

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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AT THE THRESHOLD OF THE COMING KINGDOM OF THE ANTICHRIST

From an Orthodox Conference on the End Times.

The time is not yours. At present, ye are strangers, sojourners, foreigners and aliens; seek not honours, seek not glory, seek not authority, nor revenge; bear all things, and in this way 'redeem the time;' give up many things, anything they may require... They will come to take all away. Give whatever they may demand, only preserve the principal thing, I mean the faith.

(St. John Chrysostom's Homily on the Epistle to the Ephesians)

† † †

In his homily on the Epistle to Timothy, St. John Chrysostom advises that *...we ought therefore to be prepared for everything; even for death, for martyrdom, for a life of virginity or for all of these...*

There is an urgency today that cannot be more aptly put than in the writing of Professor Ivan Andreyev, who wrote the following passage in his book *Russia's Catacomb Saints*:

"Today there is not and there cannot be any separation between ecclesiastical affairs and politics. Politics pretends to command universality, i.e., it wishes to take into its hands the resolution of questions concerning spiritual life also. This means that political actions cannot be indifferent for the Church as well. Furthermore, when the antichrist shall have power on the earth, he will naturally be a political figure. This means that the Church also will have to oppose his political persecution. And so as, even now, to weaken this opposition, his fore-runners, taking advantage of the idea that the Church should be above politics, conceal their warfare against God under [an] apolitical cloak: the martyrs are 'political criminals.' To be sure, the

Church should not intrigue, but as soon as politics touches on questions of spiritual life, the Church cannot close her eyes to this."

Clearly, the world is preparing for the reign of antichrist and more people are participating in the on-going efforts to bring this movement forward as quickly as possible. The New World Order has visibly appeared on the horizon in our lifetime. This movement is gaining momentum as "we are rapidly being pushed toward this One World government by powerful luciferic forces rooted in age-old secret societies. These forces, incredibly evil in intent, fully expect to accomplish their mission during the next few years."

We have been unknowingly and unwittingly well-prepared for this, as Brock Chisolm, past Director of [the] World Health Organization, stated, "...to achieve world government, it is necessary to remove from the minds of men their individualism, loyalty to family tradition, national patriotism and religious dogmas..." We have swallowed all manner of poisonous certainties fed us by our parents, our Sunday and day school teachers, our politicians, our priests, our newspapers and others who have a strong and vested interest in controlling us.

The late Hieromonk Seraphim Rose of blessed memory, wrote, "Ours is a spiritually unbalanced age, when many Orthodox Christians find themselves *tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive* (Eph 4:14). The time, indeed, seems to have come when men *will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.* (2Tim 4:3-4)."

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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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This subject is awesome in scope; and it is difficult to grasp that a consciously prepared movement to establish a New World Order has long been underway and, according to many prominent watchdogs, is nearing completion.

For the ill-informed mass[es] and the deceived, this very thought is fast becoming a welcomed or natural idea. For others, it is too outrageous and absurd to be true; and this is all in “their” favour. This pervasive movement has interconnected all aspects of society: church, nations, government, culture, family, education, tradition, media and entertainment. One traditional institution after another is being diabolically destroyed and replaced. We are presently witnessing its new establishment, or rather, in their colloquialism, its “new consciousness.”

Many Orthodox Christians are very informed on this anti-Christian movement. They sense its terrible awesomeness which can border on earnest sensationalism tending more to titillate the emotions. The sobering knowledge of this information, which could drastically cause them to change their lives, seemingly has not effected an astounding Christian effect. Why has not this happened? Here, the person is more informed or more excited on the knowledge of the temporal rather than properly formed in a living Orthodox world-view. Then, there are others who believe that this simply does not affect their lives although they agree that this time may be the last days of Christianity. Somehow, pastoral exhortations on this subject do not touch them—perhaps they are too involved in their daily living or simply find all this too depressing.

**For the New Year and the approaching Great and Holy Lent, “Orthodox Heritage” wishes to our readers, friends, and supporters true repentance, deep spiritual healing, and His Divine Mercy upon all of us. Let us all firmly preserve a warning that is well fit for our Lenten period:
*He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity. (Prov 22:8).***

But should this not spur us to ask, “So then, what are we to do? Or rather, what are we called to do as Orthodox Christians?”

Perhaps there is not much to do; antichrist **will** come. However, we might remember to ask, “How will I give account for my life before God’s judgment?” There are many questions to ask ourselves. “Am I to remain silent and by silence give consent? How do I witness to my faith? How will I guard my faith? Am I willing to suffer for my faith?” How does our present living answer these questions?

We might continue to examine ourselves: “How am I to participate in the world as a responsible Christian and a member of this society?” One suggestion from the monastic perspective is to renounce the world and take up the salvific cross of monastic voluntary martyrdom. There was a road sign outside a monastery in Russia that read, “If the whole world knew what life is like in a monastery, no one would come.” But if the whole world knew what heavenly rewards await for those struggling in the monastery, the whole world would rush to come in.

However, for those in the world, how is one’s relationship within the Church a Gospel witness to the world? “How do I participate responsibly in my job and duties as a Christian with its extra-curricular obligations, association and memberships? Should I vote? If so, am I an informed voter? What corporations, foundations and charities do I support by purchasing their products or using their services? (By our consumerism, we support the corporations in their activities

and sponsorships of television programs, public events, and their support of government and educational causes which are now steeped in the anti-Christian view.) What choices am I making?"

Meanwhile, those working for the benefit and advancement of the antichrist are more fervently strengthening themselves in their zealous warfare. Perhaps they are more dedicated, more alive in their commitment than we are to the Church, actually changing their lives and submitting their wills in obedience to the luciferic movement. They do not sleep but actively sacrifice their lives for the sake of their belief and to accomplish their goal.

Our Lord exhorts us, *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). And as St. John Chrysostom tells us that our Lord says these things, "thoroughly to awaken our alacrity; even as elsewhere also He said, *the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force* (Mt 11:12). For whoever is in conflict, when he actually see[s] the judge of the lists marvelling at the painfulness of his efforts, is the more inspirited. Let it not then bewilder us, when many things spring up hence, that turn to our vexation. For the way is strait, and the gate narrow, but not the city. Therefore must one neither look for rest here, nor there expect any more aught that is painful (Homily 23 on St. Matthew)."

Let the words of a great Orthodox saint and teacher of the 4th century, St. Cyril of Jerusalem, serve as a daily reminder to all: "So, be warned, my friend. I have given you the signs of the antichrist. Do not merely store them in your memory. Pass them on to everyone without stint. If you have a child after the flesh, teach them to him forthwith. And if you have become a godparent, forewarn your godchild, lest he should take the false christ for the True. For *the mystery of lawlessness doth already work.*"

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. (Mt 11:15)



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.

ST. THEOPHAN OF POLTAVA ON THE END TIMES

From an Orthodox pamphlet of the Russian Orthodox Church.

You ask me about the near future and about the coming last times. I do not speak from myself, but I relate to you what was revealed to me by elders.

The coming of the antichrist is nearing and it is already very close. The time which separates us from his arrival can be measured in years, in best case in decades.

But before his arrival, Russia has to revive, even if shortly. And there will be an Emperor there, chosen by the Lord Himself. And he will be a man of fervent faith, deep mind and iron will. That is what was revealed to us about him. And we will be waiting for the fulfillment of that revelation.

Judging by many signs, it is near; unless God changes His promise because of our sins and removes him. According to the testimony of God's word, that can also happen.

I know nothing of the Eighth Ecumenical Council. I can only quote the words of St. Theodore the Studite, "Not every gathering of bishops is a council; only the gathering of bishops who stand in truth." True, the Ecumenical Council does not depend on the number of those gathered, but on whether it will [vainly] philosophize or teach in the Orthodox manner. If it steps away from the truth, it will not be ecumenical, even if it calls itself that. The infamous "council of thugs" was in its time more numerous than many ecumenical councils, but even so it was not recognized as an Ecumenical Council but got the name "council of thugs."



What are "our traditions?" They are everything that the God-man Christ Himself, and by the Holy Spirit, gave the commandment to hold and to live according to; it is whatever He delivered in His Church, in which He dwells continuously with His Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 28:19-29). "Our traditions" are our whole life in grace in God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, the life of us Christians which began in the Church of Christ through the Apostles, by the descent of the Holy Spirit. All of this life of ours is not from us, but from the Lord Jesus, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, or, more precisely, our entire life is from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit.

St. Justin Popovich

THE SUNDAY OF THE LAST JUDGMENT

From The Explanation of the Gospel of St. Matthew (Mt 31-46) by Blessed Theophylact, Archbishop of Ochrid and Bulgaria.

We have read in Orthodox texts that the presence of God for all those who have tried to follow God's Mercy and Righteousness is called Heaven. On the other hand, the presence of God for all others who have been neither merciful nor righteous is called Hell.

Perhaps this is an overly simplistic representation of things to come. Nevertheless, it serves as a constant reminder of the ever-lasing life and the choices we make daily, during our short earthly life. It is also quite intriguing how all us, full of so many inequities, exclusively think of God's Mercy and His indulgence towards us every time we fall. On the other hand, when we see others fall, we think of God's Righteousness and His Divine Judgement of them.

It would be better to think the other way round. When we fall into sin, let us rather think of God the Righteous Judge and the fate of the goats on the left-hand side. When others fall into sin, let us rather think of the Merciful God Who forgives and the fate of the sheep on the right-hand side. As it is written in the Gospels, and as we sing at every Liturgy: Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

At the nearing conclusion of the Lenten Triodion and as a preparatory step for the Holy and Great Lent, the explanation of one of Orthodoxy's greatest biblical passages serves as a reminder of things to come, for all mankind.

Oh Lord, grant Thy mercy upon us all.
† † †

Mt 31-33: The Shepherd Divides the Flock

When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory: and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

Since the first coming of the Lord was not with glory but with dishonor and indignity, He says, When He shall come in His glory. For at the second coming He will come with glory, escorted by angels. First He will divide the saints from the

sinners, delivering them from tribulations, and set them on His right, and then speak to them. He calls the saints sheep on account of their gentleness, and because they yield fruit and useful things for us, as do sheep, providing wool, which is divine and spiritual protection, and milk, which is the sustenance that is needed. The goats are the sinners, for they walk along the precipices and are unruly and fruitless.

Mt 34-40: The Inheritance of His Kingdom

Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry, and ye fed Me: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me. Then shall the righteous answer

Him, saying, Lord, when saw we Thee hungry, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.

He does not give honor or punishment until He has first judged. For He loves mankind and teaches us to do the same as well, not to punish until we have made a careful examination. In this way those are *blessed* as they have been accepted by the Father. He considers them to be inheritors of the kingdom to show that God makes them participants in His own glory as His sons. For

He did not say, "receive", but rather inherit, as a man would say of his father's estate. By the least brethren He means either His own disciples or, simply, all the poor. For every poor man is Christ's brother for the very reason that Christ, too, spent His life in poverty. See also God's righteousness, how He acclaims the saints; and see the good disposition of their mind, how they deny, with befitting modesty, that they have cared for Him. But the Lord accepts as for Himself the things that were done for the poor.

Mt 41-46: The Condemned Ones

Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry, and ye gave Me nothing to eat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in: naked, and ye clothed Me not: sick, or in prison, and ye visited Me not. Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord,



when saw we Thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee? Then shall He answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

He sends those on the left into the fire which had been prepared for the devil. For as the demons are without compassion and are cruelly and maliciously disposed towards us, it is fitting that those who are of like mind with them, and who have been cursed by their own deeds, should merit the same punishment. See that God did not prepare the fire for men, nor did He make hell for us, but for the devil—I make myself liable to hell.

Tremble, then, O man, and understand from this that these men were not punished as fornicators, or robbers, or perpetrators of any other vice, but for not having done good. For indeed, if you consider things well, the robber is he who has much and does not give alms, even if he does no obvious injury. For whatever he has in excess of his needs, he has stolen from those who are in need and who have not received anything from him. For if he had shared these things with them, they would not be in need. Now that he has locked these things up and kept them for himself, for this very reason they are in need. So he who does not give alms is a robber, doing injustice to all those whom he could have helped but did not, and for this reason he and those like him shall go away into eternal punishment which never ends; but the righteous shall enter into eternal life.

Just as the saints have unceasing joy, so too the unjust have unceasing punishment, despite the gibberish of the heretic Origen who says that there is an end to hell and that sinners will not be punished for ever, but that there will be a time when they enter the place of the righteous because they have been purified by suffering in hell. Origen is clearly refuted here, both when the Lord speaks of everlasting punishment, that is, never ending, and when He likens the righteous to sheep and the sinners to goats. For just as a goat can never become a sheep, neither can a sinner ever be cleansed and become righteous after the Judgement. Outer darkness [mentioned in the parable of the talents] is that which is furthest from the light of God and for that reason renders the punishment more harsh.

There is another reason that could be mentioned, and that is that the sinner is in darkness even in this life, as he has fallen away from the Sun of Righteousness, but as there is still hope of conversion, this is not yet the outer darkness. But when he has died and an examination has been made of the things he has done, then the outer darkness in its turn receives him. For there is no longer any hope of conversion, but he undergoes a complete deprivation of the good things of God. While he is here in this life he enjoys to some degree the good things

of God, I mean, the tangible things of creation, and he believes that he is in some manner a servant of God, living out his life in God's house, which is this creation, being fed by Him and provided with the necessities of life. But then he will be altogether cut off from God, having no share at all in the good things of God. This is that darkness which is called outer by comparison to the darkness here, which is not outer because the sinner is not yet completely cut off from this time onward.

You, then, O reader, flee from this absence of compassion, and practice almsgiving, both tangible and spiritual. Feed Christ Who hungers for our salvation. If you give food and drink to him who hungers and thirsts for teaching, you have given food and drink to Christ. For within the Christian there is Christ, and faith is nourished and increased by teaching. If you should see someone who has become a stranger to his heavenly fatherland, take him in with you. While you yourself are entering into the heavens, lead him in as well, lest while you preach to others, you yourself be rejected. If a man should cast off the garment of incorruption which he had at his baptism, so that he is naked, clothe him; and if one should be infirm in faith, as Paul says, help him; and visit him who is shut up in the dark prison of this body and give him counsel which is as a light to him. Perform, then, all of these six types of love, both bodily and also spiritually, for we consist of both soul and body, and these acts of love are to be accomplished by both.

A Prayer on the Sunday of the Last Judgment

Receive our unworthy prayers, O Christ our God, as Thou didst accept the tears and the myrrh of the harlot, and be Thou entreated by our songs of praise, as by her kisses, and grant us a good conversion, like hers, unto Thee, bestowing upon us, as to her, the remission of our sins; and as Thou didst not reject her that touched Thy most pure feet, so too cast us not off who fall down at the unseen feet of Thy merciful kindness: and as Thou didst not send her away in shame when she confessed Thee, the Knower of Hearts, neither cause us, who confess our hidden sins, to be shamed before Angels and men at Thy dread Judgment: but rather make us heirs of eternal forgiveness, and of Thine incorruptible glory. For Thou art merciful, and glorified together with Thy Father Who is from all ages, and Thine All-Holy, and Good, and Life-creating Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.



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ORTHODOXY: DO NOT FORGET KOSOVO AND METOHIIJA!

By Metropolitan Amfilohije, delivered in Belgrade, on February 21st 2008, after the prayer service in front of the St. Sava Cathedral (translated by Snezana de Berthet).

Kosovo and Metohija must not be a word forgotten for us nor for anyone else in the world. Today we have been told by those who want to cross us out from history and erase us by taking Kosovo and Metohija from us that it is a unique case. That is true, Kosovo and Metohija is a unique case, in its fate and in what the powerful leaders of this world seek to make of it at the beginning of the 21st century.

We stand before the face of the living God and His justice, and before the face of our holy ancestors, before the face of the Great-martyr Lazarus of Kosovo and the Great-martyr Stefan of Dečani. We stand here at this decisive moment in history, called upon to witness before God and humanity, before all the peoples of the world, to repeat and confirm once again who we are and what we are.

We know once again now that we are all Kosovans, that our cradle and the cradle of our people, the place of our birth is Kosovo and Metohija. We attest that it is in Kosovo and Metohija that we joined the ranks of mature, historical peoples, and that it is through Kosovo and by Kosovo that we have built ourselves into the foundations of a respectable Europe and the entire respectable world of God and all its peoples.

When we say this here, before the face of the living God and before the face of St. Sava, our spiritual father, in whom our soul encountered and committed itself to the Lord God and God's eternal justice, then that means that for us Kosovo and Metohija is not the geography of a territory but the topography of our life purpose and commitment. Be our witnesses once again, O Christ God, Great-martyr Lazarus of Kosovo and St. Sava, that we must not under any circumstances renounce the Peć Patriarchate nor the relics of the holy Archbishops of Serbia who are the holiest, most powerful deeds of title of our people and continuity. That we cannot renounce, as a people with its own place under the sun given

us by God, the holy reliquary of the Holy King and Great-martyr Stefan of Dečani. May the head of Lazarus attest for us now and for always that our faith is strong before God and before humanity.

Now the mother of the Jugović brothers (Ed., *heroes from Kosovo Battle*) is mother to all of us: "Do not, my son, speak falsely, no matter what say your father and your uncles." Do not, O powerful leader of the modern world, repeat what say your father and your uncles but speak in accordance with the justice of the true God.

And sister to all of us is the maiden of Kosovo. And still our hero Obilić asks us who is loyal and who is disloyal. Here before us we also have the Great Leader Karadjordje and his descendant, (king) Alexander Karadjordjević, to confirm that a person, that a people, is nothing without freedom and without dignity.

We also hear the Kosovo covenant of Kosovo oath-taker Njegoš from Lovćen (Ed., *famous Serbian poet from Montenegro*): "O Kosovo, site of Judgment Day." And today still we are being judged in Kosovo as are the Albanians, the Americans, the English and the French, who today renounced their Victor Hugo, Franchet d'Espérey and de Gaulle.

Before witnesses such as these we must unite our hearts and the will of the people so that we can speak with one voice and with one heart, not just now but tomorrow and the day after tomorrow and for as long as we exist and for as long a single descendant of our people exists in this world, so

we can tell them that Kosovo and Metohija is the apple of our eye, the heart of our hearts, our holy city of Jerusalem and that we can renounce it neither in this worldly life nor in God's eternal one any more than we can renounce our soul and our destiny.

The only thing that is lost is what we ourselves renounce. That is why we are a historical people. Merely because we are few in number and because we cannot control the general circumstances of historical events in the modern world should we give up on the fact that we are

great by our nature and historical calling and summons.

Kosovo and Metohija must not be a word forgotten for us nor for anyone else in the world. Today we have been told



One of the many destroyed Orthodox churches in the city of Prizren, a historical city located in southern Kosovo and Metohija, known for its strong Orthodox cultural and antiquities heritage



Devic Monastery ruins (a 15th century monastery) looted and vandalized repeatedly during and after the war

by those who want to cross us out from history and erase us by taking Kosovo and Metohija from us that it is a unique case. That is true, Kosovo and Metohija is a unique case, in its fate and in what the powerful leaders of this world seek to make of it at the beginning of the 21st century. What is being attempted in Kosovo and Metohija today can occur only during times of occupation, tyranny and aggression.

How to explain that in a period of mature humanity which has its United Nations, Security Council, international law and conventions, swears by human rights, how to explain that these rights and this justice is valid for every corner of the earth, every people, every country but is not valid for Kosovo and Metohija.

Yes, Kosovo and Metohija is unique and every country of our modern age is being judged there. Simple and coerced solutions are a sign of moral debility and weakness, not of strength, a sign of trust in the use of force as the ultimate method for resolving human disagreements and conflicts, not in God, God's justice and the human justice upon which the world rests.

Both America and Europe know this but their rulers do not. We have belonged to this Europe from the very start of our self-knowledge, historical maturity and we desire community with its people in dignity and equality.

If the price that the EU, as a community of interests, asks is that we renounce ourselves, our historical memory, the Kosovo covenant that is by its nature a New Testament sealed not with ink but with the blood of our people—we cannot accept. As a people we have never accepted, neither before Prince Lazarus nor after him until 1941 nor today, such blackmail and such calls to trample on our dignity but on the justice that upholds states and cities. To trample on the dignity of all the countries and peoples of this world is something we cannot allow ourselves.

Today we are here for the same holy purpose: to defend not only our own honor and reputation, our freedom and dignity but also the dignity of a humiliated Europe. For Europe has never been more humiliated than it is today. The USA has never been more humiliated that it has humiliated itself today with such injustice against an honorable people and its dignity, a people that sided with them in both World Wars, and suffered immensely because of it.

As we stand before God, before this holy shrine, let us stand upright and as it was resolved in 1941 and as it is written in our Kosovo choice: If we are to live, let us live in freedom

and if we are to die, let us die for freedom, not just our own freedom and the freedom of our Kosovo and Metohija but for the freedom of every honorable person and people on the face of this earth.

May God return reason to the powerful leaders who today by their decisions are casting shame on their peoples, trampling justice and honesty. And may God grant us loyalty to our Kosovo covenant, our human and national dignity, loyalty to the holy reliquaries of the Archbishops of Peć, the Holy King Stefan of Dečani and the holy Great-martyr Lazarus of Kosovo.

Through their prayers, O Lord, strengthen this people in its sense of justice and everything that is good and enlighten all persons and people that they may live in justice, peace and God's compassion.

I would just like to conclude by asking you to depart in the same peace of God in which we gathered around this holy shrine. Let us part in peace and let me ask all those who gathered today in this capital to demonstrate that we are a dignified people, that we are not a people that destroys and devastates but a people that for centuries has built and to this day continues

to build its soul with dignity and its future. Therefore, in God's peace with a prayer to God that He intercede with us and among us and with the people of this world and accomplish what we mere mortals cannot that we may show that we are truly the descendants of the Great-martyr Lazarus of Kosovo and all those who gave their lives for their dear ones and their fatherland.

May God bless you and bestow upon you every form of divine and worldly advancement.

Amen, God grant that it be so!



The Commandment of the Lord is to not remain silent in times when the Faith is in danger. *Speak*, he said, *and do not remain silent. And, if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him* (Heb 10:38). *And, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out* (Lk 19:40). Thus, when it is a matter of faith, one should not say: "Who am I, a priest or a leader of the people?" In no case should one remain silent.

St. Theodore the Studite



The Destroyed Monastery of Holy Archangels, a 15th century (destroyed by the Albanians and currently under a multi-year reconstruction by a dedicated group of your Orthodox monks)

JESUS CHRIST—THE MODEL OF MORAL LIFE

By Professor M. Olesnitsky, Doctor of Theology (Professor of the Kiev Divinity Academy), St. Petersburg 1907.

For our success in the pursuit of a moral life, abstract law by itself is insufficient; a concrete example is necessary for the attainment of such life.

We have this model in God: *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect* (Mt 5:48); but still, we need an example that is closer to our nature, which would in turn satisfy the requirements and carry out the moral ideal, under the same conditions in which we live. This model moves into us the faith in the possibility of the true-moral life on the earth; it attracts us to virtues and paves the way to such life. Having lived on earth, we have such a model in the Incarnated, our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the Holy Scripture there are numerous places which call us to the resemblance to Christ. For example, in the Epistle of the Holy Apostle Peter we read: *Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps* (1Pet 2:21). *He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked* (1Jn 2:6). St. Paul calls the Christians to have the same sensations, which were in Christ: *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus* (Phil 2:5), *not to please ourselves... for even Christ pleased not himself* (Rom 15:1-3), *walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us* (Eph 5:2), *looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith* (Heb 12:2). The Lord said to his disciples after washing their feet: *I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you* (Jn 13:15); and pointed at his love as to the example of their mutual love: *Love one another, as I have loved you* (Jn 15:12).

Looking closer at the model presented to us through the life of Jesus Christ, we find that He carried out His earthly life exemplifying the highest level of moral freedom, combined with perfect love. This freedom was manifested in the absence of any sin as well as any other sensation of the sinful burden, in the harmony of His nature, which excludes passions and any fascinations, and in the powerful and independent attitude to the world. Understanding the complete freedom from sin he says: *which of you convinceth me of sin?* (Jn 8:46) or *the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me* (Jn 14:30). As the One, Who is sinless (although tempted), the conscience did not burden Him and it did not arise in Him the feeling of separation with the divine will.

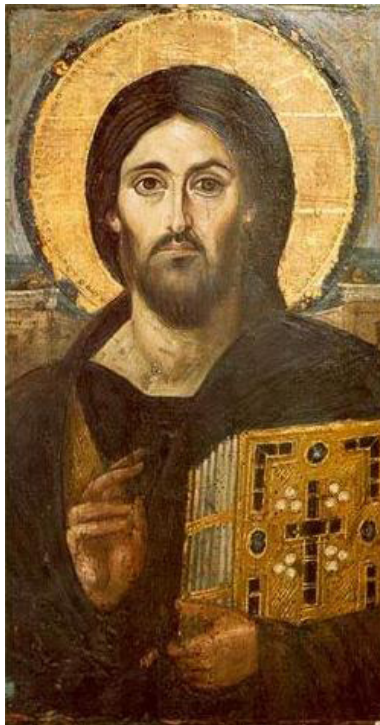
The harmonious nature of the Lord Jesus excluded the one-sided predominance in Him of any side of the human personality. For example, we distinguish male and female natures, with the predominance of distinctive qualities. However, in Christ the Savior we see the harmonious combination of male perfections, precisely—incomparable struggle, conquering the world heroism, and female—kindness, limitless devotion, extreme patience, infinite obedience. We distinguish reserved and contemplative, open and active, or practical characters.

However, in Christ the Savior we see the harmonious combination of the contemplation and practical activity. But the absence of fascinations and passions in our Lord the Savior, we see that in Him any emotional state never overcomes the others and the others do not predominate. For example, deep grief is soon changed in Him for sincere happiness, happiness is immediately dissolved by grief (Mk 14:8-9);

anger is mitigated by compassion, and compassion passes into anger (Mt 23:39); in humiliation the Lord never forgets His royal sublimity; and possessing it He always remembers that He accepted the image of a slave and came not so that they would serve Him, but in order for Him to serve others. Denying the presence of passions in the Lord, we assert that there was only animation and the strong desire to carry out His destination on the earth in Him. Therefore he says: *I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?* (Lk 12:49).

Possessing moral freedom, the Lord Jesus Christ is so free in all his relations with the surrounding world. For example, he was fasting, but he “is eating and drinking” when He finds this necessary. He is out of the family relations, but He accepts the invitation to the marriage. The Son of man hath not where to lay his head, but never asked anybody for alms. He considers Himself free from the payment of tax to the temple; however, He pays tax, finding this necessary for His goal. The Pharisees tempt Him, they want to catch him in the violation of Moses’ law, in the disturbance against the royal authority, but He with a single word exposes all their intrigues and comes out of the temptation as the victory-bearer. People are enraptured with Him and want to proclaim Him the King, but He is higher than any terrestrial honor.

But love the Lord Jesus Christ expressed by leaving the quiet dwelling in Nazareth and stepping onto the thorny way of life, by the fact that He with incredible selflessness and patience worked for the good and salvation of people, He carried



their weaknesses and their contradictions and abuse, accepted those despised by everybody publicans and sinners, blessed children, selected the disciples, loved by Him, He was close to His native Israeli people, embraced at the same time the entire world with love and finally voluntarily gave His life for the people. *Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us* (1Jn 3:16). Love of Jesus does not arrange touching scenes, it does not invent refined expressions; however, how much inimitable tenderness is manifested in the farewell conversation of the Savior with His Disciples, or in the restoration after the Resurrection of fallen Peter!

The Lord Jesus Christ expressed love for the Heavenly Father by unconditional obedience, complete devotion, accurate performance of the will of the Father, by the internal unity with the Father and sincere prayer, which frequently lasted for the entire night. Even in those hours, in which the Father apparently leaves him (on the cross), His love remains invariably faithful, appealing to the Father.

Imitating Christ: The Grace of the Holy Spirit

Following Christ must not be copying of Christ, not the literal reproduction of all His actions; otherwise we must accomplish all the miracles performed by Him. Jesus is our Savior; our task is in using the fruits of salvation under those conditions, in which we are placed to live on the earth. On the word of the apostle, we must possess the same sensations, the same direction of the will that was in Jesus Christ, the same image or *modus operandi* that was in Him. Although Jesus Christ was the begotten Son of God among people, He expressed in His life and left to us the specific example of the man, which we must imitate and reproduce in ourselves.

The second inaccuracy in the study about the imitation to Christ, characteristic of the rationalists, consists of the statement, that we (as if) can be the true imitators of Jesus Christ and carry out a truly God-pleasing life without being in the internal, spiritual unity with Him and having Him only as an external model. No, the relation between the personality of Christ the Savior and the personalities of the Christians is not as external as it is between the teacher and his students. It cannot be said that the students must only be taught by the teacher, but they should also derive the example for themselves from his life. Meanwhile the Christians, being taught from the words of the Lord and imitating His example, must at the same time derive the completeness of life from His personality, live His life. This requirement is clearly expressed by the Lord Jesus Christ in the words: *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing* (John 15:4-5). It is evident from these words that the Lord is not only the teacher and model for us, but also the source of moral life.

The force, which opens to us this exemplary source and helping us to derive from it and to live on the doctrine and model of Jesus Christ, is the Holy Spirit, His Divine Grace. *By the grace of God I am what I am, says the apostle* (1Cor 15:10). Has there ever existed a true Christian, who would thank himself for his moral Christian state, but not the Lord Jesus Christ, abundantly sending to him grace through the Holy Spirit? Grace is necessary both for the beginning of the Christian life and for its continuation. The apostle says that without *grace not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves* (2Cor 3:5), and even *we know not what we should pray for as we ought* (Rom. 8:26). However, in the Holy Scripture all the Christian virtues are called the fruits of grace (*love, joy, peace, long-suffering...* Gal 5:22-23), *whole blameless spirit and soul* (1Thess 5:23).

Have not any Christians experienced that the grace of the Holy Spirit was necessary not only for the first floating of the soul to God, but also later, when emptiness and weakness will begin to overwhelm the soul again?



In our days, people have not seen war and hunger, and they say that they have no need of God. They have everything and appreciate nothing. But if hard times come—such as a famine and so on, and they have nothing to eat—be sure that they will come to value even bread and marmalade, and everything else they will be deprived of. If we don't praise God, He will allow us to be tried with some misfortunes—so that we may come to appreciate the good things that we have. But if we are full of appreciation, God will not allow anything bad to happen to us.

In the old days, when we did not have the great comforts we have today and science had not advanced as much, people were forced to take refuge in God to cope with their difficulties; and God would help them. Nowadays, because science has made such great advances, people put God aside. They live without God. ... But what can they really do without God?

You see, for example, when there is no rain, instead of saying, 'We'll pray,' they say, 'we'll drill for water.' And the worst part is that it is not only the unbelievers who think this way, but—with all the technology in our hands—even the faithful are forgetting God's power. We are fortunate that God has not given up on us. But little do we understand of His wonderful Providence and care for us.

Elder Paisios the Athonite

ON CREMATION

By Fr. Victor Potapov.

The influence of the Western secular customs is becoming stronger in some Orthodox communities as if their aspiration is “to be like everyone else.” In these remarks we will examine one phenomenon-- the practice of cremating the bodies of the deceased, to which some Orthodox in the United States have recently chosen.

Arguments in favor of burning the bodies of the dead come down to three basic themes: the high costs associated with burial; cemeteries occupying too much scarce land, especially in small countries; and the soul rather than the body being the important part of man. The practice of cremation is not new and has occurred in pagan cultures and among peoples confessing Buddhism and Hinduism now. These religions, especially Buddhism, teach disdain for the body, which is a kind of prison for the soul.

But Christians adopted the Old Testament custom of giving the deceased over to the earth. Burial expresses our faith that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and that we live in the hope of Resurrection from the dead, according to the image of Christ, Who was buried (not cremated). The honor accorded by Christians to the bodily temple springs from the truth of the psychophysical union of body and soul and from the knowledge that man is the crown of God's creation. On the body of each man without exception lies the imprint of the image and likeness of God. In the divine incarnation, that is, in the advent of the Son of God, Our Lord and God and Savior Jesus, our body was sanctified in a special way.

Europe began to resort to cremation at the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment, when Western civilization began to move away from God. Early in the 18th century, a change took place: Faith in God was replaced by faith in the power of human Reason. Amid anticlericalism and religious doubt, cremation came as a challenge to the Church and as an expression of denial of the physical resurrection from the dead at the last day. Burning the bodies of the dead appealed to ideologists of secular humanism because it emphasized their faith in the dissolution of human existence, and the denial of life beyond the grave. The Church, like a loving mother, in order to safeguard Her children from the corrupting influence of the growing secularization of this world, forbids burning the bodies of the dead.

People who agree with the custom of burning the bodies of the dead may not necessarily think that they are denying life beyond the grave. But this does not change the fact of the matter, that at the root of the recent practice of cremation lies the denial of eternal life. The practice is anti-Christian. The faithful children of the Orthodox Church must flee from it.

One ought not to forget that the incorruption of the remains of many saints testifies to God's particular good will toward these righteous ones and their flesh. Holy relics are the visible expression of an existence transfigured and glorified. Holy relics remind us that the body of a Christian can be incorrupt and can become a relic. In the Church's Order of the Funeral Service, the body of the deceased is plainly called relics: *And so, taking up the relics, we go forth to the grave, followed by all the grave.* The hierarch, or the priest, taking a shovelful of soil, streweth it crosswise over the relics saying: *The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof, the world, and all that dwell therein.* And then the grave is filled up in the usual manner.

The incorrupt body of a saint truly tells us that Death is not all-powerful, for it was not created by God but entered the world only as a temporary shadow of sin. The size of this shadow increases as the owner moves away from God, and it shrinks according to his return to the source of life eternal and perfect. The incorrupt saint testifies to us that physical death is temporary—the general resurrection of the dead will overcome it, when the creature, who begins in God, finds his completion in Him.

The holy relics of God's saints shine on us with the glory of Jesus Christ's Paschal victory, that Jesus Christ the New Adam gained over death. The Son of God became the Son of Man in order to renew mankind in Himself, and to lead mankind out of death's embrace. The voluntary descent unto death by Christ, the incarnate Life, broke the authority of death. Death retreated in fear before Him, admitting its own defeat. To burn the bodies of the dead repudiates them as holy relics.

We are called to prayerfully remember the dead. The main such commemoration is, of course, during the Bloodless Sacrifice, the Holy Eucharist. Another commemoration is prayer at the place of burial, at the deceased's grave, which is adorned with the Life-Creating Cross—the sign of Christ's victory over death. With cremation, when the ashes are scattered to the wind, strewn over the earth, cast into the water, and so on, we lost a place where we might come in order to recall our love for the deceased. Knowing that in the grave lie the bones of people beloved by us is a source of consolation. Here one can resort to prayer, take care of the grave and adorn it, and think about life and death and about one's own spiritual future.

Traditional funerals, of course, really do encompass many preparations and take up much time. It is necessary to make arrangements with the funeral bureau and the cemetery administration, and to bring the deceased to the church and from the church to the cemetery. Someone experiencing separation from a loved one cannot wish to deal with these matters, but prefers to focus his strength and attention on the “last kiss.” Besides, the cost of American

funerals grows steadily, and cremation requires less expense and bother. These facts, however, cannot justify a decision to burn the bodies of the deceased. Already in various Orthodox Councils of Bishops it has been repeatedly resolved as a matter of principle not to permit the burning of the bodies of Orthodox Christians in crematoria, seeing that this custom has been introduced by the godless and the enemies of the Church.

Friends of the family will always help plan and accomplish the funeral. Friends always turn up in misfortune. No one, and especially not the Church, requires of us a fine coffin and a splendid burial, which will in no way help the deceased in the other world. If there is extra money, donate it to the church with a request for the commemoration of the reposed, or give it to the poor in memory of the loved one. Alms in memory of the dead can bring special benefit to those departed to a better world. If means for a funeral are lacking, the priest can arrange with the administration of the funeral bureau for a free burial. This is done throughout America because the funeral bureaus are interested in keeping good relations with the parishes that they serve. Each Orthodox parish should set up special charitable cemetery fund for the burial of needy parishioners.

In conclusion, let us turn to the Book of Needs of the Orthodox Church... The Order of the Funeral Service for Laymen reads: *For earth thou art and unto earth shalt thou return (Gen 3:12). Come ye, therefore, let us kiss him who was but lately with us; for he is committed to the grave; he is covered with a stone; he taketh up his abode in the gloom; he is interred among the dead... As we gaze upon the dead who lieth before us, let us all accept this example of our own last hour. For he vanisheth from earth like the smoke; like a flower he is faded; like the grass he is cut down. Swathed in a coarse garment he is concealed in the earth.*

The Church teaches us to bury the bodies of the dead in the earth. Everything that the Church has decreed is for our salvation. If we seriously strive for the blessed life of eternity, let us submit to the will of God and His Holy Church, for everything else is truly vanity and corruption.



Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends (Jn 15:13). In truth if someone hears an evil saying, that is, one which harms him, and in his turn, he wants to repeat it, he must fight in order not to say it. Or if someone is taken advantage of and he bears it, without retaliation at all, then he is giving his life for his neighbor.

Abba Poimen the Great
From The Sayings of the Desert Fathers

ON CONDEMNATION

From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain: From the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim."

Be attentive, my child, that you not judge any soul. For God permits the one who judges his neighbor to fall, so that he learns to have sympathy for his weak brother. The mercy of God supports all of us, but if we become proud, God will remove His grace and we shall become worse than the others.

It is one thing to condemn someone and another to be fought by thoughts of condemnation. To condemn is a terrible passion, but to be fought by such thoughts and to fight back—this is an occasion for crowns.

Each person must bear the weaknesses of others. Who is perfect? Who can boast that he has kept his heart undefiled? Hence, we are all sick, and whoever condemns his brother does not perceive that he himself is sick, because a sick person does not condemn another sick person.

Love, endure, overlook, do not get angry, do not flare up, forgive one another, so that you resemble our Christ and are counted worthy to be near Him in His Kingdom. My child, avoid condemnation—it is a very great sin. God is greatly saddened when we condemn and loathe people. Let us concern ourselves only with our own faults—for these we should feel pain. Let us condemn ourselves and then we shall find mercy and grace from God.

Love one another, and do not be embittered out of egotism. Humility is a sure guide; it does not let the one who possesses it hit the reefs of carelessness and be shipwrecked, but as a luminous guide it leads him faultlessly on sure ground.

Egotism is the most evil of evils; it causes all our lapses through non-submissive thoughts. Fear this and strive to get rid of it, for the more it remains within us, the more it will wound us with the proportionate pain.

I beg that you not criticize one another, for this is downright egotism. Excuse your brother's fault; this is evidence of humility and love. The brother who acts thus will find much grace from God, but he who judges and scandalizes his neighbor should know that not only will he not find grace, but even if he has something he will lose it, so that he may learn the lesson of humility through suffering.

Be particularly afraid of inner criticism, that is, thoughts of criticism, because it does not come to light through the spoken word, in which case it is likely to be corrected by someone who hears it. Be careful, I say, about criticism from within, which imperceptibly makes us fatally guilty and deprives us of the life of divine grace and offers as a most bitter drink the death of the soul. I pray that love and freedom from criticism will reign in every expression among you, so that the Holy Spirit may rest in your souls.

WE AND TIME

By Rev. George Dimopoulos.

In these days, my beloved brethren, millions of men accept the first day of January as the beginning of the new year, regardless of religion, race, or language. They exchange cards with wishes for a long life and a happy new year. Of course, most of them perform this duty just as a custom, without any philosophical or metaphysical regard for the significance of the mystery which we call Time. It is my desire to wish all of you a very happy new year full of prosperity, love, and understanding. Secondly, I want to explore with you for a few minutes the meaning of Time.

For many people, time, *hronos* (χρόνος), in Greek, is all subduing. It is like a river which at times can be calm, and at other times a raging torrent, sweeping along in its current all the handiwork of men into the oblivion of eternity.

The passage of time cannot be opposed, stopped or even slowed down—either by the most powerful dictators of nations, by the ingenuity of man, or by the miracles of modern science. The fate, the predestination of Time, subdivides everything.

Time has no pity for the innocence of childhood, or the beauty of youth, or the power of man who has matured; nor does it respect the white hairs of the aged; nor does it pay heed to a man's position and standing. Everything in time fades; everything in time is degraded; everything in time is destroyed. Perhaps this was what inspired the wise writer of the Ecclesiastes, in the Old Testament, to say *Vanity, vanity, all is vanity.*

Exactly what is time? Time is the measure of our lives. It is purely subjective. When we cease to exist, so does time. Many philosophers divided time into three parts—past, present, and future. We live only in the present. That is all we can comprehend. The past is something which has disappeared. The future is what is unknown and uncertain. In faith, we believe in an eternity, yet we cannot conceive of it by measurements of time, because once we limit it by any type of measurement it ceases to be eternity. Therefore, for us, we comprehend only the present, that one undivided moment which is running as I am writing. The use we make of this moment is our price for eternity. The great question for us, therefore, is how to best exploit this moment.

In the Middle Ages, men were constantly reminded of time by symbols of death placed in every room and on every street. Those symbols were obvious reminders that the present for mortal man was limited, and that a day was coming when man would be obliged to leave this earthly life.

Modern man today does not want even to hear of death. He hates it. The new symbols of time, therefore, are the clocks. This is a much clearer conception of time than that of the Middle Ages. Clocks today govern our lives. We can-

not live in modern society without the use of some type of timepiece. The clock should do more than remind us of the time to awaken, or to sleep; the time for an appointment, or to catch a train; the time to work or the time to play; the time to go to church—or even the time when we expect to leave church. (Don't we sometimes look impatiently at our watches when the priest becomes carried away and speaks too long?) The clock should also remind us that with each passing moment, we are a little older. And while we are expecting the next hour to strike, we might never hear it. Who knows when Death will call?

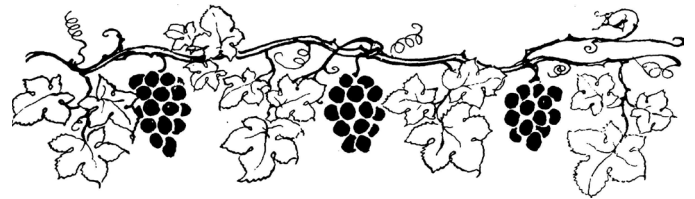
St. Basil, one of the most brilliant of the Fathers of the Church, said, "Time runs, and waits not for him who is late." Our days are rushed. The lazy man is passed by. The use or misuse of time cannot be changed or corrected.

In ancient Thebes there was once a king named Archias, a very ambitious and proud king who had many enemies. His envious enemies had finally formulated a plan to assassinate him and arranged the time and place for his murder. As luck would have it, one of King Archias' friends learned of these plans, and immediately wrote a letter to the king providing all of the planned assassination details. He gave the letter to one of the King's slaves with instructions to deliver it without any waste of time, and to say to the King that it contained a very important message. The slave took the letter, located the King at a banquet, and carried out the orders given him. He told the King, "In this letter is a very important message." The King accepted the letter but did not open it. Instead, he put it aside and delivered a quite infamous line, "The important things, we do tomorrow."

That same night, his enemies carried out the assassination that had been detailed in the letter which the King had not opened. For the King, tomorrow did not come. O foolish king—who told you that you would live until tomorrow? How could you take Time for granted?

So, my friends, it is not advisable for you to commit the same blunder. Do not postpone until tomorrow whatever is important.

Tomorrow may never come. It does not exist. The only thing which is real is the present, and after that, eternity...



A brother questioned Abba Poimen saying, "If I see my brother committing a sin, is it right to conceal it?" The old man said to him, "At the very moment when we hide our brother's fault, God hides our own and at the moment when we reveal our brother's fault, God reveals ours too."

From "Sayings of the Desert Fathers"

Ἐπὶ τοῦ Νέου Ἔτους

Τοῦ Σεβασμιωτάτου Μητροπολίτη Φλωρίνης κ. Αὐγουστίνου, ἀπὸ τὸ περιοδικὸ «ΙΕΡΑ ΠΑΡΑΚΑΤΑΘΗΚΗ», μηνὸς Δεκεμβρίου, 2007.

Καὶ βιβλία ἠνοιχθησαν... (Ἀποκ 20:12)

Νέο ἔτος. Τί θὰ φέρει τὸ ἔτος τοῦτο; Τὴν εἰρήνην ἢ τὸν Γ' παγκόσμιον πόλεμον, τὸν Ἀρμαγεδώνα τῆς Ἀποκαλύψεως; Ἄγνωστο τὸ μέλλον. Διὸ προσπέσωμεν ἐν μετανοίᾳ καὶ κρᾶζωμεν τῷ Κυρίῳ: «Κύριε! Ἄπαντες ἠνομήσαμεν καὶ ἡμαρτήσαμεν καὶ δὲν εἴμεθα ἄξιοι νὰ ὑψώσωμεν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς πρὸς τὸν Οὐρανὸν διὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν παραπτωμάτων μας. Ἡ γῆ ἐμίανθει ἀπὸ τὰ ἀπαίσια ἐγκλήματά μας. Καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ ἀέρας μὲ τὰς φρικτὰς βλασφημίας μας.» Καὶ κατόπιν, ἄς κρᾶζωμεν τὸν ὕμνον: *Πᾶσαι τῶν Ἀγγέλων αἱ στρατιαί, Πρόδρομε Κυρίου, Ἀποστόλων ἡ δωδεκάς, οἱ Ἅγιοι πάντες μετὰ τῆς Θεοτόκου ποιήσατε πρεσβείαν εἰς τὸ σωθῆναι ἡμᾶς.*

Νέο ἔτος! Τώρα, ἀγαπητοί, πού εὐρισκόμεθα εἰς τὸ κατώφλι τοῦ νέου ἔτους, συνιστῶ νὰ μελετήσετε τὴν Ἀποκάλυψη καὶ ἰδίως τοὺς στίχους 11-15 τοῦ 20^{οῦ} κεφαλαίου. Ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἰωάννης εἶδε ὄραμα πού προκαλεῖ τὸν φόβον. Ἐστήθει θρόνος ΛΕΥΚΟΣ. Λευκός, διότι Ἐκεῖνος, Ὅστις κάθεται ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου δὲν εἶπε ποτὲ τὸ ψεῦδος, δὲν ἤρπασε τὴν ἐξουσίαν βιαίως, δὲν αἱματοκύλισε τὰ ἔθνη, δὲν μετεχειρίσθην δολιότητος καὶ ἀπατηλὰ συνθήματα πρὸς στερέωση καὶ ἐξάπλωση τῆς βασιλείας Του.

Εἶπε τὴν ἀλήθεια καὶ ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀληθείας ἐθυσιάσθη. Οὐδεμία σταγὼν αἵματος μολύνει τὸν ἰδεώδη θρόνον Του. Οἱ μάρτυρες του ἐσφάγησαν, δὲν ἐσφαζαν. Λευκός ὁ θρόνος. Ὁ καθήμενος εἶναι ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, ὁ Κύριος, ὁ Βασιλεύς, ὁ Κυρίαρχος τοῦ Σύμπαντος, ἐνώπιον τοῦ Ὁποίου θὰ κάμνη πᾶν γόνυ, καὶ ὄχι πλέον ἐμπαικτικῶς, ὅπως τὴν Μεγάλην Παρασκευὴν, ἀλλὰ μὲ πλήρη συναίσθησιν τοῦ Μεγαλείου Του πᾶσα γλῶσσα θὰ κρᾶξῃ: *Χαῖρε ὁ Βασιλεὺς ἡμῶν.*

Ἀλλὰ τὴν φορὰν αὐτὴν, περὶ τῆς ὁποίας ὀμιλεῖ ὁ Ἰωάννης ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς, ἔρχεται διὰ νὰ δικάσῃ, ν' ἀποκαταστήσῃ τὴν ἠθικὴν τάξιν, νὰ τιμωρήσῃ τὴν κακίαν, νὰ βραβεύσῃ τὴν ἀρετὴν, ν' ἀποδώσῃ ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα αὐτοῦ.

Πρὸς τοῦτο ἐκ τῶν τάφων θὰ ἐγερθοῦν οἱ νεκροί. Καὶ ἡ θάλασσα θὰ δώσῃ τοὺς νεκροὺς τῆς. Οὐδεὶς θὰ μείνῃ ἔξω τῆς κρίσεως. Ὁ θρόνος θὰ ἐκπέμπῃ φλόγας πυρός. Ἡ γῆ ἔντρομος θὰ φύγῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ προσώπου του καὶ ὁ οὐρανός θὰ σαλευθῇ, καὶ δὲν θὰ βρεθῇ ὁ τόπος αὐτῶν.

Οἱ Ἄγγελοι ἐκστατικοὶ θὰ παρατηροῦν. Ποῦ τὰ μεγάλα κράτη; Ποῦ αἱ κοσμοκρατορίαι; Ποῦ ὁ ἥλιος; Ποῦ ἡ σελήνη; Ποῦ οἱ Γαλαξίαι, οἱ διάφοροι ἀστερισμοί; Τίποτε δὲν θὰ μείνῃ ἐκ τοῦ παρόντος ὑλικοῦ κόσμου. ΝΕΑ δὲ Γῆ καὶ ΝΕΟΣ ΟΥΡΑΝΟΣ θὰ ἐμφανισθοῦν μὲ τὴν δικαιοσύνην τοῦ Θεοῦ θριαμβεύουσα. Τότε, ἔμπροσθεν

τοῦ λευκοῦ θρόνου, θὰ σταθοῦν οἱ νεκροί, μεγάλοι καὶ μικροί, βασιλεῖς καὶ στρατιῶται, πλούσιοι καὶ πτωχοί, φιλόσοφοι καὶ ἀγράμματοι, ὅλα τὰ ἑκατομμύρια τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος. Καὶ θ' ἀνοιχθοῦν τὰ βιβλία, τὰ μητρῶα μας. *Καὶ βιβλία ἠνοιχθησαν* λέγει ἡ Ἀποκάλυψη. Ποῖα εἶναι τὰ βιβλία αὐτά;

Εἶναι ὁ βίος ἐκάστου, ἴνα ὀμιλήσωμεν μὲ παράδειγμα σύμφωνα μὲ τὸ ὄραμα. Εἰς τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐκάστου ἔτους, ὁ ἄγγελός μας (κάθε χριστιανὸς ἔχει τὸν ἄγγελόν του) μᾶς δίδει ἓνα βιβλίον μὲ 365 φύλλα, ὅσαι εἶναι καὶ αἱ ἡμέραι τοῦ ἔτους. Ὅλα τὰ φύλλα εἶναι ἄγραπτα. Λευκὸν εἶναι τὸ βιβλίον. «Ψυχὴ! Λάβε τὸ βιβλίον τοῦτο. Σοῦ τὸ δωρίζει ὁ Θεός. Γράψε εἰς αὐτὸ τὰ ὠραιότερα πράγματα. Πρόσεχε! Ὅτι θὰ γράψῃς, καλὸ ἢ κακὸ, θ' ἀναγνωσθῇ ὡς ἔκθεσις ἐνώπιον τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου». Ταῦτα λέγει ὁ Ἄγγελός μας.

Ἀλλὰ ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀδιαφορεῖ εἰς τὴν συμβουλὴν τοῦ φύλακος Ἀγγέλου. Δὲν δίδει καμίαν προσοχὴν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν του. Ζεῖ, κατὰ τὸν φιλόσοφον Σωκράτη, βίον ἀνεξέλεγκτον. Σκέπτεται τὸ κακὸ, ποθεῖ τὸ πονηρὸ, λαλεῖ τὸ ψεῦδος μυριάκις τῆς ἡμέρας, ἐργάζεται τὸ ἐγκλημα καὶ τὴν ἀτιμία, καλύπτει δὲ ταῦτα πάντα μὲ τὸ πέπλον τῆς κοινωνικῆς ὑποκρισίας καὶ θεωρεῖται κύριος εὐνυπόληπτος καὶ κυρία ἐρίτιμος.

Ἄθλιε! Τὸ μητρῶον σου τὸ κρατεῖ ὁ Οὐρανός. Μία ἡμέρα θ' ἀνοιχθῇ. Δὲν τρέμεις;

Καὶ βιβλία ἠνοιχθησαν... Φίλε ἀναγνώστη, σὺ πού διαβάσεις τὸ παρόν, ἐνώπιόν σου ἔχεις δυὸ βιβλία: Τὸ ἓνα εἶναι τὸ ἔτος πού παρήλθε. Τὸ ἄλλο εἶναι τὸ ἔτος πού ἔρχεται.

Τὸ ἓνα τὸ ἔχεις γράψει μέχρι τελευταίας σελίδας. Ἐξήσες καὶ σὺ τίς 365 ἡμέρες σου. Τί ἐσκέφθεις; Τί ἐπόθησες; Τί εἶπες; Τί ἐπραξες; Ἀόρατο χέρι τὰ πάντα ἔχει καταγράψει. Ἄλλ' ὅσον καὶ ἐὰν αἱ σελίδες τοῦ παρελθόντος εἶναι σκοτειναί, καμιά ἀπελπισία, ἐφ' ὅσον ἀναπνεύεις. Ἐχεις ἐλπίδας διαγραφῆς.

Τώρα, εἰς τὴν ἀρχὴν τοῦ νέου ἔτους, ἀδελφέ, σπεῦσον ἐν μετανοίᾳ πρὸς τὸν καθήμενον ἐπὶ ΛΕΥΚΟΥ θρόνου, ὅστις σχίζει ὅλα τὰ χειρόγραφα τῶν ἁμαρτημάτων μας καὶ μὲ τὴν σφραγίδα τοῦ Αἵματός Του σημειώνει ἐπὶ τῶν μαύρων σελίδων τῆς ζωῆς μας: *Τὸ χρέος ἐσβέσθη. Τὸ ἐξόφλησα ἐπὶ τοῦ Σταυροῦ.*

Καὶ τότε γεμᾶτος εὐγνωμοσύνην θὰ ψάλλῃς τὴν ὑπέροχην στροφήν τοῦ Ἀκαθίστου Ὑμνου *Χάριν δοῦναι θελήσας... καὶ ΣΧΙΣΑΣ τὸ χειρόγραφον ἀκούει παρά πάντων οὕτως: ΑΛΛΗΛΟΥΪΑ = Αἰνεῖτε τὸν Ἀνθρωπότη οἱ σωσμένοι.*

Ὡς πρὸς δὲ τὸ νέο βιβλίον τοῦ νέου ἔτους, ἰδοὺ εἶναι ἐνώπιόν σου Λευκόν. Πρόσεξε νὰ μὴ τὸ μολύνῃς μὲ πονηρὰς σκέψεις, μὲ ρυπαρὰ ἀισθήματα, μὲ ἔργα φαυλότητος καὶ ἀνομίας. Γράψε μόνον ὅ,τι ἀξίζει νὰ μείνῃ στὴν αἰωνιότητα. Καὶ μὴ λησμονῆς ποτὲ τὸ τῆς Ἀποκαλύψεως *Καὶ βιβλία ἠνοιχθησαν*. Μεταξὺ αὐτῶν θὰ εἶναι καὶ τὸ δικό σου.

Η Ὁρθόδοξη «Σεξουαλική Ἀγωγή»

Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου π. Γεωργίου Μεταλληνού, Απόσπασμα από τὸ βιβλίο «Τὸ Σῶμα Τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ὁ Κῆπος τῶν Τέρψεων».

Ἐπίμονα προβάλλεται σήμερα ἡ ἀνάγκη γιὰ «σεξουαλική Ἀγωγή» τῶν παιδιῶν μας, στὸ πλαίσιο μάλιστα τῆς σχολικῆς τους παιδείας. Ὅπως σὲ πολλοὺς ἄλλους τομεῖς τῆς ζωῆς μας, μάθαμε νὰ ἀκολουθοῦμε τυφλὰ τὴν «πολιτισμένη» Δύση, ἔτσι καὶ στὸ θέμα αὐτό. Ὁ φόβος μας εἶναι πάντα νὰ μὴν ὑστερήσουμε ἀπέναντί της. Γι' αὐτὸ ἀντιγράφουμε πάντα πρόθυμα τὸν προβληματισμὸ καὶ τὶς μεθόδους της. Ἐπόμενο, λοιπὸν, νὰ θεωροῦμε ἀπαραίτητο ὁ «διαφωτισμὸς» νὰ προχωρήσει καὶ στὴν προβληματολογία τοῦ «γενετησίου ἐνστίκτου». Βέβαια, τὸ τι διδάσκει ἡ Δύση σχετικὰ μὲ τὸ ζήτημα αὐτό, δὲν φαίνεται νὰ θεωρεῖται πρωταρχικῆς σημασίας. Γιατί δὲν πρέπει νὰ ξεχνᾶμε ὅτι ἡ Δύση—καὶ μεῖς μαζί της, ἀφοῦ εἴμαστε κομμάτι της— κλυδωνίζεται σὲ μία λαίλαπα πανσεξουαλισμοῦ.

Ὁ «φροῦδισμὸς» ἔχει καταστῆ κυρίαρχη ἰδεολογία στὴν ἐποχὴ μας. Ἡ προτεραιότητα δίνεται στὸ σεξουαλικὸ ἐνστικτο καὶ στὴν κτηνώδη ὀρμὴ. Τὸ ἀνθρώπινο σῶμα κατήντησε ὑποτιμημένη ἀξία καὶ ἀντικείμενο-ὄργανο ἡδονῆς. Μέσα σ' αὐτὸ τὸ κλίμα διαμορφώνεται τὸ περιεχόμενο τῆς «σεξουαλικῆς» διαφώτισης τοῦ Εὐρωπαίου ἀνθρώπου. Ἔρχεται ὁμως ἀπὸ τὰ βάθη τῶν αἰώνων ἡ φωνὴ τοῦ οὐρανοβάμονα καὶ θεόπτη Ἀποστόλου Παύλου νὰ μᾶς παρουσιάσει τὴν «σεξουαλικὴ ἀγωγή», ὅπως (πρέπει νά) διδάσκεται στὸ Σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, στὸ «σχολεῖο» τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Παραθέτουμε τὸ σχετικὸ κείμενό του:

Τὸ Σῶμα, Ναὸς τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος (Α΄ Κορ. 6:12-20)

Ἀδελφοί, πάντα μοι ἐξεστίν, ἀλλ' οὐ πάντα συμφέρει· πάντα μοι ἐξεστίν, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐγὼ ἐξουσιασθήσομαι ὑπὸ τίνος. Τὰ βρώματα τῆ κοιλίας καὶ ἡ κοιλία τοῖς βρώμασιν· ὁ δὲ Θεὸς καὶ ταύτην καὶ ταῦτα καταργήσει. Τὸ δὲ σῶμα οὐ τῆ πορνείᾳ, ἀλλὰ τῷ Κυρίῳ, καὶ ὁ Κύριος τῷ σώματι· ὁ δὲ Θεὸς καὶ τὸν Κύριον ἠγάπησε καὶ ἡμᾶς ἐξεγερεῖ διὰ τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ. Οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν μέλη Χριστοῦ ἐστίν; Ἄρα οὖν τὰ μέλη τοῦ Χριστοῦ ποιήσω πόρνης μέλη; Μὴ γένοιτο, ἢ οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ὁ κολλώμενος τῆ πόρνη ἐν σώμα ἐστίν; Ἔσονται γάρ, φησὶν, οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν· ὁ δὲ κολλώμενος τῷ Κυρίῳ ἐν πνεύμα ἐστίν. φεύγετε τὴν πορνείαν. Πᾶν ἁμάρτημα ὃ ἐὰν ποιήσῃ ἄνθρωπος ἐκτὸς τοῦ σώματός ἐστίν, ὁ δὲ πορνεύων εἰς τὸ ἴδιον σῶμα ἁμαρτάνει. Ἡ οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι τὸ σῶμα ὑμῶν ναὸς τοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν Ἁγίου Πνεύματος ἐστίν, οὗ ἔχετε ἀπὸ Θεοῦ, καὶ οὐκ ἐστὲ αὐτῶν; Ἠγοράσθητε γὰρ τιμῆς· δοξάσατε δὴ τὸν Θεὸν ἐν τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν καὶ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι ὑμῶν, ἃτινά ἐστι τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Μετάφραση: Ὅλα μοῦ ἐπιτρέπονται, ἀλλὰ δὲν συμφέρουν ὅλα. Ὅλα μοῦ ἐπιτρέπονται, ἀλλὰ ἐγὼ δὲν θὰ ἀφήσω τὸν

ἑαυτὸ μου νὰ ἐξουσιασθεῖ ἀπὸ τίποτα. Τὰ φαγητὰ εἶναι γιὰ τὴν κοιλία, καὶ ἡ κοιλία γιὰ τὰ φαγητὰ· ὁ Θεὸς θὰ καταργήσει καὶ αὐτὴν καὶ ἐκεῖνα. Ἀλλὰ τὸ σῶμα δὲν εἶναι γιὰ τὴν πορνεία· εἶναι γιὰ τὸν Κύριο καὶ ὁ Κύριος γιὰ τὸ σῶμα. Ὁ δὲ Θεὸς καὶ τὸν Κύριο ἀνέστησε καὶ ἐμᾶς θὰ ἀναστήσει διὰ τῆς δυνάμεώς Του. Δὲν ξέρετε ὅτι τὰ σώματά σας εἶναι μέλη τοῦ Χριστοῦ; Νὰ πάρω λοιπὸν τὰ μέλη τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ νὰ τὰ κάνω μέλη πόρνης; Μὴ γένοιτο. Δὲν ξέρετε ὅτι ἐκεῖνος ποῦ προσκολλάται στὴν πόρνη εἶναι ἓνα σῶμα μ' αὐτήν; Γιατί θὰ γίνουν, λέγει, οἱ δύο μία σάρκα. Ἐκεῖνος δὲ ποῦ προσκολλάται στὸν Κύριο εἶναι ἓνα πνεῦμα μ' Αὐτόν. Ἀποφεύγετε τὴν πορνεία. Κάθε ἄλλο ἁμάρτημα ποῦ κάνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα, ἐκεῖνος ὁμως ποῦ πορνεύει, ἁμαρτάνει πρὸς τὸ ἴδιο του τὸ σῶμα. Ἡ δὲν ξέρετε ὅτι τὸ σῶμα σας εἶναι ναὸς τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος ποῦ εἶναι μέσα σας καὶ τὸ ὅποιο ἔχετε ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό, κι ὅτι δὲν ἀνήκετε στοὺς ἑαυτοὺς σας; Ἔχετε ἀγορασθεῖ ἀντὶ τιμήματος. Δοξάστε λοιπὸν τὸ Θεὸ μὲ τὸ σῶμα σας καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα σας, τὰ ὅποια ἀνήκουν στὸ Θεό.

Ἡ Ρίζα τοῦ Προβλήματος

Ἡ ἀπάντηση τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου ἀρχίζει περίεργα, ἀλλ' ὄχι ἀνεξήγητα, ἀπὸ τὴν κοιλιόδουλεία. Γιατί οἱ «σαρκικὲς ἐπαναστάσεις» ἔχουν ὡς βασικὴ τους αἰτία τὴν γαστριμαργία. Ἀπὸ αὐτὴν γεννιέται τὸ πάθος τῆς πορνείας. Καὶ ὡς «πορνεία» νοεῖ ὁ Ἀπόστολος, καὶ μαζί του οἱ Ἅγιοι Πατέρες μας, ὄχι φυσικὰ μόνο τὴ σαρκικὴ σχέση μὲ κάποια πόρνη, ἀλλὰ κάθε χρῆση τοῦ γενετησίου ἐνστίκτου γιὰ σκοποὺς ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποῦ εἶναι ἡ δημιουργία οἰκογένειας. «Τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ δὲν ἐπλάσθη διὰ νὰ τρυφᾷ καὶ ἐκ τῆς τρυφῆς νὰ πίπτει εἰς τὴν πορνείαν, ἀλλ' ἐπλάσθη διὰ νὰ ἐνωθῆ μὲ τὸν Κύριον, Ὅς τις εἶναι ἡ κεφαλὴ αὐτοῦ» (Ἁγ. Νικόδημος ὁ Ἁγιορείτης). Ἡ νηστεία καὶ ἡ χαλιναγωγήση τοῦ σώματος, οὐσιαστικὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης ἀσκητικῆς, αὐτὸν ἀκριβῶς τὸν στόχο ἔχουν: νὰ ἀποφευχθεῖ ἡ «θεοποίηση» τῆς κοιλίας (Φιλίπ 3:19), ὥστε νὰ μὴν ὑποθάλλωνται τὰ σαρκικὰ πάθη, ποῦ ἔχουν ὡς κύρια αἰτία τὴν εὐζωία καὶ κοιλιόδουλεία. «Τί δὲ σαρκὸς εὐπαθοῦσης, καὶ νεότητι περιφερομένης, ἀφρονέστερον;» θὰ πεῖ ὁ Μ. Βασίλειος.

Ἡ Διδασκαλία τοῦ Ἀπ. Παύλου Διαρθρώνεται κατὰ τὸν Ἀκόλουθο Τρόπο:

(α') Πόσοι δὲν βλέπουν τὸ σῶμα τους ὡς ὄργανο ἡδονῆς; Ὅχι, λέγει ὁ Παῦλος. Τὸ σῶμα εἶναι δημιούργημα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ δὲν πλάσθηκε γιὰ τὶς πορνικὲς σχέσεις, ἀλλὰ γιὰ νὰ θεωθεῖ μαζί μὲ τὴν ψυχὴ, ποῦ εἶναι ἄρρηκτα δεμένη μαζί του. Θὰ ἀναστηθεῖ μαζί μὲ τὴν ψυχὴ, γιὰ νὰ ζήσει αἰώνια, ἢ στὴ «δόξα» τοῦ Θεοῦ ἢ στὴν θέασή της ὡς «καυστικοῦ πυρός» (πρβλ. Ἐβρ. 12:29), ποῦ εἶναι ἡ κόλαση. Γι' αὐτὸ δέχεται τὸ σῶμα μας τὴ χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὥστε νὰ μεταβάλλεται σὲ «ναὸ τοῦ ἐν ἡμῖν Ἁγίου Πνεύματος» ἀφοῦ βέβαια καθαρισθεῖ πρῶτα ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη τοῦ ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

Πορεία δόξας είναι ή ζωή του πιστού μέσα στο Σώμα του Χριστού. Νά, λοιπόν, γιατί είναι πώση και συντριβή ή (όποιαδήποτε) πορνεία. Έκτροχιάζει το σώμα μας, αλλά και όλο τον άνθρωπο από τον αιώνιο προορισμό του.

(β') Τα σώματά μας με το βάπτισμα γίνονται μέλη του Χριστού. Όταν λοιπόν χρησιμοποιούμε τα μέλη του σώματός μας, για να διαπράξουμε οποιοδήποτε κακό, χρησιμοποιούμε μέλη του Χριστού για τη διάπραξη της άμαρτίας μας. Έτσι, κάνουμε τα «μέλη του Χριστού» να άμαρτάνουν. Υπάρχει χειρότερο και φοβερότερο από αυτό; Άν λ.χ. φονεύσω κάποιον, με το χέρι του Χριστού τον φονεύω. Όταν βρίζω κάποιον, με το στόμα του Χριστού τον βρίζω. Όταν άδικω τον γύρω μου, με το χέρι του Χριστού τον άδικω. Και όταν πορνεύω, με τα μέλη του Χριστού πορνεύω. Αυτή είναι ή τραγικότητα και άφροσύνη της «πορνείας»! Άποσπώ τα μέλη μου από το σώμα του Χριστού και τα καταδικάζω σε θάνατο, καθιστώντας αυτά όργανα της άμαρτίας μου.

Μέσα στον άληθινά έκκλησιαστικό γάμο, με το μυστήριο, την πίστη και τη σωφροσύνη του, το ζευγάρι εντάσσει στη χάρη του Θεού και τη σωματική του σχέση, που γίνεται «διά της τεκνογονίας» μέσο σωτηρίας. Έξω από το μυστήριο και τη χάρη του Θεού (και αυτό συμβαίνει σε κάθε άλλο είδος «γάμου») ή σωματική σχέση παύει να είναι κοινωνία εν Χριστώ και γίνεται σχέση σαρκική, δηλαδή πορνεία, άποκοπή από το Σώμα του Χριστού, θάνατος.

(γ') Η ουσία της «πορνείας» παρουσιάζεται από τον Άπόστολο και από μία άλλη όπτική γωνία. «Δικό μου είναι το σώμα και το κάνω ό,τι θέλω»! Αυτή είναι ή πρόχειρη επιχειρηματολογία μας. Όχι, άπαντά ό Παύλος. Δεν είναι δικό σας τίποτε, συνεπώς ούτε και το σώμα σας. Δεν ανήκετε στον έαυτό σας. Και ως δημιουργήματα του Θεού, αλλά και για ένα έξ ίσου σπουδαίο λόγο. Σας έξαγόρασε ό Χριστός με άτιμητο τίμημα, το πανάγιο αίμα Του. Είμαστε «έξαγορασμένοι σκλάβοι», κατά τον άγιο Νικόδημο τον Άγιορείτη. Δεν είναι δικά μας, λοιπόν τα σώματά μας, αλλά του Χριστού. Περισσότερο δε από κάθε άλλη άμαρτία ή πορνεία μολύνει όλο μας το σώμα, σαρκικά και πνευματικά, και ίσοδυναμεί με αυτοκτονία.

Καταλαβαίνουμε, λοιπόν, γιατί με τόση άγωνία φωνάζει ό Παύλος; Φεύγετε (τρέξτε να σωθείτε από) την πορνεία! Τη βλέπει να καταδιώκει άπειλητικά τον άνθρωπο: Καμμιά άμαρτία δεν μάς κυνηγά τόσο, όσο ή σαρκική, γιατί είναι ριζωμένη μέσα μας.

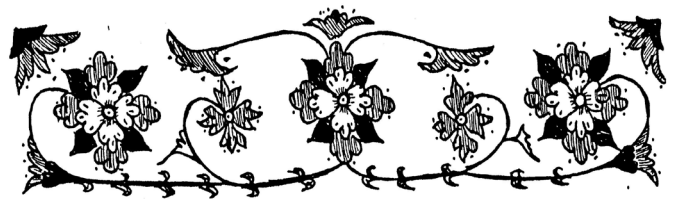
Παρατηρεί ό Άγ. Γρηγόριος Νύσσης: «... Όταν μορφή πορνική τοξεύη, νάτα διδόναι (να τρέπεται σε φυγή)... Κατατοξεύει γάρ κατ' όφθαλμών ή πορνεία, έστι δε των άλλων πονηρευμάτων φοβερότερον»!

Άναγκαία Προϋπόθεση

Γίνεται, λοιπόν, φανερό, ότι ή «σεξουαλική άγωγή» στο χώρο της Όρθοδοξίας δεν είναι παρά θεολογία του ανθρώπινου σώματος, μέρος της Όρθόδοξης

άνθρωπολογίας. Δεν πρόκειται, συνεπώς, για μία «έπιστημονική» άνάλυση και περιγραφή της σωματικής λειτουργίας ή για ήθικοκοινωνική καθοδήγηση, αλλά για θεώρηση του ανθρώπου μέσα από το πρίσμα της θείας άποκαλύψεως. Μια τέτοια αντίληψη, άρα, για τον άνθρωπο και το σώμα του δεν «διδάσκεται» θεωρητικά, ούτε, πολύ περισσότερο, επιβάλλεται! Έμπνέεται μονάχα στα πλαίσια της εν Χριστώ ζωής και του πνευματικού άγώνα της Όρθοδοξίας.

Ό Χριστιανός νέος μαθαίνει κοντά στον Γέροντα-Πνευματικό του να ζει εν Χριστώ, με προσευχή και άσκηση, άγωνα και έγκράτεια, γνωρίζοντας ότι ό στόχος του είναι ό εν Χριστώ δοξασμός του σώματος και της ψυχής του. Άν δεν ισχύει ή προϋπόθεση αυτή, δεν είναι περίεργο ή διδασκαλία του Άποστόλου Παύλου να άπορρίπτεται σαν μύθος.



Στάχια από τον Άγρό του Γέροντα Παΐσιου του Άθωνεϊτου

Ό άνθρωπος, όταν είναι δίκαιος, έχει το Θεό με το μέρος του. Όταν κανείς βαδίζει με το Εύαγγέλιο δικαιούται τη θεία βοήθεια. Από κει και πέρα άς μη φοβάται τίποτα.

Έπειδή μας κουμαντάρουν με σίδηρο, οί καρδιές μας Έ έγιναν σιδηρένιες.

Με την άδιάκριτη άγάπη τους οί γονείς άποβλακώνουν τα παιδιά τους. Έπειδή στερήθηκαν αυτοί, δεν θέλουν να στερήσουν τίποτε στα παιδιά τους, τους τα πηγαίνουν όλα στο χέρι (μάννα έλα να μου δέσεις το κορδόνι...)

Ό καλός δοκιμάζεται στα χέρια των κακών, περνάει στα λανάρια...

Τό άκάθαρτο πνεύμα δεν βγάζει στο φόρο τις άρετές των ανθρώπων, αλλά τις άδυναμίες του. Ό διάβολος μόνον αν του δώσει ό άνθρωπος δικαιώματα μπορεί να του κάνει κακό. Όταν κανείς δεν συμμετέχει στα Μυστήρια της Έκκλησίας δίνει δικαιώματα στον πειρασμό και δέχεται δαιμονικές επιδράσεις. Ό Διάβολος μπαίνει στον άνθρωπο, όταν υπάρχουν άκάθαρτα.

Η πνευματική έργασία στον έαυτό μας είναι άθόρυβη έργασία στον πλησίον, γιατί μιλάει το παράδειγμα και τότε τον μιμούνται οί άνθρωποι και διορθώνονται. Άπό πνευματικά κεφάλαιο παίρνουμε τους πνευματικούς τόκους και συντηρούμαστε.

Ό άνθρωπος είναι πλασμένος να κάνει το καλό καθώς ό Δημιουργός του.

Ἐξομολόγηση: Τὸ Σβηστήρι τοῦ Θεοῦ

ΠΗΓΗ: Ἀπὸ κείμενο *Τεράς Μονῆς Μεγίστης Λαύρας, Ἁγίου Ὁρους.*

Στὴν ζωὴ μας κάναμε πολλὰ λάθη. Κάναμε λάθη ὅταν ἤμασταν παιδιά, ὅταν γίναμε ἐφηβοὶ 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 στὸ Θεό, οἱ περισσότεροι ἀποκοπήκαμε καὶ γυρίσαμε τὶς πλάτες σ' Αὐτόν, νομίσαμε πῶς μακριὰ Του θὰ ἤμασταν εὐτυχημένοι. Κυνηγήσαμε τὴ χαρὰ καὶ τὴ εὐτυχία στὶς ἡδονές, στὴ σάρκα, στὸν κόσμο. Χαράξαμε μία ζωὴ ὕλιστική, 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 πῶς αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ μοῖρα μας καὶ τὸ τέλος μας.

Ἀλλὰ μέσα σ' αὐτὸ τὸ πυκνὸ σκοτάδι ἔνα φῶς λάμπει, δὲν τὸ προσέξαμε, δὲν τὸ εἶδαμε. Εἶναι ὁ ἀστέρας ποὺ ὁδήγησε τοὺς Μάγους στὸ σπήλαιο τῆς Βηθλεέμ. Αὐτὸ τὸ ἀστέρι ἐξακολουθεῖ νὰ ὁδηγῇ τοὺς ὁδοιπόρους τῆς ζωῆς σὲ ἐκεῖνον, στὸν ἕναν στὸ 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 στὸ Σταυρὸ γιὰ νὰ σοῦ χαρίσει σωτηρία, λύτρωση, ἐλευθερία ἀπὸ τὰ δεσμὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας. Ἴσως δὲν γνώρισες, δὲν ἐνδιαφέρθηκες γι' Αὐτόν· Αὐτὸς σὲ ἀγαπᾷ, σὲ ἀναζητᾷ, θέλει νὰ σὲ σώσει.

Γνωρίζεις ὅτι ὁ Κύριος ἔβαλε ἕνα σβηστήρι μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία Του, ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ σβήσῃ 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 νοιώσης χαρὰ καὶ εἰρήνη, πᾶρε τὴν ἀπόφασιν ν' ἀλλάξης ζωὴ καὶ πορεία.

Ἡ ζωὴ ποὺ κάνεις θὰ σὲ ὁδηγήσῃ σὲ ἕνα θάνατο αἰώνιο· ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ σὲ καλεῖ, θέλει νὰ σὲ σώσει. Αὐτὸ ποὺ διαβάσεις αὐτὴ τὴν ὥρα εἶναι ἡ φωνὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Νὰ μὴ κλείσης τὴν καρδιά σου στὴ φωνὴ Του· ἔλα κοντὰ Του, πήγαινε νὰ βρῆς ἕνα πνευματικό, ἀνοίξε τὴν καρδιά σου στὸ Θεό, πᾶς τὰ λάθη τῆς ζωῆς σου μὲ εἰλικρίνεια, μὲ ταπεινώσει, μὲ ἀληθινὴ μετάνοια. Καὶ ὁ Θεὸς θὰ σὲ σώσει, θὰ σὲ ἀλλάξῃ, θὰ σὲ καταστήσῃ παιδί δικό του, θὰ σοῦ χαρίσῃ τὸ Πνεῦμα Του τὸ Ἅγιον, θὰ γίνῃς νέος ἄνθρωπος, καινὴ κτίσι, πολίτης τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.

Ἡ Ἑλληνικότητα τῆς Ἀρχαίας Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ρώμης

Μεθοδίου Γ. Φούγια, Μητροπολίτου Πισιδίας, *Ἕλληνες καὶ Λατίνοι, Ἐκδ. Ἀποστολικὴ Διακονία, Β' ἔκδ. 1994, σελ. 48-54.*

Ἡ ἄποψις τοῦ ἀειμνήστου καθηγητοῦ Παναγιώτου Τρεμπέλα εἶναι πῶς μεταξὺ τῶν πιστῶν τῆς πρώτης Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ρώμης, συγκαταλέγονταν καὶ Χριστιανοὶ ἐξ Ἰουδαίων, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ πλεῖστον ἡ Ἐκκλησία αὐτῆς ἀποτελοῦνταν ἀπὸ Χριστιανούς ἐξ ἐθνῶν, δηλαδὴ τῆς Συρίας, Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας, Μακεδονίας καὶ Ἑλλάδος. Σὲ γενικὲς γραμμὲς αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ πραγματικότητα, ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ προσθέσουμε ἀκόμη μερικὲς λεπτομέρειες πρὸς συμπλήρωσιν τῆς εἰκόνας τῆς πρώτης Ἐκκλησίας τῆς πρωτεύουσας τῆς Ρωμαϊκῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας.

Κατ' ἀρχὴν ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος ἔγραψε τὴν ἐπιστολὴν τοῦ πρὸς τοὺς Χριστιανούς τῆς πρωτεύουσας τῆς Ρωμαϊκῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας στὴν Ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα καὶ δὲν χρειάστηκε νὰ μεταφρασθῇ στὴν Ἑλληνικὴ. Τὸ γεγονὸς τοῦτο προϋποθέτει ὅτι οἱ παραλήπτες τῆς ἐπιστολῆς αὐτῆς ἦταν καὶ Ἑλληνόφωνοι ποὺ ζοῦσαν στὸ κέντρο τοῦ Ρωμαϊκοῦ κόσμου.

Ὑπάρχουν πολλὲς πληροφορίες πῶς περὶ τὸ τέλος τοῦ Α' μ. Χ. αἰῶνος, ἡ Ρώμη ἦταν «Ἑλληνικὴ πόλις», γιατί ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τοὺς δούλους, τὸ πλῆθος τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ τῶν Ἑλληνόφωνων ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀνατολὴ καὶ ἡ ἀνωτέρα τάξις τῶν Ρωμαίων μιλοῦσαν τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα, ποὺ τὴν δίδασκαν οἱ Ἕλληνες παιδαγωγοὶ στὰ παιδιά τῶν Ρωμαϊκῶν οικογενειῶν. Ἀλλὰ τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ρώμης δὲν ἀποτελοῦνταν ἀπὸ δούλους ἢ ἀσήμαντους ἀνθρώπους· διαφορετικὰ δὲν θὰ ἦταν αὐτὴ «ἡ προκαθημένη τῆς ἀγάπης». Ἦταν πλούσιο καὶ οἰκονομικὰ καὶ πνευματικὰ.

Ὑπῆρχαν φυσικὰ καὶ Ἑβραῖοι, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἄφησαν πολλὰ ἴχνη, ἀφοῦ οἱ ἐπιγραφές τῆς ἐποχῆς ἐκεῖνης, ποὺ διασώθηκαν εἶναι κυρίως Ἑλληνικὲς καὶ ἐλάχιστες Λατινικὲς.

Ἄλλο γεγονὸς, ποὺ συνηγορεῖ ὑπὲρ τῆς Ἑλληνικότητος τῆς πρώτης Χριστιανικῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ρώμης, εἶναι ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν πρώτων Ἑλλήνων ἐπισκόπων αὐτῆς.

Οἱ ἐπίσκοποι τῆς Ρώμης, ἀπὸ τὸ Λῖνο ὡς τὸν Ἐλευθέριο εἶναι δώδεκα στὸν ἀριθμὸ. Ἐξ αὐτῶν, ὄχι περισσότεροι τῶν τριῶν (Κλήμης, Σίξτος καὶ Πῖος) φέρουν Λατινικὰ ὀνόματα. Ἀλλὰ, μολονότι τὰ ὀνόματα Κλήμης καὶ Πῖος εἶναι Λατινικά, ἡ μακρὰ ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ Κλήμεντος πρὸς Κορινθίους εἶναι γραμμὴν στὰ Ἑλληνικά καὶ ὁ Πῖος εἶναι ἀδελφὸς τοῦ Ἑλληνα ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀρκαδίαν Ἑρμᾶ, συγγραφέα τοῦ ἔργου «ὁ Ποιμὴν».

Στὴ Ρώμη ἐπίσης γράφηκε Ἑλληνιστί, περὶ τὰ μέσα τοῦ Β' αἰῶνος, τὸ λεγόμενον Ἀποστολικὸ Σύμβολο.

Πράγματι, ὅλη ἡ διασωθεῖσα φιλολογία, ποὺ συνδέεται

μέ τη Χριστιανική Ρώμη μέχρι της βασιλείας του Μάρκου Αυρήλιου, είναι γραμμένη στα Έλληνικά. Εκτός όμως από τα έργα του Κλήμεντος και του Ερμᾶ, διασώθηκαν και άλλα έργα, όπως είναι ή επιστολή του Ίγνατίου Αντιοχείας προς την Έκκλησία της Ρώμης και ή επιστολή του επίσκοπου Ρώμης Σωτήρος προς την Έκκλησία της Κορίνθου, που γράφηκαν επίσης στα Έλληνικά. Οί εκκλησιαστικοί συγγραφείς Ιουστίνος (†165) και Τατιανός (†120), που ήταν εγκατεστημένοι στη Ρώμη, έγραψαν στα Έλληνικά και στην ίδια γλώσσα αντιμετώπιστηκαν από τον Ιουστίνο και από το γνωστό επίσκοπο της Έλληνικής Χριστιανικής κοινότητας Λουγδούνου (Λυῶνος) Ειρηναίος (ό οποίος γεννήθηκε τό 140, επίσκοπος τό 178).

Με την Έλληνική γλώσσα έγιναν στη Ρώμη όλες οι προσπάθειες νά έναρμονισθῆ ὁ Χριστιανισμός με τις ἀρχές τῶν Ἑλλήνων φιλοσόφων, με τις ἀνατολικές θρησκείες, τις κοσμογονίες, τις θεοφανείες, και τὰ μυστήρια της Ἀνατολῆς. Ὁ Βαλεντίνος ὁ Ἀλεξανδρινός ήταν ὁ ἴδιος στη Ρώμη, ὁ Μαρκίων της Σινώπης επίσης. Ὁ Μοντανός ἀπό τῆ Φρυγία με τις προφητιδές του Πρίσκιλλα και Μαξιμίλλα, ἐάν δὲν ήταν οἱ ἴδιοι ἐκεῖ, διατηροῦσαν μία δυναμική ομάδα στη Ρώμη. Ἐκεῖ κατέφυγαν ἀκόμη οἱ παραχαράκτες της μεγάλης τριαδολογικῆς φιλονικίας Πραξέας ὁ Μικρασιάτης, Θεόδωρος ὁ Βυζαντινός, Ἀρτέμων Ἀσιάτης, ὁ Νοητός ἀπό τῆ Σμύρνη, και ὁ Σαβέλλιος ἀπό τὴν Πτολεμαῖδα της Κυρήνης. (1)

Στις δυτικές λειτουργίες υπάρχουν Έλληνικές περικοπές, οἱ ὁποῖες ἀνάγονται στην ἐποχή ἐκείνη, ὅπως εἶναι ὁ ἀγγελικός ὕμνος, τὸ Τρισάγιο, τὸ Κύριε ἐλέησον και τὸ Χριστὲ ἐλέησον.

Δὲν εἶναι γνωστὸ πότε ἀκριβῶς και (περίπου) κατὰ τὸν Γ΄ μ. Χ. αἰῶνα ἡ Ρωμαϊκὴ Έκκλησία ἀλλάξε ἀπὸ Ἑλληνικὴ και ἔγινε Λατινικὴ, γιατί ἡ γλώσσα της ἦταν Ἑλληνικὴ, οἱ συγγραφείς της ἦταν Ἑλληνες, τὰ γραπτά της ἦταν Ἑλληνικά και καθὼς μαρτυροῦν οἱ παραδόσεις της και οἱ λειτουργικοὶ τύποι της ἦταν επίσης Ἑλληνικοί. (2)

Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ γλώσσα ἦταν πάντοτε μεγάλος παράγοντας σπουδαιότητας γιὰ τὴν ἐνότητα της Έκκλησίας της Ρώμης με τις ἄλλες Έκκλησίες, γιατί ἡ Λατινικὴ γλώσσα ἦταν ἀνεπαρκῆς γιὰ νά ἐκφράση τις μεταφυσικὲς ἀναζητήσεις της Έλληνικῆς φιλοσοφίας. Μία παράγραφος τοῦ Aulus Gellius, ὅπως ἀναφέρει ὁ Milman, ἀπεικονίζει τὴν ἐνσυνείδητη ἀνεπάρκεια της Λατινικῆς νά ἐκφράση, παρ' ὅλες τις καινοτομίες τοῦ Κικέρωνος, τις κομψότητες διδασκαλίας της Έλληνικῆς φιλοσοφίας: «Haec Favorinum dicentem audivi Graeca oratione, cujus sententias, quantum meminisse potui, retuli. Amaenitates vero et copias ubertatesque verborum, Latina omnis facundia vix quidem indispisci potuerit».

Ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς χαρακτήρας της Έκκλησίας της Ρώμης ἦταν ἐντονος λόγω της Έλληνικῆς συνθέσεως τῶν πιστῶν της και λόγω της ἀνάγκης ἐπικοινωνίας της

με τις ἄλλες Έκκλησίες, πὸ ἦταν ἐξ ἴσου Ἑλληνικὲς. Ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς χαρακτήρας ἦταν ἐπίσης ἀναγκαῖος διότι δὲν ὑπῆρχε δυνατότητα δημιουργίας Λατινικῆς παραδόσεως στὴν Έκκλησία της Ρώμης. Ἡ Λατινικὴ παράδοσις ἐγκαινιάσθηκε ὄχι ἀπὸ Ρωμαῖους ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ Ἀφρικανούς Χριστιανούς, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἀνατολικά και μέχρι της Κυρηναϊκῆς μιλοῦσαν Ἑλληνικά, ἐνῶ δυτικά μιλοῦσαν τὴν γλώσσα Punic. Ὅταν ὁ ἅγιος Κυπριανός (248/9 258) ἔγραψε πρὸς τις Έκκλησίες της Ἀσίας στα Λατινικά, ὁ Εὐσέβιος θεώρησε τοῦτο κάτι ἐξαιρετικό, ἐνῶ ὁ Κορνῆλιος Ρώμης (251-253) γράφει πρὸς τὸν Ἀντιοχείας Φάβιο (252-255) στα Ἑλληνικά. (3)

Μόλις περὶ τὰ μέσα τοῦ Γ΄ αἰῶνος ὑποχωρεῖ ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ ἐπιρροή στὴν Έκκλησία της Ρώμης, ἀλλὰ δὲν σημαίνει τοῦτο πὼς ἐξαφανίζεται ἡ συμβολὴ της στὴ δημιουργία της Ρωμαϊκῆς Έκκλησίας, γιατί, ἂν αὐτὴ δὲν προϋπῆρχε, δὲν θὰ δινόταν ἡ εὐκαιρία στοὺς Τερτυλλιανό, Κυπριανό, Ἀρνόβιο και Νοβατιανό νά γράψουν στα Λατινικά Χριστιανικά κείμενα. Ὁ πλοῦτος ὅμως της πρωτοχριστιανικῆς Έκκλησίας της Ρώμης μέχρι τοῦ Εὐσεβίου φανερώνει και τὴν κοινωνικὴ κατάσταση τῶν Ἑλλήνων μελῶν και ἡγετῶν της Έκκλησίας της Ρώμης. (4)

Οἱ πληροφορίες πὸ ἔχουμε εἶναι ὅτι στὴν Έκκλησία της Ρώμης δὲν γίνονταν κηρύγματα, γιατί μεταξὺ τῶν πιστῶν ὑπῆρχαν και οἱ Λατῖνοι, οἱ ὁποῖοι δὲν καταλάβαιναν τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ γλώσσα. Ὁ πρῶτος πὸ συντάξε ὁμιλίες, ἀλλὰ στα Ἑλληνικά, ἦταν ὁ Ρώμης Ἰπόλυτος, μιμούμενος τὸν Ὁριγένη ὅταν ἦταν στὴ Ρώμη και κήρυττε ἐκεῖ.

Ἐκεῖνος ὅμως πὸ καθιέρωσε κηρύγματα στὴν Λατινικὴ γλώσσα, ἦταν ὁ πάπας Λέων Α΄ (440-461), ὁ ὁποῖος στερέωσε τὸ Λατινικὸ χαρακτήρα της Έκκλησίας της Ρώμης. Εκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη ἐκπληκτικὴ δραστηριότητά του, ὁ Λέων ἐγκαινίασε και στήριξε τὸ παπικὸ «πρωτεῖο» σὲ ὁμιλίες του κατὰ τὴν ἐπέτειο της μνήμης τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Πέτρου, κατὰ τις ἐπετείες της ἐκλογῆς του στο παπικὸ ἀξίωμα, και σὲ ἐπιστολές πὸ ἔστειλε στις Έκκλησίες της Ἀφρικῆς, τοῦ Ἰλλυρικοῦ, της Γαλλίας, στὸν πατριάρχη Ἀλεξανδρείας Διόσκορο, στὸν πατριάρχη Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Ἀνατόλιο, και στοὺς αὐτοκράτορες Μαρκιανό και Πουλχερία, ἐκθέτοντας τις ἀπόψεις του γιὰ τὸν επίσκοπο Ρώμης ὡς primus omnium episcoporum και ὅτι σὲ αὐτὸν μεταβιβάζεται ἡ plenitudo potestatis, ἡ sollicitudo omnium pastorum και ἡ communis cura universalis ecclesia.

Ἔτσι ὁ Λέων ἀπὸ τὸ πρωτεῖο της χάριτος και ἀπὸ τὸ πρωτεῖο της προσωπικῆς του ἀρμοδιότητος προέβαλε τὸ «πρωτεῖο» τοῦ δικαίωματος της διαδοχῆς. Ἀλλὰ ἐνῶ ὁμιλεῖ πολὺ ταπεινὰ γιὰ τὸ ἄτομό του, ἐξαίρει με αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο τὸν ἐπίσημο χαρακτήρα τοῦ ἀξιώματός του. Συνδυάζει τὴν ταπεινότητα και τὴν ἐπαρσι πὸ

ἐκφράζονται στις στερεότερες ἐκφράσεις: «Δοῦλος τῶν δούλων τοῦ Θεοῦ» «ἀντιπρόσωπος τοῦ Χριστοῦ» κι ἀκόμη «Θεὸς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς» (5).

Οἱ ἐκφράσεις αὐτὲς μαζί μὲ τις ἄλλες παπικὲς ἀξιώσεις ἀπομάκρυναν τὴν Ἐκκλησία τῆς Ρώμης ὄχι μόνον ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἕλληνες τῆς Ρώμης, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπ' ὅλη τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ Ἀνατολικὴ Ἐκκλησία.

† † †

(1) Not only do all these controversies, betray the inexhaustible fertility of the Greek or Eastern imagination, not only where they all drawn from Greek or Oriental doctrines, but they must have been still agitated, discussed, ramified into their parts and divisions, through the versatile and subtle Greek. They were all strangers and foreigners; not one of all these systems originated in Rome, in Italy, or in Africa. On all these opinions the Bishop of Rome was almost compelled to sit in judgment; he must receive or reject, authorize or condemn; he was a proselyte, whom it would be the ambition of all to gain. No one unfamiliar with Greek, no one not to a great extent Greek by birth, by education, or by habit, could in any degree comprehend the conflicting theories. [H. Hart Milman, History of Latin Christianity; includes that of the Popes to the Pontificate of Nicolas V, in six Volumes. Vol. I, London, 1857, second edition, p. 30-31].

(2) Milman: Ο Dix γράφει πολὺ ἐνδιαφέροντα συμπεράσματα γιὰ τὴν Ἑλληνικότητα τῆς Ρώμης κατὰ τὴν μεταποστολικὴ ἐποχὴ: Νομίζουμε, σημειώνει, πὼς ἡ Ρώμη δὲν ἦταν Ἑλληνικὴ πόλις, «...yet the first reference to Rome in Greek literature, in a geographer of the fourth century, speaks of it as the last “Greek city” Westwards. Rome was Latin in origin and race and languages, but seen against a background of exotic Etruscans and “barbaric” Gaulish tribes, Rome was a Πόλις. And against Carthage, the colony of Syrian Tyre, Rome defended the inheritance of Hellenism in the West in three hard wars. Culturally, Rome was, if not originally Hellenistic, at least easily and quickly “Hellasable.”» Καὶ ἐξηγεῖ ὅ,τι «Not much has been said as yet about the Subapostolic Church. Yet it has perhaps already been made clear why that Church presents a problem for the historian.» Ὁμοια καὶ ὁ B. Scott ὑποστηρίζει πὼς «Ἡ Ρωμαϊκὴ Ἐκκλησία περὶ τὰ μέσα τοῦ Γ' αἰῶνα ἐγκατέλειψε τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ ὡς ἐπίσημη γλῶσσα καὶ ἐγίνε πλήρως Λατινίζουσα. Καὶ ὅ,τι εἶναι ἀληθὲς γιὰ τὴ Ρώμη, εἶναι ἀληθὲς καὶ γιὰ τὴ Δύση γενικὰ.» The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, Cambridge Univ. Press (1934), p. 26. Βλ. καὶ τὸ κεφάλαιο St. Paul in Rome τοῦ διακεκριμένου θεολόγου καὶ ἀργότερα ἐπισκόπου τοῦ Duhnan J. B. Lightfoot στὸ ἔργο του St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians. A revised text with Introduction Notes and Dissertations. London and Cambridge (1869), σ. 128, καὶ ἰδιαίτερα σ. 19, σημ. 3, ὅπου

γράφει: «The Greek Roman Church in now generally allowed by the best writers, καὶ στὴν ἐπόμενη σελίδα: Her early bishops for several generations with very few exceptions bear Greek names. All her literature for nearly two centuries is Greek...»

(3) Εὐσεβίου, Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱστορία VI, Ἔκδ. Ἀποστολικῆς Διακονίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος, Ἀθήναι (1960), τ. 19, σ. 379. «Ρωμαϊκὴ φωνὴ συντεταγμένα τοῦ Κυπριανοῦ». Ο L. W. Barnard γράφει καθαρὰ ὅ,τι «μέχρι τοῦ τέλους τοῦ Β' αἰῶνα, ἡ Ρωμαϊκὴ Ἐκκλησία ἦταν κυρίως Ἑλληνόφωνη καὶ στὴ σύνθεσί της ἀνατολική. Τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν ἐπισκόπων της εἶναι Ἑλληνικὰ ἢ ἀνατολικά. Οἱ ἐπιγραφές ἐπὶ τῶν παπικῶν τάφων ἦταν κυρίως στὴν Ἑλληνικὴ ὡς τὸ τέλος περίπου τοῦ Γ' αἰῶνα, ἐνῶ ἡ χρῆσις τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς στὴ λειτουργία συνεχίσθηκε πρὸς πέρα...». Studies in Church History and Patristics, Ἀνάλεκτα Βλατάδων, Θεσσαλονίκη (1978), σ. 176. Γενικότερα βλ. στὸ ἴδιο ἔργο The Church of Rome at the end of the first Century A. D., Christianity in Rome 150-200 A. D., p. 176-180, καὶ The Heresy of Tatian, p. 181-193.

(4) Ἐπιστολὴ Διονυσίου Κορίνθου: «Ἐξ ἀρχῆς γὰρ ὑμῖν ἔθος ἐστὶ τοῦτο, πάντας μὲν ἀδελφοὺς ποικίλως εὐεργετεῖν ... πατροπαράδοτον ἔθος Ρωμαίων». Εὐσεβίου, «Τὸ μέχρι τοῦ καθ' ἡμᾶς διωγμοῦ φυλαχθὲν Ρωμαίων ἔθος», Διωγμὸς Δεκίου (249-251), σ. 305.

(5) Ph. Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. II: From the Reign of Constantine to Gregory the Great. Edinburgh, 1879, p. 314-322. Ἡ συγγραφικὴ δράση τοῦ Λέοντος ἀποτελεῖται ἀπὸ 96 κηρύγματα καὶ 13 ἐπιστολές, συμπεριλαμβανομένων κι ἐκείνων πρὸς αὐτόν. Ἡ συλλογὴ τῶν ὁμιλιῶν του εἶναι ἡ πρώτη στὸ εἶδος ποὺ ἔχουμε ἀπὸ ἐπίσκοπό της Ρώμης.

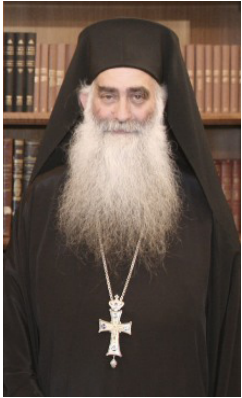


Ἐλεγε ὁ Γερο-Ἀρσένιος, ὁ Σηπλαιώτης: Ὅταν κάνω ἔκκομποσχοῖνι ὄρθιος, αἰσθάνομαι ἔντονη εὐωδία, θεϊκὴ. Ἐνῶ ὅταν λέω τὴν εὐχὴ καθιστός, ἐλάχιστη εὐωδία αἰσθάνομαι. Παρ' ὅλο ποὺ ἦταν τότε ἐνενήντα πέντε χρονῶν, ὁ Γέροντας ἀγωνιζόταν συνέχεια φιλότιμα, καὶ συνέχεια πλουτιζόταν πνευματικά, καὶ ἄς εἶχε πολλὰ ἀποταμιευμένα πνευματικά κεφάλαια!

Ἐλεγε ὁ Γερο-Ζαχαρίας ὅτι στὴν «Μεταμόρφωση» τῆς Νέας Σκήτης ἔλεγαν οἱ πατέρες τὴν εὐχὴ ἐκφώνως. Κάποτε, εἶχαν μαζευτεῖ οἱ δαίμονες ὀργισμένοι καὶ ἕνας ἀπὸ τοὺς ἔξω ἀπὸ ἐδῶ φώναζε: «Λένε ἐκφώνως τὴν εὐχὴ, δὲν ἔχει δύναμη ἢ προσευχή!» Τότε ἕνας ἀπὸ τοὺς μεγαλύτερους δαίμονες εἶπε: «Εἶτε ἐκφώνως εἶτε νοερῶς τὴν λένε τὴν εὐχὴ, ἔχει δύναμη, μιὰ ποὺ δὲν μπορούμε νὰ κάνουμε τίποτα.»

Ἐπὶ τοῦ Μαθήματος τῶν Θρησκευτικῶν Στὰ Ἑλληνικὰ Σχολεῖα

Γράφει ο Μητροπολίτης Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης κ. Παῦλος.



Ἐξοχότατε κ. Ὑπουργέ,
Ἡ πρόσφατη Ἐγκύκλιος τοῦ Ὑπουργείου Παιδείας, ἡ ὁποία ἀφορᾷ τὸ μάθημα τῶν Θρησκευτικῶν καὶ τὸν τρόπο ἀπαλλαγῆς ἀπὸ αὐτό, δημιουργεῖ ἀρκετοὺς προβληματισμούς, τόσο διὰ τὴν ὥρα τῆς ἐξαγγελίας, ὅσον καὶ διὰ τὸ περιεχόμενό της.

Τεῖνει νὰ γίνῃ παράδοση πλέον ἢ ἐκ μέρους τῆς Πολιτείας ἐξαγγελία ἐν μέσῳ θέρους τοιούτων

αἰφνιδιαστικῶν ἀποφάσεων οἱ ὁποῖες ἔχουν στόχο τὴ σχέση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μὲ τὴν Παιδεία.

Ὡς αἰτιολογία τῆς ἀνωτέρω ἀποφάσεως ἀναφέρεται ἡ σύσταση τῆς Ἀρχῆς προσωπικῶν δεδομένων προκειμένου νὰ μὴ ἐκτίθενται οἱ προσωπικὲς πεποιθήσεις τῶν μαθητῶν καὶ τῶν οἰκογενειῶν τους. Ἐὰν αὐτὸς εἶναι πραγματικὰ ὁ λόγος, τότε ἡ ἀπόφαση δημιουργεῖ τὸ ἀκριβῶς ἀντίθετο ἀποτέλεσμα τοῦ σκοποῦ τὸν ὁποῖο δῆθεν ἐπιδιώκει. Ἐκθέτει τὰ προσωπικὰ δεδομένα, στὴ συγκεκριμένη περίπτωση τὸ θρησκευτικὸ «πιστεῦω» τῶν μαθητῶν οἱ ὁποῖοι θὰ παρακολουθοῦν τὸ μάθημα.

Οἱ μαθητὲς, καὶ πολὺ περισσότερο οἱ οἰκογένειές τους, θὰ εἶναι οἱ ἔντονα θρησκευόμενοι ἢ, κατὰ τὸν συνήθη χαρακτηρισμό, «οἱ φανατικοί» ἢ «οἱ θρησκόληπτοι». Ἡ ἀπόφαση λοιπὸν ὄχι μόνον δὲν προστατεύει ἀλλὰ δημιουργεῖ ἓνα ἰσχυρὸ τεκμήριο προσδιορισμοῦ τῶν προσωπικῶν δεδομένων τῶν οἰκογενειῶν τῶν μαθητῶν ἐκείνων οἱ ὁποῖοι θὰ παρακολουθοῦν τὸ μάθημα τῶν θρησκευτικῶν.

Ἐπόμενη συνέπεια ἢ εἰσαγωγή τοῦ θρησκευτικοῦ φανατισμοῦ στὸ χῶρο τοῦ Σχολείου. Μὲ δεδομένη τὴν ἀνωριμότητα τῶν μαθητῶν δὲν εἶναι καθόλου ἀπροσδόκητο οἱ μαθηταὶ οἱ ὁποῖοι θὰ παρακολουθοῦν τὸ μάθημα νὰ γίνουν ἀντικείμενο εἰρωνίας ἐκ μέρους τῶν «ἄλλων» συμμαθητῶν τους καὶ μάλιστα στὰ πλαίσια τῶν συνηθισμένων μικροσυγκρούσεών τους.

Ἔτσι γρήγορα ἀπὸ τὴν μιὰ μεριά θὰ ἔχουμε τοὺς «θρησκόληπτους» μαθητὲς ποὺ παρακολουθοῦν τὸ μάθημα καὶ τοὺς «ἄθεους» οἱ ὁποῖοι δὲν θὰ τὸ παρακολουθοῦν. Ὀλίγη ἔνταση καὶ ἡ θρυαλλίδα τοῦ θρησκευτικοῦ φανατισμοῦ θὰ ἀνάψει.

Δὲν εἶναι δὲ καθόλου ἀπίθανο αὐτὸν τὸν φανατισμὸ νὰ τὸν ἐνισχύσουν καὶ οἱ οἰκογένειες, στὴν προσπάθειά τους νὰ στηρίξουν τὰ παιδιά τους στὴν ἐπιλογή τους.

Δία τοῦ λόγου τὸ ἀληθὲς σὲ γνωστὸ Ἰδιωτικὸ Λύκειο τῶν Ἀθηνῶν μαθητὴς ὁ ὁποῖος εἶχε ἀπαλλαγεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ μάθημα

τῶν Θρησκευτικῶν, μὲ τὴν αὐθαίρετη ἀπόφαση τοῦ πατέρα του, καὶ εἰρωνευόταν τοὺς συμμαθητὲς του οἱ ὁποῖοι τὸ παρακολουθοῦσαν.

Εἶναι ἐπίσης προφανὲς ὅτι, ἐκτὸς τῶν ἀλλοθρήσκων μαθητῶν, οἱ ὁποῖοι συνήθως ἐνῶ ἔχουν τὸ δικαίωμα τῆς ἀπαλλαγῆς δὲν τὸ χρησιμοποιοῦν, συνήντησα τέτοιους μαθητὲς, μουσουλμάνους ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλεῖστον, σὲ πολλὰ σχολεῖα διὰ τοὺς ἄλλους, πέραν ἀπὸ κάθε προσπάθεια ὠραιοποιήσεως τῆς πραγματικότητας, ἢ ἄρνηση συμμετοχῆς στὸ μάθημα θὰ πάρει τὸ χαρακτήρα ἔντονου ἀντιθρησκευτισμοῦ.

Ὁ θρησκευτικὸς φανατισμὸς λοιπὸν ἐπὶ θύραις.

Ἡ ληφθεῖσα ἀπόφαση, ἀντὶ νὰ προστατεύει, ἐκθέτει μὲ τρόπο ἀκράϊο τὰ προσωπικὰ δεδομένα τῶν μαθητῶν καὶ τῶν οἰκογενειῶν τους, καθόσον μετατρέπει τὴν ἀπλή παρακολούθηση τοῦ μαθήματος σὲ ἀκραία «θρησκευτικὴ ὁμολογία».

Θὰ ὑπάρξουν μαθητὲς οἱ ὁποῖοι κάτω ἀπὸ ἄλλες συνθήκες δὲν θὰ εἶχαν ἀντίρρηση νὰ παρακολουθήσουν τὸ θρησκευτικὸ μάθημα, ἀλλὰ τώρα ἐνώπιον τοῦ κινδύνου νὰ γίνουν ἐκ μέρους τῶν συμμαθητῶν τοὺς ἀντικείμενο εἰρωνίας, θὰ πιέζουν τοὺς γονεῖς τους καὶ γιὰ τὴ δική τους ἀπαλλαγὴ καὶ εἶναι ἐνδεχόμενο, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ μόνον τὸ λόγο, οἱ γονεῖς νὰ ἐνδώσουν στὴν ἀπαίτηση τῶν παιδιῶν τους.

Θεωρῶ ὅτι αὐτὸ εἶναι ἀπολύτως κατανοητὸ καὶ προσωπικὰ πιστεῦω ὅτι εἶναι ἓνας ἀπὸ τοὺς παράπλευρους στόχους ὅσων ἔλαβαν τὴν σχετικὴ ἀπόφαση.

Βεβαίως οἱ Χριστιανοὶ δὲν ἔχουν—δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἔχουν—προβλημα στὸ νὰ δηλώσουν εὐθαρσῶς τὴν Χριστιανικὴ τους ιδιότητα. Ἡ ἱστορία τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἶναι, ὅπως ὅλοι γνωρίζουμε, μιὰ διαρκῆς μαρτυρικὴ ὁμολογία. Μόνον ποὺ οἱ Ὀρθόδοξοι Χριστιανοὶ σὲ τοῦτον τὸν τόπο ἔχουν συνηθίσει νὰ δίνουν τὴν ὁμολογία τους, καὶ νὰ τὴν ἐπισφραγίζουν μάλιστα καὶ μὲ τὸ αἷμα τους, ἐνώπιον ἀντιχριστῶν δυνάμεων καὶ βαρβάρων κατακτητῶν καὶ ὄχι μίας πολιτείας ποὺ θεμελιώθηκε στὸ ὄνομα τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδος καὶ ποὺ στὴ σημαία της, βαμμένη μὲ μαρτύρων καὶ ἡρώων αἷμα, ἔχει τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ Σταυροῦ.

Ὅσο γιὰ τὴν διευκρίνηση τοῦ Ὑπουργείου Παιδείας, ὅτι τὸ μάθημα τῶν Θρησκευτικῶν παραμένει ὑποχρεωτικὸ μάθημα, μόνον σὰν χονδροειδῆς ἐμπαιγμὸς καὶ αὐτῆς ἀκόμη τῆς κοινῆς λογικῆς θὰ μπορούσε νὰ θεωρηθεῖ.

Τὸ λογικὸ συμπέρασμα λοιπὸν εἶναι ὅτι ὁ ἀπώτερος στόχος τῆς Κυβερνήσεως εἶναι ἡ κατάργηση τοῦ μαθήματος τῶν Θρησκευτικῶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκπαίδευση, ἀφοῦ μὲ μαθηματικὴ ἀκρίβεια ἐκεῖ ὀδηγεῖ ἡ ληφθεῖσα ἀπόφαση. Ἄλλωστε ὁ νέος λογότυπος τοῦ Ὑπουργείου σας ἐπιβεβαιώνει μὲ τὸν πλέον κατηγορηματικὸ τρόπο αὐτὴ τὴν πρόθεση, ἀφοῦ σ' αὐτὸν δὲν ὑπάρχει τὸ παραμικρὸ σύμβολο τοῦ μαθήματος τῶν Θρησκευτικῶν, γιὰ ὅλα τὰ ὑπόλοιπα μαθήματα ὑπάρχει, δὲν ὑπάρχει τὸ παραμικρὸ σημεῖο, ἔστω ἐνὸς τρούλου Ὀρθόδοξου Ναοῦ, κάτι ἀπὸ τὴν Ἁγία Σοφία.

Υπάρχει όμως προμετωπίδα ἀρχαιοελληνικοῦ Ναοῦ. Πολλοὶ καὶ σοβαροὶ ἄνθρωποι ἰσχυρίζονται ὅτι ὁ διωγμὸς τοῦ Χριστιανικοῦ φρονήματος ἔχει πλέον ἀρχίσει. Μήπως ἄραγε βρισκόμαστε στὴν ἀντιμετώπιση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἐκ μέρους τῆς Πολιτείας ὡς κάποτε ἐν κατὰ τὰς ἡμέρας τῆς Σοβιετικῆς Ἐνώσεως;

Ἡ μελέτη τοῦ Δρ. τῆς Νομικῆς κ. Κρίππα γιὰ τὴ θέση τοῦ μαθήματος τῶν Θρησκευτικῶν στὴν Εὐρώπη ἀποδεικνύει ὅτι διαφορετικὰ αὐτὴ ἀντιμετωπίζει τὸ ἄνωτέρω μάθημα, οἱ δὲ πρόσφατοι λόγοι τοῦ Γάλλου Προέδρου δείχνουν ὅτι ἄλλοι εἶναι ἀκόμη καὶ οἱ προβληματισμοὶ στὸν Εὐρωπαϊκὸ χῶρο.

Ἀλήθεια, κ. Ὑπουργέ, πῶς ἡ Ἀρχὴ προστασίας προσωπικῶν δεδομένων θὰ προστατεύσει τὰ προσωπικὰ δεδομένα τῶν μαθητῶν οἱ ὁποῖοι θὰ παρακολουθοῦν τὸ μάθημα τῶν Θρησκευτικῶν; Ὑπολογίζω ὅτι ἡ εἰσήγησή της θὰ εἶναι ἡ πλήρης ἀπόρριψη τοῦ μαθήματος τῶν θρησκευτικῶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκπαιδευτικὴ διαδικασία. Θὰ ἀποδεχθῆτε μία τέτοια εἰσήγηση; Μήπως τελικὰ θὰ ἦταν προτιμότερο ἀλλὰ καὶ τιμιότερο ἡ Κυβέρνηση νὰ ἦταν περισσότερο εἰλικρινῆς ἀπέναντι στοὺς πολίτες της;

Κύριε Ὑπουργέ, μετὴν ἀπόφαση τὴν ὁποία ἐλάβετε ὀδηγεῖτε τοὺς πιστοὺς Χριστιανοὺς ἢ στὸν πνευματικὸ αὐτοευνουχισμό ἢ στὴ ρήξη. Ἔχετε ἀσφαλῶς τὴν εὐθύνη τῆς ἀποφάσεως, θὰ ἔχετε προφανῶς καὶ τὴν εὐθύνη τῶν συνεπειῶν της.

Μὲ τιμὴ στὸ πρόσωπό σας ἀλλὰ καὶ θλίψη διὰ τὴν ἀπόφασή σας,

+ Ὁ Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης ΠΑΥΛΟΣ



Πρόσφατα κυκλοφόρησε ἓνα νέο βιβλίο «Ὁ Γέρον Ἀμβρόσιος Λαζαρη», ἀπὸ τὶς ἐκδόσεις Κυριακίδη. Μεταξὺ τῶν ἄλλων πολὺ ἐνδιαφερόντων θεμάτων, στὴ σελίδα 178 ἀναφέρει τὰ ἐξῆς:

— Θα ἔρθουν χρόνια δύσκολα, ἀλλὰ μὴ φοβάστε. τὰ παιδία τοῦ ὁ Θεὸς δὲν τὰ ἐγκαταλείπει. Θὰ τὰ φυλάει σκανδαλωδῶς!

— Δηλαδή Γέροντα;

— Τι δηλαδή; Νά, ἂν δὲν θὰ ἔχεις νὰ φᾶς, θὰ ξυπνᾶς τὸ πρωί, θὰ βρῖσκεις μία φραντζόλα ψωμί πάνω στὸ τραπέζι καὶ θὰ λές: Αὐτὸ ἀπὸ ποῦ ἦρθε; Ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ ἔχεις πίστη στὸ Θεό. χωρὶς πίστη δὲν γίνεται τίποτα.

Καὶ ἀμέσως συνεχίζει:

— Ἀπο ἐδῶ καὶ πέρα δὲν ἔχεις διανοηθεῖ τί θὰ δεῖς καὶ τί θὰ ἀκούσεις. Δὲν ἔχουν ξαναγίνει ποτὲ στὸν κόσμος, εἶπε μία μέρα τὸ καλοκαίρι τοῦ 2005. Στὴν Ἑλλάδα θὰ συμβοῦν πολλὰ. Καὶ σὲ ὅλο τὸν κόσμος καὶ σὲ ἐμᾶς. Καὶ γιατί; Γιατί ἐμεῖς ἀποτελοῦμε τὸν φάρο τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, ἀλλὰ καταντήσαμε ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία χειρότεροι ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄθεους!

Ἐνα Θαῦμα τῆς Πίστης μας

«Εγὼ πῆγα στὸ Χριστούλη καὶ στὴν Παναγίτσα ψηλὰ στὸν οὐρανό...»

Ἀφηγοῦνται ὁ Ἠλίας καὶ ἡ Θεοφανὸ Τσιραμπίδη, ἀπὸ τὸ Δροσᾶτο Ν. Κιλκίς, γονεῖς τριῶν παιδιῶν.

Στις 30 Μαρτίου τοῦ 2001 πῆγαμε τὸ Μιχαλάκη μας, Σῆλικίας 4,5 χρονῶν, ἐπειγόντως στὸ Νοσοκομεῖο Γεννηματᾶς Θεσσαλονίκης μετὰ ἀνυπόφορο κοιλόπονο. Μετὰ τὶς ἀπαραίτητες ἐξετάσεις καὶ διάγνωση ἀποφρακτικὸ εἰλεό, χειρουργήθηκε ἐπὶ 3,5 ὥρες, καὶ τοῦ ἀφαιρέθηκε μισὸ μέτρο σάπιο ἔντερο. Οἱ γιατροὶ μᾶς εἶπαν ὅτι τὸ παιδί πέρασε πολὺ μεγάλη μπόρα, ἀλλὰ δὲν ξεπέρασε τὸν κίνδυνο. Τὸ βράδυ τῆς Δευτέρας ὡς τὸ ἐπόμενο πρωὶ εἶχε 40 πυρετό. Τὴν Τρίτη μεταφέρθηκε ἐπειγόντως στὴ μονάδα ἐντατικῆς θεραπείας μετὰ σηψαιμία καὶ ὀξὺ ἀναπνευστικὸ σόκ. Οἱ ἐλπίδες νὰ ζήσει ἦταν τὸ πολὺ-πολύ, μόλις 10%.

Στὸ μεταξύ, χωρὶς νὰ γνωρίζει τίποτα, μιὰ γειτόνισσα, βλέπει σὲ ὄνειρο τὸν ἅγιο Ραφαήλ καὶ τῆς λέει: «Ἀντωνία, ἐγὼ θὰ φύγω, ἐσὺ δὲν με χρειάζεσαι ἄλλο. Θὰ πάω στὸν Ἠλία, ἐκεῖνος με ἔχει ἀνάγκη τώρα!»

Ἡ γυναίκα ὕστερα ἔμαθε γιὰ τὸ γιό μας. Μιὰ γνωστή μας οἰκογένεια ἀπὸ τὴ Γουμένισσα, τοῦ κ. Πολυβίου Σαμαρᾶ, πῆγαν στὸν Ἅγιο Ραφαήλ στὴ Γρίβα καὶ γονατιστοὶ μετὰ τὸν Ἱερέα διάβασαν παράκληση γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τοῦ παιδιοῦ μας. Ὁ ἀδελφός μας Ἀβραάμ τὸ ἀπόγευμα ἦρθε στὸ ἄδειο σπῆτι μας νὰ κάνει Παράκληση στὸν ἅγιο Γεώργιο γιὰ τὴν υἰεὶα τοῦ Μιχάλη. Κάποια στιγμή ἔλαμψε τὸ δωμάτιο, τόσο πού τρόμαξε. Ἀπὸ ποῦ ἦρθε τόσο φῶς; Ἴσως ἡ Χάρη τοῦ Ἁγίου.

Μετὰ ἀπ' αὐτά, ἡ κατάσταση τοῦ παιδιοῦ ἄρχισε συνέχεια νὰ βελτιώνεται, μέχρι τὸ Σάββατο τοῦ Λαζάρου πού ἀνοίξε τὰ ματάκια του. Τὴν Μεγάλη Δευτέρα ἦταν ἐντελῶς καλὰ καὶ βγήκε ἀπὸ τὴ Μ.Ε.Θ. Μετὰ ἀπὸ εικοσιτρεῖς ἡμέρες νοσηλείας φύγαμε ἀπὸ τὸ Νοσοκομεῖο.

Ὅταν συνήλθε, ἄρχισε νὰ μᾶς λέει διάφορα: «Εγὼ πῆγα στὸ Χριστούλη καὶ στὴν Παναγίτσα ψηλὰ στὸν οὐρανό, ὅπου ἔχει πολλὰ σύννεφα. Μετὰ τὸ ἄσπρο ἄλογο τοῦ Ἁγίου Γεωργίου. Εἶδα τὸ θεῖο Φάνη (γειτόνά μας πού πέθανε πρὶν 8 μῆνες) καὶ τὴ Δεσπούλα (ἓνα κοριτσάκι πού πέθανε πρὶν 3 χρόνια), ἦταν πολλοὶ ἄγνωστοι ἄνθρωποι ἐκεῖ καὶ φοροῦσαν χρυσὰ ἀγγελουδίστικα καὶ ὅλοι τραγουδοῦσαν... Ὁ Χριστούλης καὶ ἡ Παναγίτσα με ρώτησαν ἂν ἔχω ἀδελφία, πῶς τὰ λένε, καὶ μοῦ εἶπαν, μὴ φοβάσαι θὰ πᾶς πάλι στὴ μαμά καὶ τὰ ἀδελφία σου... Δὲν ξέρω πῶς νὰ πάω πάλι ἐκεῖ... Μετὰ τὸ ἄλογό μου, εἶπε ὁ ἅγιος Γεώργιος... Φοβᾶμαι, δὲν ξέρω νὰ ὀδηγήσω τὸ ἄλογο... Μὴ φοβᾶσαι, θὰ τὸ ὀδηγήσω ἐγώ!».

Ὁ Μιχάλης εἶναι κοντὰ μας, γερὸ παιδί ὅπως καὶ πρὶν, κάθε μέρα δοξάζουμε τὸν Θεὸ τὴν Παναγία καὶ ὅλους τοὺς Ἁγίους πού μας τὸν χάρισαν πάλι κοντὰ μας!

ON ISLAM...

Adapted from Dr. Peter Hammond's book: "Slavery, Terrorism and Islam: The Historical Roots and Contemporary Threat."

Editor's Note: In the continuing on today and off tomorrow propaganda relative to the peaceful nature of Islam, we consider it prudent to reveal statistical data as provided within the source document. For more on the frightening aspects of Islam, one should read "Infidel" by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, copyright 2007 Free Press (Simon & Schuster), 1230 Avenue of the Americas, NY, NY 10020. The reader will be shocked with the details this author gives about her formative years growing up in Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Kenya, and Ethiopia. It confirms all of the information below.



Islam is not a religion, nor is it a cult. In its fullest form, it is a complete, total, 100% system of life. Islam has religious, legal, political, economic, social, and military components.

The religious component is a beard for all of the other components.

Islamization begins when there are sufficient Muslims in a country to agitate for their religious privileges.

When politically correct, tolerant, and culturally diverse societies agree to Muslim demands for their religious privileges, some of the other components tend to creep in as well. Here's how it works.

As long as the Muslim population remains around or under 2% in any given country, they will be for the most part be regarded as a peace-loving minority, and not as a threat to other citizens. This is the case in the United States: Muslim 0.6%; Australia: Muslim 1.5%; Canada: Muslim 1.9%; China: Muslim 1.8%; Italy: Muslim 1.5%; Norway: Muslim 1.8%.

At 2% to 5%, they begin to proselytize from other ethnic minorities and disaffected groups, often with major recruiting from the jails and among street gangs. This is happening in Denmark: Muslim 2%; Germany: Muslim 3.7%; United Kingdom: Muslim 2.7%; Spain: Muslim 4%; Thailand: Muslim 4.6%.

From 5% on, they exercise an inordinate influence in proportion to their percentage of the population. For example, they will push for the introduction of halal (clean by Islamic standards) food, thereby securing food preparation jobs for Muslims. They will increase pressure on supermarket chains to feature halal on their shelves: along with threats for failure to comply. This is occurring in France: Muslim 8%; Philippines: Muslim 5%; Sweden: Muslim 5%; Switzerland: Muslim 4.3%; The Netherlands: Muslim 5.5%; Trinidad & Tobago: Muslim 5.8%

At this point, they will work to get the ruling government to allow them to rule themselves (within their ghettos) under Sharia, the Islamic Law. The ultimate goal of Islamists is to establish Sharia law over the entire world.

When Muslims approach 10% of the population, they tend to increase lawlessness as a means of complaint about their conditions. In Paris, we are already seeing car-burnings.

Any non-Muslim action offends Islam, and results in uprisings and threats, such as in Amsterdam, with opposition to Mohammed cartoons and films about Islam. Such tensions are seen daily, particularly in Muslim sections, in Guyana: Muslim 10%; India: Muslim 13.4%; Israel: Muslim 16%; Kenya: Muslim 10%; Russia: Muslim 15%.

After reaching 20%, nations can expect hair-trigger rioting, jihad militia formations, sporadic killings, and the burnings of Christian churches and Jewish synagogues, such as in Ethiopia: Muslim 32.8%

At 40%, nations experience widespread massacres, chronic terror attacks, and ongoing militia warfare, such as in Bosnia: Muslim 40%; Chad: Muslim 53.1%; Lebanon: Muslim 59.7%.

From 60%, nations experience unfettered persecution of non-believers of all other religions (including non-conforming Muslims), sporadic ethnic cleansing (genocide), use of Sharia Law as a weapon, and Jizya, the tax placed on infidels, such as in Albania: Muslim 70%; Malaysia: Muslim 60.4%; Qatar: Muslim 77.5%; Sudan: Muslim 70%.

After 80%, expect daily intimidation and violent jihad, some State-run ethnic cleansing, and even some genocide, as these nations drive out the infidels, and move toward 100% Muslim, such as has been experienced and in some ways is on-going in Bangladesh: Muslim 83%; Egypt: Muslim 90%; Gaza: Muslim 98.7%; Indonesia: Muslim 86.1%; Iran: Muslim 98%; Iraq: Muslim 97%; Jordan: Muslim 92%; Morocco: Muslim 98.7%; Pakistan: Muslim 97%; Palestine: Muslim 99%; Syria: Muslim 90%; Tajikistan: Muslim 90%; Turkey: Muslim 99.8%; United Arab Emirates: Muslim 96%.

Achieving 100% will usher in the peace of 'Dar-es-Salaam': the Islamic House of Peace. Here there's supposed to be peace, because everybody is a Muslim, the Madrasses are the only schools, and the Koran is the only word, such as in Afghanistan: Muslim 100%; Saudi Arabia: Muslim 100%; Somalia: Muslim 100%; Yemen: Muslim 100%

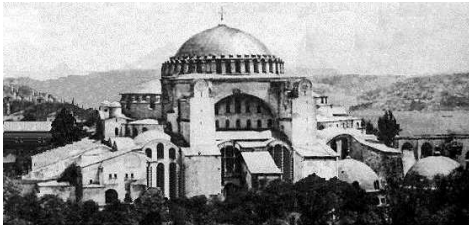
Unfortunately, peace is never achieved, as in these 100% states the most radical Muslims intimidate and spew hatred, and satisfy their blood lust by killing less radical Muslims, for a variety of reasons. "Before I was nine I had learned the basic canon of Arab life. It was me against my brother; me and my brother against our father; my family against my cousins and the clan; the clan against the tribe; the tribe against the world, and all of us against the infidel." (Leon Uris, "The Haj.")

It is important to understand that in some countries, with well under 100% Muslim populations, such as France, the minority Muslim populations live in ghettos, within which they are 100% Muslim, and within which they live by Sharia Law. The national police do not even enter these ghettos.

There are no national courts nor schools nor non-Muslim religious facilities. In such situations, Muslims do not integrate into the community at large. The children attend madrasses. They learn only the Koran. To even associate with an infidel is a crime punishable with death. Therefore, in some areas of certain nations, Muslim Imams and extremists exercise more power than the national average would indicate.

Today's 1.5 billion Muslims make up 22% of the world's population. But their birth rates dwarf the birth rates of Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Jews, and all other believers. Muslims will exceed 50% of the world's population by the end of this century.

Are the liberal governments of the Christian West ready for the coming clash? One could easily conclude that the tragic events of 9-11 would become a regularly repeated event in the lives of our children...



A PARABLE

By St. Silouan of Mount Athos.

An eagle was flying in the heights and delighting in the beauty of the world, and he thought: "I cover great expanses, and I see valleys and mountains, seas and rivers, meadows and forests. I see towns and settlements, and how men live; while here a village rooster knows nothing except his own yard. I shall fly to him and tell him about the life of the world."

The eagle flew onto the roof of the country house and saw how gallantly and merrily the rooster was strolling amidst his hens. And the eagle began to speak to the rooster of the world's beauty and wealth. At first, the rooster listened with attention, but did not understand anything. The eagle, seeing that the rooster did not understand anything, was saddened, and it became hard for him to speak with the rooster; while the rooster, not understanding what the eagle was saying, began to be bored, and it became hard for him to listen to the eagle.

Thus it happens when a learned man speaks with an unlearned man, but even more when a spiritual man speaks with an unspiritual man. A spiritual man is like the eagle, while an unspiritual man is like the rooster; the mind of a spiritual man meditates on the law of the Lord day and night and by prayer ascends to God, while the mind of an unspiritual man is attached to the earth or occupied with thoughts. And when a spiritual man meets an unspiritual man, intercourse for them both is boring and difficult.

THE BANISHMENT AND REPENTANCE OF ADAM AND EVE

By St. Symeon the New Theologian.

Being banished from Paradise, Adam and Eve immediately began to thirst and hunger, to freeze and shiver, to have labors and sweat, and to endure all those difficulties and griefs that we even now endure. Therefore, they soon felt into what a bitter condition they had descended, and to what a great misfortune they had become subject. Then they realized both their own hardness of heart and their lack of repentance, as well as God's unutterable condescension and compassion towards them. Therefore, even walking and sitting outside Paradise, they repented and shed tears, beat themselves in the face and tore out the hair of their head, lamenting over their former hardness of heart.

And this they did not for just one day or two, or for ten days, but for their whole lifetime. For how can one not weep, remembering their meek and condescending Master, that unutterable delight of Paradise, those indescribable good things and beauties of the flowers of Paradise, that care-free life without labor, and that communion with angels?

In worldly life, when servants are appointed by an eminent master in order to serve him, as long as they preserve attention, respect, and obedience towards their lord they have boldness before him, enjoy his favor and love, and live with him in peace and satisfaction. But when they become proud and begin to step away from the will of their master and despise their fellow servants, they lose not only their boldness before him, but even his favor and love; and at his order they are banished into a far country where they are subjected to innumerable necessities and sorrows, and the more they suffer and are in misfortunes, the more they feel the bitterness of their condition, remembering the peaceful and satisfied life that they have lost.

This same thing was experienced by our first ancestors also, who lived in Paradise and took sweet delight in its great good things. They acknowledged the greatness and value of these good things after they had lost them, being banished from Paradise; then they recognized also the whole greatness of the evil which they had done. Therefore they ceaselessly grieved and wept, calling on God's compassion.

And what did God do, being quick and ready to mercy, and slow to punishment? He foresaw that they would finally become humble and repent, and therefore He foreordained a special means for abolishing His righteous sentence upon them. But, He did not immediately bring into execution this foreordained decree, but assigned for this His own place and time and fashion, so as to teach us to love wisdom and not to rise up against our Creator and God.

Just as He foreordained, so later did He do: for those whom He banished from Paradise for their brazenness before Him and their unrepentant heart, since they had humbled themselves and wept over themselves, He arranged a way for the restoration of what had been lost.

And this is what it was: The Only-begotten Son and Word of the Unoriginate Father descended from the heavens to earth, and not only became man like them, but even was pleased to endure a violent and shameful death; then He descended into Hades, brought them up from there and restored them. And thus, since Christ so suffered for them, as you hear every day, that He returned them from such a distant exile, would He not have had pity on them, if they had repented then in Paradise? How could he not have had pity on them, when He by nature is the Lover of mankind and compassionate, and He created them in order that they might take sweet delight of the good things of Paradise and might glorify their Benefactor?

But so that you might the better understand this and believe my words, hear yet more: If they had repented then, when they were still in Paradise, they would have received again only Paradise and nothing more.

But inasmuch as, being banished from Paradise for their lack of repentance, they then repented, wept much and were in great misfortunes, therefore God the Master of all, for their labors and sweat, for the misfortunes which they endured and for their good repentance, was pleased again to honor them and to glorify them so as to cause them to forget the whole evil that they had caused.

And what did He do? Behold how great is God's Love of mankind! Descending to Hades and bringing them out, He did not bring them again into the same Paradise from which they had been banished, but He raised them up to the heaven of heavens; and when He sat down at the right hand of His God and Father, He sat them down together with Him. Just think what great honor He gave to Adam who by nature was His slave, and vouchsafed him to be God's own father according to His grace-given dispensation. See to what a height our Master Christ raised him up for his repentance, humility, lamentation and tears! O the power of repentance and tears! O the ocean of Love of mankind which is beyond words, and mercy which cannot be traced out!

And not only Adam did God honor and glorify, but also us his sons, those, that is, who have begun to please him by repentance, tears, lamentation and by all of which we have spoken; and even up to now He glorifies and honors like

Adam those who repent well and do what Adam did. Further, those who up until now and in the future will do this and repent, whether they be laymen or monks, He will glorify like Adam, as He Himself, our true God, has said: Truly I say to you, I will not leave them ever, but show them to be My brethren and friends, fathers and mothers, kinsmen and co-inheritors. I have glorified them and will glorify them, both in the heavens on high and on the earth below; and of their life and rejoicing and glory there shall be no end.

Tell me, then, my brother: What profit was there for our first ancestors in that laborless and carefree life which they had in Paradise, when they were careless, disdained God by not believing Him, and transgressed His commandment? For if they had believed Him, Eve would not have considered the serpent to be more trustworthy than God, Adam would not have believed Eve rather than God, and they would have refrained from eating of the forbidden tree. But they ate and did not repent, and for this they were banished from Paradise.

Moreover, from banishment also they received no harm, but great benefit. This is by power of the dispensation of our salvation. For our Master Christ descended from the heavens, by His death loosed the bonds of our death, and took away the condemnation that came down to us from the

transgression of our first parents; by the power of holy Baptism He regenerated us, recreated us and delivered us from every condemnation and made us in this world completely free, so that our enemy the devil might no longer act in us and against us by violence and force. He honored us with the same autonomy which was given us in the beginning, and He gave us more power against the enemy than all the saints had who lived before the dispensation of Christ, so that those who desire might easily conquer the enemy. And when such ones die they do not descend to Hades like the ancients, but ascend to the heavens and are vouchsafed to receive the repose and eternal joy which are there, only to a certain degree at the present time, but completely and entirely after the resurrection.

And so let no one invent excuses for his sins and say that we, by virtue of the transgression of Adam, are entirely subject to the action of the devil and are dragged by force into sin. They who think and speak thus consider that the dispensation of the Incarnation of our Master and Savior Jesus Christ was useless and in vain. Such an opinion is the opinion of heretics and not of the Orthodox. For what other reason did Christ descend and become Incarnate, and for what else did



He suffer if not in order to loose the condemnation which proceeded from sin, and to deliver our race from slavery to the devil and from the activity in us of this our enemy? This is true autonomy: in no way to be subject to someone else. We are all born sinners from our forefather Adam who sinned; we are all criminals from a criminal, slaves of sin from a slave of sin, subject to the curse and death from him who was subject to the curse and death.

And because of Adam who received the action of the cunning devil, and by his counsel was moved to sin, and enslaved himself to him and lost his autonomy, we also, as his children, are subject to the action and the compulsory dominion of the devil and are his slaves. But our Lord came down from the heavens, was Incarnate and became man like us in everything except sin, in order to annihilate sin. He was conceived and born so as to sanctify the conception and birth of men. He was raised up and grew little by little so as to bless every age of life. He began to preach at the age of thirty, having become a full-grown man, so as to teach us not to jump out of line and go before those who are greater than us in mind and virtue, that is, are more intelligent and virtuous than we, especially if we are still young and not perfect in understanding and virtue. He preserved all the commandments of His God and Father so as to loose every transgression and to deliver us criminals from condemnation. He became a slave, took the form of a slave, in order to raise us, the slaves of the devil, once more into the condition of masters and to make us masters and possessors over the devil himself, our former tyrant.

(This is confirmed by the saints who have cast out the devil, as a weak and infirm one, as well as his servants, not only in their lifetime but also after their death.). He was hung upon a Cross and became a curse, as the prophet says: *Cursed is everyone that hangeth upon a tree* (Deut 21:23), in order to loose the whole curse of Adam. He died in order to put death to death, and He rose in order to annihilate the power and activity of the devil who had authority over us by means of death and sin.

Thus our Lord, having cast into the midst of the death-dealing poison of sin the unutterable and life-giving activity of His Divinity and His Flesh, has liberated our race from the working of the devil; and purifying us by holy Baptism and bringing us to life by the communion of the most pure Mysteries of His precious Body and Blood, He makes us holy and sinless. But He then leaves us again to have autonomy, so that it might not seem that we serve our Master by compulsion, but rather by our own free will. Therefore, as in the beginning Adam in Paradise was free and sinless, and by his free will obeyed the enemy, was deceived and transgressed the commandment of God, so on the contrary we, being regenerated by holy Baptism, delivered from slavery and becoming free, if we do not obey by our own free will our enemy the

devil, this cunning one will in no way be able to place in us any kind of evil.

Now, before the law and the coming of Christ, without the aid of those means of which we have spoken, many and very many pleased God and manifested themselves as irreproachable; among their number the righteous Enoch was honored by God by being translated, and Elias was raised to heaven in a fiery chariot. Therefore, what kind of justification can we give, if after the manifestation of grace, after such and so great benefactions, after the annihilation of death and sin, we do not manifest ourselves as holy; if after being regenerated by the holy Baptism which we have received, standing under the protection of the holy angels by whom we are surrounded, and under the action of the grace of the Holy Spirit which we have been vouchsafed to receive, we do not become even like those who were before grace, that is, before Christ, but we remain in carelessness, and disdain and transgress the commandments of God?

And that we, if we are careless about our salvation, will be punished more than those who sinned before Christ, the Apostle Paul indicates when he says: *If the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation* (Heb 2:2-3).

And thus, each one of us, no matter what transgression he might have fallen into, let him not accuse Adam, but let him reproach himself. And let him show true and worthy repentance like Adam, if he desires to be vouchsafed the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen.



People are blind and don't see what takes place in church during the Divine Liturgy. Once I was serving, and I couldn't make the Great Entrance because of what I saw. I suddenly felt someone pushing me by my shoulder, and guiding me towards the *prothesi* (i.e., table of Preparation). I thought it was the chanter. I turned around and saw a huge wing that the archangel had laid on my shoulder, and that he was guiding me to make the Great Entrance.

What amazing things take place in the altar during the Divine Liturgy! ... Sometimes I can't handle it, and so I pass out in a chair, and thus some cocolebrators conclude that there is something wrong with my health, but they don't realize what I see and hear.

Blessed Elder Iakovos of Evia (+1991)

WILL OUR HUMAN BONES COME TO LIFE?

By St. John Maximovitch of Shanghai and San Francisco (a Sermon given in Shanghai, on October 22, 1948).



St. John Maximovitch
(+1966)

There was no limit to the grief and despondency of the ancient Jews when Jerusalem was destroyed and they were led away into the Babylonian captivity. *Lord, where are thy former loving kindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth? (Pss 88:49), they cried out. But thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and goest not forth with our armies. Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy: and they which hate us spoil for themselves. Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat;*

and hast scattered us among the heathen. (Pss 44:9-11).

However, when it seemed that there was no hope for deliverance, the Prophet Ezekiel, who was likewise in captivity, was made worthy of a wondrous vision. Moreover, *the hand of the Lord came upon me*, he says of this. The invisible right hand of the Lord placed him in the midst of a field full of human bones. The Lord asked him: *Son of man, will these bones live?* The Prophet replied: *O Lord God, Thou knowest this.*

Then the voice of the Lord commanded the Prophet to say to the bones that the Lord will give to them the spirit of life, clothing them with sinews, flesh and skin. The Prophet uttered the word of the Lord, a voice resounded, the earth shook, and the bones began to come together, bone to bone, each to its own joint; sinews appeared on them, the flesh grew and became covered with skin, so that the whole field became filled with the bodies of men; only there were no souls in them. Again the Prophet heard the Lord, and at His command, he prophesied the word of the Lord. From the four directions souls flew to them, the spirit of life entered the bodies, they stood up and the field was filled with an assembly of a multitude of people.

And the Lord said, *Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; and they say, Our hope has been lost, we have perished... Behold, I will open your tombs and will bring you up out of your tombs, My people, and I will put thy spirit within you and ye shall live, and I will place you upon your own land. (Ezek 37:1-14).* Thus, the Lord God revealed to Ezekiel that His promises are steadfast, and that what

seems impossible to the human mind is performed by the power of God.

This vision signified that Israel, after being delivered from captivity, would return to its own land; in a higher sense, it indicated the settlement of the spiritual Israel in the eternal heavenly Kingdom of Christ. At the same time, there is prefigured the future General Resurrection of all the dead. Therefore, this prophecy of Ezekiel is read at the Matins of Great Saturday, when by His death, Christ, having broken down the gates of death, opens the tombs of all the dead.

Belief in the resurrection is the cornerstone of our faith. *But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen. And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. (1Cor 15:13-14).* If there is no resurrection, the whole Christian teaching is false. This is why the enemies of Christianity fight so much against faith in the resurrection and it is why the Church of Christ affirms faith in the resurrection. Many times the waves of unbelief have risen high, but they have rolled back before new signs which revealed the reality of the resurrection, of God's bringing to life of what was acknowledged as dead.

In the 5th century, in the reign of the Emperor Theodosius the Younger, doubt in the resurrection of the dead was widespread, so that there were disputes about this even in the churches. It was just at this time that a wondrous event occurred, the authenticity of which is confirmed by a number of historical writings.

In the middle of the third century, in the reign of the Emperor Decius (249-251), by his decree, seven youths were walled up with stones in a cave near the city of Ephesus. The son of the head of the city of Ephesus, Maximilian, and his six friends, Jamblicus, Dionysius, John, Antoninus, Martinian, and Exacustodian confessed themselves Christians and refused to offer sacrifice to the idols. They had taken advantage of the time, which had been given them for reflection, and of the temporary absence of the Emperor, and had gone away from Ephesus and hidden in a cave in the nearby mountains, (in mountain called Ochlon). When Decius returned and found out about this, he ordered that the entrance to the cave be walled up with stones so that the youths, deprived of food and air, might be buried alive. When the command of Decius had been fulfilled, two secret Christians, Theodore and Rufinus, wrote down this event on pewter plates that they hid among the stones at the entrance to the cave.

The youths who were in the cave, however, did not know what had happened. On the eve of this event, having found out about the arrival of Decius in the city, and having prayed fervently to God, they fell asleep in a powerful and unusual sleep which lasted for about 172 years. They awoke only in the reign of Theodosius the Younger, precisely when there were disputes concerning the resurrection. At that time, the

owner of that place was taking out the stones that walled up the entrance to the cave and was using them for a building, without suspecting in the least that the children whom everyone had forgotten, long before, were still in the cave.

The youths, having awoke, thought that they had slept one night, since they did not notice any changes in the cave, and they themselves had not changed at all. One of them, the youngest, Jamblicus, who had previously gone to the city for food, having prayed to God with his friends, likewise went to Ephesus to find out whether they were being looked for, and to buy some food for themselves. He was astonished at the change, seeing churches which, as it seemed, had not existed the day before, and hearing the name of Christ being pronounced openly.

Thinking that by mistake he had come across some other city, he decided nonetheless to buy some bread here. When he gave a coin for the bread, the bread merchant began to examine it carefully and asked where he had found the treasure. When Jamblicus affirmed that he had found no treasure, but that he had received the money from his parents, people began to gather, and they tried to find out where he had found such old money. Jamblicus named the names of his parents and friends, but no one knew them. Finally, Jamblicus heard from those present that he was really in Ephesus, that there had been no Emperor Decius for a long time, and that the Christ-loving Emperor Theodosius was reigning.

The head of the city and the bishop heard about what had happened, and in order to test the words of Jamblicus they went with him to the cave where the other six youths were. At the entrance to the cave they discovered the pewter plates, and from them, they found out when and how the youths had been in the cave.

Concerning all this, the head of the city immediately informed the Emperor, who personally came to Ephesus and conversed with the youths. During one of these conversations they lay down their heads and fell asleep in eternal sleep. The Emperor ordered that they be brought to the Capital, but the youths, appearing to him to be asleep, commanded him to bury them in the cave where they had already been in a wondrous sleep, for many years. This was done, and during the course of many centuries, their relics reposed in that cave; the Russian pilgrim of the 12th century, Anthony, describes how veneration was paid to them.

This miraculous awakening of the youths was accepted at that time as a prefiguration and confirmation of the res-

urrection. Everywhere the news spread about this. Several contemporary historians mention it, and it was discussed at the Third Ecumenical Council, which soon thereafter, convoked in the same city. This striking miracle strengthened faith in the resurrection at that time. The power of God, which had preserved the bodies and clothing of the youths incorrupt for many years, was clearly revealed. In addition, just as the Lord raised them from sleep, so will he gather the bones and raise the dead according to the vision of the Prophet Ezekiel.

This prophecy, which foreshadows not only the resurrection of the dead, but also the preservation from destruction of the people who keep God's law, was manifestly fulfilled upon the Russian land.

At the beginning of the 17th century, with the dying out of the reigning house, a time of troubles came upon Rus-

sia. The Russian land was without a government. It was torn asunder by internal rebellion and subjected to the attack of neighboring peoples who seized many Russian provinces and the heart of Russia, Moscow. The Russian people became fainthearted and lost hope that the Russian kingdom would continue to exist. Many sought alms from foreign governments, others adhered to various impostors and thieves who pretended to be crown princes.

When it seemed that there was no more Russia and only a few still hoped in her deliverance, then from a subterranean prison in the Chudov Monastery, resounded the last appeal of the starving Patriarch St. Hermogenes. This document, together with the epistle of

Archimandrite St. Dionysius of the Trinity St. Sergius Monastery and the cellarer Abraham Palitzin, reached Nizhni-Novgorod. There, the Russian people were called upon to stand up in defense of Moscow's holy things and the House of the Mother of God.

The document moved hearts and the citizen Cosmas Minin addressed his fellow citizens from the porch of the cathedral with a flaming appeal to sacrifice everything for the fatherland. Immediately contributions poured in and an army began to be gathered. The courageous general, Prince Demetrius Michaelovich Pozharsky, was called to lead it, although he had scarcely recovered from wounds. While acknowledging the infirmity of human power, the Russian people gave themselves over to the protection of the Champion General and the greatest treasure the army took from Kazan, was the miraculous Icon of the Mother of God which had been brought out of the earth by the



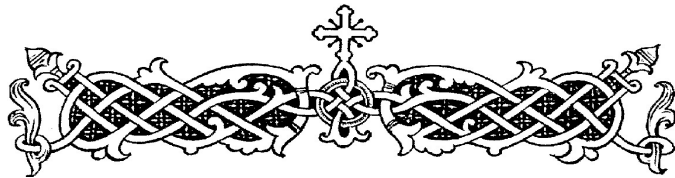
Kazan Icon of the Mother of God

holy Patriarch Hermogenes while he was the Presbyter Hernialaus.

The Russian army moved, not trusting its weak power, but in the almighty help of God. Moreover, in reality it accomplished what no other force had been able to do. In a short time, Moscow was delivered, and on the same day of the commemoration of the Seven Youths of Ephesus (October 22), the Russian army entered the Kremlin with a triumphant procession, and to meet it, another procession came from the Kremlin with the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God which had been in the captive city.

The Russian land was cleansed of the enemies and imposters, the Russian kingdom was restored and the young Michael Feodorovich Romanov ascended on its throne. Russia was resurrected, its wounds were healed and it went from glory to glory. The Icon of the Mother of God with which Moscow had been delivered, and with it the whole Russian land, became the greatest holy object of the entire Russian people. Copies of it were placed in the capital city of Moscow, and later in the new reigning city of St. Petersburg, which was glorified by a multitude of miracles. Kazan Icons of the Mother of God were to be found in every city, village, and in almost every house. All of Russia celebrated the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God, as a great feast.

Grief takes possession of the heart, and in perils, other people across our world are ready, like the captive Israelites, to call out: "Our bones are dry, our hope has been lost, we have perished." But the memory of the Seven Youths who arose from sleep, together with the Meeting of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God, proclaims the almighty right hand of God, and the word of the Prophet Ezekiel thunders from the depths of the ages with the voice of the Lord: "*Behold, I will open your tombs, and will bring you up out of your tombs, My people, and will bring you into your own land, and you shall know that I am the Lord: I have spoken and will do it, saith the Lord.*" (Ezek 37:12-14).



THE INEXPLICABLE BEHAVIOUR OF THE ECUMENISTS

By the Holy Monastery of Pantokrator, Melissohori, Thessalonica (Greece).

In our time while Papism is collapsing, abandoned and disapproved by thousands, not only by its simple followers but also by prominent members, there come the representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the rest of the pro-union bishops ready to shore up the collapsing

Papism, to stand by them to the point of calling her a sister Church and claim that the Papists are not heretics.

It is a sad result, because the natural guardians of the unblemished faith and the protectors of the noetic flock from good shepherds became bad, and are of the opinion and preach against the faith and traditions of the Orthodox Church as well as of her faithful voices, the holy Godbearing Fathers.

Unfortunately, most of the Orthodox representatives have come to accept as important the heretic incarnate Pope. And not only they do not try to have the heretics return to Orthodoxy, but they praise the heresy and struggle to convince the Orthodox faithful that the heretic Papists and Protestants are not deceived. Those of the Orthodox Christians who rightly do not accept the anti-Orthodox acts, instead of being praised for their steadfastness of faith of their Fathers, they are severely persecuted. Thus the fall and perversion.

Pro-union church members and theological circles, direct us towards a false union, to a great temptation and schisms. As the situation shows it is conducive to a gradual deepening and ever increasing betrayal of the Faith. Many of those who took the side to protect the Church and the flock, keep the silence of the fish and keep busy for the most part with the upkeep of the buildings and so become indirectly accomplices with those that impose on the Orthodox faith. We shall find ourselves unfortunately facing "de-facto" events. The false union it seems they have already decided by secret agreements and they advance it by doses, like the common prayers of the Orthodox with westerners and other innovative and strongly unsupportable fabrications.

The unbreachable fort of Orthodoxy in our times, is more in danger by particular patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, clerics and lay people, who are shipwrecked in faith and struggle hard for the evil union since it is not in accordance with Christ and the Truth. When do the Bishops of the Orthodox Church and the forefront forts of Faith, the Holy Monasteries, intend to sound the alarm if not now that the Orthodox faith of the Holy Fathers is being adulterated? Grotesque theories are being heard and published that the papist church is a sister church, that they have grace and other blasphemes, irreverent and contrary to what the Orthodox Church stands for. The blessed Archimandrite Spyridon Bilalis writes the following. The true union of the Churches cannot succeed though the forced adaptation of the Orthodox faithful to the Latin innovations, but by the return of the schismatic and heretic Papist Church to the bosom of the "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church", which only the Eastern Orthodox Catholic Church comprises the functional and uninterrupted continuity.

OUR HOLY AND GREAT LENT

Source: An Orthodox pamphlet by the OCA Church in Canada.

Lent, as it exists today in the Orthodox Church, is the result of a long historical development.

In the 2nd century, it was customary for Christians to observe a short fast of one or two days on the Friday and/or Saturday before the Sunday of Pascha. It was a fast of sorrow at the absence of the Bridegroom, in the fulfillment of Christ's own words in Mark 2:20, *But the days will come, when the Bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast in those days.* It was a total fast, from all food and drink.

By the middle of the 3rd century, in most places, the Paschal fast had been extended so that it started on the Monday before Easter Sunday and went through to the Thursday. The original total fast then followed. There was no uniform practice at this stage however. A few people sustained a total fast from the Monday to the Saturday. Some ate bread, salt and water at the ninth hour (3pm) from the Monday to the Thursday, followed by the total fast. What we can say is that there was a uniform celebration of Christ's death and Resurrection and that those events were celebrated together as a single mystery (unlike today when we remember the Crucifixion on the Friday and the Resurrection on the Sunday). We also have the idea of a Holy Week before Easter with fasting. All this was pre-Nicene.

At the Council of Nicaea (325AD), Canon 5 provided us our first explicit reference to the "40-day fast" before Pascha. It is clear that this 40-day period had a different purpose to the "Holy Week" and that it was connected with the final preparation of the catechumens for the sacrament of Holy Baptism. The last 40 days of their training were very intensive and included daily instruction, special services, and fasting. From the 4th century onwards, the existing members of the church were encouraged to share with the catechumens in this time of preparation and it became a time for them to renew their baptism vows. This is how the 40 days came to involve the whole body of the faithful and not just those preparing for baptism. So Lent, as we know it today, is a convergence of these 2 elements: the six-day "Holy Week" and the 40-day period of training for the catechumens.

Today there is no "organized" Catechumenate but we still maintain the 40-day fast and the time is seen as: a time of renewal of baptism vows, a time of spiritual training, a time to remember that when we were baptized we were buried with Christ and we rose with Him, and a time to listen to the Holy Spirit Who was given to us at Chrismation.

Let us briefly address the question of "why 40 days?" There are in fact many biblical precedents. Moses fasted 40 days

on Mount Sinai (Exodus 16:35), Elijah fasted 40 days on his way to Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8) and most important of all, Christ fasted 40 days and nights in the wilderness (Mark 4).

The Mother Church, from the 6th and 7th centuries onwards, added an eighth week, a preliminary week of modified fasting. The reason for this additional 8th week is because the Christians around the Holy Land (Palestine) did not count Saturdays or Sundays as fast days! So they needed 8 weeks X 5 days to get 40 days. In a compromise to align all Orthodox Christians, the rest of the Orthodox Churches added the 8th week of modified fasting. The 8th Sunday before Easter is called "meat-fare" Sunday and it is the last day meat is eaten before Easter Sunday. The 7th Sunday before Easter is called "cheese fare" Sunday and the fast begins in earnest the next day.

There were even more developments between the 6th and 11th centuries. During this time, the pre-Lenten preparation was gradually expanded to include 3 more preparatory Sundays:

- Ten weeks before Easter is known as "Publican and Pharisee Sunday" and is a call to humility before God.
- Nine weeks before Easter is known as "the Prodigal Son Sunday" and is a call to return to the Father.
- Eight weeks before Easter (also known as a "meat fare") is known as the "Sunday of the last Judgement" and is a call to do positive good in the light of the coming judgement.
- There is even one more addition that is included eleven weeks before Pascha, called the "Sunday of Zachaeus." This is a reminder that if we do not have a strong enough desire to see God we won't. Zachaeus had to climb a sycamore tree to see our Lord. We will have to make an effort in Lent.

So, the whole process of Orthodox Lent can be spread over a period of 11 Sundays.

On Sunday, March 1st, 2009, we will observe the "cheese fare Sunday, also referred to as "Forgiveness Sunday." In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go, first be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift." Before we can be reconciled to God in Lent, we must first be reconciled to our fellow humans. If any of us are not reconciled at this point, now is the time to put things right and I would urge everyone to do that as a matter of priority.

The Holy Orthodox Faith gives us a prescribed way to achieve reconciliation with God through prayer, Confession, almsgiving and fasting. It is a time to learn the inner discipline of abstinence, not just from rich foods but more importantly, from vain and empty language and activities.

It is also a time of repentance. All of the Lenten services inspire within us penitent thoughts as well as hope in the compassion of God. So we are encouraged to unclutter our crowded calendars and replace our activities with the special Lenten services. Lent should not be seen as a kind of inconvenience which, if we suffer through it, will automatically credit us with merits, but rather as a time of spiritual renewal, a time of joy, light and peace.

An important part of the Orthodox Lent is fasting. In the Book of Common Prayer, under "Tables and Rules for the Feast and Fast", the 40 days of Lent are described as, "days of fasting and abstinence." Fasting for the Orthodox means abstaining from animal products, such as meat, fish, chicken, milk, cheese, butter etc. etc.; also abstaining from alcohol. It is not seen as a negative experience and is sometimes described as returning to the Garden of Eden before there was any killing of animals for food. One young Orthodox man told me that he really looks forward to Lent because his mother always produces special foods that they didn't normally eat.

Not all are compelled to fast. In fact, some must not fast: the sick, the pregnant, nursing mothers and children under seven. However, periods of fasting are strongly encouraged for those able to do it. The purpose is to gain mastery over oneself and to conquer the passions of the flesh. We also do it because Jesus Himself fasted and taught His disciples to fast. He taught that some forms of evil could not be overcome without fasting. He also taught that fasting should be in secret. We should not draw attention to our fasting or ourselves. As Orthodox Christians we are also taught never to judge those who are not fasting and never to be proud. A desert Father once wrote to one of his disciples, "Are you proud that you haven't eaten meat? You had better go and eat some meat!"

The Church's hymn in the Lenten fast is "Fasting in the body, brethren, let us also fast from sin." The tongue also needs to fast, refraining from slander, lies, evil talking, denigrating one's brother and anger. This is the theme of the prayer of St. Ephraim, which is said at the end of the special Lenten services with prostrations after each petition.

The prayer mentions "sloth," a word used to describe a form of laziness, which leads to despondency and cynicism about spiritual disciplines.

"Lust for power" refers to self-centered living in the way we relate to others.

"Vain curiosity and idle talk" refer to negative uses of our speech.

"Soberness" refers to chastity, control of the body.

"Humility" is living with an honest view of ourselves and not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought.

"Patience" is resisting the instinct to quickly judge and condemn others.

"Love" is a gift from God and the desired result of all our spiritual effort.

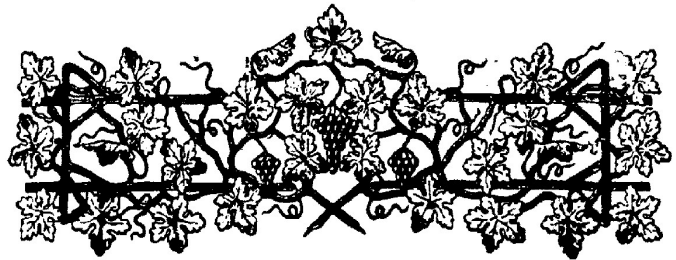
St. Ephraim was a 4th century Syrian saint known as one of the great teachers of the spiritual life.

Here is the prayer: O Lord and Master of my life, Give me not a spirit of sloth, vain curiosity, lust for power, and idle talk. But give to me your servant, a spirit of soberness, humility, patience and love. O Lord and King, allow me to see my own faults and not to judge my brother, For You are blessed to the ages of ages.

Perhaps we could take up the challenge of praying this prayer every day this Lent and using it as a checklist for our spiritual progress.

We end with a quote for us all to meditate on as we move into Lent together. This one is from another Syrian saint, St. Isaac, from the 7th century: "He who knows his own sin is higher than the man who resurrects the dead in his prayers. He who is granted the gift of seeing himself is superior to the man who has the gift of seeing angels."

May God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit give us understanding of the way He wishes us to live through this Lent. Amen.



Love towards God-Christ is part and parcel of love towards one's fellows-man ... Priests burdened with pastoral cares are often torn (between these two loves). On the one hand they know that there is no profit in *gaining the whole world, and losing one's own soul* (Mk 8:36). On the other hand, there is the Lord's injunction, *Go ye [therefore], and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit* (Mt 28:19), and *Freely ye have received, freely give* (Mt 10:8).

Parallel with this goes the idea that the vital need for mankind is to *know the true God* (Jn 17:3). But how are we to find Him? So then, if knowledge of God is to continue on earth, it is imperative that people should not go astray like sheep without a shepherd. This knowledge is so important that St. Isaac of Syria makes a fearful statement, difficult to understand and painful to grasp: *Do not liken them that work signs and wonders and powerful deeds in the world with them that elect to fast and pray in the desert. Prefer inner stillness (hesychia) rather than feeding the hungry in the world, and the conversion of many peoples to the worship of God.*

Elder Sophrony (Sakharov) of Essex (+1993)

ON WORK AND STRESS

Translated by Luke Hartung, from the Book: "Family Life" by Elder Paisios the Athonite, published by the Sacred Hesychastirion of St. John the Evangelist, Souroti, Greece (2002), re-printed with permission.

Geronda, many people return home from work stressed out. —I suggest to men that if they can, they should find an open church after work, go in, light a candle and stay inside for ten to fifteen minutes. Or go sit in a park somewhere and read a small section of the Gospel, so as to quiet down a bit. Then they can go home in peace, smiling, instead of stressed out and ready to pick a fight. They shouldn't bring work problems home with them—leave them at the door on the way out.

—But Geronda, some of them are justified, for their work responsibilities fill them with anxiety.

—It fills them with anxiety because they don't involve God in their dealings. The sluggard who says "O, God will take care of things..." is better off than such people. I'd rather someone be an employee and do his work well, with *philotimo*—but simplifying his life, concentrating on the essentials and quieting his mind—rather than a factory owner and constantly whining and moaning because he is always in debt. Pride gets in and says, "I'll borrow this amount, I'll take care of this and that, and tidy things right up..."; but afterwards his business fails, he goes bankrupt, and then must sell everything, etc.

Many people don't use their mind at work. They tire unnecessarily and thus no work gets done. Later they aren't able to snap out of it, and get all stressed out. For example, someone wants to learn a certain trade and, because he doesn't pay attention, for years he comes and goes, without making any progress, because he never uses his mind. He should observe what his work requires of him and do it. Look, when I worked in the world as a carpenter, I saw that the furniture I made required a lathe. What did I do? Did I go find someone to do the work for me? No, I got myself a lathe and learned how to use it. Next, I saw that I needed to make spiral staircases. So I sat down, called to mind the math and geometry I had learned, and figured out how to make them. If you don't use your mind, you end up working too hard. What I want to emphasize is how one should use his mind, because at work one meets with a whole heap of challenges. In this way he will become a good craftsman; and from then on he will know what to do—he will make progress. Therein lies the entire foundation. The mind ought to be creative in all matters. Otherwise man remains an under-achiever and wastes his time.

—Geronda, for someone strained at work, what is to blame?

—Perhaps they don't approach their work with good thoughts? If they confront it rightly, then whatever job they do will seem like a festival.

—Geronda, when someone is upset because his job is difficult or distasteful—for example, he works construction or washes dishes at a restaurant—how should he find peace?

—If he will remember that Christ washed the feet of His disciples he will quit worrying. It's as if Christ was saying to us: "You should do likewise." Whether one is washing dishes or digging ditches, he should rejoice. Another cleans out sewers filled with germs because the poor man doesn't have any other work. But is he any less of a person? Isn't he also an image of God? Once there was a family man who cleaned out sewers for a living, and who had attained a great spiritual state. He suffered from pulmonary tuberculosis; and although he had the chance to quit, he didn't want to, because he thought, "why should someone else have to suffer?" He loved the beggarly life, and for that, God gave him grace.

Work doesn't make the man. I once knew a longshoreman who had raised the dead. One day, when I was *dikaioi* (the director of a skete who is elected each year by its elders) at the Skete of Iveron, someone who was around 55 years old visited me. He had arrived late in the evening, and slept outside rather than knock and disturb the fathers. When the fathers saw him they brought him inside and informed me. "My goodness," I told him, "why didn't you ring the bell so that we could let you in and take care of you?" "What are you saying my father?" he said to me, "How could I disturb the monks?" I noticed that his face had a certain radiance. I understood that he must have lived very spiritually. Afterwards, he explained to me that he had been left a young orphan when his father died; as a result, when he married he greatly loved his father-in-law. At first he and his wife lived in his in-laws house but after a time they moved into their own house. But he was constantly worried because his father-in-law swore a lot. He had pleaded with him many times not to swear, but he got even worse. His father-in-law once became seriously ill. They took him to the hospital, but after a few days he died. The man, however, was not with him at the hour he gave up his soul because he was unloading a ship. When he arrived at the hospital and found him in the morgue, he prayed with great pain: "My God, I beg Thee to resurrect him that he may repent, and then take him." Immediately the dead man opened his eyes and began moving his hands. As soon as the attendant saw him he fainted. They got his things together and took him home, perfectly well! He lived another five years in repentance and then died. The man said to me, "My father, I thank God so much for doing me this favor. Who am I that God would grant me such a gift?" He had great simplicity and such humility that it didn't even enter his mind that he had raised the dead. Out of his gratitude towards God, he was blind to that which he had done.

Many people suffer because they fail to receive recognition through vain, worldly honor, or fail to become rich in pointless, mundane things. It doesn't occur to them that in the other life—the real life—such stuff is not needed, nor can they take it with them. To that place we can only take our works, which here and now acquire for us a passport for that great and eternal journey.

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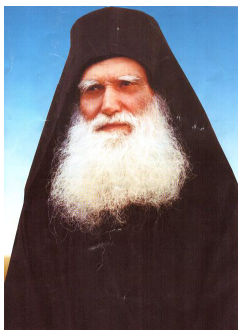
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ELDER EPHRAIM OF KATOUNAKIA AN EXEMPLARY FIGURE OF CONTEMPORARY ATHONITE MONASTICISM

From "Voice of Orthodoxy" (the official publication of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia).



At the end of the month of February 1998, the tall cedar of the desert of Katounakia fell. He was a modern hesychast of Mt. Athos, the embodiment of Orthodox Athonite Hesychasm, the embodiment of renunciation and departure, and of great obedience and ceaseless prayer.

The late spiritual father was one who approached the divine through the experience of personal struggle. He was a great teacher of our times and a faithful guide. He was the one who taught and practised Hesychasm, departure, obedience, prayer.

He came from the region of Thebes, but he never visited his relatives, as far as I recall, after being tonsured a monk. He was a disciple of true departure. He placed himself under the guidance of the saintly elder Joseph the Cave Dweller, from whom he learnt the mysteries and spiritual ascent of inner labour and prayer, the monk who became his father and whom he served as a son. He was always eager to fulfill the rigorous discipline which harsh and strict elders required.

Elder Ephraim's specialty was to speak, teach and advise others about such obedience. This was his beloved topic. On an

almost daily basis, he would refer one thing to all and relate to all, obedience. And with that expressive tone of his strong voice, with the persuasion and experience of an old Biblical figure, he would often come back to the topic so dear to him with a new surge of refreshing ascetic demeanor, to the sweetest lesson and the unique matter, obedience. This is the requirement of sacred humility and the coming of the Grace of the Holy Spirit, the cause of all fruitfulness, the pretext of pure prayer. "Do you have obedience? You have prayer. If you don't have obedience, you do not have prayer", he would say, without his words receiving any objection (and Father Ephraim insisted correctly). For, according to St John of Sinai, "obedience means that we place our own discernment into the care of the rich discernment of the spiritual father".

Countless souls travelled the pathway to the ascetic dwelling of the Holy Father Ephraim of Katounakia—laity, monks, priests and bishops—visitors and beggars of spiritual mercy. The sick came and left healed. The burdened came and left feeling lighter. They came weak and left strong.

I remember the late spiritual father even before his fine monastic community was formed, when he was alone. When he made the seals for the prosphora loaves in his humble hut. With a cassock that was mended a thousand times. With spiritual vision and practical virtues, precisely as developed by St Isaac the Syrian in his ascetical works...

May we have your blessing, Holy Father, and may your worthy community follow your hesychastic "model".

Amen!

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

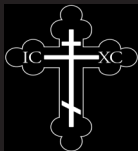
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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PARADISE AND HELL IN THE ORTHODOX TRADITION

By Fr. George Metallinos, Dean of the Athens University School of Theology.

On Meatfare Sunday, as we prepare for the commencement of the Holy and Great Lent, we commemorate the *Second and Incorruptible Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The expression “we commemorate” confirms that our Church, as the Body of Christ, re-enacts in its worship the Second Coming of our Lord as an **event** and not just something that is historically expected. The reason is that through the Divine Eucharist, we are transported to the celestial kingdom, to meta-history. It is in this Orthodox perspective that the subject of Paradise and hell is approached.

In the Gospels (Matthew, Ch. 5), mention is made of *kingdom* and *eternal fire*. In this excerpt, the *kingdom* is the divine destination of mankind. The *fire* is “prepared” for the devil and his “angels” (demons), not because God desired it, but because they are impenitent. The *kingdom* is *prepared* for those who remain faithful to the will of God. *Kingdom* (the uncreated glory) is Paradise. *Fire* (eternal) is hell (Mt 5:22). At the beginning of history, God invites man into Paradise, into a communion with His uncreated Grace. At the end of history, man has to face Paradise and hell. What this means, we shall see, is further down. We do however stress that it is one of the central subjects of our faith—it is Orthodox Christianity’s philosophical cornerstone.

(i) Mention of Paradise and hell in the New Testament is frequent. In Luke 23:43, Christ says to the robber on the cross: *Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in Paradise*. (Lk 23:43). However, the robber also refers to Paradise, when he says: *Lord, remember me*

when thou comest into thy kingdom. (Lk 23:42). According to St. Theofylaktos of Bulgaria, “for the robber was in Paradise, in other words, the kingdom.” The Apostle Paul (2 Cor 12:3-4) confesses (of himself): *And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth.) How that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter*. In Revelations we read: *To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God*. (Rev 2:7). And Arethas of Caesaria interprets: “Paradise is understood to be the blessed and eternal life.” Thus, Paradise, eternal life, Kingdom of God, are all related.

(2) Paradise and hell are not two different places. This separation idea is an idolatrous concept. They instead signify two different situations (ways), which originate from the same uncreated source, and are perceived by man as two, different experiences. Or, more precisely, they are the same experience, except that they are perceived differently by man, depending on man’s internal state. This experience is the sight of Christ inside the uncreated light of His divinity, of His glory. From the moment of His Second Coming, through eternity, all people will be seeing Christ in His uncreated light. That is *...the hour is coming, ... all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation*. (Jn 5:28-29). In the presence of Christ, mankind will be separated (*sheep* and *goats*, to His right and His left). In other words, they will be discerned in two separate groups: those who will be looking upon Christ as Paradise and those who will be looking upon Christ as hell. *For our God is a consuming fire*. (Heb 12:29).

Paradise and hell are the same reality. This is what is depicted in the portrayal

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of the Second Coming. From Christ a river flows forth: it is radiant like a golden light at the upper end of it, where the saints are. At its lower end, the same river is fiery, and it is in that part of the river that the demons and the unrepentant (“the never repentant” according to a hymn) are depicted. This is why in Lk 2:34 we read that Christ stands *as the fall and the rising (resurrection) of many*. Christ becomes the resurrection into eternal life, for those who accepted Him and who followed the suggested means of healing the heart; and to those who rejected Him, He becomes their demise and their hell.

There exist numerous patristic testimonies: St. John of the Ladder says that the uncreated light of Christ is “an all-consuming fire and an illuminating light.” St. Gregory Palamas observes: “Thus, it is said, He will baptize you by the Holy Spirit and by fire: in other words, by illumination and punishment, depending on each person’s predisposition, which will bring upon him that which he deserves.” Elsewhere, The light of Christ, “albeit one and accessible to all, is not partaken of uniformly, but differently.”

Consequently, Paradise and hell are not a reward or a punishment (condemnation), but the way that we individually experience the sight of Christ, depending on the condition of our heart. God does not punish in essence, although, for educative purposes, the Scripture does mention punishment. The more spiritual one becomes, the better he can comprehend the Scripture and our traditions. Man’s condition (clean-unclean, repentant-unrepentant) is the factor that determines the acceptance of the Light as “Paradise” or “hell.”



(3) The anthropological issue in Orthodoxy is that man will eternally look upon Christ as Paradise and not as hell; that man will partake of His heavenly and eternal *Kingdom*. And this is where we see the difference between Christianity as Orthodoxy and the various other religions. The other religions promise a certain “blissful” state, even after death. Orthodoxy however is not a quest for bliss, but a cure from the illness of religion, as the late Fr. John Romanides so patristically teaches. Orthodoxy

is an open hospital within history (“spiritual infirmary” according to St. John the Chrysostom), which offers the healing (catharsis) of the heart, in order to finally attain “theosis”—the only destination of man. This is the course that has been so comprehensively described by Fr. John Romanides and the Rev. Metropolitan of Nafpaktos, Hierotheos (Vlachos); it is the healing of mankind, as experienced by all of our Saints.

This is the meaning of life in the body of Christ (the Church) and the Church’s reason for existence. St. Gregory Palamas (in his 4th Homily on the Second Coming) says that the pre-eternal will of God for man is “to find a place in the majesty of the divine kingdom”—to reach theo-

sis. That was the purpose of creation. And he continues: “But even His divine and secret *kenosis*, His god-human conduct, His redemptory passions, and every single mystery (in other words, all of Christ’s opus on earth) were all providentially and omnisciently pre-determined for this very end (purpose).”

(4) The important thing, however, is that not all people respond to this invitation of Christ, and that is why not everyone partakes in the same way of His uncreated glory. This

is taught by Christ, in the parable of the rich man and the poor Lazarus (Luke, Ch. 16). Man refuses Christ's offer, he becomes God's enemy and rejects the redemption offered by Christ (which is a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit—it is within the Holy Spirit that we accept the calling of Christ). This is the “never repentant” person referred to in the hymn. God “never bears enmity,” the blessed Chrysostom observes; it is we who become His enemies; we are the ones who reject Him. The unrepentant man becomes demonized, because he has chosen to. God doesn't want this. St. Gregory Palamas says: “...for this was not My pre-existing will; I did not create you for this purpose; I did not prepare the pyre for you. This undying pyre was pre-fired for the demons who bear the unchanging trait of evil, to whom your own unrepentant opinion attracted you.” “The co-habitation with mischievous angels is arbitrary (voluntary).” In other words, it is something that is freely chosen by man.

Both the rich man and Lazarus were looking upon the same reality, i.e., God in His uncreated light. The rich man reached the Truth, the sight of Christ, but could not partake of it, as Lazarus did. The poor Lazarus received “consolation,” whereas the rich man received “anguish.” Christ's words, that they: “have Moses and the prophets”—for those still in the world—signifies that we are all inexcusable. Because we have the Saints, who have experienced *theosis* and who call upon us to accede to their way of life so that we too might reach *theosis* like they did. We therefore conclude that those who have chosen evil ways—like the rich man—are inexcusable.

Our stance towards our fellow man is indicative of our inner state, and that is why this will be the criterion of Judgment Day, during Christ's Second Coming. This doesn't imply that faith, or man's faithfulness to Christ is disregarded; faith is naturally a prerequisite, because our stance towards each other will show whether or not we have God within us. The first Sundays of the Triodion preceding Lent revolve around fellow man. On the first of these Sundays, the (seemingly pious) Pharisee justifies (sanctifies) himself and rejects (derogates) the Tax-collector. On the second Sunday, the “elder” brother (a repetition of the seemingly pious Pharisee) is sorrowed by the return (salvation) of his brother. Likewise seemingly pious, he too had false piety, which did not produce love. On the third (carnival) Sunday, this stance reaches Christ's seat of judgment, and is evidenced as the criterion for our eternal life.

(5) The experience of Paradise or hell is beyond words or senses. It is an uncreated reality, not a created one. The Franks created the myth that Paradise and hell are both created realities. It is a myth that the damned will not be looking upon God; just as the “absence of God” is equally a myth. The Franks had also perceived the fires of hell as something created (e.g. Dante's *Inferno*). Orthodox tradition has remained faithful to the Scriptural claim that the damned shall see God (like the rich man of the parable), but will perceive Him only as “an all-consuming fire.” The Frankish scholastics accepted hell as punishment and the deprivation of a tangible vision of the divine essence. Biblically and patristically however, “hell” is

understood as man's failure to collaborate with Divine Grace, in order to reach the “illuminating” view of God (Paradise) and selfless love. Consequently, there is no such thing as “God's absence,” only His presence. That is why His Second Coming is dire (“O, what an hour it will be then,” we chant in the Laudatory hymns). It is an irrefutable reality, toward which Orthodoxy is permanently oriented: *I anticipate resurrection of the dead...*

The damned—those who are depraved at heart, just like the Pharisees—eternally perceive the pyre of hell as their salvation! It is because their condition is not susceptible to any other form of salvation. They too are “finalized”—they reach the end of their road—but only the righteous reach the end of the road as saved persons. The others finish as damned. “Salvation” to them is hell, since in their lifetime, they pursued only pleasure. The rich man of the parable had “enjoyed all of his riches.” The poor Lazarus uncomplainingly endured “every suffering.”

The Apostle Paul expresses this (1 Cor 3:13-15): *Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.* The righteous and the unrepentant shall both pass through the uncreated “fire” of divine presence, however, the one shall pass through unscathed, while the other shall be burnt. He too is “saved,” but only in the way that one passes through a fire. Eftthimios Zigavinos (a 12th century theologian) indicates: “God is fire that illuminates and brightens the pure, and burns and obscures the unclean.” And Theodoritos Kyrou (regarding this “saving”) writes: “One is also saved by fire, being tested by it,” just as when one passes through fire. If he has an appropriate protective cover, he will not be burnt, otherwise, he may be “saved,” but he will be charred!

Consequently, the fire of hell has nothing in common with the Frankish “purgatory,” nor is it created, nor is it punishment, or an intermediate stage. A viewpoint such as this is virtually a transferal of one's accountability to God. The accountability is entirely our own, whether we choose to accept or reject the salvation (healing) that is offered by God. “Spiritual death” is the viewing of the uncreated light, of divine glory, as a pyre, as fire. St. John the Chrysostom in his 9th homily on Corinthians I, notes: “Hell is never-ending... sinners shall be judged into a never-ending suffering. As for the ‘being burnt altogether,’ it means this: that he does not withstand the strength of the fire.” And he continues: “And he (St. Paul) says, it means this: that he shall not be thus burnt also—like his works—into nothingness, but he shall continue to exist, only inside that fire. He therefore considers this as his ‘salvation.’ For it is customary for us to say ‘saved in the fire,’ when referring to materials that are not totally burnt away.”

Scholastic perceptions-interpretations, which, through Dante's work (*Inferno*) have permeated our world, have consequences that amount to idolatrous views. An example is the

separation of Paradise and hell as two different places. This has happened, because they did not distinguish between the created and the uncreated. Also, the denial of hell's eternity, with their idea of the "restoration" of everything, or the concept of a "good God" (Bon Dieu). God is indeed *benevolent* (Mt 8:17), since He offers salvation to everyone. (*He wants all to be saved...* per 1 Tim 2:4) However, the words of our Lord, as heard during the funeral service, are formidable: *I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just.* (Jn 5:30).

Equally manufactured is the concept of "theodicy," which applies in this case. Everything is finally attributed to God alone (i.e., if He intends to redeem or condemn), without taking into consideration man's "collaboration" as a factor of redemption. Salvation is possible, only within the framework of collaboration between man and Divine Grace. According to the blessed Chrysostom, "the utmost, almost everything, is God's; He did however leave something little to us." That "little something" is our acceptance of God's invitation. The robber on the cross was saved, "by using the key request of *remember me...*"

Finally, idolatrous is also the perception of a God becoming outraged against a sinner, whereas we mentioned earlier that God "never shows enmity." This is a juridical perception of God, which also leads to the prospect of "penances" in confessions as forms of punishment, and not as medications (means of healing).

(6) The mystery of Paradise-hell is also experienced in the life of the Church in the world. During the sacraments, there is a participation of the faithful in Grace, so that Grace may be activated in our lives, by our course towards Christ. Especially during the Divine Eucharist, the uncreated—Holy Communion—becomes inside us either Paradise or hell, depending on our condition. But mostly, our participation in Holy Communion is a participation in Paradise or hell, throughout history. That is why we beseech God, prior to receiving Holy Communion, to render the Precious Gifts inside us *not as judgment or condemnation, or as eternal damnation.*

Participation in Holy Communion is thus linked to the overall spiritual course of the faithful. When we approach Holy Communion uncleaned and unrepentant, we are condemned (burnt). Holy Communion inside us becomes the "inferno" and "spiritual death." Not because it is transformed into those things of course, but because our own uncleanness cannot accept Holy Communion as "Paradise." Given that Holy Communion is called "medication for immortality" (St. Ignatius the God-bearer, 2nd century), the same thing exactly occurs as with any medication. If our organism does not have the prerequisites to absorb the medication, then the medication will produce side-effects and will kill instead of heal. It is not the medication that is responsible, but the condition of our organism. It must be stressed, that if we do not accept Christianity as a therapeutic process, and its sacraments as spiritual medication, then we are led to a

"religionizing" of Christianity; in other words, we "idolatrize" it. And unfortunately, this is a frequent occurrence, when we perceive Christianity as a "religion."

St. Basil the Great tells us: "Everything we do is in preparation of another life." Our life must be a continuous preparation for our participation in "Paradise"—our community with the Uncreated. And everything begins from this lifetime. That is why the Apostle Paul says: "*Behold, now is the opportune time. Behold, now is the day of redemption.*" (2 Cor 6:2).

Every moment of our lives is of redemptive importance. Either we gain eternity, the eternal community with God, or we lose it. Consequently, we can now understand why oriental religions and cults that preach reincarnations are injuring mankind; they are virtually transferring the problem to other, (nonexistent of course) lifetimes. The truth is, however, that only one life corresponds to each of us, whether we are saved or condemned. This is why St. Basil the Great continues: "Those things therefore that lead us towards that life, we need to say should be cherished and pursued with all our might; and those that do not lead us there, we should disregard, as something of no value." This is the criterion of Christian living.

A Christian continuously chooses whatever favors his salvation. We gain Paradise or lose it and end up in hell, in this lifetime. As St. John the Evangelist says: *He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.* (Jn 3:18)

Consequently, the work of the church is not to "send" people to Paradise or to hell, but to prepare them for the final judgment. The work of the Clergy is therapeutic and not moralistic or character-shaping, in the temporal sense of the word. The essence of life in Christ is preserved in monasteries—naturally wherever they are Orthodox and of course patristic. The purpose of the Church's offered therapy is not to create "useful" citizens and essentially "usable" ones, but citizens of the celestial (uncreated) kingdom. Such citizens are the Confessors and the Martyrs, the true faithful, the saints.

However, this is also the way that our mission is supervised: What are we inviting people to? To the Church as a Hospital and a Therapy Center, or just an ideology that is labelled "Christian?"

More often than not, we strive to secure a place in "Paradise," instead of striving to be healed. That is why we focus on rituals and not on therapy. This of course does not signify a rejection of worship. But, without *ascesis* (spiritual exercise, ascetic lifestyle, act of therapy), worship cannot hallow us. The Grace that pours forth from it remains inert inside us. Orthodoxy doesn't make any promises to send mankind to any sort of Paradise or hell; but it does have the power—as evidenced by the incorruptible and miracle-working relics of our saints (incorruptibility=*theosis*)—to prepare man, so that he may forever look upon the Uncreated Grace and the Kingdom of Christ as Paradise, and not as Hell.

PASCHA AND THE GOOD THIEF

By St. Maximus of Turin.

St. Maximus is the first known Christian bishop of Turin. Our knowledge of his life is very fragmentary. Historical sources mention that Maximus died around A.D. 423. Other sources mention one "Maximus episcopus Taurinensis" at two local councils (Milan A.D. 451 and Rome A.D. 465). It is likely that Maximus summoned the Council of Turin in the year 398.

The veneration of St. Maximus has always been present in Turin and his memory is linked to the most ancient churches and places of worship of the town. The feast day of Saint Maximus is on 25 June, the day after the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, for whom St. Maximus had a particular veneration, and whom he elected as patron saint of Turin.

† † †

Most fittingly does the world rejoice, with great gladness, upon this day; for with Christ returning from the dead the hope of resurrection has everywhere been awakened in the hearts of men. For it is but right that when the Lord of creation triumphs, the creatures He has made should also rejoice.

This day the heavens rejoice, for now at length they see the earth, defiled by sin, made clean in the Blood of the Lord. The multitudes of the hosts of heaven rejoice, for their king has overthrown in battle the hosts of the prince of evil. The sun rejoices, and now with unceasing thankfulness holds back by its joyful beams that woeful darkness that overshadowed it as Christ was dying. And together with them we too above all others must rejoice, for whom the Only-Begotten Son of God, Who also is True God, clothed Himself in our flesh, that through that flesh He might come to the Cross, by the Cross suffer death, and through death despoil the kingdom of Hades. Should we not rejoice: we whose sins the Mystery of this new Mystery has taken away, to whom heaven is given, paradise restored?

And as He drew near His end, the Lord Himself says to the Thief then hanging on his cross: He whose faith, neither Christ's torment, nor his own, had weakened: Amen, I say to you, this day thou shalt be with me in Paradise. (Lk 23:43). For the Thief had said to Him: Lord, remember me when Thou shalt come into Thy kingdom. (Lk 23:42). How admirable this faith!

Brethren, that a thief who had been judged unworthy of this life, should amid his torments nourish the hope of life eternal, and believe, that this could be given to him by One Who also was being crucified. And how justly does the believing Thief receive the favor of such a promise, he who, in that hour when the Apostles scattered in fear, had confessed the Kingdom of God? And the merit of this one confession wipes away all his past sins; in that brief moment, whatever crimes he had committed, throughout all the years of his life, were now forgiven. Nor did the blood he shed in his robberies condemn him before God for he believed that the Blood of Christ was shed for a Kingdom, not for a punishment. And that this death was a gain for all men, there can, Beloved Brethren, be no possible doubt. For who can despair of God's grace, when the Thief was forgiven? Should we all not unite the faith of the Thief with our own humble prayer for pardon?

We have yet another shining example of the Lord's most loving kindness, and because of it, let us, putting away all fear, and all deadly despair, place our trust in the unspeakable generosity of Our Redeemer. For when, condemned by the godless, Christ hung upon the Cross, and the Jews in their evil rage mocked at Him they had crucified, in the midst of His agony, this kind Petitioner prayed to His Almighty Father for His executioners, and said: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they



do. (Lk 23:34). And though in His hands was the judgment of both the living and the dead, He implored pardon for those who were then perishing in sin; and this, I believe, that He might show us beyond any manner of doubt, that He forgave them their awful crime, and that His Father would also spare them, if they, putting away their unbelief, would come together in Christ's Name. For who can doubt the effect of that prayer, where He Who is Goodness asks help for those in misery?

They know not, He says, what they do. The Jews knew well that they were shedding the blood of an innocent Man; but they did not know that the guilt of all men was being washed away in that Blood. They knew they were punishing Christ by this most bitter torment of the Cross; but they did not know that it was through this Cross the Son of God would triumph. They knew He would die; but they did not know

He would rise again. So, well might the Lord declare: They know not what they do.

For they knew not, the Jews, of what immense goodness their very wickedness was the instrument. But the Lord, in the knowledge of His own majesty, has compassion on their human errors, and knowing how great the joy that would follow these torments, while He yet endured them, forgives the crime of those who were crucifying Him, He is willing that His death would give life to His slayers, and be the condemnation of those who willed to perish. Returning from Hades, He seeks His Apostles, so that He might show them that within Him there was both the power of divinity and the reality of our flesh*.

Because of this, Brethren, let us rejoice in Christ, now risen from the dead. Let us hold firmly, that He has recalled this flesh* from the sepulchre that we may merit to have part in that wondrous common heritage; namely, the grace of the Apostles and the Resurrection of the Lord, by the help of this Same Lord Who with the Father and the Holy Ghost lives and reigns unto the ages of ages. Amen.

† † †

(*): *The emphasis given here and elsewhere by St. Maximus to the fact that it was our flesh, worn by Christ, that was resurrected to immortality and that the Lord's flesh was the same as our flesh, but now clothed with immortality, probably reflects his earlier controversies with the Origenist heretics of Palestine; the latter believed that the body of the Resurrection would not be real human flesh, but a sort of spirit-body, immaterial in essence, not even necessarily having all the recognizable parts of the former human body, which latter body they believed souls were imprisoned into in a primeval fall from contemplation. This heresy and its propagators were condemned at the Fifth Ecumenical Council.*



An elder said, "Many times our prayers are not answered because of us. Other times it is because of someone else and for a different reason. For example, someone asks me to pray for a person who is ill. I pray, and let's say I have sufficient faith and am not egotistical. Still God does not answer my prayer, because the other person is not humble enough. He may believe that God will help, but his ego stands in the way. We must trust God. We should let Him do whatever He wills. If I pray correctly, I may feel the removal of the temptation, and everything will go well. Any time, however, that God allows us to go through a temptation, it is for our own benefit, and we should probably not ask God to deliver us from that difficulty. If the difficulty is caused by the Devil, then God helps us right away. Many times God's will is unknown to us."

From *Athonite Gerontikon*

ST. NICHOLAS (VELIMIROVICH) OF ZHICHA (+1956)

COMMEMORATED MARCH 18TH

Courtesy of the St. Nicholas Orthodox Church, Billings, MT.



As stated by St. John (Maximovitch), Archbishop of Shanghai and San Francisco, and the Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann, St. Nikolai Velimirovich is one "of the great theological writers," and "for all the people of Orthodox religion he is an epitome for the Orthodox spiritual quality." Simultaneously the bishop Nikolaj holds an important position among those who

have rendered the Orthodox religion eternal in America.

St. Nicholas of Zhicha, "the Serbian Chrysostom," (known to many of us in the West as St. Nikolai Velimirovich) was born in Lelich in western Serbia on January 4, 1881. His parents were Dragomir and Katherine Velimirovich, who lived on a farm where they raised a large family. His pious mother was a major influence on his spiritual development, teaching him by word and especially by example. As a small child, Nicholas often walked three miles to the Chelije Monastery with his mother to attend services there.

Sickly as a child, Nicholas was not physically strong as an adult. He failed his physical requirements when he applied to the military academy, but his excellent academic qualifications allowed him to enter the St. Sava Seminary in Belgrade, even before he finished preparatory school. After graduating from the seminary in 1905, he earned doctoral degrees from the University of Berne in 1908, and from King's College, Oxford in 1909. When he returned home, he fell ill with dysentery. Vowing to serve God for the rest of his life if he recovered, he was tonsured at the Rakovica Monastery on December 20, 1909 and was also ordained to the holy priesthood.

In 1910 he went to study in Russia to prepare himself for a teaching position at the seminary in Belgrade. At the Theological Academy in St. Petersburg, the Provost asked him why he had come. He replied, "I wanted to be a shepherd. As a child, I tended my father's sheep. Now that I am a man, I wish to tend the rational flock of my heavenly Father. I believe that is the way that has been shown to me." The Provost smiled, pleased by this response, then showed the young man to his quarters. After completing his studies, he returned to Belgrade and taught philosophy, logic, history, and foreign languages at the seminary. He spoke seven languages, and this ability proved very useful to him throughout his life.

St. Nicholas was renowned for his sermons, which never lasted more than twenty minutes, and focused on just three main points. He taught people the theology of the Church in a language they could understand, and inspired them to repentance.

At the start of World War I, Archimandrite Nicholas was sent to England on a diplomatic mission to seek help in the struggle of the Serbs against Austria. His doctorate from Oxford gained him an invitation to speak at Westminster Abbey. He remained in England for three short months, but St. Nicholas left a lasting impression on those who heard him. His writings "The Lord's Commandments," and "Meditations on the Lord's Prayer" impressed many in the Church of England.

Archimandrite Nicholas left England and went to America, where he proved to be a good ambassador for his nation and his Church. The future saint returned to Serbia in 1919, where he was consecrated as Bishop of Zhicha, and was later transferred to Ochrid. The new hierarch assisted those who were suffering from the ravages of war by establishing orphanages and helping the poor.

Bishop Nicholas took over as leader of Bogomljcki Pokret, a popular movement for spiritual revival which encouraged people to pray and read the Bible. Under the bishop's direction, it also contributed to a renewal of monasticism. Monasteries were restored and reopened, and this in turn revitalized the spiritual life of the Serbian people.

In 1921, Bishop Nicholas was invited to visit America again and spent two years as a missionary bishop. He gave more than a hundred talks in less than six months, raising funds for his orphanages. Over the next twenty years, he lectured in various churches and universities.

When Germany invaded Yugoslavia on April 6, 1941, Bishop Nicholas, a fearless critic of the Nazis, was arrested and confined in Ljubostir Vojlovici Monastery. In 1944, he and Patriarch Gavriilo were sent to the death camp at Dachau. There he witnessed many atrocities and was tortured himself. When American troops liberated the prisoners in May 1945, the patriarch returned to Yugoslavia, but Bishop Nicholas went to England.

The Communist leader Tito was just coming to power in Yugoslavia, where he persecuted the Church and crushed those who opposed him. Therefore, Bishop Nicholas believed he could serve the Serbian people more effectively by remaining abroad. He went to America in 1946, following a hectic schedule in spite of his health problems which were exacerbated by his time in Dachau. He taught for three years at St. Sava's Seminary in Libertyville, IL before he settled at St. Tikhon's Monastery in South Canaan, PA in 1951.

He taught at St. Tikhon's and also served as the seminary's Dean and Rector. He was also a guest lecturer at St. Vladimir's Seminary in NY, and at Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, NY.

On Saturday March 17, 1956 Bishop Nicholas served his last Liturgy. After the service he went to the trapeza and gave a short talk. As he was leaving, he bowed low and said, "Forgive me, brothers." This was something unusual which he had not done before.

On March 18, 1956 St. Nicholas fell asleep in the Lord Whom he had served throughout his life. He was found in his room kneeling in an attitude of prayer. Though he was buried at St. Sava's Monastery in Libertyville, IL, he had always expressed a desire to be buried in his homeland. In April of 1991 his relics were transferred to the Chetinje Monastery in Lelich. There he was buried next to his friend and disciple Elder Justin Popovich (+ 1979).

English readers are familiar with St. Nicholas's "Prologue from Ochrid," "The Life of St. Sava," "A Treasury of Serbian Spirituality," and many other writings which are of great benefit for the whole Church. He thought of his writings as silent sermons addressed to people who would never hear him preach. In his life and writings, the grace of the Holy Spirit shone forth for all to see, but in his humility he considered himself the least of men.

Though he was a native of Serbia, St. Nicholas has a universal significance for Orthodox Christians in all countries. He was like a candle set upon a candlestick giving light to all (MT 5:15). A spiritual guide and teacher with a magnetic personality, he attracted many people to himself. He also loved them, seeing the image of God in each person he met. He had a special love for children, who hastened to receive his blessing whenever they saw him in the street.

He was a man of compunctious prayer, and possessed the gift of tears which purify the soul (St. John Climacus, LADDER, Step 7). He was a true pastor to his flock protecting them from spiritual wolves, and guiding them on the path to salvation. He has left behind many soul-profiting writings which proclaim the truth of Christ to modern man. In them he exhorts people to love God, and to live a life of virtue and holiness. May we also be found worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven through the prayers of St. Nicholas, and by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory forever. Amen.



It is impossible to find the Red Sea among the stars or to walk this earth without breathing air; so too it is impossible to cleanse our heart from impassioned thoughts and to expel its spiritual enemies without the frequent invocation of Jesus Christ.

**Saint Hesychios's treatise on
*Watchfulness and Holiness***

WE SHALL BE RESURRECTED!

By S. N. Sakos, University Professor Emeritus, from the Greek Orthodox newspaper «Ορθόδοξος Τύπος» (“Orthodox Press”), April 2007.

Without a doubt, the most intimate desire of the heart—and yet the greatest scandal of the mind—is the confession of our Faith, that states: *I anticipate the resurrection of the dead.*

Our life is not eliminated by the gravedigger’s shovel. It is not demarcated by the solemn cypress trees that stand by the freshly-dug graves. Our life is without boundaries; it is eternal. And, just as all of us shall die, thus shall all of us be resurrected! What can we point to as definitive testimony for this statement? What proof do we have that verifies this dogmatic statement? **The resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.**

Let us therefore step aside and allow the God-inspired preacher of the Resurrection, the Holy Apostle Paul, to speak to us; he expounds the issue of resurrection extensively in the 15th chapter of his 1st Epistle to Corinthians. I shall isolate the related paragraph (1 Cor 15:12-20): *Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen. And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised. And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.*

There were several Christians of Corinth who had basically accepted the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but had doubts about the resurrection of all the dead bodies, and so were asking for logical evidence in order to be convinced of it. In his address to them, the Apostle Paul referred to a chain of arguments, which he actually set forth in the mathematical method “*reductio ad absurdum.*” As those who have been taught mathematics already know, this scientific method begins from an erroneous hypothesis, which it attempts to prove by using correct proposals. But, because the hypothesis is incorrect, the reasoning ends up with contradictory and ambiguous proposals, in other words, absurdities.

These absurd conclusions are precisely what convince that the original basis was incorrect, and is therefore negated, rejected.

In this instance, the erroneous proposal from which the Apostle begins his reasoning is: “It is not possible for a dead person to be resurrected; therefore, Christ was not resurrected.” If we were to accept the validity of this proposal—as many do, even today—we must also accept the following consequences, which depend on it:

First: The apostles’ teaching, i.e., the Gospel itself, is vacant. It is nothing more than hollow words, devoid of content.

Second: The Christians’ faith, i.e., the Church, is void, hollow, and unsubstantial.

Third: As heralds of the Resurrection, the apostles are exposed and proven to be false witnesses, sycophants and sanctimonious frauds, since they have been preaching a monstrous lie to the world: that God resurrected Christ, when He didn’t resurrect Him.

Fourth: The Christians’ faith is futile, useless, deceptive and harmful. It promises salvation to mankind, but leads it into

destruction, since everything deteriorates and is lost inside the grave.

Fifth: Those who are redeemed in Christ, the faithful, remain unredeemed, under the slavery of sin and of their vices. Who can redeem them, if Christ was not resurrected?

Sixth: The reposed brethren, all of our loved ones who died with faith in Christ, have

vanished altogether; they no longer exist, since there is nothing beyond the grave.

Seventh: “We, the faithful, the members of the Church, are the most miserable and wretched creatures on earth, if we cannot hope for another life, after death.” If a metaphysical reality does indeed exist, then mankind is even more tragic than the animal kingdom, because Man has an innate yearning for the eternal, whereas animals do not have any metaphysical anxieties. Similarly, the faithful are even more unfortunate than the faithless, who lack any familiarity with the celestial reality and are totally indifferent to its existence.

For the Christians who have had experiences in Christ during their lifetime, the above seven proposals are absolutely absurd and incongruous, therefore the original proposition on which they are based is likewise absurd and is to be rejected. It is wrong to claim “the dead can’t be resurrected, therefore neither Christ was resurrected.” The truth declares the exact opposite: that Christ WAS resurrected, therefore the dead



WILL be resurrected. Out of this reality, the following seven consequences ensue:

First: The apostolic sermon constitutes an irrefutable reality and a salvific truth. It is the founding stone of historic witness in prophecy, and is testified by the faithful Christian's experience and familiarity; for example, the hungry person, who has eaten and is satiated, knows with certainty that the plate he was given was full of tasty and nourishing food; also the thirsty person, who has drunk and quenched his thirst, is more than certain that his glass was not empty; thus do Christians have the certainty and the "aftertaste" that the Apostles' sermon was not just hollow words. The Corinthians themselves had first-hand experience of the sweetness and the spiritual satiety that the word of the Gospel infused in their hearts. They were no hollow words—they were Light, Truth, and Life!

Second: The faith of the Christians—the Church of Christ—is an historic reality, which continues the life and the work of Christ. People can either accept it or reject it. But, regardless of the stance that each person takes, the Church is an unchallenged reality. For example, one may never attend Church, but that does not mean that he can assert (for that reason) that temples do not exist!

Third: The Apostles, among whom Paul (who was known and familiar to the Corinthians) is included, are the true witnesses of Christ's Gospel. They are neither false witnesses, nor sanctimonious frauds. This is certified by their very lives. With all the sufferings that they endured for the sake of the resurrected Christ, they sealed everything that they testified with their sermons. Would they have truly sacrificed their very lives for the Resurrection, if it were a falsehood? Would they have dared to relate the very Persona of God to a falsehood?

Fourth: The Christians' faith leads to salvation. It has no resemblance whatsoever to the orgies and the ugliness that characterized the Pagan religions, whose teachings the faithful were already familiar with, given that they too used to be pagans. The Christian faith inspires purity and cleanliness in one's life; it teaches love and solidarity towards the destitute, and forgiveness towards one's enemy. Its benefits do not pertain to the afterlife only. They enrich and adorn this life also.

Fifth: The very Christians whom Paul was addressing proved, with their new life in Christ, that their faith was not fruitless. Thanks to this faith, they were transported from darkness into the light; from the lion's teeth, into Christ's embrace. They, who were once full of empathy, malice and moral discrepancies, have now changed their lives. They are experiencing this wonderful change, within their very existence; they rejoice in it, and they praise God. But their change is also evident to their environment; it is confessed by the community of the entire city.

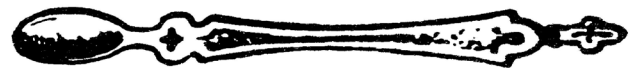
Sixth: The Christians of Corinth had first-hand experience of an **actual event**: a live communication between the "triumphant" (celestial) Church and the "enlisted" (terrestrial) Church. In other words, the reposed in Christ brethren would inform the living that those who have passed away are still alive; that, while their dead bodies are asleep in graves, their souls are in the land of the living.

For example, during the Transfiguration of the Lord, the apostles **saw and heard** the prophets Moses and Elijah conversing with the Lord (Mt 17:3, Mk 9:4, Lk 9:30-32), therefore they had not vanished altogether, even though they had died. That specific experience alone testifies that it is not possible for so many saints and spiritual people to have vanished; so many prophets and martyrs, who, for Christ's namesake, "trod the narrow path" and gave up their lives for Him.

This argument of the apostle Paul is corroborated throughout the ages, by the holy relics of the saints: in the old Testament, we find mention that the bones of the prophet Elijah brought a dead soldier back to life (Kings IV, 13:21). But even up to our time, the relics of saints that still exude fragrance and perform so many other signs through the Grace they are endowed with, all testify that the reposed saints are still alive and will most assuredly be resurrected.

Seventh: The charismas of the holy Spirit certify the state of Grace that Christians enjoy as members of the Church. Through the tribulations and the tempests of life, they can remain cheerful and at peace. The Bishop of Kyrus, Theodoretus, characteristically writes: "We live here, amidst a multitude of perils. We are pressured by famine; we are constantly tortured and we alternate between the prisons of the universe. Homeless and migrants, we struggle with consecutive, oncoming waves. But that is not how things are, because we have as our vehicle, our good hope and reassurance of our own resurrection, the resurrection of our Saviour." The hope and the joy that we feel in this world are but an "advance payment" and a "foretaste" of our future joy and hope.

The post-mortem reality, therefore, is the continuation and the extension of this present life of ours, within the grace of Christ. The one who does not doubt the resurrection, is the one who already lives a resurrected life in Christ. When our faith begins to pale and wane before the fact of the resurrection—that "capita of all good things" according to the Chrysostom's expression—then we must examine more closely just how honest and consistent our spiritual life really is.



You should know which of the passions torments you the most, and you should especially struggle against it. To achieve this, you must examine your conscience daily.

St. Nikon of Optina (+1931)

THE GREAT MIRACLE OF THE CENTURIES

An excerpt from the booklet "I Saw the Holy Light," by Archimandrite Savvas Achilleos.

Many things have been told and have been written about the Holy LIGHT. However, no matter what has been recorded, the Holy LIGHT still remains a reality for all believers and an "enigmatic phenomenon" for others. This "mysterious" Light spontaneously and inexplicably pours forth every Holy Saturday from the Most Holy and Life-giving Tomb of the Resurrected Savior Christ.

The booklet from within which the subject article is extracted is a short description of the life of a saintly monk, Fr. Mitrofanis, who for 57 years served as the diligent guard at the entrance to the Holy Sepulchre. It is the result of many interviews the author had with the saintly Elder Mitrofanis. This specific excerpt relates to Fr. Mitrofanis' personal witnessing of the Holy Light, when he hid in a location right above the Holy Sepulchre, in his effort to personally witness the arrival of the Holy LIGHT.



In the beginning cold sweat bathed me from head to toe. My whole body trembled and I began to shiver. I felt as one who was about to be executed. Then, I experienced an exceedingly great fear, such as I had never felt before. Even until today I still seek to find the reason for that panic. I can give no explanation. My sense of helplessness and bewilderment was unprecedented. At the same time inside me, a strong intense, threatening voice of censure, constantly threw me into confusion. "Who else dared something similar in the passing of the centuries of Christianity? How could you decide upon this daring act? If, for any reason you are caught, what will you do? What justification will you give? What excuse will you dare to voice? What, Fr. Mitrofanis?"

Despite these horrible thoughts that terrified me, my perseverance did not desist. I must resolve my doubts. Why should I live every day with questions and misgivings? For my own satisfaction I must verify whatever happens, whether it is called a miracle or a delusion, I needed to know so that I could live the rest of my life in peace and trust. I must have weakened, however, because soon my strong persistence was on the wane and repentance was setting in.

I began to repent for the things I had done up to that moment. I felt someone forcefully telling me, "Come down quickly! Why did you entangle yourself in such a predicament? You still have time. In a little while the Orthodox Divine Liturgy will begin. It will end at 4 o'clock in the morning. Immediately following, the Armenians will come, and their service will last as long as ours. You will be compelled to be still continuously silent, composed, and calm. Will you last? And if not, then what? After the Armenians, the Latins will follow. Until 6:15 in the morning when they finish their Liturgy, you will not be

able to make a move or a sound. What if something annoys your throat, and you are forced to cough? What then? Well? Woe to you and three times woe to you. What will become of you, Fr. Mitrofanis?"

I began to deplore myself for my hasty and foolhardy decision. Continuously I was upbraiding myself and repeatedly kept saying: "The whole world believes! Who are you not to believe? Think of the consequences if you are discovered. In what a dreadful and difficult position you will find yourself then!"

While all of these thoughts, pricked my conscience, my eyes were glued to my watch. The minutes seemed as days and the hours seemed to last for years. The hour hand, as if in revenge for my rashness, refused to move.

Finally, it was two o'clock after midnight towards Holy Saturday, when the Orthodox priest came to the Holy Sepulchre to commence the Divine Liturgy. After the Orthodox worship, at exactly 4:00 in the morning, the Armenian priest came and immediately began his Liturgy.

The excruciating fatigue of being in a cramped position compounded by protracted wakefulness affected my hearing. Every sound reverberated through the whole of my feverish throbbing body. The taxing strain and exhaustion of the previous days combined with unwavering weariness and monotony brought on an unimaginable dizziness. Finally the Armenian service ended and the Latins arrived. To keep myself alert and awake I followed and observed closely whatever occurred during the duration of each Liturgy. I saw the unleavened wafers, thin round pieces, used as the Body of Christ, instead of the bread that the Orthodox use. With abated breath I sat patiently. The need to cough was unnecessary since I was in good health, but my mouth was dry from agony. Only from time to time I put a little water on my lips to cool and wet them.

At 6:15, the morning hour of Holy Saturday, the last of the Latins departed and the Holy Sepulchre was given over to my geronda, Fr. Anatolios.

Imagine what an unbearable shock he would have had if he had known that I was within reach of him. Truly, what would have happened? What a dreadful reaction could result if he knew that my pleas and my tears were all a monstrous lie, a lie that I was forced to resort to in order to pacify my dubiousness!

Immediately, preparations were begun, which under different circumstances I would have been the one to bring to completion. Fr. Anatolios, put out one after the other the 43 vigil lights of the Holy Sepulchre. Then, he went to the entrance of the Tomb where the Holy Stone was. There he occupied himself to have the sealing wax ready.

There was no delay in this preparation, because at 11 o'clock, the search was to be made for any instrument capable of igniting. Immediately after, the doors of the Tomb would be

sealed. At exactly 12 o'clock noon the Holy Sepulchre would be opened. Every Holy Saturday, this routine was executed with attention to every detail. I was aware of all the movements. At 11 o'clock when the Tomb was sealed, I was in total darkness. I lit the flashlight that I had with me and I saw on the Tomb the Holy Kantila. I saw it, awaiting an invisible hand to give it LIGHT. Beside it, I saw the Prayer Book closed, except for a thick candle between some pages which would allow easy access to the special supplications. I turned off the flashlight. My agony reached its climax. I prayed to Christ.

"My Lord, You know the reasons for my decision to be in this unlikely predicament. All emanated by doubts of one shaken and weak in his faith. I have imitated your chosen and beloved Thomas. He didn't want to believe when the other disciples assured him of your Resurrection. Instead he wanted to see for himself and to touch your wounds and then to be convinced. I, much weaker than your doubting Thomas, ask to see with my own eyes what takes place regarding the Holy LIGHT. My faith such as it is, You know, Lord. My love does not escape Your omniscience. My Lord, and My God, make me worthy to see what will happen so that faith will replace faithlessness. Besides, even Your disciples asked You for reassurance even though they witnessed innumerable miracles, *Increase our faith* (Lk 17:5), they said."

When I finished my prayer, I again turned on the flashlight to see the Holy Tomb. The light fell precisely on the candle. "Oh, that candle," I said. "What is this candle doing there?" In a moment, I interrupted my monologue, because I noticed the door of the Holy Sepulchre opening. With a quick glance I saw it was exactly 12 o'clock noon. Agony began to overcome me, and my heart multiplied its beats so rapidly that I thought it would jump out of my chest. I felt a tightening pressure about me. I was ready to faint. I tried to control myself with all my strength and to give courage to my quaking body. The sound of footsteps inside the first chamber of the Holy Stone startled me. For a brief moment, I noticed the silhouette of the Patriarch, who bent down in order to enter the space of the Life-giving Tomb.

My excitement had reached a fearful peak; Yet I was so immersed in an endless silence that I could hardly hear my own breath. Suddenly came the sound of a soft whistling. It was similar to a fine breeze of wind. And immediately, an unforgettable sight, a blue LIGHT filled the entire Tomb.

That blue LIGHT, was going round and round exactly as a strong whirlwind, whose force uproots the tallest trees, grasps them, and carries them off. The restless blue LIGHT gyrated about with lightning speed and then the movements slowed down.

Within that LIGHT I saw very clearly the Patriarch. Drops of perspiration trickled down his face. As he was kneeling, he placed his finger at the opening in the Holy Book where the 'candle' was. In the meantime, he placed on the Tomb four bundles, each containing 33 candles. When the mysterious LIGHT changed to a steady glow the Patriarch opened to the 'candle' page and he began to read the prayers.

The then somewhat calm blue LIGHT, began again an uneasy movement. It was an unimaginable and indescribable whirling, stronger than the first. Immediately it began to change into an all-white LIGHT, as at the Transfiguration of Christ (Mt 17:2). Gradually the all white LIGHT began to take the form of a disc, brilliant as the sun, and stopped motionless precisely over the head of the Patriarch. I saw the Patriarch take in his hands the bundles of candles. He raised them and waited. He was awaiting the arrival of the elusive LIGHT from God. As he raised his hands slowly, not quite reaching the height of his head, instantaneously as if he were touching a lighted furnace, the Holy Kantila and the four bundles of candles lit.



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

In an instant that bright disc vanished before me.

My eyes filled with tears. I felt shivers in my spine while my whole body was burning. I had the feeling that untamed flames of an incandescent furnace enveloped me. My entire body was soaked in perspiration, while my mind, heart, and soul seemed paralyzed at the heavenly revelation of the Holy LIGHT.

The Patriarch, deeply touched, and in a state of bliss, departed. Out of reverence for the Holy space of the Tomb, he bent his head low and backed out to enter the chamber of the Holy Stone. In his hands were the bundles of candles lit by the flames of the Divine LIGHT. Here was evidence of Grace in its glory!

Now was the time for the first bundle of candles to be presented to the Orthodox prelate. Out of joy, he was carried on the shoulders of the faithful to transport the LIGHT to the Church of the Resurrection. From his hand the LIGHT would be passed out to all of the people who clamored to have their tapers lit by the Holy FLAME.

The Armenian, the Latin, and the Coptic prelates each received their bundles of burning candles, and they in turn, distributed the Holy FLAME to their followers.

The bells of the Holy Church of the Resurrection began to ring joyfully while all of the people, elated and jubilant, began to sing with fervor, hymns of praises and gratitude to the Resurrected Christ. The pealing of the bells sounding as trumpets of Heaven, proclaimed to the faithful the message of the Resurrection “that the Lord is truly risen!”

During that period of high glee and in the excitement of the enthusiastic people, an opportunity was given to me. Without losing any time and after a quick glance, I jumped from the niche down into the space of the Holy Tomb. Immediately I took the Holy Kantila and the Holy Book for which I was responsible as well as the thick “candle” which was used only as a marker for the page of the prayers. In a quick moment I appeared before my geronda, Fr. Anatolios. He, astonished by my unexpected presence, asked me: “How did you get here, Fr. Mitrofanis?” “Didn’t you see me, my geronda? I was next to you. I was right by your side. I promised you that I would be here on time and here I am!”

Now, my friends, if you can put yourself in my place, and if you can perceive the gamut of sensations which pierced my soul, then let me compare two Paschas for you, the one of 1925, and that of 1926. As much sadness as I felt on the Pascha of the previous year, that is how much more happiness was mine this present Pascha. As shakable as was my faith the last Holy Saturday, that much more fervent and strong it was this Pascha.

Wherever my eyes turned toward whatever direction, inside and outside the Church of the Resurrection, everywhere I saw before me the Heavenly Blue LIGHT. I saw it restless and vibrant with an unbelievable velocity. Everywhere I heard its faint but penetrating whistling, and felt its delicate cool breath touching me. Its Heavenly grace overshadowed me. The visitation of the Holy Spirit filled me, although I felt so unworthy.

Immediately my whole being was transported to the upper room of Zion, there where the disciples were gathered and waiting for the gift from above of the Holy Spirit. The awe that seized me filled my soul with an inexpressible joy and kept my mind on the Divine Event. Through my imagination I followed the Heavenly vision. Continually I saw the restless presence of the mysterious and ultramundane blue LIGHT filling the Holy Tomb with its unique brightness, illuminating the entire surroundings. I saw its all-white transformation and its reshaping into a bright disc of a summer day.

Again I returned to the upper room of the disciples. I brought to mind the infinite quietness and their waiting. Suddenly I heard *the breath and the sound from heaven.* (Acts 2:2). Yes, the upper room was transformed into a place for the descent of the Holy Spirit. To me, the Holy Tomb replaced the upper

room. There, “in the shape of fiery tongues,” here, in Holy LIGHT. There, to the disciples, here, to the multitude of the faithful, its grace was distributed.

A great length of time passed. I didn’t, however, have the power or the inclination to dismiss from my mind the Heavenly vision. The wondrous joy would not depart from my soul. Continually I repeated “Glory be to God.” At times, as I thought of the forbearance of God, with shame and regret I admonished myself for my doubts and for my persistence to witness in order to believe. It was in His infinite Love that He granted to me whatever I wanted and He satisfied the longing in my soul.

Others too have seen the Holy LIGHT, on the hallowed day of Holy Saturday, not, however, in the same way. Each one, according to the degree of his faith is made worthy of this vision. Some see the Holy LIGHT as a flash of light similar to lightning. Other, see the Holy Tomb surrounded by flames. Again, others see a small LIGHT, as that of a bright star.

There are also non-believers who go during Holy Saturday to the Church of the Resurrection and they demand to see the Holy LIGHT. These naive people do not comprehend that everything depends on faith. Since they do not believe, they misinterpret and speak demeaningly of all that occurs. This reflects the emptiness in their souls. All that they want to do, is to argue with those who do believe.



The light of dawn comes before the sun, and meekness is the precursor of all humility. So, let us listen to the order in which Christ, our Light, places these virtues. He says, *Learn from Me, because I am meek and humble of heart.* Therefore, before gazing at the sun of humility, we must let the light of meekness flow over us. If we do, we will then be able to look steadily at the sun. The true order of these virtues teaches us that we are totally unable to turn our eyes to the sun before we have first become accustomed to the light.

Meekness is a mind consistent amid honor and dishonor. Meekness prays quietly and sincerely for a neighbor however troublesome he may be. Meekness is a rock looking out over the sea of anger which breaks the waves which come crashing on it and stays entirely unmoved. Meekness is the bulwark of patience, the door, indeed the mother of love, and the foundation of discernment. For it is said, *The meek will He guide in judgment; and the meek will he teach His way.* (Pss 25:9). And it is meekness that earns pardon for our sins, gives confidence to our prayers and makes a place for the Holy Spirit. *This is the one I esteem: he who is meek and contrite in spirit, and trembles at My word.* (Isa 66:2).

St. John Climacus

Ἀλαλάξατε τῷ Κυρίῳ Πᾶσα ἡ Γῆ...

Γ. Καφετζάκη - Μαράντη, 1961 (μία πάνεμορφη Πασχαλιάτικη ιστοριοῦλα ἀπὸ τὴν εὐλογημένη Πατρίδα μας).



Ἡνεανικὴ συντροφιά ἀποφάσισε νὰ κάνει Πάσχα σὲ κανένα ἀπόμακρο χωριό. Ἡ νύχτα τοῦ Μεγάλου Σαββάτου τοὺς βρῆκε νὰ περιπλανῶνται σὲ κορφοβούνια ἄγνωστα. Εἶχαν χάσει ὀριστικὰ τὸ δρόμο.

Ξαφνικὰ ἀκούστηκε ἀπὸ πέρα τὸ χτύπημα καμπάνας τῆς Ἀναστάσιμης Λειτουργίας

καὶ τότε κατάλαβαν πὼς κινδύνευαν νὰ μὴ κάνουν Ἀνάσταση τῆ χρονιά αὐτή.

- Βρὲ παιδιά, βλέπω φῶς ἐκεῖ στὴ διπλανὴ κορφή, φώναξε κάποιος.

Ξεκίνησαν ὅλοι μαζί κατὰ 'κεῖ, πλησίασαν, μὰ σταμάτησαν ἀπότομα ὅταν ἓνας μαντρόσκυλος οὐρλιαξε ἄγρια. Ἔτσι σκαρφαλωμένοι σ' ἐκείνη τὴν κορφή, εἶδαν ἀπὸ μικρὴ ἀπόσταση τὴ σκηνὴ τὴν ἀλησμόνητη: Ὁ βοσκὸς ἀνάμεσα στὰ πρόβατα, μ' ἓνα κερὶ στὸ χέρι, ἔκανε μονάχος του τὴν Ἀνάσταση. Ἀκουγότανε καθαρὰ κομμάτια ἀπὸ τροπάρια πὺ ἐψαλλε μὲ τὴν χοντρὴ φωνή του καὶ ἄλλοτε ἀπάγγελλε σὲ ἐκκλησιαστικὸ τόνο. Κάπου – κάπου, διέκοπτε τὸ ψαλτικὸ του γιὰ νὰ ἐπιβάλλει σιωπὴ στὰ γρυλίσματα τοῦ μαντρόσκυλου, πὺ καθὼς μᾶς ἐνοιωθε κοντὰ οὐρλιαξε: καὶ στὸ τέλος, γιὰ νὰ μείνει ἡσυχος, τὸν ἔδεσε σὲ κάποιο δεντράκι ἐκεῖ κοντὰ.

«Τὴν Ἀνάστασή σου Χριστέ Σωτήρ, ἀγγέλοι κουνουῖσιν ἐν οὐρανοῖ..., Ἀναστάσις ὁ Χριστὸς ἀπὸ τοῦ τάφου...», (καὶ διέκοπτε γιὰ νὰ ἐπιβάλλει σιωπὴ στοὺς γρυλλισμοὺς τοῦ σκυλιοῦ): «Σῶπα, μωρέ, ἄδικο νὰ σοῦ δώσει, καταραμένε καὶ λειτουργιὰ γίνεται!» (καὶ συνέχιζε): «Ἀνάσταση Χριστοῦ περασάμενος... Ἰησοῦς ὁ μόνος ἀναμάρτητος...», «Τὸν Σταυρόν του προσκουνουῖμεν Δέσποτα...» (μπέε, ἔκαμε ἄξαφνα ὁ διπλάνος του τράγος). «Εἶντα 'χεις ἐδὰ κι ἡ ἀφεδιά σου τέθοια ὄρα; Κεδιὰ (σιωπὴ) νὰ σὲ κόψει, δὲ θωρεῖς πὼς λειτουργῶ;»

Καθὼς εἶχαμε πλησιάσει, τὰ μάτια μας εἶχανε συνηθίσει στὸ λίγο φῶς τῆς ἀστροφεγγιάς καὶ βλέπαμε πιά καθαρὰ ὅλες τὶς λεπτομέρειες τοῦ προσευχόμενου.

Μὲ τὸ ἓνα χέρι κρατοῦσε μία μεγάλη λαμπάδα ἀναμμένη, πὺ τὴν εἶχε βέβαια φέρει ἀπὸ τὸ χωριό, καὶ μὲ τὸ δεξιὸ κουνουῖσε ἓνα θυμιατήρι δικῆς του κατασκευῆς: Εἶχε δέσει μὲ σπάγκο τὸν πάτο μίας σπασμένης στάμνας καὶ μέσα εἶχε τὰ κάρβουνα καὶ τὸ λιβάνι.

Καθὼς λοιπὸν ἀπάγγελλε ἡ ἐψαλλε τὶς προσευχῆς του, θυμιάτιζε συγχρόνως συνεχῶς, καθὼς κάνει ὁ διάκος στὴν ἐκκλησία. Καὶ ἡ ἀκολουθία συνεχιζόταν:

«Κύματι θαλάσσης τὸν πρήξαντα πάλι διώχτη τύραννε...» σφεντονίζοντας τὴν τελευταία λέξη μὲ μῖσος καὶ ἀγανάκτηση.

Σὲ λίγο οἱ καμπάνες τῶν γύρω χωριῶν χτυποῦσαν χαρμόσυνα καὶ ἀπόμακροι κρότοι τουφεκοβολισμῶν ἔφτασαν καὶ ἐκεῖ πάνω. «Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶχε ἀναστηθεῖ». Στὸ ἄκουσμα αὐτὸ ὁ βοσκὸς ἄφησε τὸ θυμιατήρι καὶ παίζοντας ἓνα πήδημα, ὅπως θὰ ἔκανε καὶ στὸ χορὸ, ἄρχισε μὲ ὅλη τὴ δύναμη τοῦ στήθους του νὰ ψέλνει τὸ «Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη», κουνώντας τὸ κερὶ του, καὶ πετώντας διάφορα σπασμένα πήλινα ἀγγεῖα πὺ εἶχε συσσωρεύσει γύρω του ἐδὼ κι ἐκεῖ, πὺ καθὼς σποῦσαν ἔκαναν ἓνα τρομερὸ κρότο πὺ ἀντιλαλιόταν στὴν ἡσυχία τῆς ἐρημιᾶς. Μ' αὐτὸ τὸν τρόπο ἀντικαθιστοῦσε τὰ βαρελὸτα καὶ τὶς γιορταστικῆς τουφεκιές. Τὰ πρόβατα μὲ τοὺς ἀπροσδόκητους αὐτοὺς θορύβους, σκόρπισαν· καὶ τὸ μαντρόσκυλο οὐρλιαξε ἄγριεμένο, κοιτάζοντας κατὰ τὸ μέρος πὺ εἶμαστε...

«Ἀναστήτω ὁ Θεὸς καὶ σκορπιστεῖτε καὶ σεῖς μωρέ, καὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ πλάσματα εἴσαστε...». Καὶ δῶσ' του καὶ πετοῦσε τὶς σπασμένες γλάστρες σὲ ὅλα τὰ σημεῖα... Ἦτανε τόση ἡ χαρὰ του, τόσο ὁ ἐnthουσιασμός του γιὰ τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Κυρίου, πὺ δὲ θυμούμαστε νὰ εἶχαμε ἰδεῖ ποτὲ μεγαλύτερη θρησκευτικὴ χαρὰ...

Ἀποφασίσαμε τώρα νὰ παρουσιαστοῦμε καὶ ὅλοι μαζί τοῦ φωνάξαμε

- Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη, κουμπάρε.

- Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη ὁ Κύριος, εἶπε κι ἔτρεξε κοντὰ μας.

Ἦτανε ἓνας θεόψηλος ἄντρας, ὡς 25 χρονῶν, πλατύστερνος, μὲ τεράστιες πλάτες, πὺ ἡ φωνή του καθὼς μᾶς μιλοῦσε ἀντιβοοῦσε στὶς γύρω λαγκαδιές.

- Ἐχάσαμε τὴ στράτα, καὶ δὲν προφτάξαμε νὰ πᾶμε στὸ χωριὸ νὰ κάμουμε ἐκεῖ Ἀνάσταση.

- Ὁ Θεὸς τὰ 'φερε «δεξιά», εἶπε ὁ βοσκὸς γελώντας, νὰ ῥθετε κατὰ τὸ κονάκι μου ἀπόψε νὰ κάμω κι ἐγὼ Λαμπρὴ μαζί σας, ἀλλιῶς ἤθελε νὰ 'μαι μονάχος.

- Καλῶς ἦρθετε, καλῶς ἐκοπιάζετε. Πᾶμε στὸ μητᾶτο παρακάτω καὶ πρᾶμα δὲ θὰ μᾶς λείψει.

Καὶ ἀληθινὰ τίποτε δὲν ἔλειψε ἀπὸ τὸ πλοῦσιο τραπέζι πὺ μᾶς ἔστρωσε, ἀπὸ τὰ κόκκινα αὐγά καὶ τὸν ὀβελία πὺ ψήσαμε ὅλοι μαζί, ὡς τὰ παχύτατα γαλακτερά, πὺ ἄφθονα, ἀκατάπαυστα, μᾶς κουβανοῦσε...

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη!



Γνωῖμες, καρδιές, ὅσοι Ἕλληνες, ὅ,τι εἶστε μὴν ξεχνᾶτε, δὲν εἶστε ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια σας μονάχα, ὄχι. Χρωστᾶτε καὶ σὲ ὅσους ἦρθαν, πέρασαν, θὰ ῥθοῦνε, θὰ περάσουν. Κριτές, θὰ μᾶς δικάσουν οἱ ἀγέννητοι, οἱ νεκροί.

Κωστῆς Παλαμᾶς

Ὁ Ἰούδας ὁ Ἰσκαριώτης

ΠΗΓΗ: *Εβδομαδιαία Ἐκκλησιαστική Ἐφημερίς «Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος», 25 Ἀπριλίου 2008, σελ. 1-2.*

Υπῆρξε ἓνας ἀπὸ τοὺς δώδεκα μαθητὲς τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἦταν ἐκλεκτός, στενός, καὶ χαρισματοῦχος συνεργάτης του. Ὁ Χριστὸς ἐμπιστεύθηκε στὸν Ἰούδα θησαυρὸ ὑλικό, τὸ ταμεῖο τοῦ ἱεροῦ κοινοβίου τῶν ἀποστόλων, καὶ θησαυρὸ πνευματικό, δηλαδή τοῦ ἔδωσε τὴ χάρη καὶ τὴ δύναμη νὰ κάνει θαύματα, νὰ θεραπεύει, νὰ ἐκδιώκει δαιμόνια, νὰ κηρύττει (Ματθ 10:1-4, Λουκ 9:1-6). Πόσο εὐγνώμων καὶ ἀφοσιωμένος ἔπρεπε νὰ εἶναι ὁ Ἰούδας στὸ Χριστὸ γι' αὐτὰ ποὺ τοῦ ἐμπιστεύθηκε.

Κι ὁμως ἐνῶ ζοῦσε μαζί μετὰ τὸ Χριστό, ἀπολάμβανε τὴ διδασκαλία του, προστατευόταν ἀπὸ τὴ προσευχὴ του, πιστοποιοῦσε καθημερινὰ τὰ θαύματά του, τὰ σημεῖα αὐτὰ τῆς Θεότητάς του, ἐν τούτοις δὲν πρόσεξε καὶ ἀγάπησε σιγά-σιγά τὸ χρῆμα. Καὶ ἔτσι, ἀπὸ φιλάργυρος ἔγινε φιλάργυρος· καὶ ἀπὸ φιλάργυρος ἔγινε κλέφτης· καὶ ἀπὸ κλέφτης ἔγινε προδότης σιχαμερός.

Ἐξί μέρες πρὶν τὸ πάθος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἡ ἀδελφὴ τοῦ Λαζάρου συγκλονισμένη ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνάσταση τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ τῆς μυρώνει μετὰ πανάκριβο μύρο τὰ πόδια τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ὁ Ἰούδας, ἀντὶ νὰ συγκινηθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν πράξη τῆς καὶ νὰ δοξάσει τὸ Θεὸ ποὺ εἶναι κοντὰ τους καὶ ζοῦν μαζί του ὅπως ζοῦσε ὁ Ἀδὰμ καὶ ἡ Εὐὰ στὸν παράδεισο, αὐτὸς φορώντας τὸ προσωπεῖο τῆς φιλοπτωχείας διαμαρτύρεται καὶ κατσουφιάζει (Ἰω. 12:4-6). Λυπᾶται, γιατί ἡ Μαρία χύνει τὸ πανάκριβο μύρο· αὐτὸς ὁμως δὲν λυπᾶται νὰ προδώσει τὸ διδάσκαλο καὶ εὐεργέτη του καὶ Θεὸ του καὶ ἔτσι νὰ γίνῃ ὁ ἠθικὸς αὐτουργὸς στὸ νὰ χυθεῖ τὸ πανάκριβο καὶ ἀνεκτίμητο αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Σ' ὅλο τὸν κόσμο θὰ γίνῃ γνωστὴ ἡ μύρωση τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ προδοσίᾳ του ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰούδα. Τὰ καλὰ καὶ τὰ κακὰ παραμένουν αἰώνια καὶ οἱ συνέπειές τους μᾶς ἀκολουθοῦν καὶ μετὰ τὸν θάνατό μας, ἐὰν φυσικὰ δὲν μετανοήσουμε.

Ἐπίσης, στὸ Μυστικὸ Δεῖπνο (Ἰω. 13^ο κεφ.) βλέπει τὸ Χριστὸ νὰ τοῦς πλένει τὰ πόδια, νὰ προγνωρίζει τί θὰ συμβεῖ, νὰ λέγει ὅτι ἓνας ἀπὸ ἐσᾶς θὰ μετὰ παραδώσει, κι

ὁμως δὲν τὸν ἀποκαλύπτει, δὲν τὸν ἐπιπλήττει· τοῦ φέρεται εὐγενικά. Κι ὁμως αὐτὸς παραμένει ἀναίσθητος καὶ ἀχάριστος καὶ πορωμένος εἰς τὸ ἔπακρον, μετὰ ἀποτέλεσμα ὁ σατανᾶς νὰ μπεῖ μέσα του καὶ νὰ γίνῃ τέλειο ὑποχείριό του. Στὸ τέλος μετὰ φίλημα θὰ τὸν προδώσει...

Ὁ Ἰούδας, ἐὰν ἐβλεπε κάτι κακὸ στὸ Χριστὸ τόσο καιρὸ ποὺ παρέμεινε κοντὰ του, θὰ μπορούσε νὰ γίνῃ μάρτυς κατηγορίας καὶ νὰ ξεσκεπάσει τὴν τυχὸν ὑποκρισίᾳ ἢ ἀνακολουθία τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ὁχι ὁμως νὰ γίνῃ προδότης. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὅτι τίποτα δὲν εἶχε νὰ καταμαρτυρήσει. Ὁ Χριστὸς ἦταν ἀπόλυτα ἀθῶος καὶ ἀμεμπτος σὲ ὅλα. Καὶ ἡ κακία τοῦ Ἰούδα ἐντελῶς ἀδικαιολόγητος καὶ χωρὶς κανένα ἔρεισμα.

Οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς, ἐνῶ δὲν ἤξεραν πῶς νὰ συλλάβουν τὸν Χριστὸ χωρὶς νὰ προκαλοῦν ἀντιδράσεις, τώρα χαίρονται καὶ ὑπόσχονται χρήματα στὸν προδότη. Ὁ Ἰούδας



συνδυάζει τὴν ἀχαριστία καὶ ἀπιστία τοῦ Ἀδὰμ καὶ τὴν ιδιοτέλεια, κακία καὶ ἀναισθησία τοῦ Κάϊν. Ὑπερβαίνει τὴν μοχθηρία τοῦ Φαρισαίου ποὺ ἐπιχειροῦσε νὰ φονεύσει ἠθικὰ τὸν τελῶνη στὴ γνωστὴ παραβολὴ καὶ τὴν ἀνταρσία καὶ αὐθάδεια τοῦ ἀσώτου υἱοῦ ποὺ φέρεται μὲν μετὰ ἀναίδεια καὶ ἀλαζονεία στὸν πατέρα του, τὸν πικραίνει ἀφάνταστα, ἀλλὰ οὔτε κὰν διανοεῖται νὰ τὸν σκοτώσει καὶ νὰ πάρῃ τὴν περιουσίᾳ. Τελικὰ δὲ ὁ ἄσωτος θὰ μετανοήσει

καὶ θὰ γυρίσει συντριμμένος καὶ ταπεινωμένος πίσω στὸν πατέρα του, χωρὶς νὰ ἔχει ἀπαίτηση νὰ πάρῃ τὴ θέση τοῦ υἱοῦ ξανὰ ἀλλὰ ἀρκούμενος στὴ θέση τοῦ ὑπηρετή.

Ὁ Ἰούδας θὰ συναισθανθεῖ τὸ λάθος του, ἀλλὰ δὲν θὰ μετανοήσει. Ἡ καταδίκη του Ἰησοῦ θὰ πετύχει ὅτι δὲν πέτυχε ἡ καλωσύνη καὶ ἡ εὐγένειά του. «Ἡμαρτον παραδοὺς αἷμα ἀθῶον». Εἶναι ὁ πρῶτος ποὺ ἀναγνωρίζει ἀθρότητα Ἰησοῦ, μετὰ τὸν Πιλάτο βέβαια, ἀλλὰ δὲν ζητᾶ συγγνώμη.

Ἡ ἐγωιστικὴ ἀναγνώριση τοῦ λάθους μας, χωρὶς νὰ συνοδεύεται ἀπὸ συντριβὴ καὶ ἐκζήτηση τοῦ θεοῦ ἐλέους, δὲν μᾶς σφάζει. Ἀντίθετα, μᾶς ὁδηγεῖ στὴν ἀπελπισία καὶ τὴν αἰώνια καταδίκη. Ἔτσι ὁ ληστής κερδίζει τὸν παράδεισο, ἐνῶ ὁ Ἰούδας βαδίζει πρὸς τὴν κόλαση. Ὁ παράνομος παίρνει τὴν ἄφεση καὶ ὁ μαθητὴς τὴν αἰώνια τιμωρία! Ἡ ἀναγνώριση τοῦ ἐγκλήματός του δὲν συγκινεῖ

κανένα. Οί φίλοι του οί άρχιερείς και οί πρεσβύτεροι όταν θα πεί «ήμαρτον παραδούς αίμα άθῶν» θα του άπαντήσουν· «Τί πρὸς ήμᾶς; σὺ ὄψει». Δικό σου θέμα και δική σου εὐθύνη· κανείς δὲν σε ανάγκασε (Μαθ. 27:3-4).

Ἡ τιμωρία τοῦ Ἰούδα εἶναι πολύμορφη. Ἡ κακία του χτυπᾷ τὸν ἴδιο, τὰ χρήματα πὸν κέρδισε, τὸν τόπο πὸν ἀγοράσθηκε μ' αὐτά. Ὁ Ἰούδας ἀποθνήσκει τὴν ἴδια μέρα μὲ τὸν Χριστὸ και λίγο νωρίτερα. Μὲ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ μόνος του. Κρεμάστηκε ἀπὸ κάπου (Μαθ. 27:5) και ὅταν ἔπεσε πρηγῆς ἀνοιξαν τὰ σπλάχνα του (Πράξ. 1:18), ἀφοῦ προφανῶς ἔσπασε κάποια στιγμή τὸ σχοινί ἀπὸ τὸ ὅποιο κρεμόταν. Τὸν Χριστὸ τὸν σταύρωσαν ἄλλοι· ὁ Ἰούδας κρεμάστηκε μόνος του. Τὸ κακὸ πάντοτε αὐτοτιμωρεῖται· ἀκόμη και στὴν κόλαση. Τὸ ἔλεος τοῦ Θεοῦ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἐπεμβεῖ στὴν αὐτοτιμωρία πὸν ἐπιβάλλει τὸ ἴδιο τὸ κακὸ. Γι' αὐτὸ, λένε οί πατέρες, ὅτι αὐτὸς πὸν ἀδικεῖται και ὑπομένει τὴν ἀδικία κατὰ Θεὸν δὲν παθαίνει κάτι κακὸ ἀλλὰ αὐτὸς πὸν ἀδικεῖ και δὲν μετανοεῖ. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ κατ' ἐξοχὴν δυστυχῆς και ταλαίπωρος.

Μεγάλη τιμωρία και ἡ φήμη πὸν ἀποκτᾷ ὁ κακὸς αἰώνια, ἐνῶ μεγάλη εὐεργεσία και ἀνταμοιβή ἡ φήμη πὸν ἀποκτᾷ ὁ δίκαιος αἰώνια. Ὁ Χριστὸς ὑπέροχος εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας· ὁ Ἰούδας σιχαμερὸς και ἀπόβλητος αἰώνιος. Ἀκόμη και τὸ ὄνομά του καταστράφηκε. Δὲν τὸ δίδουμε σὲ κανένα, ἂν και ἔχουμε ἅγιο μ' αὐτὸ τὸ ὄνομα τὸν Ἰούδα τὸν ἀδελφόθεο. Ἐκτοτε μόνον ὡς βρισιά τὸ χρησιμοποιοῦμε. Πόση ἡ δύναμη τῆς κακίας και πόσο τιμωρήθηκε ὁ Ἰούδας πὸν τὴν ὑπηρετήσε τόσο πιστά!

Χωρὶς χρήματα πέθανε ὁ Χριστὸς, λόγω ἐκούσιας ἀκτιμοσύνης· χωρὶς χρήματα πεθαίνει και ὁ Ἰούδας ἂν και φιλάργυρος. Τὰ χρήματα πὸν θέλγανε τώρα τὸν καῖνε. Πηγαίνει νὰ τὰ ἐπιστρέψει στοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς και στοὺς πρεσβυτέρους. Καῖνε ὅμως κι αὐτούς, γι' αὐτὸ δὲν τὰ θέλουν· ἐπειδὴ εἶναι ἀποκτημένα μὲ αίμα δὲν μποροῦν νὰ εἰσέλθουν στὸ ταμεῖο τοῦ ναοῦ.

Οἱ ὑποκριτὲς ἀρχιερεῖς λένε ὅτι τὰ χρήματα δὲν μποροῦν νὰ μπουῦν στὸ ναὸ. Δὲν σκέπτονται ὅμως ὅτι κι αὐτοὶ πὸν τὰ ἔδωσαν δὲν μποροῦν πλέον νὰ παραμένουν στὸ ναὸ και νὰ ἡγοῦνται τῶν πιστῶν τοῦ Ἰσραήλ.

Θεέ μου, πόσο τυφλωνόμαστε μερικὲς φορὲς ἐμεῖς οἱ πάνσοφοι ἱερεῖς, Παλαιᾶς και Καινῆς Διαθήκης, πὸν συμβουλευοῦμε τοὺς πάντας και τὰ πάντα, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἐλέγχουμε ποτὲ τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας! Ὁ Ἰούδας τὰ ἔρριξε στὸ δάπεδο τοῦ ναοῦ. Οὔτε ὅμως ὁ ναὸς τὰ θέλει. Στὸ τέλος γίνονται νεκροταφεῖο· ἀλλὰ και τὸ νεκροταφεῖο καταντᾷ σιχαμερό. Ἄγρὸς αίματος! Εἶναι σίγουρο ὅτι οἱ νεκροὶ ἂν μποροῦσαν νὰ μιλήσουν δὲν θὰ δεχόταν νὰ ταφοῦν ἐκεῖ.

Τὴν κακία τοῦ Ἰούδα δὲ θὰ τὴ φθάσει κανένας ἀπόστολος. Ὁ Πέτρος ἀρνήθηκε τὸν διδάσκαλο και Θεὸ

του και οἱ ἄλλοι μαθητὲς τὸν ἐγκατέλειψαν (ἐκτὸς τοῦ Ἰωάννου) ἀπὸ ἀδυναμία, ἐνῶ ὁ Ἰούδας τὸν πρόδωσε ἀπὸ κακία και φιλαργυρία. Κανένας δὲν ἔδωσε τόση χαρὰ και ἱκανοποίηση στοὺς ἐχθροὺς του Χριστοῦ. Οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς, πὸν φοβοῦνταν τὸν λαὸ και δίσταζαν νὰ προχωρήσουν στὰ σατανικά τους σχέδια, ἀνακαλύπτουν τώρα ὅτι ἔχουν ἄνθρωπο και σύμμαχο δικὸ τους μέσα στὸ κύκλο τῶν στενῶν συνεργατῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Πόσο τοὺς ἐνθαρρύνει αὐτὸ, πόσο τοὺς ἀναπτέρωνει τὸ ἠθικὸ και τὴ σατανική τους διάθεση. Κι ἔτσι, ἐνῶ σκεπτόταν νὰ ἐξοντώσουν τὸν Χριστὸ μετὰ τὴ γιορτὴ τοῦ Πάσχα, χάρις στὴ συνεργασία τοῦ Ἰούδα, τὸν ἐξόντωσαν κατὰ τὴ γιορτὴ. Πόσο μεγάλη ὑπῆρξε ἡ συμβολὴ τοῦ προδότου στὸ ἐγκλημα τῆς σταυρώσεως!

Διάδοχος τοῦ Ἰούδα στὸ κακὸ και στὴν προδοσία ἀπέβη ὁ Πάπας. Δὲν ἀρκέστηκε στὴν πνευματικὴ ἐξουσία πὸν εἶχε, ἀλλὰ ἀγάπησε πάνω ἀπὸ τὴν ἐξουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴν κοσμικὴ ἡγεσία. Ἐγινε κοσμικὸς ἡγέτης και προσπάθησε νὰ κυβερνήσει μὲ τὸ ξίφος και τὴν καταπίεση τοὺς Εὐρωπαίους. Τὸ «εἰ τις θέλει» τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὸ ἀντικατέστησε μὲ τὴν ἱερὰ Ἐξέταση. Τὴν πτωχεία και τὴν ἀπλότητα τοῦ ἀκτήμονος Ναζωραίου, τοῦ μὴ ἔχοντος «πὸν τὴν κεφαλὴν κλίνη» (Μαθ. 1:20), τὴν ἀντάλλαξε μὲ τὸν πλοῦτο, τὴ χλιδὴ, τὴν μεγαλοπρέπεια τὴν σπατάλη. Μ' ὅλα αὐτὰ ἔγινε αἴτιος ν' ἀντίσει ἡ ἀθεΐα και ἡ ἄρνηση στὴν Εὐρώπη. Ἐγινε αἰτία νὰ μισήσουν οἱ Εὐρωπαῖοι τὸ Χριστὸ και τὴν Ἐκκλησία του και νὰ προσπαθήσουν νὰ τὴν περιθωριοποιήσουν και νὰ τὴν ἐξαφανίσουν.

Τρεῖς οἱ μεγάλες πτώσεις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου λέγει ὁ ἅγιος πατὴρ Ἰουστίνος Πόποβιτς· «**Ἀδάμ, Ἰούδας, Πάπας**»!
«Ὁ ἔχων ὅτα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω»...



Ο Κύριος εἶναι εὐσπλαχνος και ἀγαθός. Κι ἂν ἀκόμα ἐμεῖς παρασυρθῆκαμε και ἀμαρτήσαμε ἀπὸ ἀπερισκεψία, ἄς φροντίσουμε νὰ θεραπευθοῦμε μὲ τὴ μετάνοια. Ἄν πάλι, ὡς ἄνθρωποι παρασυρθῆκαμε ἀπὸ κάποιο πάθος, ἄς μὴν ἀπελπιστοῦμε ἐντελῶς, ἀλλὰ γνωρίζοντας Ποιὸς Θεὸς μᾶς ἔχει προσκαλέσει και ἔχοντας συναίσθηση τῆς κλήσης μας, ἄς ἀκούσουμε ἐκεῖνον πὸν λέει: «Μετανοεῖτε· ἡγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.» (Μαθ. 4:17).

Δὲν ὄρισε τὴ μετάνοια σὰν φάρμακο γιὰ κάποια μονάχα ἀμαρτήματα, ἀποκλείοντας κάποια ἄλλα. Γιὰ κάθε εἶδος τραῦμα τῆς ἀμαρτίας, γιὰ κάθε ἀμάρτημα πνευματικὸ, ὁ Μεγάλος Γιατρός τῶν ψυχῶν μας, μᾶς τὴν ἔχει, σὰν φάρμακο χαρίσει.

Ὁσίου πατρὸς ἡμῶν Ἐφραίμ τοῦ Σύρου

Παπισμός - Ὁρθοδοξία - Ρωμανία και οὐ Φράγκοι: Τὰ Αἴτια τοῦ Σχίσματος

Τοῦ Θωμά Φ. Δρίτσα.

Πολλοὶ νομίζουν πὼς τὸ filioque (δηλαδή ἡ προσθήκη τῆς λέξεως «καὶ ἐκ τοῦ Υἱοῦ» γιὰ τὴν ἐκπόρευση τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, στὸ σύμβολο τῆς πίστεως) ἀποτέλεσε αἰτία τοῦ σχίσματος ἀνάμεσα στὴ «Ρωμαιοκαθολικὴ» καὶ τὴν Ἑλληνορθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία. Ἡ Ἱστορία αὐτὴ, εἶναι ἕνας μῦθος πὺν πρέπει ἐπιτέλους κάποτε νὰ ἐκλείψει.

Στὴν πραγματικότητα, οἱ Ρωμαῖοι Πάπες ἀντιστάθηκαν δυναμικὰ στὸ filioque, μόλις αὐτὸ προστέθηκε στὸ Σύμβολο τῆς Πίστεως ἀπὸ τοὺς Φράγκους. Ὁ Πάπας Λέων Γ' (796-816), ἐπειδὴ γνώριζε ἀπὸ πρῶτο χέρι τίς πιέσεις τῶν Φράγκων σ' αὐτὸ τὸ ζήτημα, προχώρησε σὲ μία πράξη πὺν φανερώνει τὸ πλῆρες μέγεθος τῆς παπικῆς ἀντίδρασης στὶς φράγκικες ἀσθαιρέσεις. Φρόντισε ὥστε τὸ Ὁρθόδοξο Σύμβολο τῆς Πίστεως (χωρὶς τὸ filioque) νὰ ἀναγραφῆ σὲ δυὸ ἀσημένιες πλάκες (μιὰ στὰ λατινικὰ καὶ μία στὰ ἑλληνικὰ) τίς ὁποῖες ἀνήρτησε σὲ ψηλὸ σημεῖο στὸ ναὸ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πέτρου γιὰ νὰ εἶναι εὐανάγνωστες ἀπὸ ὅλους τοὺς πιστοὺς.

Οἱ μεγάλες ἀσημένιες πλάκες πὺν ἔγραφαν τὸ Ὁρθόδοξο σύμβολο τῆς πίστεως εἶχαν τὴν ἐπιγραφή: «HAEC LEO POSUI AMORE ET CAUTELA ORTHODOXAE FIDEI» δηλαδή: «Ἐγώ, ὁ Λέων βάζω ἐδῶ (τίς πλάκες) γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη καὶ τὴν προστασία τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Πίστεως». Σχετικὴ ἀναφορὰ μπορεῖτε νὰ βρεῖτε στὸ: VITA LEONIS, LIBER PONTIFICALIS (Ed. Duchene, III, p.26—ἡ πηγή εἶναι ἀπὸ βιβλιογραφία τῶν Παπικῶν!).

Ὁ Λέων πίστεψε ὅτι οἱ Φράγκοι δὲ θὰ τολμοῦσαν νὰ προσβάλουν τὸ ἱερότερο κέντρο τῆς δυτικῆς Χριστιανοσύνης. Τὸ 809 οἱ τελευταῖοι προχώρησαν στὴν ἐπίσημη καθιέρωση τοῦ filioque μὲ τὴν σύνοδο τοῦ Ἄαχεν. Μιὰ καὶ ὁ Πάπας ἐξακολουθοῦσε νὰ διατηρεῖ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη παράδοση, ὁ Καρλομάγνος ἔστειλε μία ἀντιπροσωπεία στὴ Ρώμη ὑπὸ τὸ μοναχὸ Σμάραγδο γιὰ νὰ τὸν μεταπεισεῖ. Στὰ πρακτικὰ τῆς συνάντησης, πὺν διασῶζονται μέχρι σήμερα, φαίνεται ξεκάθαρα ὅτι ὁ Λέων ἀρνήθηκε κατηγορηματικὰ. Οἱ διάδοχοί του συνέχισαν νὰ εἶναι ἀντίθετοι στὸ filioque μέχρις ὅτου οἱ Φράγκοι κατέλαβαν διὰ τῆς βίας τὸ Πατριαρχεῖο Ρώμης καὶ ἐγκατέστησαν ὀριστικὰ δικὸν τοὺς Πάπα (πιθανὸν ἀπὸ τὸ 1009 καὶ μετὰ).

Ἄλλη μία ἀπάτη τῶν Φράγκων ἀποκαλύφθηκε τὸ 1948 ἀπὸ τὸν μεγάλο ἱστορικὸ F. Dvornik στὸ ἔργο του «The Photian Schism», τὸ ὁποῖο πλέον εἶναι κλασσικὸ. Διαβάζοντας τὸ βιβλίον αὐτὸ, κάθε Ρωμῆς θὰ σοκαριστεῖ ἀπὸ τίς μηχανορραφίες τῆς δύσης ἐναντίον τῶν Ρωμῶν. Σὲ αὐτὸ μαθαίνουμε πὼς τὸν 12^ο αἰῶνα οἱ Φράγκοι πλαστογράφησαν κάποιον δῆθεν ἀφορισμὸ τοῦ Φωτίου ἀπὸ τὸν Ρωμαῖο Πάπα Ἰωάννη Η'. Βεβαίως κάτι τέτοιο

δὲν συνέβη ποτέ! Σὲ αὐτὸν τὸν ψεύτικο ἀφορισμὸ στηρίχτηκαν οἱ θεωρίες τῶν Φράγκων παπικῶν γιὰ τὸ Σχίσμα, μέχρι καὶ τὸν εικοστὸ αἰῶνα.

Ὁ Ρωμαῖος Πάπας Ἰωάννης Η' δείχνει μὲ τὸν βίον του τὴν ἀγάπη του στὴν Ρωμηοσύνη καὶ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη:

(1) Τὸ 873 πίεσε τὸ Φράγκο αὐτοκράτορα Λουδοβίκο τὸν Εὐσεβὴ καὶ κατὰφερε νὰ τὸν κάνει νὰ ἀπελευθερώσει τὸν Ρωμῆο ἱεραπόστολο τῶν Σλάβων Μεθόδιο, πὺν ἦταν φυλακισμένος στὴ Μοραβία ἀπὸ τοὺς Φράγκους γιὰ τρία χρόνια [Obolensky Dimitri, «Ἡ Βυζαντινὴ Κοινοπολιτεία», Βάνιας, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1991, τόμ. Α', σελ. 242].

(2) Ἀγωνίστηκε γιὰ τὸ δικαίωμα τῶν Σλάβων νὰ τελοῦν τίς ἀκολουθίες στὴ γλώσσα τους. Σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν περίπτωσι ἐρχόμενος σὲ ὀξύτατη σύγκρουσι μὲ τοὺς Φράγκους πὺν ὑποστήριζαν τὴ θεωρία τῶν τριῶν ἱερῶν γλωσσῶν (ἐβραϊκὴ, ἑλληνικὴ, λατινικὴ). [Obolensky σελ. 244].

(3) Συμμετεῖχε τὸ 879, (ὅταν Πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἦταν ὁ Μέγας Φώτιος) στὴν Η' Οἰκουμενικὴ Σύνοδο στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολι—ἡ ὁποία σήμερα δὲν ἀναγνωρίζεται ἀπὸ τοὺς Φράγκους Παπικούς—στὴν ὁποία καταδικάστηκαν ὅσοι δὲν ἀποδέχονταν τὴν Ζ' Οἰκουμενικὴ Σύνοδο τῆς Νίκαιας, δηλαδή οἱ Φράγκοι, πὺν τὴν ἀπέρριψαν ἐπὶ Καρλομάγνου τὸ 794. (Περισσότερα στὸ βιβλίον «Ρωμηοσύνη ἢ Βαρβαρότητα» τοῦ Ἀναστ. Φιλίππιδη σελ. 162).

Διαβάζουμε: «Τὴν γέννησι τοῦ Φραγκικοῦ Πολιτισμοῦ περιγράφει εἰς ἐπιστολήν του ὁ Ἅγιος Βονιφάτιος πρὸς τὸν Πάπα τῆς Ρώμης Ζαχαρίαν (natione Graecus) [Δηλαδή γέννημα τῆς Magna Graecia τῆς Κάτω Ἰταλίας] τὸ 741. Οἱ Φράγκοι εἶχαν ἀπαλλάξει τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν τῆς Φραγκίας ἀπὸ ὅλους τοὺς Ρωμαίους ἐπίσκοπους καὶ εἶχον αὐτοκατασταθῆ ἐπίσκοποι καὶ κληρικὸι διοικηταί της. Ἦρπασαν τὴν περιουσίαν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τὴν ἐχώρισαν εἰς τιμάρια, τῶν ὁποίων τὴν ἐπικαρπίαν διένειμαν ὡς Φέουδα, συμφώνως πρὸς τὸν βαθμὸν πὺν κατεῖχε ἕκαστος εἰς τὴν πυραμίδα τῆς στρατιωτικῆς φεουδαρχικῆς ἱεραρχίας. Αὐτοὶ οἱ Φράγκοι ἐπίσκοποι δὲν εἶχον Ἀρχιεπίσκοπον καὶ δὲν εἶχον συνῆλθει εἰς σύνοδον ἐπὶ 80 χρόνια. Συνήρχοντο διὰ τὰ ἐθνικοεκκλησιαστικὰ θέματα μαζί μὲ τοὺς βασιλεῖς καὶ λοιποὺς συναδέλφους ὀπλαρχηγούς. Κατὰ τὸν Ἅγιον Βονιφάτιον, ἦσαν ἀδηφάγοι λαϊκοί, μοιχοὶ καὶ μέθυσοι κληρικοί, οἱ ὁποῖοι μάχονται εἰς τὸν στρατὸν μὲ πλήρη πολεμικὴν ἐξάρτησι καὶ μὲ τὰς χεῖρας των σφάζουν Χριστιανούς καὶ εἰδωλολάτρας.» [Migne P L, 89, 744; Mansi 12, 313-314]

Μόλις πενηντατρία χρόνια ἀργότερα οἱ διάδοχοι αὐτῶν τῶν ἀγραμμάτων βαρβάρων προσέθεσαν τὸ Filioque εἰς τὸ Σύμβολον τῆς Πίστεως καὶ κατεδίκαν τὴν Ἀνατολικὴν Ρωμαϊκὴν Αὐτοκρατορίαν ὡς αἰρετικὴν καὶ

«Γραικικήν,» εἰς τὰς Συνόδους τῶν τῆς Φραγκφούρτης τὸ 794 περὶ εἰκόνων καὶ τῆς Ἀκουσίγρανου τὸ 809 περὶ τῆς προσθήκης τοῦ Filioque εἰς τὸ Σύμβολον τῆς Πίστεως τῆς Β΄ Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου, καὶ εἰς ἐποχὴν μάλιστα πού δὲν ἐγνώριζον οὔτε ἓνα Πατέρα Οἰκουμενικῆς Συνόδου.

Ἐπὶ 215 χρόνια, ἀπὸ τὸ 794 μέχρι τὸ 1012, οἱ Ρωμαῖοι Ὀρθόδοξοι Πάπαι ἠρνήθησαν νὰ ὑποταχθῶν εἰς τοὺς Φράγκους κυρίους τοὺς εἰς τὰ θέματα τοῦ Filioque καὶ τῶν εἰκόνων. Ὁ τελευταῖος Ὀρθόδοξος Ρωμαῖος Πάπας πού μνημονεῦεται στὰ δίπτυχα τῶν ὑπολοίπων τεσσάρων Ρωμαίων Πατριαρχείων εἶναι ὁ Ἰωάννης ΙΗ΄ (1003-1009) καὶ ὁ πρῶτος αἰρετικὸς Ρωμαῖος Πάπας πού ἐξέπεσε ἀπὸ τὰ δίπτυχα, ἀφοῦ προσέθεσε τὸ Filioque στὴν ὁμολογίαν πίστεώς του, ἦτο ὁ Σέργιος Δ΄ (1009-1012), δηλαδή 42 χρόνια πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸ λεγόμενον σχίσμα τοῦ 1054.» Πρ. Ἰωάννης Σ. Ρωμανίδης, «Ὀρθόδοξος καὶ Βατικάνιος συμφωνία περὶ Οὐνίας».

Ἡ κίνηση τῶν Φράγκων, νὰ καταλάβουν τὴν παλαιὰ Ρώμη καὶ νὰ ἐπιβάλλουν τὶς ἀπόψεις τους, δὲν ἦταν τυχαῖα. Ἡ παλαιὰ Ρώμη περιεβάλετο μὲ μία αἶγλη. Ἄν καὶ ἡ πόλη τῆς Ρώμης εἶχε ὀλόκληρη μεταφερθεῖ, ὡστόσο, ἡ κατάληψη τῆς παλαιᾶς Ρώμης θὰ ἔδινε τὸ (ψευτο)νομικὸ ἔρεισμα πού χρειαζόντουσαν οἱ Φράγκοι γιὰ νὰ προβληθῶν ὡς συνεχιστὲς τῆς Ρωμαϊκῆς αὐτοκρατορίας. Ἐπίσης ἡ διάσπαση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τοὺς βοηθοῦσε, γιατί σήμαινε ἀποκοπὴ τῆς δύσης ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνατολή καὶ ἄρα ἀποκοπὴ τῆς ἀπὸ τὴν Νέα Ρώμη. Ἦταν μία πολὺ ἐξυπνὴ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄκρως διαβολικὴ κίνηση...



Ὁ ἄββās Δουλάς, ὁ μαθητὴς τοῦ ἄββā Βησσαρίωνα, διηγήθηκε:

- Πῆγα κάποτε στὸ κελλι τοῦ Γέροντα, καὶ τὸν βρῆκα σὲ στάση προσευχῆς, μὲ τὰ χέρια ὑψωμένα στὸν οὐρανό. Δεκατέσσερις ἡμέρες ἔμεινε σ' αὐτὴ τὴ στάση! Ὑστερα μὲ φώναξε καὶ μοῦ εἶπε: «Ἀκολούθησέ με». Βγήκαμε μαζί στὴν ἔρημο. Κάποια στιγμή δίψασα, καὶ τοῦ εἶπα: «Ἀββά, διψάω». Τότε ἐκεῖνος πῆρε τὸ δερμάτινο πανωφόρι μου καὶ πῆγε λίγο πῶς πέρα, σὲ ἀπόσταση μᾶς πετροβολιάς. Προσευχήθηκε, καὶ μοῦ τὸ ἔφερε πίσω γεμάτο νερό!

Ἄλλοτε πάλι, καθὼς βαδίζαμε στὴν ἀκροθαλασσιά, δίψασα καὶ τοῦ εἶπα: «Ἀββά, διψάω πολὺ». Τότε ὁ Γέροντας προσευχήθηκε καὶ μοῦ εἶπε: «Πιὲς ἀπ' τὴ θάλασσα». Ἀμέσως τὸ θαλασσινὸ νερὸ ἔγινε γλυκό, καὶ ἦπια. Γέμισα μάλιστα κι ἓνα ἀγγεῖο. Βλέποντας ὁ Γέροντας τι ἔκανα, μοῦ λέει: «Γιατί πῆρες νερό;». Καὶ τοῦ ἀποκρίθηκα: «Συγχώρεσέ με, μὴν τυχόν διψάσω πάλι παρακάτω». Καὶ ὁ Γέροντας μοῦ εἶπε: «Ὁ Θεὸς πού εἶναι ἐδῶ, εἶναι παντοῦ».

Ἀπὸ τὸ Γεροντικὸ

Ἀνέστη Χριστός: Ἡ Μεγίστη Δοκιμασία τοῦ Λογικοῦ

Τοῦ Φώτη Κόντογλου.

Ἡ πίστη τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ δοκιμάζεται μὲ τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ σὰν τὸ χρυσάφι στὸ χωνευτήρι. Ἀπ' ὄλο τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, ἡ Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι τὸ πλεόν ἀπίστευτο πρᾶγμα, ὀλοτέλα ἀπαράδεκτο ἀπὸ τὸ λογικὸ μας, ἀληθινὸ μαρτύριο γιὰ δαῦτο.

Μὰ ἴσια-ἴσια, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι ἓνα πρᾶγμα ὀλοτέλα ἀπίστευτο, γιὰ τοῦτο χρειάζεται ὀλόκληρη ἡ πίστη μας γιὰ νὰ τὸ πιστέψουμε. Ἐμεῖς οἱ ἄνθρωποι λέμε συχνὰ πὼς ἔχουμε πίστη, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἔχουμε μονάχα γιὰ ὅσα εἶναι πιστευτὰ ἀπ' τὸ μυαλό μας. Ἀλλὰ τότε, δὲν χρειάζεται ἡ πίστη, ἀφοῦ φτάνει ἡ λογικὴ. Ἡ πίστη χρειάζεται γιὰ τὰ ἀπίστευτα.

Οἱ πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι ἄπιστοι. Οἱ ἴδιοι οἱ μαθητὰδες τοῦ Χριστοῦ δὲν δίνανε πίστη στὰ λόγια τοῦ Δασκάλου τοὺς ὅποτε τοὺς ἔλεγε πὼς θ' ἀναστήθῃ, μ' ὄλο τὸ σεβασμὸ καὶ τὴν ἀφοσίωση πού εἶχαν σ' Αὐτὸν καὶ τὴν ἐμπιστοσύνη στὰ λόγια του. Καὶ σὰν πῆγανε οἱ Μυροφόρες τὴν αὐγὴ στὸ μνήμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, κ' εἶδανε τοὺς δυὸ ἀγγέλους πού τὶς μιλῆσανε, λέγοντας σ' αὐτὲς πὼς ἀναστήθηκε, τρέξανε νὰ ποῦνε τὴ χαροποιὰ τὴν εἶδηση στοὺς μαθητὲς· ἐκεῖνοι δὲν πιστέψανε τὰ λόγια τους, ἔχοντας τὴν ἰδέα πὼς ἦτανε φαντασίες: «Καὶ ἐφάνησαν ἐνώπιον αὐτῶν ὡσεὶ λῆρος (τρέλα) τὰ ῥήματα αὐτῶν, καὶ ἠπίστουν αὐταῖς»...

Βλέπεις καταπάνω σὲ πόση ἀπιστία ἀγωνίσθηκε ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστός; Καὶ στοὺς ἴδιους τοὺς μαθητὰδες του. Εἶδες μὲ πόση μακροθυμία τὰ ὑπόμεινε ὅλα; Καὶ μ' ὅλα αὐτὰ, ἴσαμε σήμερα οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπὸ μᾶς εἶμαστε χωρισμένοι ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστὸ μ' ἓνα τοῖχο παγωμένον, τὸν τοῖχο τῆς ἀπιστίας. Ἐκεῖνος ἀνοίγει τὴν ἀγκάλη του καὶ μᾶς καλεῖ κ' ἐμεῖς τὸν ἀρνιόμαστε. Μᾶς δείχνει τὰ τρυπημένα χέρια του καὶ τὰ πόδια του, κ' ἐμεῖς λέμε πὼς δὲν τὰ βλέπουμε.

Ἐμεῖς ψάχνουμε νὰ βροῦμε στηρίγματα στὴν ἀπιστία μας γιὰ νὰ ἱκανοποιήσουμε τὸν ἐγωῖσμό μας, πού τὸν λέμε Φιλοσοφία καὶ Ἐπιστήμη. Ἡ λέξη Ἀνάσταση δὲν χωρᾶ μέσα στὰ βιβλία τῆς γνώσης μας... Γιατί «ἡ γνώση τούτου τοῦ κόσμου, δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ γνωρίσει ἄλλο τίποτα, παρεκτὸς ἀπὸ ἓνα πλῆθος λογισμῶν, ὄχι ὅμως ἐκεῖνο πού γνωρίζεται μὲ τὴν ἀπλότητα τῆς διάνοιας».

Ναί, ἐκεῖνους πού ἔχουνε αὐτὴ τὴν εὐλογημένη ἀπλότητα τῆς διάνοιας, τοὺς μακάρισε ὁ Κύριος, λέγοντας: «Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. Μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν Θεὸν ὁψονται.» Καὶ στὸν Θωμᾶ, πού γύρευε νὰ τὸν ψηλαφήσῃ γιὰ νὰ πιστέψῃ, εἶπε: «Γιατί μὲ εἶδες Θωμᾶ, γιὰ τοῦτο πίστεψες; Μακάριοι εἶναι ἐκεῖνοι πού δὲν εἶδανε καὶ πιστέψανε».

Ἄς παρακαλέσουμε τὸν Κύριο νὰ μᾶς δώσει αὐτὴ τὴν πλούσια φτώχεια, καὶ τὴν καθαρὴ καρδιά, ὡστε νὰ τὸν δοῦμε ν' ἀναστήνεται γιὰ νὰ ἀναστηθοῦμε κ' ἐμεῖς μαζί του.

Παιδική Πασχαλιά

Τοῦ κυρ-Αλέξανδρου Παπαδιαμάντη.

Τὸν υἱὸν τῆς τὸν καπετὰν Κομνιανὸν τὸν ἐπαντρο-
λογοῦσεν ἤδη ἡ γριά Κομνιανάκαινα, ἂν (καί) δὲν εἶχε
χρονίσει ἀκόμη ἡ νύμφη τῆς, ἡ μακαρίτις.

Τὰ δυὸ ὀρφανά, μία κόρη ὀκταετίς καὶ ἓν τετραετὲς
παιδίον, ἐφόρουσαν μαῦρα, κατάμαυρα, ὅπου ἐστενοχώρουσαν
ἐχλωμίαιναν τὰ πτωχὰ κάτισχνα κορμάκια τῶν, καὶ ἦτον
καημὸς καρδιάς νὰ τὰ βλέπη τις. Ἐνθύμιζαν τὸ δημῶδες
δίσιχον:

*Βαρύτερ' ἀπ' τὰ σίδερα εἶναι τὰ μαῦρα ροῦχα,
Γιατὶ τὰ φόρεσα κ' ἐγὼ γιὰ μιὰν ἀγάπη πού 'χα.*

Ἡ γραῖα ἔκειτο ἐπὶ τῆς κλίνης καθ' ὅλην τὴν ἐβδομάδα
τῶν Παθῶν, γογγύζουσα, ρέγγουσα, φωνάζουσα. Ἐβεβαίον
ὅτι «ἀγγελιάστηκε» καὶ ἠτοιμάζετο ν' ἀποθάνῃ. Ἐπέβαλλεν
εἰς τὴν Μόρφω, τὴν μικρὰν ἐγγονὴν τῆς, ἐργασίες ἀνωτέρας
τῆς ἡλικίας τοῦ πτωχοῦ κορασίου. Αἴφνης, ἐν μέσῳ δυὸ
γογγυσμῶν, ἔβαλε μιὰν φωνήν, κ' ἔκραζεν ἀπὸ τῆς κλίνης
πρὸς τὴν ἐκτὸς τοῦ ἰσογείου θαλάμου πηγαινο-ἐρχομένην
καὶ ὑπηρετοῦσαν παιδίσκην.

- Μὴ χύνῃς στὴν αὐλὴ τὰ νερά, χίλιες φορὲς σ' τὸ εἶπα,
στὸ νεροχύτη!

Κ' ἐπανελάμβανε τοὺς ἀφορήτους στεναγμούς, ἐπιτεί-
νουσα μάλιστα αὐτοὺς ὡσάκις τυχὸν πτωχὴ γειτόνισσα,
μὴ τολμῶσα νὰ εἰσέλθῃ, ἤρχετο δειλῶς μέχρι τῆς θύρας
καὶ ἠρώτα πῶς ἦτο ἡ ἀσθενής.

Βεβαίως ἡ γριά - Κομνιανάκαινα ἔπασχεν, ἀλλ' ἴσως
ἐμεγαλοποιεῖ τὸ πράγμα. Ἐκλαίει «τὰ νιάτα τῆς», ἔλεγε ὅτι
δὲν θὰ προφθάσῃ νὰ κάμῃ ἐφέτος Πάσχα. Ἡ γειτόνισσα ἡ
Μηλιά ἐβεβαίον ὅτι ἡ γραῖα εἶχε καὶ «κομπόδεμα», ἀλλὰ
ποῦ νὰ ἐμβάσῃ μέσα καμμίαν ἐκ τῶν γειτονισσῶν τῆς!
Ἐλλεῖψει ἄλλης ἀσθενείας ἦτον ἱκανὴ ν' ἀποθάνῃ ἀπὸ τὴν
φιλαργυρίαν τῆς. Δὲν ἐβάστα ἡ ψυχὴ τῆς νὰ δώσῃ κάτι τι
εἰς μιὰν πτωχὴν γυναῖκα διὰ νὰ τὴν «κυττάξῃ» κ' ἐπέβαλλε
βαρεῖαν ἀγγαρεῖαν εἰς τὴν Μόρφω, ὀκταετὴ παιδίσκην.
Ἐνίοτε παρελθὲν ἀληθῶς. Εἶτα ἔβαλλε ἀγρίαν κραυγὴν.
Ἐκραζε τὴν παιδίσκην νὰ τὴν σκεπάσῃ μὲ τὸ σινδόνιον,
ἀλλὰ χωρὶς αὐτὴ νὰ τὴν ἐγγίση κἂν, ἡ γερόντισσα ἔβαλλε
τοιαύτην ὠρυγὴν, ὥστε ἡ μικρὰ κατετρόμαξε.

Ὁ καπεταν-Κομνιανὸς ἔλειπε μὲ τὸ γολετί, κ' ἐπεριμένετο
νὰ ἔλθῃ. Εἶχε μαζί του, μὲ τὸ γολετί, καὶ τὸν πρωτότοκον
υἱὸν του, τὸν Γεώργην, δωδεκαετὴ παῖδα. Τοῦτο ἦτο ἕνας
ἀπὸ τοὺς καημοὺς τῆς γραίας, ὅτι ἔμελλε ν' ἀποθάνῃ, ὡς
ἔλεγε, χωρὶς νὰ ἐπαινίδῃ τὸν υἱὸν τῆς, καὶ τὸν ἐγγονόν τῆς
τὸν μεγάλον, ὅστις ὁμοίαιζε τόσο μὲ τὸν μακαρίτην τὸν
πάππον του. Καὶ ποῖος νὰ τῆς σφαλῆσῃ τὰ μάτια; Αἱ ἀνεψιαί
τῆς, ὑπανδρυσμέναι καὶ αἱ δύο, τῆς ἐβαστοῦσαν κακίαν διὰ
κάτι κληρονομικὰς διαφορὰς, καὶ δὲν ἔσπασαν τὸ πόδι «οἱ
λαχταρισμένες, οἱ ἀχρόνιαστες!» νὰ ἔλθουν νὰ τὴν ἰδοῦν.
Οὕτω τῆς ἤρχετο καὶ αὐτῆς ν' ἀποθάνῃ εἰς τὸ πείσμα τῶν,
ν' ἀποθάνῃ χωρὶς νὰ τῆς φιλήσωσι τὴν χεῖρα.

Ἰατρός, ποῦ νὰ εὔρεθῇ; Εἶχε αὐτὴ νὰ πληρώνη; Αὐτὴ
ᾧφειλε νὰ κάμνῃ οἰκονομίαν διὰ τὰ ὀρφανά, καὶ δὲν
ἔπρεπε νὰ φθείρῃ τὸ βίῳ τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς εἰς γιαιτρικὰ καὶ
δὲν ξέρω τί. Ψευτογιάτρισσες! Κάμε τὴ δουλειὰ σου!
Ἐχουν ἐμπιστοσύνην τώρα αὐταὶ αἱ γυναῖκες; Ὁ κόσμος
ἐχάλασε, τί τὰ θέλεις! Ἐμβαζε αὐτὴ μὲς στὸ βίῳ τῆς, μὲς
στὰ καλά τῆς, ξένην γυναῖκα; Τῆς ἤρχετο νὰ ἐπαναλάβῃ
πρὸς τὰς γειτονίσσας τὴν ἰδίαν κραυγὴν, δι' ἧς ἀπεδίωκε
τὸ πάλαι παρίσακτον ὄρνιθα ἀπὸ τὸν ὄρνιθῶνα τῆς. Ξοῦ,
ξένη!...

Ὡς τόσο ἐπεθύμει νὰ ἤρχετο ὁ υἱὸς τῆς διὰ νὰ τὸν
νυμφεῦσῃ νὰ τοῦ δώσῃ καὶ τὴν εὐχήν τῆς. Σαραντα χρόνων
ἄνθρωπος, κὶ ὁ κόσμος εἶναι πελάγος σὰν ἐκεῖνο ποῦ
ἀρμένιζε τώρα. Πῶς νὰ περάσῃ τὴ ζωὴν του χωρὶς νὰ ἔλθῃ
εἰς δεῦτερον γάμον; Καὶ τὰ ὀρφανά, καὶ αὐτὰ θὰ εὔρισκαν
μητέρα, μιὰν καλὴν οἰκοκυρά, ἦτις ἀπὸ τώρα ἐπροσφέρετο
μάλιστα νὰ ἔλθῃ νὰ τὴν ὑπηρετήσῃ εἰς τὴν ἀσθενείαν τῆς.
Ἄλλ' ἡ γραῖα Κομνιανάκαινα, μὴ θέλουσα νὰ παραβῇ τὴν
ἀρχὴν τῆς, δὲν ἐδέχθη τὴν ἐκδούλευσιν.

Τὸ βέβαιον εἶναι ὅτι ἐκ τῶν δυὸ ὀρφανῶν ἡ Μόρφω, ἦτις
εἶχε ἤδη αἰσθησιν, ἂν δὲν ἐπεθύμει ν' ἀποκτήσῃ μητέρα,
ἐνθυμεῖτο κ' ἐλυπεῖτο τὴν μητέρα τῆς. Ὁ Εὐαγγελινός,
νήπιον τριετίζον ἐν καιρῷ τῆς συμφορᾶς, οὔτε ἤξευρε
τίποτε, οὔτε ἐνθυμεῖτο. Ἐκλαίει μόνον ὅταν ἡ μάμμη τὸν
ἐβίαζε νὰ φορέσῃ τὸν κατάμαυρον σάκκον του.

Ἡ Μόρφω, λευκὴ καὶ ὠχρὰ μὲ τὰ μαῦρα φουστάνια τῆς,
καὶ μὲ τὸν μαῦρον μανδῆλιον τὸ σκεπάζον τὰ ξανθὰ τῆς
μαλλιά, ἦτο κατηφής, κ' ἐνθυμεῖτο τὸ περυσινὸν Πάσχα,
ὅταν ἔξῃ ἡ μήτηρ τῆς. Ἡ ἀτυχὴς γυνὴ εἶχε ἀποθάνει ἀπὸ
τὴν γένναν τῆς, τὸ παρελθὸν θέρος, καὶ τὸ βρέφος μετ'
αὐτῆς. Τώρα ἡ κορασίς εἶχε ἀντὶ τῆς καλῆς καὶ πονετικῆς
μητρὸς, τὴν μάμμη μὲ τὴν ἀφόρητον παρεξενιά τῆς, ἦτις
ἐνὸς ἐβεβαίου ὅτι ὅλα τῆς ἐπόνουν, κεφαλὴ, λαιμός, χεῖρες,
πόδες, πλαῖται, κοιλία, μέση καὶ τὰ λοιπά, πνιγομένη δὲ ἀπὸ
τὸν βήχα καὶ γογγύζουσα δυνατὰ καὶ βάλλουσα κραυγὰς
ἀγρίας, ἐφείδετο νὰ δώσῃ εἰς ἰατροὺς καὶ φάρμακα, αἴφνης
ἠγείρετο, ὑποβαστάζουσα τὴν κοιλίαν τῆς, ἠξήρχετο
μέχρι τῆς θύρας, ἔρριπτε βλέμμα εἰς τὸν ἐκτὸς κόσμον
κ' ἔλεγε:

- Ἄχ! Τί γλυκιά πού 'ν' ἡ ζωὴ!

Πέρυσι τὴν Μεγάλην Πέμπτην πρωί, ἀφοῦ ἐγύρισαν
ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν ὅπου εἶχον μεταλάβει ὅλοι, ἡ καλὴ
καὶ προκομμένη μήτηρ, καίτοι ἄγουσα ἤδη τὸν ἑβδομον
μῆνα τῆς ἐγκυμοσύνης τῆς, ἀνεσφουγγώθη καὶ ἤρχισε
νὰ βάφῃ ἐν τῇ χύτρᾳ τὰ αὐγά, μὲ ριζάρι, κιννάβαρι
καὶ ὄξος. Εἶτα ἤρχισαν νὰ ἔρχονται εἰς τὴν θύραν ἀνὰ
ζεύγη τὰ παιδία τῆς πολίχνης, μὲ τὸν ὑψηλὸν καλάμινον
σταυρὸν στεφανωμένον μὲ ρόδα εὐώδη καὶ μὲ μήκωνας
κατακοκκίνους, μὲ δεινρολίβανον καὶ μὲ ποικιλόχροα
ἀγριολούλουδα, μὲ τὸν ἀποσπασθέντα ἀπὸ τ' Ὀχτωήχι
χάρτινον Ἐσταυρωμένον εἰς τὸ μέσον τοῦ σταυροῦ, καὶ μὲ
ἐρυθρὸν μανδῆλιον κυματίζον, μέλποντα τὸ ἄσμα:

*Βλέπεις εκείνο τὸ βουνὶ μὲ κόκκινη παντιέρα;
Εκεῖ σταυρῶσαν τὸ Χριστὸ τὸν πάντων Βασιλέα.
Σύρε μητέρα μ' στὸ καλὸ καὶ στὴν καλὴ τὴν ὥρα,
Κ' ἐμένα νὰ μὲ καρτερῆς τὸ Σάββατο τὸ βράδυ
Ὅταν σημαίνουν ἐκκλησιῆς καὶ ψέλνουνε παπᾶδες,
Τότες καὶ σύ, μαννούλα μου, νὰ ᾄχῃς χαρὲς μεγάλες.*

Καὶ τί χαρὲς μεγάλες τῷ ὄντι, τί χαρὲς δ' ὅλα τὰ παιδιά!
Καὶ ἡ καλὴ ἡ μήτηρ της προθυμότατα ἔδιδεν ἀνὰ δυὸ
ἄρτιβαφὴ αὐγὰ εἰς ὅλα τὰ παιδιά, δυὸ αὐγὰ κόκκινα, καὶ
τί εὐτυχία! τί νίκη! Ἐνῶ ἡ μάμμη ἐφώναζεν ὅτι ἄρκετὰ
παιδιά ἦλθαν, καὶ ἄρκετὰ ἐτραγοῦδησαν, καὶ ὅτι ἔπρεπε
νὰ ὑπάγουν καὶ ἀλλοῦ.

Μετὰ ταῦτα ἡ μήτηρ ἤρχισε νὰ ζυμώνῃ καὶ ἔπλασεν ἄρκετὲς
κουλοῦρες μετ' αὐγῶν διὰ τὸν σύζυγον, ἐπιδημοῦντα τότε,
διὰ τὴν πενθεράν της, δι' ἑαυτήν, διὰ τὲς κουμπάρες, ὡς καὶ
μικρὲς «κοκῶνες» διὰ τὴν Μόρφω, διὰ τὸν Εὐαγγελινόν, διὰ
τ' ἀνεδεξίμια της καὶ διὰ τὰ πτωχὰ παιδιά τῆς γειτονιάς.

Κ' ἐπειδὴ ὁ μικρὸς Εὐαγγελινὸς ἔκλαιε, λέγων ὅτι δὲν
εἶναι ἄρκετὰ μεγάλη ἡ κοκῶνα του, ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ ἔδιδεν
ἄλλην νὰ ἐκλέξῃ ἀλλὰ αὐτὸς δὲν ἡμέρωνεν οὔτε ἤθελε νὰ
ταιριασθῇ. Τὸ βέβαιον εἶναι ὅτι τὰς ἤθελεν ὅλας διὰ τὸν
ἑαυτὸν του.

Καὶ τότε ἡ μήτηρ τὸν ἐπαρηγόρει λέγουσα ὅτι «τὸ Σάββατο
τὸ βράδυ θὰ ᾄρθῃ ἡ κουρούνα (κρά, κρά!) νὰ φέρῃ τὸ τυρί
καὶ τὸ κρέας (τσι, τσί!) καὶ τότε νὰ ἰδῆς τὸ παραμῦθι. Πάρε
Βαγγελινὲ τὸ τυρί, πάρε καὶ τὸ τσί-τσι, νὰ φᾶτε!»

Καὶ ὁ μικρὸς ἐψέλλιζε καὶ αὐτὸς, «θὰ ᾄρθῃ ἡ κουρούνα νὰ
φῆ τοῦ τσί-τσι», καὶ συνάπτων τὰς χεῖρας, δακτύλους
μεταξὺ δακτύλων κατὰ τὸ ὑπόδειγμα τῆς μητρὸς τῆς
γειτόνισσας τῆς Μηλιάς ἐξαετές, ἄνιπτον, ρακένδυτον,
ὀκλάζον εἰς μίαν γωνία, κρατοῦν τὴν κοκῶνα του, τὴν
ὅποιαν ἐκσέπετο ἀν δὲν ἦτο καλὸν νὰ τὴ φάγῃ τώρα ποῦ
εἶναι ζεστή, διεμαρτύρητο γρυλλίζον καὶ λέγον: «Ναί! Θα
ᾄρθῃ ἡ κουρούνα! Ἄμ' δὲ θὰ ᾄρθῃ!»

Καὶ τὴν Μεγάλην Παρασκευὴν, περὶ τὴν δύσιν τοῦ ἡλίου,
ἡ μήτηρ ὠδήγησε τὰ δυὸ παιδιά εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, ὅπου,
ἀφοῦ ἔκαμαν τρεῖς γονυκλισίας πρὸ τοῦ ἀνθοστεφοῦς
κουβουκλίου, ἤσπασθησαν τὸν μυόπνοσον Ἐπιτάφιον,
τὸ ἀργυρόχρυσον Εὐαγγέλιον μὲ τ' ἀγγελούδια, καὶ τὸν
Σταυρὸν μὲ τ' ἀνθρωπάκια καὶ τὴς Παναγίτσες. Τί χαρά, τί
δόξα! Καὶ εἶτα ἐπέρασαν τρεῖς ὑπὸ τὸν ὑψηλόν, μεγαλοπρεπὴ
Ἐπιτάφιον, ὁ δ' Εὐαγγελινὸς (ὅλα τὰ ἐνθυμεῖτο ἡ μικρὰ
Μόρφω) ἀνέτρεψεν ἐξ ἀπροσεξίας πῆλινον ἀμφορέα μὲ
ὔδωρ, ἐξ ἐκείνων οὗς θέτουσιν ὑπὸ τὸν Ἐπιτάφιον πρὸς
ἀγιασμόν, διὰ νὰ μεταχειρισθῶσι τὸ ὔδωρ εἰς τὸ καματηρό,
ἦτοι τοὺς μεταξοσκώληκας, καὶ εἰς ἄλλας χρεῖας, αἱ νεώτεροι
μυροφόροι, γυναῖκες διακαῶς ποθοῦσαι «νὰ ξενυχτίσουν
τὸν Χριστὸν» μένουσαι ἄγρυπνοι ἐν τῷ ναῷ πέραν τοῦ
μεσονυκτίου, διότι ἡ ἀκολουθία τοῦ Ἐπιταφίου ψάλλεται
ἐκεῖ τὸ Μέγα Σάββατο, περὶ ὄρθρον βαθύν.

Ὁ ἀμφορεὺς πεσὼν ἐθραύσθη, ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἦς ἦτο κτήμα
ὠργίσθη, καὶ εἶπεν ὅτι τὸ ἔχει «σὲ κακὸ της». Τότε ἡ μήτηρ

τοῦ Εὐαγγελينوῦ, ἀφοῦ ἐπέπληξεν αὐστηρῶς τὸ παιδίον,
πειραχθεῖσα εἶπεν ὅτι «ἂν εἶναι κακὸ, ἄς εἶναι γιὰ μένα!»
Καὶ τὴν πτωχὴν δὲν τὴν ἤυρε ὁ χρόνος.

Τὸ Μέγα Σάββατον δέ, μικρὸν μετὰ τὰ μεσάνυκτα, ἡ
μήτηρ ἐξύπνισε τὸν Εὐαγγελινὸν καὶ τὴν Μόρφω, κ'
ἐνῶ σήμαιναν διὰ μακρῶν οἱ κώδωνες ἐπῆγαν εἰς τὴν
ἐκκλησίαν ὅπου ἐψάλη τὸ «ὦ γλυκύ μου ἔαρ» καὶ ἄλλα
ἀκόμη παθητικὰ ἄσματα. Εἶτα οἱ πιστοὶ ὅλοι μὲ ἀνημμένας
λαμπάδας ἐξῆλθον εἰς τὸ ὑπαιθρο, ὑπὸ τὸ ἀμαυρωθὲν
φέγγος τῆς φθινοῦσης σελήνης, ἐνῶ ἡ αὐγὴ ἔλαμπεν
ἤδη ροδίνη καὶ ξανθὴ, προπέμποντες τὸν Ἐπιτάφιον
ἀγλαόφωτον μὲ σειρᾶς λαμπάδων.

Καὶ ἡ αὐρα πραεῖα ἐκίνει ἡρέμα τὺς πυρσούς, χωρὶς νὰ
τοὺς σβήνῃ καὶ ἡ ἄνοιξις ἔπεμπε τὰ ἐκλεκτότερα ἀρώματά
της εἰς τὸν Παθόντα καὶ ταφέντα, ὡς τὰ συνέψαλλε καὶ
αὐτὴ, «ὦ γλυκύ μου ἔαρ, γλυκύτατόν μου τέκνον!» καὶ
ἡ θάλασσα φλοισβίζουσα καὶ μορμύρουσα παρὰ τὸν
αἰγιαλὸν ἐπανελάμβανεν, «οἴμοι γλυκύτατε Ἰησοῦ!». Τὰ δὲ
παιδιά προπορευόμενα τῆς πομπῆς, μεγαλοφώνως
ἔκραζον: «Κύριε Ἐλέησον! Κύριε ἐλέησον!» Ὁ
Εὐαγγελινὸς ἐψέλλιζε μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων: «Κύριε ἔησον!
Κύριε ἔησον!»

Καὶ ὕστερον, ὅταν ἀνέτειλεν ὁ ἥλιος τοῦ Μεγάλου
Σαββάτου, διαλύων τὴν ἀπαραίτητον ὀμίχλην τῆς
Μεγάλης Παρασκευῆς, (ἦτις καθιστᾶ μελαψὴν μιγάδα
τὴν ἡμέραν καὶ παμμέλαιναν ἀράβισσαν τὴν νύκτα) ὁ
Εὐαγγελινὸς ἐξύπνησεν ἀπὸ τὰ βελάσματα τοῦ ἀρνίου,
τὸ ὅποιον ἠτοιμάζετο νὰ σφάξῃ διὰ τὴν οἰκογένειαν τοῦ
καπετὰν Κομνιανοῦ ὁ γείτονας Νικόλας, ὁ σύζυγος τῆς
Μηλιάς.

Ὁ Εὐαγγελινὸς καὶ ἡ Μόρφω ἐξῆλθον εἰς τὸ προαύλιον.
Τί ὠραῖον, τί ἡμερον, τί λευκόμαλλον ποῦ ἦτο τὸ ἄρνι!
Καὶ πὼς ἐβέλαζε (μπέ! μπέ!) τὸ καημένο. Ἐν τούτοις δὲν
ἐφαίνετο πολὺ δυσαρεστημένον, διότι ἔμελλε νὰ σφαγῇ.
Καὶ ἄλλος Ἄμνος ἄμωμος, Ἄμνος αἴρων τὴν ἀμαρτίαν
τοῦ κόσμου, καὶ ἄλλος ἀτίμητος Ἄμνος ἐσφάγη...

Τὴν ἐσπέραν ἔφερον οἴκαδε ὁ πατήρ τὰς πασχαλινὰς
λαμπάδας, ὠραίας, λεπτὰς, περιτέχνους. Τί χαρά! Τί
θρίαμβος! Φαντασθῆτε ὠραίας μικρὰς λαμπάδας, μὲ ἄνθη
τεχνητὰ, μὲ χρυσόχαρτα. Ὁ Εὐαγγελινὸς ἤθελε νὰ πάρῃ
τὴν τῆς ἀδελφῆς του, λέγων, ὅτι ἐκείνη εἶναι μεγαλύτερα.
Ἡ μήτηρ του τὴν ἔδωκεν, ἀλλ' ὁ μικρὸς τὴν ἔσπασε, ἐκεῖ
ποῦ ἔπαιζε μὲ αὐτήν, ἔσπασε καὶ τὴν ἰδικὴν του, καὶ
ὕστερον ἔβαλε τὰ κλάματα. Ὁ πατήρ του ἠγόρασεν ἄλλην,
ἀφοῦ τὸν ὑπεχρέωσε νὰ ὑποσχεθῇ ὅτι δὲν θὰ τὴν πιάσῃ
εἰς τὴν χεῖρα, ἕως τὰ μεσάνυκτα, ὅταν θὰ ὑπάγουν εἰς τὴν
Ἀνάστασιν.

Ὁ μικρὸς ἀπεκοιμήθη κλαίων καὶ χαίρων.

Μετὰ τὰ μεσάνυκτα, ἀφοῦ ἐγένετο ἡ Ἀνάστασις, καὶ
ἦστραψεν ὁ ναὸς ὅλος, ἦστραψε καὶ ἡ πλατεία ἀπὸ τὸ
φῶς τῶν κηρίων, τὰ παιδιά ἤρχισαν νὰ καίουν μετὰ κρότου
σπίρτα καὶ μικρὰ πυροκρόταλα ἔξω εἰς τὸ πρόναον, καὶ

τίνες παῖδες δεκαετείς ἐπυροβόλουν μὲ μικρὰ πιστόλια, ἄλλοι ἔρριπτον ἐντὸς τοῦ ναοῦ ἐπὶ τῶν πλακῶν τοῦ ἐδάφους τὰ βαρέα καρφία μὲ τὰ καψύλια καταπτοῦντες καὶ σκανδαλίζοντες τὰς πτωχὰς γραιίας, αἰτινες, μεθ' ὄλον τὸν διωγμὸν ὃν ἐκίνουν κατ' αὐτῶν τὴν Μεγάλην Ἑβδομάδα κατ' ἔτος οἱ ἐπίτροποι, ἀξιούντες νὰ περιορίσωσιν αὐτὰς εἰς τὸν γυναικωνίτην, οὐχ ἦττον ἐπέμενον καὶ παρῆσαν ἐντὸς τοῦ ναοῦ ἀριστερά, εἰς τὴν μίαν κόγχην.

Εἷς δ' ἐπίτροπος τῆς ἐπάνω ἐνορίας, ἄνθρωπος προοδευτικός, βλέπων ὅτι ὅλοι οἱ ἐθελονταὶ ψάλλται, νεανία εἰκοσαετείς, ἐφοίτων κατὰ προτίμησιν εἰς τὴν κάτω ἐκκλησίαν, εἰς δὲ τὴν ἐπάνω ἠναγκάζοντο νὰ ψάλλωσιν οἱ ἱερεῖς, τί ἐσοφίσθη; Πιάνει καὶ ἀποσπᾷ ἀπὸ τὸν γυναικωνίτην τὰ καφάσια, τὰ δικτυωτά, δι' ὧν ἐφράττοντο τέως αἱ γυναικεῖαι μορφαὶ ἀπὸ τῆς ὄψεως τῶν ἀνδρῶν, καὶ ἀφήνει τὸν γυναικωνίτην ἄφρακτον. Τότε διὰ μιᾶς ὅλοι οἱ εὐλαβεῖς καὶ μουσόληπτοι νεανίσκοι ἀφήκαν τὴν κάτω ἐκκλησίαν ἔρημον ψαλτῶν κ' ἔτρεξαν ὅλοι εἰς τὴν ἐπάνω.

Εἶτα τὰ μικρὰ παιδιά καὶ τίνες παιδίσκαι τετραετείς, μὲ τὰς κομψὰς ποικιλτὰς λαμπάδας, ἐτάχθησαν ἀνὰ τὸν χορὸν, περὶ τὰ δύο ἀναλόγια, καὶ παρὰ τὸ εἰκονοστάσιον, καὶ ἤρχισαν νὰ θορυβῶσι, νὰ παίζωσι, νὰ στάζωσιν εἰς τοὺς λαιμοὺς ἀλλήλων, καὶ νὰ τσουγκρίζωσι τὰ αὐγά των. Καὶ ἐν παιδίον ἐξαιετές, πονηρότερον τῶν ἄλλων (ἦτο ὁ υἱὸς τῆς Μηλιάς τῆς γειτόνισσας) εἶχε πλαστὸν αὐγὸν εἰς τὸν κόλπον του, πωρῶδη λίθον στρογγυλεμένον κοκκινοβαφῆ καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ ἔσπαζε τὰ αὐγά ὄλων τῶν παιδιῶν, καὶ τὰ ἔπαιρνε, κατὰ τὴν συμφωνίαν, καὶ τὰ ἔτρωγε.

Μία παιδίσκη καὶ εἷς παῖς, πενταετής, ἤρχισαν νὰ φιλονικῶσι περὶ τοῦ τίνος ἢ λαμπάδα ἦτο εὐμορφότερα.

- Ὅχι, ἡ δική μου ἢ λαμπάδα εἶναι καλύτερη.

- Ὅχι, ἡ δική μου.

- Ἐμένα ὁ πατέρας μ' τὴν ἐδιάλεξε, κ' εἶναι πλιὸ καλή.

- Ἐμένα ἡ μάνα μ' τὴν ἐστόλισε μονάχη της.

- Καὶ ξέρεῖ νὰ κάμη λαμπάδες ἢ μάνα σ' ;

- Ὅχι, δὲ ξέρεῖ; Σὰν τὴ δική σ' !

- Τέτοια παλιολαμπάδα!

- Ναί, παλιολαμπάδα;... νά!...

- Νὰ κ' ἐσύ!

- Νὰ κι ἄλλη μιά!

Καὶ ἤρχισαν νὰ τύπτουν ἀλύπητα τὰς κεφαλὰς ἀλλήλων μὲ τὰς λαμπάδας των, ἕως οὗ ἔβαλαν τὰ κλάματα καὶ οἱ δύο.

Τὸ ἀπόγευμα πάλιν, ἀφοῦ ἐψάλη ἡ Β' Ἀνάστασις κ' ἔγενεν ἡ Ἀγάπη, ἐξῆλθαν ὅλοι εἰς τὴν πλατείαν κ' ἔθεῶντο τὴν πυρπόλησιν τοῦ Ἑβραίου.

Τί ἄσχημος καὶ τί εὐμορφοκαμωμένος πού ἦτον ὁ Ἑβραῖος! Εἶχε μίαν χύτραν ὡς κεφαλὴν, εἶχε καὶ λινάρι ὡς γένειον. Ἐφερε καὶ ζευγὸς γυαλιᾶ (ἢ Μόρφω τὰ ἐνθυμεῖτο ὄλα), ὅμοια μ' ἐκεῖνα πού φορεῖ ἡ γραῖα μάμμη ὅταν ράπτῃ ἢ ἐμβαλῶνῃ τὰ παλαιὰ ροῦχα της. Εἶχε κ' ἓνα σακκοῦλι ἢ πουγγὶ κρεμασμένον εἰς τὸ ἀριστερὸν πλευρόν του. Ἐφόρει μακριά, μακριὰ φορέματα, παρδαλά, ραβδωτά! Καὶ ἀφοῦ

τὸν ἐκρέμασαν ὑψηλὰ ὑψηλά, ἕως ἐπτὰ ὀργυῖας ἐπάνω, ἤρχισαν οἱ ἄνδρες νὰ τὸν μαστίξουν, νὰ τὸν τουφεκίζουν ὅλοι, ἕως ὅτου τὸν ἔκαυσαν.

Καὶ ὕστερον ἡ μήτηρ ἔστρωσε τὴν τράπεζαν εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν, καὶ παρέθεσε τὰ αὐγά τὰ κόκκινα, τὸ τυρί, πού εἶχε φέρει ἢ κουρούνα, καὶ τὸ ἄρνι τὸ ψημένον, καὶ τὰ παιδιά ἐκάθισαν εἰς τὴν τράπεζαν καὶ ἤρχισαν νὰ τσουγκρίζουν τὰ αὐγά των. Τί χαρά! τί ἀγαλλίασις!

Ἐφέτος, δηλαδὴ κατὰ τὸ ἔτος ἐκεῖνο τῆς δυστυχίας διὰ τὰ δύο ὄρφανὰ δὲν ἦτο πλέον ἐκεῖ οὔτε ὁ πατήρ των, ὅστις ἔλειπεν, οὔτε ἡ μήτηρ των, ἥτις ἐπῆγε μακρύτερα ἀκόμη. Ἄντι τῶν δύο ἦτο ἡ γηραιὰ μάμμη, ρογχάζουσα ἐπὶ τῆς κλίνης καὶ γογγύζουσα. Ἄντι τῶν ἐπιχρῦσων λαμπάδων, ἦσαν οἱ δύο τρεμοσβήνοντες καὶ βλοσυροὶ ὀφθαλμοὶ της. Ἄντι τῆς ἀθώας χαρᾶς, ἀντι τῆς ἀφάτου εὐτυχίας τοῦ παιδικοῦ Πάσχα, ἦτο ἡ λύπη ἢ βαρεῖα, ἢ ἀνεπανόρθωτος συμφορά.

Εὐτυχῶς ἡ γραῖα Κομνιανάκαινα δὲν ἀπέθανε, καὶ ὁ υἱὸς της ἔφθασεν ἀπόπασχα μὲ τὸ γολεττί, καὶ ἤρχισε νὰ καλλωπίζεται καὶ νὰ στρίβῃ τὸν μύστακα ἀποβλέπων εἰς δεῦτερον γάμον. Ἀλλά, διὰ τὰ δύο παιδιά, τάχα θὰ ἐπανάρχετο πάλιν ἡ χαρὰ ἐκεῖνη, θ' ἀνέτελλεν ἐκ νέου γλυκεῖα ἢ παιδικὴ Πασχαλιά; Διὰ τὸν Εὐαγγελινὸν ἴσως, διὰ τὴν Μόρφω ὅμως ποτέ. Αὕτη ἠσθάνετο τὴν ἀπουσίαν τῆς μητρὸς της καὶ ἤξευρεν ὅτι δὲν ἔμελλε νὰ τὴν ἐπανάιδῃ πλέον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

Γλυκεῖα Πασχαλιά, ἡ μήτηρ τῆς χαρᾶς! Γλυκεῖα μήτηρ, τῆς Πασχαλιάς ἢ ἐνσάρκωσις!

Ἄλλ' ὁ Χριστὸς ὑπεσχέθη νὰ πῆ μὲ τοὺς ἐκλεκτοὺς του καινὸν τὸ γέννημα τῆς ἀμπέλου ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τοῦ Πατρὸς Του, καὶ οἱ ὕμνωδοὶ ἔψαλλον: «Ὡ Πάσχα τὸ μέγα καὶ ιερῶτατον Χριστέ· ὦ σοφία καὶ Λόγε τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ δύναμις· δίδου ἡμῖν ἐκτυπώτερον σοῦ μετασχεῖν, ἐν τῇ ἀνεσπέρῳ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς βασιλείας σου!».



ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΕΩΣ ἡμέρα,
καὶ λαμπρυνθῶμεν τῇ πανηγύρει
καὶ ἀλλήλους περιπτυσθῶμεθα.
ΕΙΠΩΜΕΝ, ἀδελφοί,
καὶ τοῖς μισοῦσιν ἡμᾶς·
συγχωρήσωμεν
πάντα τῇ ἀναστάσει·
καὶ οὕτω βοήσωμεν·
ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ἀνέστη ἐκ νεκρῶν,
θανάτῳ θάνατον πατήσας
καὶ τοῖς ἐν τοῖς μνήμασι
ζωὴν χαρισάμενος.

THE MISINTERPRETATIONS OF THE TERMS “SOUL” AND “SPIRIT”

By Michael Mavroforakis.

Within a passage from the book of Genesis there is an obscure point that confuses those who regard the human soul as having the same nature and value as animals: *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.* (Gen 2:7).

It becomes obvious from this passage that the “whole Man”—who is also mentioned as “living soul” in there—consists of two components: his body and his soul as we would say today, thus denoting the visible and the invisible element of his composition, or, the clay body and the breath of life according to the author of Genesis. In fact, instead of the word *breath*, the Hebrew text has the word *nismah*, a derivative of *neshamah* which literally also means *breath*. This same word is also found in the Genesis passage 7:22, which speaks of the Flood: *All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died.*

To determine what the breath of life was, we need to find out what had died. And we are in fact told what that was, in the preceding verse of Genesis 7:21: *And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man.* Hence, all of these living organisms—including Man—possess the “breath of life.”

This is the verse used by all those who erroneously believe that the soul is mortal and impersonal and, by isolating the specific text, they assert two things: firstly, that the soul is mortal and is not the invisible and virtual component of Man but merely his “self;” and secondly, that the thing which finally animates the body of Man and is of course invisible is NOT called “soul” in the Holy Bible, but is called “breath of life” or “spirit.” In fact, they assert that this component is not something personal / individual and the carrier of awareness, but merely an impersonal power common to all living creatures. They also usually assert that the Holy Bible does not say that Man has a soul but that he is a soul, while they assert on the contrary that Man is not “spirit” or “breath of life,” but that he has the breath of life.

We can say—on both these points in general—that this is precisely how the erroneous dogmatic position is summarized, i.e., that the soul is mortal and so these are the two points on which we shall focus. Because, if it is proven that these assertions do not hold, then the entire dogmatic position regarding the supposed mortality of the soul and its impersonal status will collapse. Most assuredly, there are adequate references and clear testimonies in the Holy Bible that can prove that these two heretical hypotheses are incorrect.

Let us begin with the second cacodoxy (Ed., an erroneous and heretical doctrine), which is subdivided into two limbs: First, that this invisible component of Man which animates the earthen body is not mentioned in the Holy Bible as being the soul but the breath of life or, equally and in parallel, the spirit. And second, that this spirit or breath of life is common to all living creatures and consequently is an impersonal force.

Let us tackle the first limb first, and prove that the Holy Bible equally uses the word for “soul” and alternates it with the terms “breath of life” and “spirit.”

The Equivalence of the Terms “Spirit” and “Breath”

There is no doubt that in the passages of Genesis that we examined, Gen 2:7 and 7:21-22, it clearly states that Man and animals are comprised of two components. One is their earthen body, and the other is the “breath of life” which is the invisible element that animates and vivifies the body. Without it, the body falls dead. Let us examine a few passages of the Holy Bible where it shows that when this invisible element departs we subsequently have death, or, when it returns, we have resurrection:

Job said to his three consolers that: *All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils.* (Job 27:3). We notice here that in wanting to say *for as long as I live*, he says *for as long as my breath is within me and the spirit of God is in my nostrils*; in other words, the word *breath* (of life, naturally) and *spirit* are used equivalently, in order to denote the invisible component of the living being. Further down, in passage 27:5, he says: *Till I expire I will not remove mine integrity from me.* The word *expire*—in its permanent sense, which is likewise used today as an equivalent term for “death”—evidently denotes death as the removal of the “respiratory” breath of life.

Indicatively, let us mention some more passages where the word “spirit” is used equally in place of the term “breath,” for example, in Genesis 6:17: *And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.* And in Genesis 7:15: *And they came towards Noah in the Ark, two by two, from every flesh in which there is the spirit of life.* Again, we note the use of the term “spirit” instead of “breath of life.”

There are many other similar passages, such as—for example—Ezekiel 1:20-21, as well as Ezekiel 10:17 etc. It is very important that this “breath of life” or “spirit of life” is characterized as a creature, as a creation, and not as a part of the essence of God, as many believe, who have been influenced by Hellenic philosophy and have thus surmised that it is “by nature” immortal—because in the Book of Proverbs (24:12) we read the following: *Be advised, that the Lord knows everyone’s hearts, and that the One Who formed breath for everyone* (in Septuagint* Greek text = *Ὁ πλάσας πνοὴν πᾶσιν*) *is the One Who knows everything, rendering unto each according to his works.* We observe here that God is referred to as the *One Who*

has formed breath for everyone, hence, the breath of life, or the spirit, is a formed, created thing—a creation.

Let us take a look at two more, similar passages, this time from Isaiah: *Thus says the Lord God, Who made the heavens and extended them; Who secured the earth and everything that is born out of it; Who gave breath to the people that are upon it and spirit to those who walk upon it.* (Isa 42:5). In this passage, the words *breath* and *spirit* are used equally, in the sense that we mentioned previously; and this *spirit*—or *breath*—is something that is given by the Lord. In another place, the prophet Isaiah writes: *I shall not avenge you for eternity, nor shall I be forever angry with you, for the spirit comes forth from Me, and I have formed every breath.* (Isa 57:16). We again observe here that *breath*—or its equivalent, *spirit*—in every living being is something formed by God; it is a creation, and not a part of His Nature—His Essence.

A similar passage is in Zechariah 12:1: *Says the Lord, Who extends the heavens and lays the foundations of the earth, and Who forms the spirit of Man within him.* A notion such as that—i.e., that the spirit of Man is a part of the essence of God—inevitably leads one to an irrational and idolatry-based pantheism, like the one that also exists in oriental religions—given that according to this erroneous perception, the essence of God exists in every single creature.

Albeit seemingly improbable (after the very few references that we have set out so far) that one could still be fooled into believing this kind of fallacy, it is however a cacodoxy that is widely prevalent in the West, on account of the alienation—especially by Papism—from the robust and proper teaching of the Church and the clinging to human philosophies, especially those of Plato and Aristotle. And of course it was from Papism that many of its offshoot Protestant groups inherited it also. We could also mention only in brief, that it is not the object of this study to analyze how the latent cause behind this fallacy was the Papist confusion regarding the essence and the energies of God.

But, to revert to our subject, we have so far determined that: (1): the word *breath* is used in the Holy Scriptures equally and alternately with the word *spirit*; (2): that it is responsible for life, and that when it is severed from the body, whatever is alive becomes dead, and (3): that it is a created element, a creation, and not a part of God.

The Association between the Terms “Spirit” or “Breath” and the Term “Soul”

Now let us take a look at the association between the words *spirit* (Greek = πνευμα, πνεῦμα)—or its equivalent, *breath* (Greek = πνοε, πνοή)—and the word “soul” (Greek = ψυχη, ψυχή).

From what we have examined so far, it is obvious that the *spirit* animates living organisms, and that when it departs, they die biologically; that is, the body lies *breath*-less and *spirit*-less—in other words, dead.

Let us take a look at some Biblical references to that effect, beginning with the Book of Judges 15: 18-19, where it refers to Samson: *And thirsting severely, he cried out to the Lord and said: ‘You have provided this great deliverance by the hand of Your servant, and now, am I to die of thirst and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?’ And God split apart the hollow that was in Lehi, and water came forth from it; and after drinking it, his spirit returned and he was revived.* It is quite clear that, should the spirit leave the body, a human will die, and that when it returns, he will live again.

Another similar, touching passage is Job 34:14-15, where the prudent Elihu says of God: *Should He set His heart upon mankind, He will take back for Himself His Spirit and His Breath; every flesh shall expire* (Greek= εκρνοε, εκπνοή) *together, and man shall return to the soil.* A similar passage is in the Book of Psalms, 104:29-30: *You turn away Your countenance, and they are agitated; You lift away their breath, and they die and they return to their soil. You send forth Your spirit and they are created, and You renew the face of the earth.*

In the same manner, David had cried out to God to strengthen him because he was dying: *Hearken to me quickly, Lord; my spirit is vanishing; do not hide Your countenance from me, lest I resemble those who descend into the pit.* (Pss 143:7). In other words, they would be burying him in a grave, as one who is dead. And in another Psalm: *Do not rely on princes, or on a son of man, out of whom there is no salvation. For his spirit departs, and he returns to his soil. On that day, his contemplations (=his plans) are destroyed.* (Pss 146:3-4).

We must pay careful attention to the fact that neither here, nor anywhere else, does it say that Man’s spirit is destroyed or annihilated, but on the contrary, that the spirit departs, and that only man’s plans are annihilated. These passages clearly denote the equivalence of the terms *breath* and *spirit* inasmuch as they are the life-giving, invisible and created component of every living existence. It is essential to note that the separation of the *breath of life*, or *spirit*, from the body will lead a body to necrosis, and an organism to biological death. But now we must see how these two meanings are connected to the word for “soul.”

Let us therefore see what happened when Rachel was dying while giving birth to Benjamin: *And it passed that while her soul was leaving her—for she was dying—she called her son’s name ‘the son of my pain’.* (Gen 35:18) In this passage, we notice that it was not the *spirit* or *breath* that left the person—as we noticed elsewhere—but her *soul*. It is therefore obvious and absolutely clear that what the Holy Bible refers to as *spirit* and *breath* in some places, here, it refers to it as *soul*. So, we have here yet another significance behind the word for *soul*, one that is not entirely unrelated to the previous ones, as we shall see further along.

Let us therefore highlight some more, equally explicit passages, in order to solidify the significance of the word for

soul, especially for the sake of those who would like to have additional references on the topic, and let us take a look at 1 Kings 17:21-22, where we read of the miracle of the resurrection of the widow's son by the prophet Elijah: *And he (the prophet Elijah) stretched himself above the child and cried out to the Lord and said: 'My Lord God, I beseech You, let the soul of this child return inside him.' And the Lord hearkened to the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the youth returned inside him and he lived once again.*

In this very important excerpt we must note the following:

(1) One should not assert that it is correct to say that someone is a soul, and that it is wrong to say that someone has a soul, because here, the living body of a child has a soul; his soul returned, and went back inside him. It does not say that the boy became a soul again.

(2) Attempts by many to prove that in this instance, the word *soul* implies the "self" are both failed and irrational attempts, as it is irrational to interpret this passage as implying that it was the "self" of the boy that returned inside it.

(3) It is equally erroneous to interpret the word *soul* as denoting an impersonal and abstract notion of life, because it twice states the soul as belonging to the boy—i.e., that it is a specific *soul*; besides, it would not have stated that the boy's life returned inside it, but would have merely mentioned that "life returned to the boy." Also, whatever "returns" must have previously "departed," and, as we noted earlier, that which departs is clearly referred to as breath of life or spirit, and not "life" generally.

Thus, even here we can surmise that the word *soul* also implies an invisible and re-animating element of man, which departs during death and returns during resurrection. In other words, the word *soul* in this context, is equivalent to the words *spirit—rouah* in Hebrew—and *breath—nesamah* in Hebrew.

Later, when the prophet Elijah had reached the point of exasperation, fear and sorrow on account of Jezebel's irreverence, he went into the desert, a day's walk away. We can read the continuation, in 1 Kings 19:4: *And he wished to himself to die and he said: 'Enough! Now, Lord, take my soul.'* The Lord takes away the the soul of man, or, equally, his spirit, or, his breath of life.

But let us also mention an example from within the New Testament, where the words *soul* and *spirit* are used equally and alternately, and in fact by the same author.

The first excerpt is in the Gospel according to Luke, where Christ raised from the dead the daughter of Jaerus, the head of the synagogue: *And when Christ came, He took hold of her hand, and cried out, saying 'o child, rise up!' and her spirit returned, and she rose up immediately.* (Lk 8:54-55). Here, Luke the evangelist is describing resurrection as the return of the daughter's spirit. We must notice here that He did not say simply and generally "the spirit" or "the spirit of God," but

"her spirit"; i.e., the personal and specific spirit, and not an abstract or impersonal force.

Let us also see how the same evangelist, Luke, describes another resurrection; that of Eutychus, the youth from Troas. During the hour of the Sunday Divine Eucharist, in which the Apostle Paul was chief officiator, Eutychus fell asleep and fell from the third storey and was killed. *He was lifted up dead* specifies the text, and not "as though dead." Now let us see how the text continues, in the Book of Acts, 20:10: *And when Paul went downstairs, he fell upon him and embracing him (note: like the prophet Elijah), he said: 'Do not be alarmed, for his soul is within him.* We see here that although we have the same kind of event in both excerpts—i.e., the resurrection of persons, or their return to life—in the first instance of the daughter of Jaerus, Luke the evangelist refers to "her spirit," whereas in the second instance, he refers to "his soul."

As one can easily perceive, it is more than clear that the terms "spirit" and "soul" are comfortably interchanged, simply because they have the same significance.



(*) *Septuagint = The oldest available Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures by seventy scholars, that dates from the 3rd century B.C., acknowledged as the standard form of the Old Testament in the early Christian Church and still canonical in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Older by 800 years to the Hebrew Masorite text.*



All faith in the triumph of Life over death, every presentment of the Resurrection, are implicit belief in Christ: for only the power of Christ raises, and will raise the dead.

Since the victory of Christ over death, the Resurrection has become Universal Law for creation; and not only for humanity, but also for the beasts, the plants and the stones, for the whole cosmos in which each one of us is the head. We are baptized in the death of Christ, shrouded in water to rise again with Him. And for the soul purified in the baptismal waters of tears, and ablaze with the fire of the Holy Spirit, the Resurrection is not only hope but present reality. The Second Coming begins in the souls of the saints, and St. Symeon the New Theologian can write: "For those who became children of the light and sons of the day to come, for those who always walk in the light, the Day of the Lord will never come, for they are already with God and in God." An infinite ocean of light flows from the risen body of the Lord.

V. N. Lossky, from his book
Orthodox Theology: An Introduction

THE THOUGHTS OF MY HEART

By Fr. Seraphim Majmudar, November 2008.

My Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Christ is in our midst! He is and ever shall be!

I hope you and your families are well during this season of the Nativity Fast. I am writing to you simply to share the thoughts of my heart, which has been heavy of late. Please forgive these unsolicited remarks—I offer them with humility and love, trusting that you will receive them with the same.

For some years now, I have had a growing sense that our common enemy, the devil, has sharpened his attacks against us, the faithful in Christ. I have felt that he has done more than just attack each of us in the midst of our own struggles and passions; he has been trying to tear us away from the very basis of our Faith: **The eternal value of human life.** It seems that he and his demons have been doing this on a massive scale, attempting to encompass the entire Church, if that were possible.

This feeling became very powerful during my recent pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It was there, in an apartment overlooking the Sea of Galilee, that I watched the results of the US national elections. I am sorry to say that as I took a walk along the shore, I literally felt sick in my bones. This is not because I hate Mr. Obama (I don't) or because I am a partisan Republican (I am not). It is because it seemed that I just watched millions of Americans say definitively—by their votes on national, state and local levels—that the legalized slaughter of four thousand Americans every day (commonly called “abortion”) was simply “one issue among many”; that there are just as many important issues such as the Iraq war, the economy, health care, foreign policy and the environment—and to vote for otherwise undesirable candidates simply because they claim to be “Pro-Life” is foolish, “single-issue” voting.

Please understand that I am not trying to be political. Indeed, there is nothing “political” whatsoever about the legalized slaughter of millions of innocent children! It has nothing to do with Democrat, Republican, Liberal or Conservative—but that is how the demons want us to think about it. They want us to think that the most serious spiritual crisis of our generation is simply “one issue among many.” It is, in my poor and inexperienced opinion, a massive deception on a scale that perhaps only saints could begin to understand.

On the Mount of Temptation, the devil offered the entire world to Christ if He would only worship him. We might ask: why didn't He? Imagine if Christ had said “Yes, I will worship you”, then the entire world would have been (presumably) under Christ's benevolent rule. He could have ended suffering, poverty and war. All of this in exchange for a simple act

of worship? It seems that the Lord could have brought about a “greater good” and yet did not.

All simply to avoid worshiping the devil? How would that matter in comparison to ending so much misery? The Gospel's answer is simple: that the real enemy of mankind is death, not suffering. If Christ had brought about “global hope” by worshiping Satan, what would have changed? Nothing! Man's greatest fear is death, and that would have remained as strong as ever. How nice can an earthly paradise be if we know that death awaits each one of us? The devil, in his arrogance, thought that Christ could be deceived, so he tempted Him with the same kind of utilitarianism that he is bringing about in our time: i.e., “let's work together to bring about the most good for the most people.” The danger with this approach is that it is abstract: “good” is an abstraction, and it is measured statistically—not personally. The utilitarian universe is cold, impersonal and “just,” because “goodness” is an idea, and not a Person.

But the root of our Gospel faith is the Life of Persons: the Life of the Father, the Life of the Son, and the Life of the Holy Spirit. Everything derives from that: The holy fathers of the Seven Councils did not argue about health care or foreign policy—they defended the truth about the Persons of the Holy Trinity. We might be tempted to think that they wasted their time, wondering why they spent so much energy on seemingly arcane theological fineries, when they should have been in their own towns, helping people and “doing good.”

But this is precisely the point: How does good come about in the world? The holy fathers wanted nothing else than the Good. They would not settle for an earthly kind of “good,” because “only One is Good: that is God.” On the Mount of Temptation, Christ knew that “every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights,” and not through shrewd government policy, or even “people getting together for good.” Goodness comes into the world when Christ God comes into the world: It is not an abstraction, it is a Person, the Beloved of the Father. This is the teaching of the holy fathers, and they were willing to suffer torture and death to preserve it.

The Lord said that the “sons of this age are more shrewd than the sons of light,” and I fear that we are being tempted to think that we can bring goodness into the world through shrewdness, and not by grace.

Again: what is our starting point? It is the Person of Jesus Christ, the source of Life and every goodness. We are Orthodox Christians because we believe that goodness is a gift, that life comes into the world through our loving relationship with Jesus Christ. He sends the Comforter to His people, the New Israel. He does not sit back in Heaven and wonder if we will somehow figure out how to do good in this world. He fills real persons with the Holy Spirit, and those real persons

bring life to the world—real persons like St. Silouan, who carried the burden of the entire world’s pain in his soul, and exchanged it for life and mercy from the Holy Spirit. This is how to bring goodness into the world!

The Lord creates every child to do the same thing St. Silouan did. So every time one of them is murdered, the world is deprived of an infinite blessing from God. What if Christ had been aborted? Or Panagia? Or St. Silouan?

The devil wishes to steal our inheritance in Christ by convincing us that it is foolish or irresponsible to “reduce” things to a single issue like this. But what would St. Paul say right now? Would he say, “Beloved brethren: Abortion is a fact; you’re not going to change it simply by changing the law. Work towards changing the underlying societal factors, and hope that you can reduce the overall number of abortions through smart and realistic policy.”? Never!

Would St. John Chrysostom say, “Yes, abortion is bad, but there are lots of other problems in the world. In fact, most of those children would lead miserable lives of neglect, abuse and poverty; for them, it’s probably better to get it over with quickly anyway.” Impossible!

Thinking like this is a direct denial of God’s goodness in creating every human being—because it is a denial of hope, which can only be found in Jesus Christ. And this is what it is all about, isn’t it? It is a question about hope: in my sorrow, in the world’s misery, is there really reason to hope? We think it over: Maybe it is better not to have lived—and therefore, not suffered—than to have lived and suffered? But by professing faith in Christ, we have the audacity to hope that the answer is yes. I say it again: By our faith in Christ, we make the outrageous claim that life—no matter how “horrible”—is worth living.

As St. Paul already observed, to the unbelievers, this is foolishness! Why? Because the world in its shrewd hopelessness cannot believe this. Ultimately, the world is simply trying to make the best of what it sees as an inherently meaningless situation. But if nothing is inherently meaningful, nothing can be inherently precious. “Good”—the abstraction—becomes simply that which is agreed upon as good. That essentially means, to use Joseph Campbell’s phrase, “Follow your bliss”. The legal corollary is to make sure that your bliss doesn’t interfere in anyone else’s bliss. Hence, we cannot interfere with a woman’s right to her own bliss, because it is her body, and therefore her bliss.

But we of the household of Faith say, “No! Life is inherently precious, because Jesus Christ is Life, and the Light of men. He dwelt in the Virgin’s womb for nine months” – and therefore, we cannot deliberately take the life of a person that Jesus Christ created. He is the Lord of Life and Death, and He alone.

Some may say that we cannot attempt to “legislate morality”, even if we are personally Pro-Life. But how is protect-

ing innocent children from murder “legislating morality”? If four thousand American schoolchildren were being abducted and murdered every day, would it be “legislating morality” to try to stop it? Moreover, if you or I had our own child murdered, would we be comforted being told “well, we are succeeding in diminishing the overall child murder trend nationwide.

Statistically, “the pattern is approaching positive results.” None of us would. Why? Because we know instinctively that life is not about statistics—it is about real, unique and living persons, just as our faith is not abstract, but about Real, Living Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Others may feel that trying to change the law won’t do any good. But what is the law? It is, ultimately, a set of promises to God. Laws are born of our freedom: In our freedom, we make laws, and thereby tell the Lord, “These are the ways in which we bind ourselves freely to Thy precepts, O Lord.” Remember Psalm 118: *I will run the way of thy commandments, when thou shalt enlarge my heart.* (Pss 118:32).

Law is an expression of our freedom as persons, and is a direct expression of the measure with which we wish to be measured. We may not be able to stop wars, famines or disease—indeed, the Lord said these things would remain until His Second Coming—but God did give us the freedom to choose our own laws. Why? Because by freely ordering our earthly laws according to God’s Law, we freely love God. Without freedom, there is no love. If we allow laws that destroy innocent human beings, then we are freely hardening our hearts before God. We cannot serve God and mammon. And on the Day of Judgment, what will really matter? The only thing that will matter is that we have soft hearts before Christ—that He knew us because we freely put our hope in Him, and not in the sons of men.

This is why the issue of abortion is so central: It is always presented, even by those of the Pro-Death position, as a question of freedom. Cain in his freedom killed his brother Abel; but did freedom give birth to love? No! Freedom gave birth to death. So the supposed “freedom of choice” is anything but true freedom. **It is slavery to death disguised as freedom.**

The problem, for many, is the “hiddenness” of the child in the womb. Is it a person? Is it just a ball of tissue? When does the soul enter it? But it is precisely this hiddenness that gives us the freedom to love these children, and to love the Lord who made them. Inside the hiddenness lies the freedom. We don’t hear their silent screams, but we defend them anyway. By loving them without sensing them, we fulfill the Lord’s word to Thomas: *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.*

The great irony now is that we are faced with the “Freedom of Choice Act—FOCA”, which President-elect Obama has pledged, on record, to sign into law. I leave it to you to read

about FOCA and its potentially devastating spiritual consequences. I beg each and every one of you to do whatever you can to stop this monstrous attempt on the lives of thousands of innocent children.

I also ask you to commit to one concrete way you can help defend His innocent ones: Whether in the effort to block FOCA or other legislative efforts; to volunteer at a local pregnancy help center and offer hands-on kindness and love to real women in crisis; to pray for and console the women who have already aborted children; to speak up in your parishes and communities (“Blessed are those who so do and so teach...”); to donate money and time in whatever way possible; to offer support to families you know who have adopted children—and recognize them to be the heroes that they are. Most of all, I ask every one of you to search your heart and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into His Truth, and to protect you from the deception of the evil one.

If every Orthodox Christian in the United States took this approach, is it not certain that God would fill our hearts—and purses—with everything we need to accomplish it? The Lord already said yes to this: “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you.”

Beloved brothers and sisters, let us stand firm for the Gospel in these dangerous times! Glory to Jesus Christ, our Hope and our Life!

Forgive me a sinner,

Unworthy Priest Seraphim Majmudar, Silikou, Cyprus.



Humility is a wonderful virtue, which makes fragrant the one who has it. He who has humility also has obedience, love, patience, and every virtue. When we get angry, or become enraged, or criticize, or do not obey, it is evident that we have a corresponding amount of pride and egotism. The more we progress in humility, the more the evil offspring of egotism will retreat.

My children, let us humble ourselves for the Lord who humbled Himself for us. The Lord showed so much humility, even to the point of crucifixion. So shouldn't we, who are lowly by nature, bow our head to our brother? Do we expect always to get our own way?

If we want Jesus to dwell within our heart, let us love and humble ourselves like Christ. Let us not grieve Him any more with egotistic manifestations. Let us not crucify Him again with expressions and conduct lacking brotherly love. No more bitterness in the holy heart of our most sweet Christ.

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

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

By St. John Maximovitch.



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

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

When we are immersed in sins and our mind is occupied only with worldly cares, we do not notice the state of our soul. We are indifferent as to how we are within, and go constantly by a false path, ourselves not noticing this.

But now a ray of Divine Light penetrates into our soul. How much filth shall we see then in ourselves! How much injustice, how much falsehood! How hideous will many actions turn out to be which we fancied excellent. It will become clear to us that we are going by wrong paths. It becomes clear to us which path is right.

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

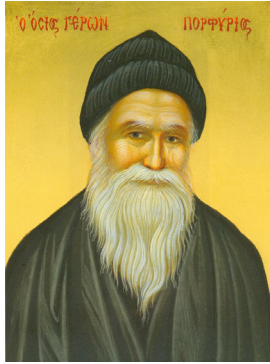
At the beginning and throughout the great Fast let us hasten to forgive each other all hurts and offenses. Let us ever hear the words of the Gospel of Forgiveness. Sunday: *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* (Mt 6:14-15).

REMEMBERING THE HOLY ELDER PORPHYRIOS

Source: "Elder Porphyrios: Testimonies and Experiences," By K. Ioannides.

The one who comes to me I will by no means cast out.

(Jn. 3:37)



Elder Porphyrios throughout his whole life received all those who came to him; becoming, like St. Paul, *all things to all people in order to save them.*

All kinds passed by his humble cell; both holy ascetics and sinful thieves, Orthodox Christians and people of other denominations and religions, insignificant people and famous personalities, rich and poor, illiterate and literate, lay people and clergy of all ranks. To each one he offered the love of Christ for their salvation.

This does not mean that all those who went to the Elder or who knew him, for however long, adopted our Lord's message or acquired the Elder's virtue, and thus are worthy of our complete trust, as he was. A great deal of care, vigilance and good sense is required, because, as an Elder becomes well known, the temptation will come to some people to claim some type of attachment or connection with him. They will want to boast or to create the false impression that they are speaking for him. Apart from pure devotion and true love, apart from humble approach and honest learning, there is also conceit and personal gain. Naivety exists, but so does guile. Ignorance exists but so does error and deception.

In his final years Elder Porphyrios grieved about this a lot. That is to say, many people passed themselves off as his spiritual children and let it be hinted that they did what they did with the Elder's blessing or approval. However, the Elder neither knew them nor sanctioned their activities. In fact he twice requested that relevant notices to be written for the briefing of Christians. On both occasions he revoked the order for their publication.

Here is one example. The Elder had taken a certain stance regarding various ecclesiastical issues that were dividing the faithful. This was known to very few people, who should have kept it confidential. Sometimes, however, people came who followed or expressed the opinion of one side or the other. It is not right to suppose that because a certain person saw the Elder, the opinion which that person held was then blessed by the Elder. If only we were obedient to the Elder! If only those of us who approached him had embraced his advice and in general his spirit!

His spirit generally speaking was one of absolute submission to the "official" Church. He did absolutely nothing without her approval. He knew from experience in the Holy Spirit that

the bishops are bearers of divine grace quite independent of their personal virtue. He perceptibly felt divine grace and he saw where it was acting and where it wasn't acting. He graphically emphasized that grace is opposed to the proud, but not to sinners, however humble.

For this reason, he didn't agree with actions that provoked disputes and conflicts within the Church or verbal attacks on bishops. He always advised that the solution to all the Church's problems should be found in the Church and by the Church with prayer, humility and repentance. It is better, he said, for us to make mistakes within the Church than to act correctly outside it. *Stand fast in one spirit with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel.* (Phil. 1:27)

The Elder taught that the basic element of the Spiritual life in Christ, the great mystery of our faith, is unity in Christ. It is that sense of identifying with our brother, of carrying the burdens of one another, of living for others as we live for ourselves, of saying *Lord Jesus Christ have mercy upon ME* and for that "ME" to contain and to become for ourselves the pain and the problems of the other, of suffering like they suffer, of rejoicing like they rejoice, their fall becoming our fall and their getting up again becoming our getting up again. This is why his last words, his last entreaty to God, his last prayer, his greatest desire was that we "become one." That was what he ached, wished and longed for.

In this wonderful and simple way, how many problems were solved and how many sins were avoided. Did my brother fall? I fell. How can I blame him since I am at fault? Did my brother succeed? I succeed. How can I envy him since I am the winner?

The Elder knew that because it's our weakest point, it is here that the evil one does greatest battle. We put our own interests first. We separate ourselves. We want to flee the consequences of our actions for ourselves only. However when such a spirit prevails, there is no salvation for us. We must want to be saved along with everyone else. We should, together with God's saint, say, "If you don't save all of these people, Lord, then erase my name from the book of Life." Or, like Christ's apostle, wish to become accursed from Christ, for the sake of my fellow man, my brothers and my sisters.

This is love. This is the power of Christ. This is the essence of God. This is the royal way of spiritual life. We should love Christ who is EVERYTHING, by loving His brothers and sisters, for whom the least of which Christ died.



Hypocrisy is the mother of lying and frequently its cause. Some would argue that hypocrisy is nothing other than a meditation on falsehood, that it is the inventor of falsehood laced with lies.

St. John Climacus

TRUE CHRISTIANITY IS A STRUGGLE

By Archbishop Averky.

Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. (Mk 8:34).

The Great Fast is a season of repentance; and repentance is that struggle to contend against sinful passions and lusts which is so difficult for man that the Lord, the Judge of the contest Himself, likened it to the bearing of a cross. We are vividly reminded of this at the very midpoint of the Great Fast, on the Sunday of the Adoration of the Cross. Just as the Lord bore the Cross for the sake of our salvation, so each of us must bear "his cross" in order to attain the salvation prepared for us by the Lord.

Without the cross, without struggle, there can be no salvation! This is what true Christianity teaches. The teaching on struggle, on the bearing of the cross, runs like a scarlet thread through all the Sacred Scriptures and all of the history of the Church; and the lives of those holy ones who were pleasing unto God, the spiritual athletes of Christian piety, clearly bear witness to this. The Great Fast is merely an annually repeated exercise in the bearing of one's cross in this life, an exercise in spiritual struggle inseparably bound up with the entire life of the true Christian.

But now, in the twentieth century of the Christian era, "wise men" have appeared—"neo-Christians," as some of them refer to themselves—who do not wish to hear of this. They preach a new sort of saccharine, sentimental, rosy-hued neo-Christian love and the unrestricted enjoyment of all the delights of this transitory earthly life. They totally ignore the innumerable passages in Holy Writ which forcefully and eloquently speak of spiritual struggles, of emulating Christ the Savior in crucifying oneself, of the many sorrows which await the Christian in this life, beginning with the words which Christ the Savior Himself addressed to His disciples at the Mystical Supper: *In the world ye shall have tribulation.* (Jn 16:33). And this is because, as the Lord Himself explained, true Christians are not *of the world* (Jn 15:19), since *the whole world lieth in wickedness* (I Jn 5:19). This is why Christians must not love this world and *the things that are in the world* (I Jn 2:15); *the friendship of the world is enmity with God, and whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.* (Jas 4:4).

These modern "wise men" somehow fail to see that the Word of God nowhere promises Christians full spiritual satisfaction and paradisaical blessedness in this earthly life. Quite the contrary; it emphasizes that life on earth will move further and further away from the Law of God; that, in respect to morality, men will *fall lower and lower* (II Tim 3:1-5); that *all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving,*

and being deceived (II Tim 3:12-13); and that, finally, *the earth also and the works therein shall be burned up.* (II Pet 3:10). But there will appear *new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.* (II Pet 3:13)—a wondrous *New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven* (Rev 21:2), which was shown to John, the beholder of mysteries, during the revelation accorded him.

All of this is not to the liking of the "neo-Christians." They want blessedness here in this world, burdened with its multitude of sins and iniquities; and they await this blessedness with impatience. They consider one of the surest ways of attaining it to be the "ecumenical movement," the union and unification of all peoples in one new "church" which will comprise not only Roman Catholics and Protestants, but also Jews, Moslems and pagans, each retaining his own convictions and errors. This imaginary "Christian" love, in the name of the future blessedness of men on earth, cannot but trample upon the Truth.

The destruction of this earth with everything on it, although clearly foretold by the Word of God, is considered by them to be something indescribably horrible, as though it were not consistent with the omnipotence of God and, apparently, quite undesirable. They reluctantly admit the destruction of earth (for how can one not accept something prophesied in the Word of God?), but with the condition that it will take place in the far, far distant, mist-enshrouded future, not centuries, but millions of years from now.

What is the reason for this? One might say, because they are weak of faith, or lacking entirely in faith in *the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come.* For them everything is in this earthly life, and when it ends for them, everything does.

In a few of its points—especially in the expectation of the blessed life in this world—such a frame of mind closely resembles the widespread heresy of the first centuries of Christianity called "chiliasm." This is the expectation of a thousand-year reign of Christ on earth; therefore the modern manifestation of this heresy may be termed "neo-chiliasm."

One should be aware and keep in mind that chiliasm was condemned by the Second Ecumenical Council in the year 381; and therefore to believe in it now in the twentieth century, even in part, is quite unforgivable. Besides which, this contemporary "neo-chiliasm" is far worse than the ancient chiliastic heresy in that at its basis indubitably lies a disbelief in the *life of the age to come* and the passionate desire to attain blessedness here on earth, using all the improvements and achievements of the material progress of our times.

This false teaching wreaks terrible harm, lulling to sleep the spiritual vigilance of the faithful and suggesting to them that the end of the world is far away (if in fact there will be an end?), and therefore there is no particular need to *watch and pray*, to which Christ the Savior constantly called His

followers (cf. Mt 26:41), since everything in the world is gradually getting better and better, spiritual progress keeping step with materialism. And the terrible phenomena which we observe at the present time are all temporary; all has happened before, and all will ultimately pass away, and an extraordinary flourishing of Christianity will replace it, in which, of course, the ecumenists will occupy the principal and honored places.

Thus, everything is fine! It is not necessary to labor over oneself, and no spiritual struggle is required; the fasts may be abolished. Everything will get better all by itself, until the Kingdom of God is finally established on earth with universal earthly satisfaction and blessedness.

Brethren! Is it not clear where the ultimate source of this alluring false teaching is found? Who suggests all these thoughts to contemporary Christians with the purpose of overthrowing all of Christianity? As an infectious plague, as fire, must we fear this “neo-chiliasm” which is so profoundly contrary to the teaching of the Word of God, the teaching of the Holy Fathers and all of the centuries-old teachings of our Holy Church, by which many, many thousands of the righteous have been saved.

Without spiritual struggle there is not, and cannot be true Christianity! Therefore, our path does not lie with all the modern movements, nor with ecumenists, nor with the new-chiliasm.

Our faith is the faith of the holy ascetics, *the apostolic faith, the faith of the Fathers, the Orthodox Faith* which, *hath made the whole world steadfast* (from the service for the Sunday of Orthodoxy). **This faith and only this faith will we firmly adhere to in these evil days in which we now live. Amen.**



Conscience is the 1st law of God, which He carved deeply into the hearts of the first-created. In turn, we each make a photocopy from our parents when we are born. Those who manage to heighten their sense of conscience through daily study of themselves, feel themselves to be foreigners to this world; and worldly people are baffled by their gracious behavior. Those who haven't studied their conscience, benefit neither from their spiritual studies nor from counsel from their elders. They won't be even able to keep God's commandments, for they have lost their senses all together.

(Blessed Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994))

A MOTHER'S LOVE

From the Book: "Family Life" by Elder Paisios the Athonite, published by the Sacred Hesychastirion of St. John the Evangelist, Souroti-Greece, 2002, translated by Fr. Luke Hartung.

Geronda, you once told us that with love, a person grows and matures.

It's not enough for someone to simply love another; he must love him more than he loves himself. A mother loves her children more than herself. She fasts so as to feed her children, yet she experiences more gratitude than they. The little children are fed bodily and the mother spiritually. They experience the pleasure of taste, while she spiritual rejoicing.

A young girl before marrying is able to sleep till ten in the morning and even asks her mother to get her milk. She is lazy about doing even the slightest chore. She wants everything ready-made; everyone to take care of her. Her mother calls for her, her father calls for her, but she only wants to whittle the day away. Although love exists within her nature, it does not develop because she continually accepts help and favors from her mother, her father and her siblings. However, from the moment she becomes a mother, she resembles a little engine which works as much as it is forced to, because love constantly works within her. Before, she would have hated touching anything dirty and immediately would have found aromatic soap to wash with. But after, when the child becomes dirty and she needs to wash him, she takes him and says ... my sweetheart! She is not repulsed by it anymore. In the beginning, if you wake her, she yells, because she doesn't want to be disturbed. But after, when the child cries, she stays up all night without difficulty. She cares for the baby and rejoices. Why? Because she is no longer a child. She has become a mother and with it has come sacrifice and love.

Indeed, a mother comes to attain a greater love and sacrifice than the father, because the father is not given many chances to sacrifice himself. She distresses and gives more of herself for the children, but at the same time receives more from the children. Perpetually she gives, and thus she always takes. The father however, does not suffer much with the children, and therefore neither does he receive; his love is not as great as the mother's.

How many mothers come crying to me begging, "Pray for my child Father." What agony! Very few men say, "Pray for my child who has gone astray." Why, even today a mother, with what eagerness the poor thing forced her children—all eight of them—and put them all in line to take a blessing. For a father to do that would have been difficult. Russia survived because of mothers. A father's embrace, when without the Grace of God, is dry. While the mother's embrace, even when it is without God, has milk. The child loves its father and respects him, but due to the tender-hearted love and affection of a mother, the love for his father grows even stronger!

ON THE PASSION OF CHRIST

By St. Ephraim the Syrian.

The sons of perdition and the children of darkness went out in the darkness to arrest the Sun, Who had the power to consume them in an instant. But the Master, knowing their effrontery and the force of their anger, with gentleness, by His own authority, gave Himself up into the hands of the ungodly. And lawless men, having bound the most pure Master, mocked the One Who had bound the strong one with unbreakable bonds, and set us free from the bonds of sins.

They plaited a crown of their own thorns, the fruit borne by the vine of the Jews. In mockery they called Him “King.” The lawless spat in the face of the Most Pure, at Whose glance all the Powers of Heaven and the ranks of Angels quake with fear.

See, once again grief and tears grip hold of my heart, as I contemplate the Master enduring outrage and insults, scourgings, spitting from slaves, and blows... Let us fear, my brethren and not simply listen. The Saviour endured all these things for us...

You that are longed for and loved by Christ, draw near, with compunction and longing for the Saviour. Come, let us learn what took place today in Sion, David’s city.

The longed-for and chosen offspring of Abraham, what did they do today? They gave up to death the most pure Master on this day. Christ our Savior was unjustly hanged on the tree of the Cross through lawless hands.

Come, let us all wash our bodies with tears and groans, because our Lord, the King of glory, for us ungodly people was given up to death... Let us always be fearful, keeping before our eyes the Saviour’s sufferings. Let us always keep in mind His sufferings, because it was for us He suffered, the dispassionate Master; for us, He was crucified—the only sinless One.

What return can we make for all this, brethren? Let us be attentive to ourselves and not despise His sufferings. Draw near all of you, children of the Church, bought with the precious and holy blood of the most pure Master. Come, let us meditate on His sufferings with tears, thinking on fear, meditating with trembling, saying to ourselves: “Christ our Savior—for us, the impious—was given over to death.”

Learn well, brother, what it is you hear: God Who is without sin, Son of the Most High, for you was given up. Open your heart, learn in details His sufferings and say to yourself, God, Who is without sin: today was given up, today was mocked, today was abused, today was struck, today was

scourged, today wore a crown of thorns, today was crucified, He, the heavenly Lamb.

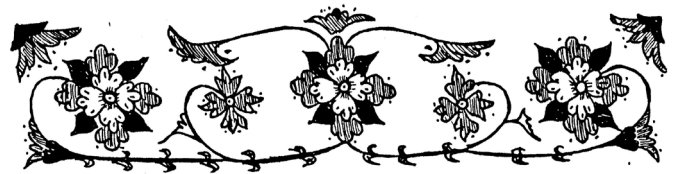
Your heart will tremble, your soul will shudder. Shed tears everyday by this meditation on the Master’s sufferings. Tears become sweet, (for) the soul is enlightened that always meditates on Christ’s sufferings.

Always meditating thus, shedding tears every day, giving thanks to the Master for the sufferings that He suffered for you, so that in the day of His Coming your tears may become your boast and exaltation before the judgment seat. Endure as you meditate on the loving Master’s sufferings—endure temptations, give thanks from your soul. Blessed is the one who has before his eyes the heavenly Master and His sufferings, and has crucified himself from all the passions and

earthly deeds, who has become an imitator of his own Master. This is the understanding, this is the attitude of servants who love God, when they become ever imitators of their Master by good works.

Shameless man, do you watch the most pure Master hanging on the Cross, while you pass the time that you have to live on earth in pleasure and laughter? Do not you know, miserable wretch, that the crucified Lord will demand an account of all your disdainful deeds, for which, when you hear of them, you show no concern; and as you take your pleasure, you laugh and enjoy yourself with indifference? The day will come, that fearful day, for you to

weep unceasingly and cry out in the fire from your pains, and there will be no one at all to answer and have mercy on your soul.



Faith is the key of God’s treasury. She dwells in simple, kind, loving hearts. *All things are possible to him that believeth.* Faith is a spiritual mouth, the more freely it opens the greater the stream by which the Divine springs enter into it; let this mouth freely open, as your bodily one does; do not let your lips be compressed by doubt and unbelief: if you compress them by doubt and unbelief, the treasury of God’s blessings will be closed to you. The more openly, the more heartily you believe in God’s omnipotence, the more bountifully will God’s heart be opened to you. *What things so ever ye desire, when ye pray believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them.*

St. John of Kronstadt

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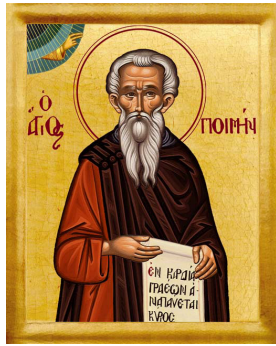
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THE LETTER OF THE LAW CAN BE QUITE DEADLY

By Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain.

Once asked someone: “What type of warrior do you consider yourself to be? Christ’s warrior or temptation’s warrior? Are you aware that the evil of temptation also has its own warriors?”

A Christian must not be fanatic; he must have love for and be sensitive towards all people. Those who inconsiderately toss out comments, even if they are true, can cause harm.

I met a theologian who was extremely pious, but had the habit of speaking to the (secular) people around him in a very blunt manner; his method penetrated the listener so deeply that it shook them severely. He told me once: “During a gathering, I said such and such a thing to a lady.” But the way that he said it, he crushed her. “Look,” I said to him, “you may be tossing golden crowns studded with diamonds to other people, but the way that you throw them can smash heads, not only the sensitive ones, but the sound ones as well.”

Let’s not stone our fellow-man in a so-called “Christian manner.” The person who—in the presence of others—checks someone for having sinned (or speaks in an impassioned manner about a certain person) is not moved by the Spirit of God; he is moved by another spirit.

The way of the Church is love; it differs from the way of the legalists. The Church sees everything with tolerance and seeks to help each person, whatever he may have done, however sinful he may be.

I have observed a peculiar kind of logic in certain pious people. Their piety is a good thing, as is their predisposition for good; however, a certain spiritual discernment and amplitude is required so that their piety is not accompanied by narrow mindedness or strong-headedness. Someone who is truly in a spiritual state must possess and exemplify spiritual discernment; otherwise he will forever remain attached to the “letter of the Law,” and the letter of the Law can be quite deadly.

A truly humble person never behaves like a teacher; he listens, and, whenever his opinion is requested, he responds humbly. In other words, he responds like a student. He who believes that he is capable of correcting others is filled with egotism.

A person that begins to do something with a good intention and eventually reaches an extreme point lacks true discernment. His actions exemplify a latent type of egotism that is hidden beneath this behavior; he is unaware of it, because he does not know himself that well, which is why he goes to extremes.

Quite often, people begin with good intentions, but look where they may find themselves! This was the case with the “icon-worshippers” and the “icon-combatters” in the past: both cases were extremes! The former had reached the point of scraping icons of Christ and placing the scrapings into the Holy Chalice in order to “improve” Holy Communion; the latter, on the other hand, burnt and totally discarded all icons. That is why the Church was obliged to place icons in higher places, out of reach, and, when the dispute was over, lowered them so that we can venerate them and thus confer the appropriate honor to the persons portrayed therein.

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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THE SACK OF CONSTANTINOPLE BY THE LATIN

By Nicholas A. Cooke (St. Michael the Archangel Orthodox Church—printed with permission).

The classical Gothic Cathedral of Notre Dame in Amiens, the largest in France, was built to contain the head of St. John the Baptist, stolen during the commission of one of the greatest crimes in history: The sack of Constantinople by the Latin West during the Fourth Crusade. It is but one of the countless examples of treasures that were looted from that Orthodox city after its capture by the “Christian” West. This is an account of that event, telling what has to be told, an event regarding which the Orthodox Church has been silent far too long.

The Crusades were supposedly fought with several aims in mind: To free the Holy Land, to stop the spread of Islam, and to unify the Eastern and Western Churches. They failed in all of these; the holy places remained under Mohammedan control, Islam extended its influence, and a deeper wedge was driven between the two churches. If anything, the Crusades hastened the demise of the Byzantine Empire and its ultimate fall into Moslem hands. Overall, the Crusades had a devastating effect on the Orthodox Church.

Pope Innocent III called the Fourth Crusade in 1196. Essentially it was a French enterprise, supported by Swabians, and later by the Venetians. Because Mohammedan power had shifted from Palestine to Cairo, the objective was to take Egypt. This meant launching a maritime campaign, requiring ships and related supplies which the French did not have. They turned to Venice, ruled by the aged, blind Enrico Dandolo, who

hated the capital city of Constantinople and envied its wealth and success in commerce. Constantinople and Venice were old rivals.

Dandolo persuaded the Crusaders to move on to Constantinople instead of Egypt by offering to advance the 85,000 silver marks needed for ships. All conquests and lootings were to be divided evenly. The French agreed. Here the Crusade turned away from the control of the pope and into the hands of schemers, politicians, and adventurers.

Greeks themselves were not entirely blameless in the plot against the city. The emperor Isaac had been deposed by his brother, Alexius III. Isaac's son, Alexius (the Younger), sat down with Dandolo and the Crusaders and made them an offer. He would pay 200,000 silver marks, put up an army to fight against Islam, assign 500 knights for life to guard the Holy Land, and he offered the submission of the Eastern Church in exchange for help in regaining the throne. Later, when it came time to pay, Alexius could not raise the money. The Crusaders were infuriated and used this as another excuse to attack the city.

In any event, the original intent of the Crusade was forgotten, and the armies stood before Constantinople. Inside the walls most of the inhabitants were Orthodox Christians. Outside the walls the men wore crosses on their mantles and called themselves Christians. It was Holy Week of the year 1204.

Their own historian wrote that the Crusaders never had imagined that there could be a city like this anywhere in the world. These men, who came from mud huts with thatched roofs, gaped in astonishment. Here it was; the imperial city, called “Tsargrad” by the Russians, greatest in the world, hub of culture and commerce, center of the civilized world. Here was more wealth than in all of Eu-

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rope put together. This was the inheritor of the Roman Empire. Here was a city of churches, monasteries, palaces, towers, forums, arenas, bazaars, baths, libraries and monuments. Here stood the Church of Agia Sophia (Ἁγία Σοφία—Holy Wisdom), crowning glory of the city, marvel of the world, built by Justinian six centuries earlier. The Theotokos being the City's patron and protectress, had over a hundred churches dedicated in her name. Her omophorion, which twice had saved the city (once from the Avars and once from the Russ'), was kept in the Blacharnae Church, as was her wonder-working icon. The Theotokos' belt (zone) was preserved in the Chalkrateia Church in the copperware district.

In the center of the city stood the Church of the Holy Apostles, built as a shrine for St. Luke, wherein the relics of Sts. Timothy and Andrew were preserved as well as the head of St. John the Forerunner, in whose name there were some 35 other churches throughout the City. St. John Chrysostom was brought to this church from far-off Armenia for burial eight centuries earlier.

Elsewhere were the relics of St. Stephen and St. James, as was the wood of the True Cross found by St. Helena. The Pantacrator Monastery was the guardian of the Icon of the Theotokos of Nicopeia, which preceded the emperor into battle. At Blacharnae stood two gigantic pillars, on the tops of which sainted stylites in past centuries had spent the remaining years of their lives in prayer and meditation. Throughout the city were numerous other churches and monasteries which guarded the many relics of Apostles, martyrs and Church fathers. Such was the city before which the western armies stood in awe and disbelief.

After receiving absolution, the Crusaders attacked. Constantinople fell after three days of the final, furious attack by land and by sea. Once inside the walls, the Crusaders began an

orgy of carnage, brutality and vandalism not seen in Europe since the barbarians invaded seven centuries earlier. No one was spared; not bishop, priest, nun, man, woman or child. Very few women escaped being violated, whether at home, in the street, or in the convent. Fires were started throughout the city. The butchery ended only when the Crusaders were so tired that they no longer could lift their swords.

Then began looting and profanation on a scale unparalleled in history. A mob rushed into Agia Sophia. With the Image of the Pantacrator looking down upon them from the great dome, they broke up the altar for its gold content, smashed the icons, threw the Holy Gifts to the floor, seized the church vessels for their Jewels, and tore mosaics and tapestries from the walls. Horses and mules were brought into the church the better to carry off the sacred vessels, gold, silver, and whatever else they could gather. Drunken soldiers drank from chalices and ate from patens while riding asses draped with priestly vestments. A mocking prostitute was placed on the Patriarch's chair to dance and sing obscene songs.

This pattern of pilferage and desecration was repeated in churches, monasteries and palaces throughout the city. The tombs of the emperors were rifled, and all of the classical statues and monuments which had survived from ancient Greece and imperial Rome were now destroyed. One writer wrote that never in history had so much beauty, so much superb craftsmanship been so wantonly destroyed in so short a space of time. What was not carried off was burned, smashed, melted down for its precious metal content, or stripped for its jewels.

After the killing, after the city had been subdued, there began a slow and steady removal of treasures out of the Orthodox temples and into the cathedrals, churches, monasteries, convents, cities and towns of Latin Europe. Some of these items

had been venerated, cherished, and protected for centuries, others for a millennium. Now they were being carted away from over a hundred and fifty churches; altars, altar screens, tabernacles, antimins, icons, icon frames, processional, pectoral and altar crosses, gold and silver chains, panagias, mitres, croziers, chalices, patens, star covers and spears, Gospels, Epistle books, ladles, church plates, censers, votive lights, relics, candelabra, epitaphia, fans, reliquaries, vestments, banners, manuscripts, miniatures, ivories, carvings, mosaics, thrones, tapestries, furniture and architectural items. Cartloads of gold and silver from Agia Sophia found their way into the Vatican treasury. Constantinople had become the gold mine which supplied Latin "Christendom."

The wealth was so great that the looting continued for sixty years. A century earlier, after the First Crusade, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Edessa were similarly stripped for a period of forty years. Now it was happening to the imperial city. A scandalous traffic in relics was started. The head of St. John the Baptist was carried off to Amiens. Amalfi, Italy took the head of St. Andrew the First-Called from the Church of the Holy Apostles, along with a set of heavy bronze doors. The bishop of Soissons shipped home the head of St. Stephen and a relic of St. John. The remains of St. Clement, pillaged from the Church of St. Theodosia, were taken to Cluny. St. Albans received the relics of St. Marina. Halbstadt claimed the relics of St. James. The True Cross was divided up among the barons, with a portion sent to the pope, and another fragment taken to Paris. A priceless gold and enamel reliquary encrusted with jewels, containing a fragment of the Wood wound up in a nunnery in Steuben. King Louis IX of France paid 10,000 silver marks for the "true" Crown of Thorns, for which he built St. Chapells in Paris.

Gone was the omophorion of the Theotokos, as was her zoni and the wonder-working icon. Gone or destroyed were the relics of St. Luke and St. Timothy; no trace remained of the relics of St. John Chrysostom. An altar cloth with the relic of St. Paul was missing. Nothing is known of the stone seat of St. Mark.

The Venetians were the most discriminating—they knew exactly what to take. From the Monastery of the Pantocrator, they appropriated a group of exquisite gem-crusted enamel cameos, (a vast collection of Panagias), to enhance the Palo D'Oro, an elaborate Byzantine bejeweled gold screen which was used in the Cathedral in Venice to cover the relics of St. Mark. (We all recall that St. Mark was stolen from Alexandria in the ninth century.) They also carried off the Icon of the Theotokos of Nikopeia, as well as a relic of St. Stephen (the feet already were in Venice). The golden tabernacle from the Church of the Holy Apostles, a replica of the church itself, was added to their booty.

Venice's prized possessions are the four magnificent glided bronze horses, cast in Constantine's time, which once stood in the Hippodrome; today, except when removed for cleaning, they stand atop the gallery of St. Mark's basilica. The porphyry

statue of four tetrarchs, taken from a palace, stands in a corner of St. Mark's treasury.

Venetians valued craftsmen, and they took away the best goldsmiths, silversmiths, jewel workers, iconographers, wood-carvers, stone and glass workers. Much of the Venetian glass technique so famous today originated in Constantinople. St. Mark's contains the finest collection of Byzantine craftsmanship in the world. It includes 32 Byzantine chalices, plus assorted relics, reliquaries, altar pieces, Gospels, Jewels, vestments, manuscripts and church plates. The collection includes the Veroli casket, the finest Byzantine carved ivory in the world, and the Psalter of Emperor Basil.

Dandolo sent home shiploads of mosaics, panels, stones, pillars, precious marbles, columns of rare stones and the many building components which have gone into creating the texture of the city which today is Venice.

Pope Innocent was very distressed when he heard about the outrages in Constantinople. He denounced the perpetrators harshly, and excommunicated most of them. The pope was unaware that, before the attack, his legate had absolved the Crusaders from their original vows. Later, when confronted with the possibility that he might have a unified church on his hands, Innocent acquiesced and went along with the reality that what was done was done. He did nothing to stop the flow of desecrated wealth into Latin cathedrals and churches.

Baldwin of Flanders was put on the throne and a Latin kingdom was established in the East. A Venetian replaced the Patriarch. Orthodox bishops were deposed and replaced by Roman prelates. Pressure was put on priests to submit to the papacy, but they resisted firmly. There was no union.

Dandolo demanded for Venice "one half and one quarter of the Roman Empire" as its share of conquered lands. Along with other territories, Venice took over all of the Greek islands, which it was to have for four centuries. On Crete all of the churches were seized, the bishops were thrown out, and the priests forced to submit to Latin prelates. The Greek language was forbidden in the churches. A precious relic, the head of St. Titus, was taken away to Venice, (A century earlier, Venetians carried off the head of St. Isidore from the island of Chios, and the relics of St. Donatus from the island of Cephalonia, as well as a marble slab on which Christ had stood.) The looting continued on the islands as on the mainland. The empire was being stripped bare.

Enrico Dandolo performed his final and lasting profanation of Agia Sophia by being buried there. Recently, when asked whether he knew the location of Dandolo's tombstone, a prominent Greek scholar replied, "Yes, I go there to spit on it".

One might ask, "Why bring up something which happened so long ago? It is past history." The answer is simple. These church items were not taken from a dead, vanquished emperor; they were taken from a living, active, performing Orthodox Christian Church. They were stolen from the Patriarchate of Constantinople, in whose care they were placed. The Patri-

archate of Constantinople still exists. It is a viable, active body which has been functioning without interruption since it was founded by the Second Ecumenical Council in 381 AD. This is not the first time such depredations had taken place. Of the five sees extant after the Second Council, three of them: Antioch, Jerusalem and Constantinople all had been violated by the one which was accorded primacy, but which demanded supremacy.

It is easier to report on these deplorable events than it is to suggest what to do about it. Picketing Latin institutions with placards and chanting slogans would be foolhardy and non-productive. After all, the problem is not entirely that of the Orthodox Church. Whoever possesses these articles is a receiver of stolen goods. Moreover, they are a receiver of stolen goods obtained by murder, rape, and desecration—not an enviable position in which to be, especially if such a holder happens to be a “Christian” church. Unfortunately, there is little to indicate that “the West,” to use a general expression, even realizes the enormity that took place in Constantinople so long ago.

The Orthodox Church long has been accustomed to suffering in silence. Perhaps it is time we learned a lesson from other religions or nations. When a calamity befalls us, we must ensure that the world is never allowed to forget. A great injustice persists, even after almost eight centuries; sacred Orthodox items are being held by a “Christian” church in the West, all of the items acquired under most distressing circumstances. This is what we must never let the world forget, by one means or another. Perhaps one day, by the grace of God, this great wrong will be made right.

In the meantime, scientists tell us that Venice slowly is sinking into the Adriatic. Perhaps it is trying to hide from the enormity its sins.



It will be enough if you take care to instruct your children in the fear of God [and] instill them with an Orthodox understanding; and by teaching them to be faithful, you protect them from any manner of thinking that is foreign to the teachings of the Orthodox Church. The good that you sow in the hearts of your children—while they are young—will blossom forth in their hearts, when they come to full maturity, after enduring the bitter trials of school and contemporary life (which often break off the branches of a good Christian upbringing).

St. Ambrose of Optina (+1891)

ON HELPING THE DEPARTED

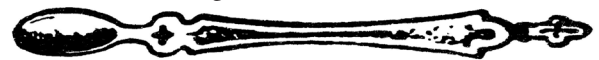
By Elder Ephraim, from “*Counsels from the Holy Mountain.*”

Do you know how much help the departed seek! Since there is no repentance after death, and as humans they also departed with stains and blemishes, and since they see that the help of the living greatly assists them to be perfected and find rest, they yearn, seek, and long for someone to commemorate them. They also long for one of their descendants to become a priest or a virtuous Christian who will care for them.

Let me tell you about a vision of a certain bishop which he himself told me while we were serving together years ago. He told me there was a priest who had a drinking problem and often got drunk; this was going on for many years. Other than this, though, the priest was virtuous and pious. One day he drank wine as usual and got drunk, and then before he was fully sober, he went and served Liturgy. So God allowed an accident to happen; he spilled the holy Body and Blood of the Lord! The poor fellow froze with fear, while also thinking about the heavy penance his bishop would give him!

Finally, after he confessed, his bishop told him, “Go, I will notify you when to return, and then I’ll give you the penance.” So as the bishop was all alone reflecting and pondering, and as he picked up a pen to write his decision to depose him, he saw an endless multitude of people of every age, kind and class unwind before him like a movie. The bishop was stunned by this vision but was also overcome with fear. Then all those people together said to him, “Your Eminence, do not punish the priest; do not depose him.” Then, little by little, they disappeared.

Afterwards, the bishop called the priest to come. The poor priest was terrified, thinking about being deposed. The bishop said to him, “Tell me something, do you commemorate many names when you serve Liturgy?” The priest answered, “In the proskomidi, Your Eminence, I commemorate names for a long time—from kings and emperors down to the last pauper.” The bishop then said to him, “Go, then, and whenever you serve Liturgy, commemorate as many people as you can, and take care not to get drunk anymore. You are pardoned.” Thereafter, the priest—with the help of God—was delivered from drinking.



Behold, you have learned that you are clay, poor, and naked. Now, seek from Him Who is able to regenerate nature to make you rich. And whether He gives you a lot or a little, acknowledge your Benefactor. And do not boast of foreign things as your own. You will receive grace with pain and tears. And then with tears, thanksgiving, and fear of God, you will keep it. With fervency and zeal it is attracted; with coldness and negligence it is lost.”

Elder Joseph the Hesychast

AS YOU SOW, SO SHALL YOU REAP

By Philip Jones, April 29, 2009.

Editor's Note: While we are not familiar with the writings of this author (or his personal religious beliefs), this article provides a timely and a soberly realistic description of our society at large. Its inclusion in this issue, as we approach the time of summer vacation for all of our children, is considered both prudent and necessary.

† † †

Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same. (Job 4:8)

In the UK recently, a headline story told of a 13-year-old boy named "Alfie" who fathered a child with "Chantelle," a 15-year old girl of a reportedly promiscuous nature. It is indeed a sad indictment on British Society that there was no great public outcry, no outraged calls that "something must be done," no questions raised in Parliament. In fact, the two juveniles were treated in some quarters like mini-celebrities, and let us be clear about this, Alfie and Chantelle are in no way isolated cases in today's Britain.

Incredibly, young Chantelle was unable to identify with any certainty the actual father of the child, although she says she "thinks" it's Alfie. The sadly tragic truth is that throughout the UK now, there are many "Chantelles," having sex and getting pregnant whilst under the age of legal consent; and what is the government doing about it? Apparently very little. In fact, in the opinion of this writer, the UK's "sex-education" program appears to be designed to actively encourage teenage sexual promiscuity, not curb it. Britain's rate of teenage pregnancy is now the highest in Western Europe. Each one of these cases is a personal tragedy, and not just for the babies who are conceived, but for their undeveloped and immature "parents" also.

The high numbers of underage teenage boys and girls who are engaging in sexual activity today, and not only in the UK, but throughout the "West" is indicative of a degenerate civilization whose leaders in politics, banking, industry, science, education and any other field which influences human affairs, appear to be in thrall to Lucifer himself. There can be no other explanation as to why this pitiful downward trend in morality and basic human decency has been allowed to persist for so long.

In the New Testament Second Book Of Timothy, we read: *This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, raitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; from such turn away. (2 Tim 3:1-5).*

Does not the above Bible verse describe much of our world today?

The likes of Alfie and Chantelle are only doing what they are being encouraged to do at school, during "sex-education" classes, in movies, on television, and in pop songs. I am simply unable to think of any of today's so called celebrity "role models" advocating chastity, abstinence, marriage and family as worthwhile life choices. The message is being broadcast loud and clear throughout the entertainment media and in the state controlled "education" system; "sex is cool, sex is trendy, be sexy, if you're not, you are a loser."

Very young girls who conceive and give birth to babies (along with the young fathers) are condemned to a miserable and unfulfilled semi-life, whereby their childhood vanishes and in consequence their adulthood becomes severely arrested, all due to this catastrophic disruption of their normal development into maturity.

The rate of family breakdown is now reaching epidemic levels, and plays a crucial part in this destructive and maladaptive pattern. Premature sexual activity, creates a vicious cycle of family fracture and childhood promiscuity. Increasing numbers of young people are being trapped into this cycle of abandonment, emotional chaos and harm. But even this is only part of a wider and deeper breakdown of the fundamental moral understanding that once kept our society together.

It is not very popular and not at all trendy these days to advocate Christian Morality, especially not in the UK [Ed., or the rest of the "West"]. But only the most willfully ignorant and virulent humanist, feminist or "New Ager" would deny the obvious fact, that as belief in the Christian faith has declined, immorality, and all lack of self restraint has escalated accordingly.

We have, over the past forty or so years, seen a profound degradation in that very necessary element of self-restraint mentioned above, and in the observance of those Christian boundaries of social behavior, which gave our civilization it's moral and spiritual "anchor." During this same period, we have witnessed an increase in every imaginable form of vice and licentious conduct. This has been eagerly advocated and promoted from the top, by treacherous opportunist politicians, narcissistic liberals, humanists, new agers and "closet" communists, whilst being funded at the bottom by a system of welfare state benefits. The modern socialist welfare state has done much to aid in the destruction of morality in our societies. Its promise of a "cradle to grave" social security "net" creates a form of pathetic dependency on the system, which slowly erodes the ability of people to think independently. Furthermore, this parasitic organism insidiously encourages the abdication of individual responsibility, even in the upbringing of our children, and eventually causes degradation in the ability of the individual to make even the most rudimentary decisions for himself and his family.

It is the Marxist Socialist equivalent of “selling one’s soul” to the devil. Dependence = Control.

With the dependency achieved, the secular humanists then foisted the idea on society that the concepts of stigma and shame were discriminatory and “exclusive.” Illegitimacy was accordingly abolished, single mothers given welfare benefits and any mention that marriage and the traditional family unit were in any way beneficial to children was labeled as being ‘judgmental’ and irrelevant. With all constraints on behavior thus vilified as “moralizing,” and the teachings of Christianity considered “persona non grata” in the public forum, sex was transformed from its traditional role as the means by which humanity reproduced itself, through the coupling of man and wife, to being treated by secular society as a recreation, a pleasurable pastime and an end in itself.

In a modern political context, the most recent historical precedent for the kind of immoral licentious behavior we are now seeing on an almost pandemic scale is to be found in the post WWI Hungarian regime of Bela Kun. In his book, “The Death Of The West,” Senator Patrick Buchanan writes:

“The first dissenting Marxist disciple was the Hungarian Georg Lukacs, an agent of the Comintern, whose ‘History and Class Consciousness’ had brought him recognition as a Marxist theorist to rival Marx himself. ‘I saw the revolutionary destruction of society as the one and only solution.’ As Deputy commissar for culture in Bela Kun’s regime, Lukacs put his self described demonic ideas into action in what came to be known as cultural terrorism. As part of this terrorism, he instituted a radical sex education program in Hungarian schools. Children were instructed in free love, sexual intercourse, the archaic nature of middle class family codes, the outdatedness of monogamy and the irrelevance of religion, which deprives man of all pleasures. Women too were called to rebel against the sexual mores of the time. Lukacs’ purpose in promoting licentiousness among women and children was to destroy the family, the core institution of Christianity and western culture.”

Children thrive and prosper when given clear and consistent borders, limits and a moral code for life. Christianity taught them that sex was an activity sanctified by God for married couples who were committing their lives to each other. Instead, they were now taught that sex should be seen as a form of recreation pursuit, or in some cases, a “New Age” means of achieving spiritual realization. Either way, the fruit has proved poisonous, and children have been placed in harm’s way because of it.

For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Lk 6.

It is sadly indicative of the perverse nature of our modern lifestyles that the only aspect of the sexual “jamboree” we are now witnessing in society, which the humanists, feminists and “new agers” consider harmful is teenage pregnancy. Children

are told in school that sexually transmitted diseases can be prevented by the use of “safe sex” using condoms, or if the worse comes to the worse, belatedly treated, and all of this is accompanied by a complete absence of acknowledgement with regard to the emotional harm caused to children, due to their involvement in premature sexual activity.

This paltry attitude was accompanied by a deliberate and concerted attempt to destroy the very idea of respectability. The notion of “respectability” here in the West is unarguably based on Christian moral principals, and it was these principals that all the forces of Lucifer were mustered against. Whether we call them the Illuminati, Communists, Secular Humanists, or The New Age Movement, all have been dedicated to destroying and replacing the fundamental teachings of Christianity with another completely adversary code of immoral behavior.

In order to make wretched and dehumanize our children, governments, law enforcement officials and the social services have turned a very “blind eye” to breaches of the legal age of consent, while sex educationists have targeted teenagers and minors with a direct attack on society’s traditional mores, by promoting the “Illuminist New Age Libertarian Agenda” to society’s innocents, whilst at the same time doing everything possible, including the use of legislation, to keep parents out of the “loop” and therefore basically ignorant as to the pernicious concepts and ideas their children were being indoctrinated with.

School sex education manuals graphically depict the full range of sexual information, sexual orientation “choices,” along with many of the available perversions. These manuals are nothing more than government directed ideological propaganda booklets, encouraging extreme sexual license in our children, and much of it is so perverse and exploitative, it verges on the predatory. What we are dealing with here has nothing to do with education and everything to do with indoctrination, and in this case indoctrination into those ideas which underlie the global family planning movement and the Illuminati New World Order Depopulation Agenda. The International Planned Parenthood Federation promotes sexual pleasure as a “valid sexual and reproductive health need for all young people.” For their purposes, the term “young people” is defined as being between the ages of ten to twenty four years of age. That’s right, they include prepubescent minors within their target group for systematic demoralization and corruption.

The first director of the World Health Organization, Dr. Brock Chisholm, believed the barrier to his idea of what a civilized life should be, was the Biblical standard of right and wrong. Chisholm wanted children to be “freed” from such prejudices through the introduction of sex education from the age of nine. He strongly promoted the idea that children should be raised in as “intellectually free” an environment as

possible, independent of the prejudices and biases—political, moral and religious—of their parents (but not the secular state’s). This man’s ideas are entirely Luciferian and compliment those of Marxist Lukacs very nicely. Furthermore they mirror the story of Eve’s temptation in the Garden of Eden as Lucifer in the guise of a serpent explains that eating of the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would open her eyes, and at that moment all would be revealed:

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die; for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. (Gen 3:4-6).

Much of the sex education being pushed on our children today, some no older than nine years of age or even less, originates from destructive and nihilistic anti-Christian ideas. The whole “sex education” facade has nothing to do with reducing teenage pregnancy, and everything to do with the depraving of innocents and the deconstruction of family life in particular and society in general, by the advocating of a debauched and perverse sexual free-for-all: A “New Age” Sodom and Gomorrah.

The “educators” began by marginalizing the traditional role of parents with regard to sex education and then delivered the “Coup d’ Grace” by excluding that influence altogether. So nowadays, very immature children are provided not just with contraceptives and state sponsored sexual programming, but also with abortion counseling without their parents’ knowledge. It was recently reported that family doctors in the UK will even be paid bonuses, bribes in effect, to persuade teenagers to have long-lasting contraceptive implants and jabs, again without any consultation with their parents.

Our political and professional elites wish us to believe that the escalating rates of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases are the result of ignorance among young people of the facts of life. But even a casual look at the statistics shows that cannot be the case because there has never been a time when so much sex education has been offered. In fact, it seems that the more sex education and contraception is provided to children and teenagers, the more young girls fall pregnant.

Great Britain, the land of my birth where I spent the majority of my life, has lost completely its historical, traditional and spiritual moral compass. [Ed., this is easily surmised for the rest of the West.] The planned and designed denigration and deconstruction of the Christian faith in the hearts and minds of British people, has resulted in a complete breakdown in the basic codes of decorum. This has led to scenes such as were described in a British Sunday newspaper, of children in Chantelle’s neighborhood having sex openly in the street like rutting animals. I myself witnessed a similar scene back in 2004 whilst living in a small village in the South Wales

Valleys, when one Saturday afternoon at around 2pm, two young teenagers could be seen from our living room window fornicating like animals in full public view. By the time the Police arrived, an hour later, they had of course left the scene and moved on to “pastures” new.

Unless we are prepared to allow our civilization to implode completely, teenage promiscuity must be discouraged through the promotion of abstinence. Young women must again be taught to value themselves, and refrain from allowing their bodies to be used like public toilet basins.

Some North American schemes, have shown that when such abstinence is taught, it restores sexual restraint by instilling in young people a sense of self respect and self-worth. But in the UK, some years ago, sex education advisers in East Sussex told head teachers who booked a youth theater group to deliver a message of sexual abstinence in their schools, not to repeat the invitation because it was considered ‘unsuitable’ for pupils...

We again see the dictatorial “Luciferian” nature of the closet communists and their utter contempt for ‘informed choice’. British society has abandoned its children by treating them prematurely as adults because it considers looking after and protecting them an outmoded concept, and far too akin to traditional Christian values to be acceptable in the “new” society.

So let us consider the “Alfies and Chantelles” and their like, who have been taught by society that life is about sex for the sake of sex, and that sex is an end in itself, and who as a result, have descended into a downward spiral of debauchery and degradation. Why is it that our “elite” and their lackey’s are so determined that the most innocent and vulnerable members of society be so filled with the “knowledge of good and evil,” to be so defiled and corrupted at such an early stage in their lives?

Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. Rev 12:12

I believe that all the evil, vice, perversion and turmoil we are now witnessing is the work of Satan/Lucifer, who knowing well his time is short, is intent on causing, with the devotion and assistance of his disciples in the Illuminati and New Age movement, the most terrible carnage and corruption in our sad and tragic world, and can anyone reading this article think of a greater evil, than the corruption of young children.



Learn to know the spirit of the age, [and] study it; so [that]—whenever possible—you will be able to avoid its influence.

St. Ignatii Brianchaninov

THE FORMATION OF THE SOUL

By Blessed Fr. Seraphim (Rose) of Platina (edited for length).



The soul that comes to Orthodoxy today often finds itself in a disadvantaged or even crippled state. Often one hears from converts after some years of seemingly unfruitful struggles that “I didn’t know what I was getting into when I became Orthodox.” Some sense this when they are first exposed to the Orthodox Faith, and this can cause them to postpone their encounter with Orthodoxy or even run away from it entirely. A similar

thing often happens to those baptized in childhood when they reach mature years and must choose whether or not to commit themselves to their childhood faith.

From one point of view, this is a result of the deep commitment required of those who are serious about the Orthodox Faith—a commitment that is quite different in kind from that of those who merely join a new denomination or sect. There are many denominations with their various interpretations of Christian life, but only One Church of Christ which lives the true life in Christ and the unchanged teaching and practice of the Apostles and Fathers of the Church.

But from a more practical point of view, the problem lies in the poverty of our modern soul, which has not been prepared or trained to receive the depths of true Christian experience. There is a cultural as well as a psychological aspect to this poverty of ours: The education of youth today, especially in America, is notoriously deficient in developing responsiveness to the best expressions of human art, literature, and music, as a result of which young people are formed haphazardly under the influence of television, rock music, and other manifestations of today’s culture (or rather, anti-culture); and, both as a cause and as a result of this—but most of all because of the absence on the part of parents and teachers of any conscious idea of what Christian Life is and how a young person should be brought up in it—the soul of a person who has survived the years of youth is often an emotional wasteland, and at best reveals deficiencies in the basic attitudes towards life that were once considered normal and indispensable:

Few are those today who can clearly express their emotions and ideas and face them in a mature way; many do not even know what is going on inside themselves. Life is artificially divided into work (and very few can put the best part of themselves, their heart, into it because it is “just for money”); play (in which many see the real meaning of their life), religion

(usually no more than an hour or two a week), and the like, without an underlying unity that gives meaning to the whole of one’s life. Many, finding daily life unsatisfying, try to live in a fantasy world of their own creation (into which they also try to fit religion). And underlying the whole of modern culture is the common denominator of the worship of oneself and one’s own comfort, which is deadly to any idea of spiritual life.

Such is something of the background, the “cultural baggage,” which a person brings with him today when he becomes Orthodox. Many, of course, survive as Orthodox despite their background; some come to some spiritual disaster because of it; but a good number remain crippled or at least spiritually undeveloped because they are simply unprepared for and unaware of the real demands of spiritual life.

As a beginning to the facing of this question (and hopefully, helping some of those troubled by it), let us look here briefly at the Orthodox teaching on human nature as set forth by a profound Orthodox writer of the 19th century, a true Holy Father of these latter times, Bishop Theophan the Recluse (+1892). In his hook, “What the Spiritual Life Is and How to Attune Oneself to It,” he writes: “Human life is complex and many-sided. In it there is a side of the body, another of the soul, and another of the spirit. Each of these has its own faculties and needs, its own methods and their exercise and satisfaction. Only when all our faculties are in movement and all our needs are satisfied does a man live. But when only one little part of these faculties is in motion and only one little part of our needs is satisfied, such a life is no life... A man does not live in a human way unless everything, in him is in motion... One must live as God created us, and when one does not live thus one can boldly say that he is not living at all.”

The distinction made here between “soul” and “spirit” does not mean that these are separate entities within human nature; rather, the “spirit” is the higher part, the “soul” the lower part, of the single invisible part of man (which as a whole is usually called the “soul”). To the “soul” in this sense belong those ideas and feelings which are not occupied directly with spiritual life—most of human art, knowledge, and culture; while to the “spirit” belong man’s strivings towards God through prayer, sacred art, and obedience to God’s law.

From these words of Bishop Theophan one can already spot a common fault of today’s seekers after spiritual life: Not all sides of their nature are in movement; they are trying to satisfy religious needs (the needs of the spirit) without having come to terms with some of their other (more specifically, psychological and emotional) needs, or worse: they use religion illegitimately to satisfy these psychological needs. In such people religion is an artificial thing that has not yet touched the deepest part of them, and often some upsetting event in their life, or just the natural attraction of the world, is enough to destroy their plastic universe and turn them away from religion. Sometimes such people, after bitter experience in

life, return to religion: but too often they are lost, or at best crippled and unfruitful.

Bishop Theophan continues in his teaching: “A man has three layers of life: that of the spirit, of the soul, and of the body. Each of these has its sum of needs, natural and proper to a man. These needs are not all of equal value, but some are higher and others lower; and the balanced satisfaction of them gives a man peace. Spiritual needs are the highest of all, and when they are satisfied, then there is peace even if the others are not satisfied; but when spiritual needs are not satisfied, then even if the others are satisfied abundantly, there is no peace. Therefore, the satisfaction of them is called the one thing needful.

He goes on: “When spiritual needs are satisfied, they instruct a man to put into harmony with them the satisfaction of one’s other needs also, so that neither what satisfies the soul nor what satisfies the body contradicts spiritual life, but helps it; and then there is a full harmony in a man of all the movements and revelations of his life, a harmony of thoughts, feelings, desires, undertakings, relationships, pleasures. And this is paradise!”

In our own day, the chief ingredient missing from this ideal harmony of human life is something one might call the emotional development of the soul. It is something that is not directly spiritual, but that very often hinders spiritual development. It is the state of someone who, while he may think he thirsts for spiritual struggles and an elevated life of prayer, is poorly able to respond to normal human love and friendship; for if a man say, *I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?* (1Jn 4:20).

In a few people this defect exists in an extreme form; but as a tendency it is present to some extent in all of us who have been raised in the emotional and spiritual wasteland of our times. This being so, it is often necessary for us to humble our seemingly spiritual impulses and struggles and be tested on our human and emotional readiness for them. Sometimes a spiritual father will deny his child the reading of some spiritual book and give him instead a novel of Dostoevsky or Dickens, or will encourage him to become familiar with certain kinds of classical music, not with any “aesthetic” purpose in mind—for one can be an “expert” in such matters and even be “emotionally well-developed” without the least interest in spiritual struggle, and that is also an unbalanced state—but solely to refine and form his soul and make it better disposed to understand genuine spiritual texts. Thus (and as an example of a spiritual father’s discernment towards a spiritual child) Bishop Theophan, in his advice to a young woman who was preparing in the world for monastic life, allowed her to read (in addition to other non-spiritual books) certain novels which were “...recommended by well-meaning people who have read them...”.

FOUR ARGUMENTS FOR THE ELIMINATION OF TELEVISION

By George Karras. (This article presents a summary of the book titled “Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television,” by Jerry Mander. Mr. Mander holds BS and MS degrees in Economics, spent 15 years in the advertising business, including five as president of Freeman, Mander, & Gossage, San Francisco, one of the most celebrated agencies in the country. The Wall Street Journal called him “the Ralph Nader of Advertising.” The entire book is available on-line at <http://www.motherearthnews.com/Nature-Community/1978-09-01/Subliminal-Messages-From-TV.aspx>.)

The book “Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television” (1977) by Jerry Mander presents a compelling position that there are a number of problems with the medium of television. Its author argues that many of the problems with television are inherent in the medium and technology itself, and thus cannot be reformed. In specific, the technology of television is not a neutral, benign instrument, or tool. The author argues that in varied technologies and institutions such as militaries, automobiles, nuclear power plants, mass production, and advertising, the basic form of the institution and the technology determines its interaction with the world, the way it will be used, the kind of people who use it, and to what ends.

Mr. Mander maintains that far from being “neutral,” television predetermines who shall use it, how they will use it, what effects it will have on individual lives, and, if it continues to be widely used, what sorts of political forms will inevitably emerge. Mr. Mander’s four arguments are as follows:

- The first argument is that while television may seem useful, interesting, and worthwhile, at the same time it further boxes people into a physical and mental condition appropriate for the emergence of autocratic control.
- The second argument concerns the emergence of the controllers. That television would be used and expanded by the present powers-that-be was inevitable, and should have been predictable at the outset. The technology permits no other controllers.
- The third argument concerns the effects of television upon individual human bodies and minds, effects which fit the purposes of the people who control the medium.
- The fourth argument demonstrates that television has no democratic potential. The technology itself places absolute limits on what may pass through it. The medium, in effect, chooses its own content from a very narrow field of possibilities. The effect is to drastically confine all human understanding within a rigid channel.

What binds the four arguments together is that they deal with aspects of television that are not reformable. And this point must be understood by every well-meaning Orthodox parent who allows (and at times even encourages) the

subjection of family youth to countless hours of television viewing.

The author points out that what we see, hear, touch, taste, smell, feel and understand about the world has been processed for us. Our experiences of the world can no longer be called direct, or primary. They are secondary, mediated experiences. When we live in cities, virtually all experience is mediated in some way. Concrete covers whatever would grow from the ground. Buildings block the natural vistas. The water we drink comes from a faucet, not from a stream or the sky. All foliage has been confined by human considerations and are designed according to human tastes.

Most of us are conditioned to give little importance to this change in human experience of the world, if we notice it at all. We are so surrounded by a reconstructed world that it is difficult to grasp how astonishingly different it is from the world of only one hundred years ago, and that it bears virtually no resemblance to the world in which human beings lived for four thousand years before that. The fact that this affects the way we think is rarely considered. In other words, our artificial environment is there and we can experience it, yet it has been created on purpose by other humans. We are left with no frame of reference untouched by human interpretation.

When people cannot distinguish with certainty the natural from the interpreted, or the artificial from the organic, then all theories of the ideal organization of life become equal. None of them can be understood as any more or any less connected to planetary truth. Therefore, the person or the worldly forces which are capable of speaking the most loudly or most forcefully, or with some apparent logic—even if it is an unrooted logic—can become convincing within the void of understanding. In other words, whoever recognizes that people's minds are appropriately confused and receptive, can speak directly into them without interference. Television is the ideal tool for such purposes because it both confines experience and implants simple, clear ideas.

On Advertising

We all know that advertising cannot be considered truthful. In fact, it is by nature one-sided. Advertising always reflects only the facts and opinions of the people who pay for it. Why else would they pay for it?

Advertising exists only to purvey what people don't need. Whatever people do need they will find without advertising, if it is available. This is so obvious and simple that it continues to stagger the mind that the ad industry has succeeded in muddying the point. No single issue gets advertisers screaming louder than this one. They speak about how they are only fulfilling the needs of people by providing an information service about where and how people can achieve satisfaction for their needs. Advertising is only a public service, they insist.

Speaking privately, however, and to corporate clients, advertisers sell their services on the basis of how well they are

able to create needs where there were none before. The only need that is expressed by advertising is the need of advertisers to accelerate the process of conversion of raw materials with no intrinsic value into commodities that people will buy. In fact, advertising intervenes between people and their needs, separates them from direct fulfillment and urges them to believe that satisfaction can be obtained only through commodities.

The goal of all advertising is discontent or, to put it another way, an internal scarcity of contentment. This must be continually created, even at the moment when someone has finally bought something. In that event, advertising has the task of creating discontent with what has just been bought, since once that act is completed, the purchase has no further benefit to the market system. The newly purchased commodity must be gotten rid of and replaced by the 'need' for a new commodity as soon as possible. The ideal world for advertisers would be one in which whatever is bought is used only once and then tossed aside. Many new products have been designed to fit such a world (such as cigarettes).

Thousands of psychologists, behavioral scientists, perceptual researchers, sociologists and others have found extremely high salaries and steady, interesting work aiding advertisers in finding nuances of artificial discontent in consumers. By entering the human being's inner sanctum (the family), our inner wilderness, advertising effectively pulls our feelings up out of ourselves, displays them and sells them back to us like iron from the ground.

Though television passes for experience, it is really more like 'time out.' Its interaction with the human body and mind fixes people to itself, dulls human sensibility and dims awareness of the world. This enhances the commodity life by reducing knowledge of any other.

The Inherent Believability of all Images

Seeing is believing. Like many an axiom, this one is literally true. Only since the ascendancy of the media has this been opened to question. Whatever information the senses produce the brain trusts as inherently believable. If the sense could not be relied upon, then the world would have been an utterly confusing place. Humans would have been unable to make any sensible choices leading to survival. If there were no concretely true information, there could have been no sane functioning; the species could not have survived.

This is not to say there is no illusion. There is animal camouflage. Animals use it to fool each other, including humans. In this way images become processed images, deliberately altered, and may serve to fool an observer whose senses and interpretations are not sufficiently sharp. These are classical exceptions which prove the point, because the basis of success for camouflage and illusion is that humans will believe what they see. In this sense, camouflage is a kind of sensory

jujitsu that only confirms the original point; the senses are inherently believable.

Without the human bias toward belief, the media could not exist. What's more, because the bias is so automatic and unnoticed, the media, all media, are in a position to exploit the belief, to encourage you to believe in their questionable sensory information. This bias has commercial value for the media since it allows them to keep your attention.

The natural evolutionary design is for humans to see all things as real, since the things that we see have always been real. Distinguishing real from unreal on television has to be learned. Yet how is a child to understand that? When the child is watching a television program, he or she has no innate ability to make any distinction between real and not real.

The Bionic Man's movements, his way of speaking, his attitudes, his way of relating to people, are in the child's mind no matter what we tell him about reality and unreality. Volume IV of *Television and Social Behavior*, prepared by the National Institute of Mental Health for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, reports that a majority of adults, nearly as high a percentage as children, use television to learn how to handle specific life problems; family routines, relationships with fellow workers, hierarchical values, etc.

Practical knowledge and methods of problem solving lead the list of knowledge acquired through television programs. Heavy viewers of television were more likely to overestimate the percentage of the world population that lives in America; they seriously overestimated the percentage of the population who have professional jobs; and they drastically overestimated the number of police in the U.S. and the amount of violence. The more television people watch, the more their view of the world matched television reality.

Our thinking processes cannot save us. To the degree that we are thinking as we watch television, a minute degree at most, the images pass right through anyway. They enter our brains. They remain permanently. We cannot tell for sure which images are ours and which came from distant places. Imagination and reality have merged. We have lost control of our images. We have lost control of our minds.

The liquid quality of television imagery derives from the simple fact that television sets its own visual pace. One image is always evolving into the next, arriving in a stream of light and proceeding inward to the brain at its own electronic speed. The viewer has no way to slow the flow, except to turn off the set altogether. If you decide to watch television, then there's no choice but to accept the steam of images as it comes.

Thus, the first effect is to create a passive mental attitude. Since there is no way to stop the images, one merely gives over to them. More than this, one has to clear all channels of reception to allow them in more cleanly. Conclusively, "Thinking only gets in the way..."

Artificial Unusualness and the Technical Events Test

To get an idea of the extent to which television is dependent upon technical tricks to maintain your interest (lacking real content), try the following "Technical Events Test:" Put on your television set and simply count the number of seconds between each cut, zoom, superimposition, voice-over, dissolve—a technical event of some kind. Very rarely will you be able to count more than about eight seconds without some video-magic alteration of reality.

Each technical event—each alteration of what would be natural imagery—is intended to keep your attention from wandering as it might otherwise. The effect is to lure your attention forward like a mechanical rabbit teasing a greyhound. The luring forward never ceases for very long. If it did, you might become aware of the vacuousness of the content that can get through the inherent limitations of the medium. Then you would be aware of the boredom. Commercials have roughly double the amount of these interruptions per minute.

Thus, television has become an extremely odd phenomenon. On the one hand, it offers non-unique, totally repetitive experience. No matter what is on television, the viewer is sitting in a darkened room with almost all systems shut down, looking at a flickering light. But within this deprived, repetitive, inherently boring environment, television producers create a fiction that something unusual is going on, thereby fixing attention.

Leaving the television to go outdoors, or to have an ordinary conversation, becomes unsatisfying. One wants action! Life becomes boring, and television interesting, all as a result of a system of technical hypes. This begins to explain Attention Deficit Disorder and the drastically declining skills in written and verbal articulation that are becoming so rampant now in society.

Conclusion

Television has helped to create the ironic cynicism that permeates western culture. On television reality is constantly re-arranged to suit the advertiser's needs, and everything has a snappy, one line answer—people who are indoctrinated by television acquire this mental habit of putting all of life into surface-only flash cards. By being constantly ironic, television preempts our own instinctual derision of it. By being coy and silly, and mocking itself, it poses as an ally to our uncertainty—our doubts about television in general.

Television drives a wedge between reality and fantasy, putting us in a dream world, and creating an inability to differentiate between real bullets and fantasy bullets. "Pulp Fiction" is a film that could not have existed if television had not been there first.

A constant diet of the television con-game turns its watchers into con artists. A fusion of crass commercialism and witless

sentimentality, television has created a nation of credulous wheedlers, impressed by one dimensional surface displays, like stretch limos and cell phones, designed to prove that the owners of these objects are “somebody,” and to hopefully impress someone even more vulgar than themselves.

Let us not forget a pointed 21st century paradoxical observation by a well-meaning NY artist: “Theater is Life, Film is Art, and Television is Furniture; Television must be a Medium Because it’s not Rare, and it’s Certainly not Well Done...”

Of course, television does have a good side. Within the spectrum of material broadcast, the crass, commercial junk does predominate; but the educational effect of television has been well demonstrated. Mander is dubious of this potential, pointing out the bad aspects: “Shallowing” of content, superficializing history, creating the illusion of experience, etc. And when people substitute television for real life, they’re in trouble. But it can be useful, when used judiciously. The TV set is an appliance, and with VCR assistance, corporate spew becomes totally avoidable!



Let us strive to enter by the narrow gate. Just as trees, if they have not stood before the winter’s storms cannot bear good fruit, so it is with us. This present age is a storm, and it is only through many trials and temptations that we can obtain an inheritance in the kingdom of heaven.

St. Theodora



FOR WHATEVER IS BORN OF GOD OVERCOMES THE WORLD

By Archpriest Valentin Svetsitsky (+1931).

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world, says the Holy Apostle John. When we think about it, these are powerful words indeed. They are not easy for us to digest for we hardly resemble victors over our lives! Look at the state of the Church today! There are many sins on the consciences of pastors; the faith is poorly presented; how to pray or even how to live our lives are poorly taught.

Today more than ever we feel our lack of spiritual education in Church life (Tserkovnost). Today there is an even greater attack by the enemy of our salvation. And how can someone who is ‘unprepared’ not lose hope, for he has to make spiritual decisions for himself, based on his own conscience.

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world”. These words, in the first instance, pertain to the inner disposition of

a person. A person must at the outset conquer the world. He must overcome those secular influences that have penetrated his soul and which he constantly encounters as he pursues the spiritual life. He must overcome within himself those things that are foreign and harmful to his inner spiritual disposition. He has to conquer the secular within.

What can he rely on in this struggle? He cannot rely on his own strength. He cannot rely on his own will since it is inclined to the pleasures of this life. He has to turn to the Church.

The Church is the only place that remains free from the principles of secular society. But it is not only in his inner life that someone should overcome the world. He should be victorious in everything; in all the conditions and circumstances that surround him. He needs to maintain literally every step on his spiritual path which leads to perfection. In this respect the secular world does not provide a single step in this direction. On the contrary, it obstructs him.

Mockery of Christ, disbelief and a thirst for secular power – all these impede the path to salvation. But nevertheless, the believer must overcome the world. He must not concede to the enemy of our salvation. He must have a firm resolve. And furthermore he must accept the consequences, which are unavoidable when one makes the true decision to lead a spiritual life.

Not peace, but a sword. The Lord brought division. Not division between believers but between the world of believers and that of non-believers. And we feel this division, this strife, as we journey along the spiritual path of life. We feel it everywhere. We must, however, unremittingly overcome obstacles and emerge as victors!

If this applies to our personal lives, it equally applies to the life of the Church. Here we have the repository of grace, the very source of a higher existence, which is able to overcome the world.

The victory of the Church over the world is conclusive to the degree that the Church is indeed the Church and never conforms or adapts to secular life. The Church lives according to different laws. It sees other goals before it; it has in its life another source. It contains the source of grace of the life-giving power of God and does not need to adapt to the whims of the world. It proceeds victoriously to a higher goal.

For the Church to be victorious over the world means for it to journey along its own path, neither at any time or any place adapting to this world. This is how we understand the victory which is spoken of by the Apostle John.

In these times each one of us should consciously be immersed in Church life. This should be the measure of what we do and what we are. We should be ‘church-minded’ and ‘church-active’. Only by following such a firm resolve to lead a ‘churched’ life and hoping in God can we avoid being driven from the true path of the Church in these godless days.

Τὸ Πάρισμο Τῆς Πόλης μας

Φώτης Κόντογλου.

Σὺν πατήθηκε πειὰ ἡ πόρτα τοῦ Ρωμανοῦ καὶ σκοτώθηκε ὁ βασιλιάς, οἱ Τοῦρκοι γιουργιάρανε μέσα στὴν Πόλη σὰν τ' ἀγριεμένο ξεροπόταμο ποὺ κατεβαίνει στενεμένο ἀνάμεσα στ' ἀψηλὰ βράχια, ὕστερ' ἀπὸ νεροποντὴ. Δὲ μπαίνανε ἑκατό-ἑκατό, μηδὲ διακόσιοι, μὰ χιλιάδα ἀπάνω στὴ χιλιάδα. Τέτοια ἦταν ἡ μανία τους μὴ δὲν προφτάζουνε νὰ κουρσέσουνε, ποὺ ἀπ' τὸ στρίμωγμα λαβωνόντανε συναμεταξύ τους καὶ πολλοὶ σκάσανε ποδοπατημένοι ἀπ' τοὺς δικούς τους. Καὶ σὰ μπαίνανε μέσα στὸ κάστρο, σκορπίζανε ἄλλος ἐδῶ, ἄλλος ἐκεῖ, κοπάδια-κοπάδια, σφάζοντας ὅποιον βρῖσκανε μπροστὰ τους, εἴτε γυναίκα, εἴτε παιδί, εἴτε ἄντρα.

Τὸ μεγάλο μακελειὸ βάσταζε ἀπ' τὴν ἀνατολὴ τοῦ ἡλίου ἴσαμε τὸ μεσημέρι. Πολλοὶ Χριστιανοὶ κρυφτήκανε μέσα σὲ λαγούμια καὶ σὲ σπηλιές κ' ὕστερα τοὺς βρῖσκανε καὶ τοὺς σκλαβώσανε.

Φτάνοντας οἱ Τοῦρκοι στὴν πλατεία, ἀνεβήκανε στὸν πύργο καὶ κατεβάσανε τὴ βυζαντινὴ σημαία καὶ τὴ σημαία τ' ἁγίου Μάρκου καὶ ἰσάρανε στὸν τόπο τους τὸ σάνταρδο τοῦ σουλτάνου. Τὰ κάστρα ἀπὸ τὴ μίαν ἄκρη ἴσαμε τὴν ἄλλη πέσανε στὰ χέρια τοῦ Τοῦρκου. Μονάχα οἱ Κρητικοί, ποὺ βρισκόντανε μέσα στοὺς πύργους τοῦ Λέοντα καὶ τοῦ Βασιλείου, βαστήζανε τὸν πόλεμο ἴσαμε τὸ μεσημέρι. Ὁ σουλτάν Μεμέτης σὰν τάκουσε θαύμασε τὴν παλληκαριά τους καὶ τοὺς ἄφησε νὰ φύγουνε στὴν πατρίδα τους, παίρνοντας μαζί τους ὅ,τι εἶχανε ἀπάνω τους.

Ὅπως εἶπα πρωτύτερα, πολὺς κόσμος ἔτρεξε στὴ θάλασσα νὰ γλυτώσῃ, μὰ ἔπεσε μαζεμένος στὰ καράβια καὶ πολλὰ βουλιάζανε καὶ πνιγήκανε πολὺς λαός. Οἱ πορτιέρηδες, βλέποντας τὸν κόσμο ποὺ ὤρμουσε ἀπὸ τὶς πόρτες, θυμηθήκανε ἕνα παλιὸ ρητὸ πῶλεγε πὼς ἡ Πόλη θὰ ξαναπαιρνότανε ἀπ' τὰ χέρια τῶν Τοῦρκων ἂν γυρίζανε πίσω οἱ Χριστιανοί, κλειδώσανε τὶς πόρτες καὶ ρίξαν τὰ κλειδιά ἔξω ἀπ' τὸ κάστρο. Τότε δὲ φούντωσε ἡ σφαγὴ, ποὺ δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ τὴ χωρέσῃ τὸ μυαλὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ὅσοι γλυτώσανε χάσανε τὰ φρένα τους καὶ τρέχανε νὰ κλειστοῦνε στὴν Ἁγία-Σοφία. Κεῖνὴ τὴν ὥρα ἦτανε πῶχαν' ἡ μάννα τὸ παιδί καὶ τὸ παιδί τὴ μάννα.

Θεὲ Μεγαλοδύναμη, ἀπάνω σ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς συμφορισμένους ἔπεσε ὅλη ἡ ὀργή σου! Μερμήγκια ἀμέτρητα πλημύρισε ἡ ἐκκλησιά, ἀπάνω, κάτω, στὸ νάρθηκα,

στ' ἅγιο βῆμα, σὲ κάθε μεριά. Σφαλίζανε τὶς πόρτες καὶ παρακαλοῦσανε μὲ μεγάλες φωνές τὸ Θεὸ νὰ τοὺς λυπηθῇ. Οἱ κουμπέδες κ' οἱ θεόρατες καμάρες ἀντιβουίζανε καὶ ρίχνανε πῖο πολλὴ τρομάρα στὶς καρδιές τῶν κοριτσιῶν· τὰ μικρὰ παιδάκια ξεψυχούσανε ἀπ' τὸ φόβο τους. Σὲ λίγο φτάζανε οἱ Τοῦρκοι καὶ πιάσανε νὰ βαρᾶνε μὲ τοὺς μπαλτάδες τὶς πόρτες. Τὸ κοπάδι, ποὺ ἦτανε μαντρισμένο μέσα βέλαζε λυπητερὰ σὲ κάθε τσεκουριά.

Ποιὰ γλῶσσα μπορεῖ νὰ πῆ τί γίνηκε σὰν μπήκανε μέσα οἱ Τοῦρκοι, βαστώντας στὰ χέρια τους ἄλλοι ματωμένα μαχαίρια μίᾳ ὀργυιὰ μάκρος, ἄλλοι πελέκια ἀκονισμένα, ἄλλοι κοντάρια, π' ἀστράφτανε οἱ σουβλερὲς μύτες τους. Ἡ ἐκκλησιά πιτσιλίστηκε ἀπ' τὰ αἵματα σὲ δυὸ μπόγια ὕψος, πῶλεγες πὼς ἦτανε χασάπικο. Ὅσοι ἀπομείνανε ζωντανοὶ εἶχανε τρελλαθῇ. Οἱ Τοῦρκοι δένανε τοὺς ἄντρες μὲ σκοινιά, τὶς γυναῖκες μὲ τὶς ζῶνες τους. Ἐβλεπες ἀφεντάδες δεμένους

πιστάγκωνα μαζί μὲ τοὺς ὑπρέτες, κυράδες μὲ τὶς δοῦλες, παπάδες μὲ γρηές, δεσποτάδες, παλληκάρια βουτημένα στὸ αἷμα. Ὁ ἕνας μπροστὰ στὸν ἄλλον βιάζανε τὶς γυναῖκες, ἀνάμεσα σὲ κουφάρια καὶ σὲ λαβωμένους ποὺ μουγκρίζανε. Ἄλλοι πάλι ἀπὸ κεῖνα τ' ἀγρίμια ξεγυμνώνανε τὴν ἐκκλησιά. Μέσα σὲ μίᾳ ὥρα ἀπομείνανε μονάχα οἱ τοῖχοι. Δὲν ἀφήσανε



μηδὲ καντήλι, μηδὲ δυσκοπότηρο, μηδὲ βαγγέλιο, μηδὲ εἰκόνα, μηδὲ ροῦχα, τίποτα! Πὼς περνᾷ ἡ ἀκρίδα ἀπὸ ἕνα καταπράσινο περιβόλι κ' ὕστερα, σὰν κἀνὴ φτερά, ἀφήνει χῶμα μοναχό, ἔτσι ἀπόμεινε κ' ἡ Ἁγία-Σοφία ξεγυμνωμένη.

Τὸ μαχαίρι κ' ἡ φωτιά βάσταζε τρία μερόνυχτα, ὅπως εἶχε ταμένο στοὺς στρατιῶτες τοῦ ὁ σουλτάνου. Ἡ ἀπέραντη Κωνσταντινούπολη ἀντιλαλοῦσε μέρα νύχτα. Τὸ αἷμα καὶ τὸ δάκρυα χυθήκανε! Χιλιάδες καρδιές χτυπούσανε, τέτοια συμφορὰ δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ τὴ συλλογισθῇ ἄνθρωπος. Ἄλλοι σφαζόντανε πρὶν πᾶνε στὰ σπίτια τους, ἄλλοι καταφέρνανε νὰ φτάζουνε στὰ δικά τους μὰ δὲ βρῖσκανε τὰ παιδιά τους καὶ τὶς γυναῖκες τους. Ἄντρογυνα χωριζόντουσαν, ὁ ἕνας Τοῦρκος ἔσερνε τὸν ἄντρα κι' ὁ ἄλλος τὴ γυναίκα. Τὰ παιδιά τὰ ξεκολλούσανε ἀπ' τὸ λαιμὸ τῆς μάννας, τὰ κορίτσια τὰ σέρνανε ἀπ' τὰ μαλλιά μέσα στὸ δρόμο. Πεινασμένα σκυλιὰ πίνανε τὸ αἷμα π' ἄχιζε μέσα στὰ χαντάκια. Πειὸ πολλὰ ἦτανε τὰ κομμένα κεφάλια, ποὺ κειτόντανε στὸ χῶμα, παρὰ οἱ πέτρες τῆς γῆς. Φρόνιμες

νοικοκυράδες, πού δὲν τὶς εἶχε δῆ ὁ ἥλιος, ἀτιμαζόντανε γυμνές μέσα στὶς πλατεῖες. Παπάδες περπατούσανε βιαστικά, φορτωμένοι μὲ βαρεῖα σεντούκια, πού τοὺς τάχανε φορτωμένα οἱ ζεμπέκηδες καὶ τοὺς δέρνανε σὰν γαϊδούρια καὶ τοὺς τραβούσανε μὲ τὸ καπίστρι πούχανε περασμένο στὸ λαιμό τους. «Καὶ ἦν ἰδεῖν ὄρμαθούς ἐξερχομένους ἀπείρους ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἀδύτων τοῦ ναοῦ ὡσπερ ἀγέλας».

Στὰ καράβια δὲν εἶχε ἀπομείνει μηδὲ ἕνα Τούρκος, γιατί ριχτήκανε στὸ πλιάτσικο. Μὲ μεγάλη μανία γυρεύανε νὰ βροῦνε τὰ γυναικεῖα μοναστήρια, τὰ πατούσανε καὶ κουβαλούσανε τὶς καλογρηές μέσα στὰ καράβια κ' ἐκεῖ ὁ διάβολος πειὰ μπορεῖ νὰ πῆ τὸ τί γίνηκε. Πολλές γυναικες, γιὰ νὰ ξεφύγουνε τὴν ἀτιμία, πέσανε καὶ πνιγήκανε στὴ θάλασσα καὶ στὰ πηγάδια.

Οἱ Τούρκοι εἶχανε τούτη τὴ συνήθεια, ἅμα μπαίνανε μέσα σ' ἕνα σπίτι γιὰ νὰ κουρσέψουνε, στήνανε μιὰ σημαία ἀπάνω στὰ κεραμίδια. Οἱ ἄλλοι Τούρκοι, βλέποντας τούτη τὴ σημαία, δὲ μπαίνανε ποτὲ μέσα, μὰ τραβούσανε πάρα πέρα, ναβροῦνε ἄλλο σπίτι λεύτερο. Ἰσαμε διακόσες χιλιάδες τέτοια κουρέλια σαλεύανε ἀπάνω στὴν Πόλη, γιατί οἱ Τούρκοι βάζανε πολλὰ παντιέρες στὸ ἴδιο σπίτι γιὰ νὰ κάνουνε πανηγύρι.

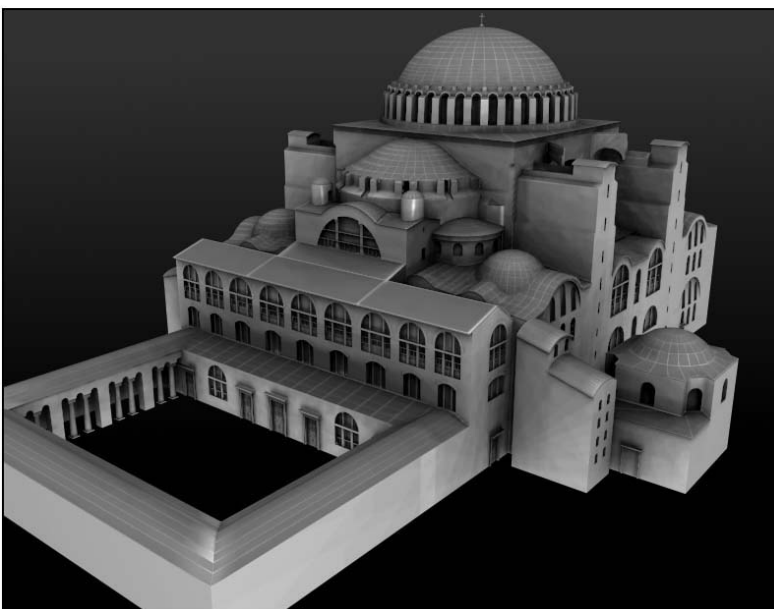
Ὅλη τὴ μέρα σφάζανε. Τόσο μουσκεμένη ἦτανε ἡ γῆς, πώλεγες πὼς ἔβρεξε αἷμα, κ' ὅπου ἔβρισκε χαντάκι τὸ αἷμα ἔτρεχε σὰ νάτανε βροχονέρι. Τὰ κουφάρια τὰ ρίχνανε στὸ μπουγάζι τοῦ Βοσπόρου, καὶ τὸ ρέμα τὰ κατρακυλοῦσε σὰ νάτανε πεπόνια, Χριστιανοὶ-Τούρκοι ἀνακατεμένοι.

Ὁ σουλτάνος δὲ μπῆκε μέσα στὴν Πόλη μὲ τὸ στρατό, παρὰ ἀπόμεινε στὸ στρατόπεδο. Κατὰ τὸ μεσημέρι οἱ πασάδες του πήγανε τὰ κλειδιά, σημάδι πὼς ἦτανε πειὰ δική του ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη. Τότε καβαλλίκεψε καὶ μπῆκε μὲ τὴ συνοδεία του μέσα στὸ κάστρο καὶ τράβηξε ἴσια στὴν Ἁγία-Σοφία. Δὲ μπῆκε μέσα στὴν ἐκκλησιά μὲ τάλογο, παρὰ ξεπέζεψε καὶ μπαίνοντας μέσα θαύμασε πολλὴν ὥρα καὶ περιεργάσθηκε τὸ χτίριο. Ὑστερα φώναξε ἕνα χότζα καὶ τοῦπε ν' ἀνεβῆ ἀπάνω στὸν ἄμβωνα καὶ νὰ φωνάξῃ τὴν προσευχή τους «Ἀλλάχου ἐκπέρ, Ἀλλάχου ἐκπέρ, Μουχαμετοῦλ ρεσοῦλ Οὐλλάχ». Σὰν τελείωσε ὁ χότζας, ἀνέβηκε ὁ ἴδιος στὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζα καὶ τὸ ξανάπε.

Τὴν ὥρα πὼγβαινε ἔξω, εἶδε ἕνα Τούρκο πού τσάκιζε τὰ μάρμαρα. Ὁ Μεμέτης τὸν βάρωσε μὲ τὸ καμουτσί λέγοντάς του: «Κιοπέκ, σὰς ἄφησα τὸ θησαυρὸ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, μὰ τὰ χτίρια εἶνε δικά μου!»

Ἀπὸ κεῖ τράβηξε μὲ τοὺς πασάδες καὶ ρώτηξε γιὰ τὸ βασιλιά τῆς Πόλης, ζῆ ἢ πέθανε. Καὶ σὰν τοῦπανε πὼς σκοτώθηκε, πρόσταξε καὶ πλύνανε πολλὰ κεφάλια στὸ μέρος πού χάθηκε, γιὰ νὰ τὸν γνωρίσουνε, μὰ δὲ μπορέσανε μέσα σὲ τέτοιο πλῆθος. Σὲ λίγο ὁμως βρέθηκε τὸ κορμί του καὶ τὸ γνωρίσανε ἀπ' τὰ κόκκινα ποδήματά του μὲ τοὺς κεντημένους ἀητούς. Κόψανε τὸ κεφάλι καὶ τὸ βάλανε σὲ μία πλατεῖα κοντὰ στ' ἄγαλμα τοῦ Γιουστινιανοῦ καὶ κεῖ στάθηκε ἴσαμε τὸ βράδυ. Ὑστερα τὸ μπαλασμάσανε καὶ τώστειλε ὁ σουλτάνος στὴν ἀνατολὴ ἀπὸ χώρα σὲ χώρα, γιὰ νὰ δῆ ὁ κόσμος τὴ νίκη του. Τὸ σῶμα τὸ πήρανε οἱ Χριστιανοὶ καὶ τὸ θάψανε.

Τὰ πλιάτσικα κ' οἱ σκλάβοι, ἄλλα στοιβαχθήκανε στὶς τέντες,



ἄλλα φορτωθήκανε στὰ καράβια καὶ τραβήξανε νὰ τὰ πουλήσουνε, ὅπως ἔστερξε ὁ σουλτάνος. Κάθε Τούρκος ἦτανε φορτωμένος. Τὶ μαλάματα, τὶ ἀσήμια, τὶ χαλκώματα, τὶ ρούχα μεταξωτά, τὶ βιβλία! Καράβια ὀλάκερα γεμίσανε καλόγερους καὶ καλογρηές. Ἐβλεπες ζεϊμπέκια ψειριασμένα νᾶνε ντυμένα μὲ δεσποτικά ἐνδύματα, ἐνω ἄλλοι φοράγανε χρυσὰ πετραχήλια, ἄλλοι κορῶνες καὶ

καλυμμαύχια στὸ κεφάλι. Σκυλιὰ δεμένα μὲ ζῶνες κεντημένες, ἐπιγονάτια καὶ φελόνια γιὰ σαγὴ στ' ἄλογα. Μέσα στοὺς ἀσημένιους δίσκους βάζανε ντομάτες καὶ κρέατα, πίνανε κρασί μέσα στὰ δισκοπότρηρα. Φορτώσανε στὶς καρότσες βιβλία, πού δὲν εἶχανε μετρημὸ καὶ τὰ σκορπίσανε σ' ἀνατολὴ καὶ δύση. Γιὰ ἕνα γρόσι πουλιόντανε ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης, ὁ Πλάτωνας κ' οἱ ἄλλοι ξακουσμένοι σοφοὶ τῆς ἀρχαιότητος, γραμμένοι σὲ πετσί, μὲ χρυσοκοντυλιές καὶ μὲ χρυσὰ δεσίματα. Τὰ εικονίσματα τὰ σκίζανε μὲ τὸ τσεκούρι καὶ βράζανε κρέας μέσα στὰ καζάνια.

Τὴ δευτέρη μέρα, δηλαδὴ στὶς 30 Μαγιοῦ, ξαναμπῆκε στὴν Πόλη ὁ σουλτάνος, μὲ πολλὴ παράταξη, κ' ἀφοῦ τριγύρισε σὲ διάφορα μέρη, πῆγε καὶ στὸ παλάτι. Καὶ βλέποντάς το ἔρημο εἶπε ἕνα στίχο κάποιου Πέρση ποιητῆ γιὰ τὴν ματαιότητα τοῦ κόσμου.

Ἦτανε πειὰ πεθαμένη καὶ θαμμένη ἡ ξακουσμένη Κωνσταντινούπολη, ἡ Θεοσκεπάστη, ἡ Νέα Σιών, ἡ

Ἐφτάλοφῃ, τὸ καμάρι τῆς Ἀνατολῆς, πώβρισκε ἄνθρωπος καὶ τοῦ πουλιοῦ τὰ γάλα. Ποῦχε τὸ κάστρο μὲ τοὺς τρακόσους πύργους, τὰ παζάρια, τὰ ἀρτοποιεῖα, τὰ χαλκοπρατεῖα, τὰ ἀργυροπωλεῖα, τὰ βλατοπωλεῖα, τὰ κηροπωλεῖα, τὰ λουτρά, τὰ συντριβάνια, τὶς βρύσες, τὶς δεκαεννιά στέρνες, τὰ Ἱπποδρόμια, τὰ παλάτια, τὶς τρακόσες ἐκκλησιᾶς καὶ τὰ διακόσια μοναστήρια, τ' ἀμέτρητα τ' ἀγάλματα κι' ὅ,τι μπορεῖ νὰ βάλῃ ὁ νοῦς τ' ἄνθρωπου. «Τῆ δευτέρῃ δὲ ἀπὸ τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης, εἰσελθὼν ὁ Μεχμέτης, περιόδευσε τὴν πόλιν· καὶ ἦν ἡ πάσα ἄοικος, οὔτε ἄνθρωπος, οὔτε κτῆνος, οὔτε ὄρνειον κραυγάζον ἢ λαλοῦν ἐντός».

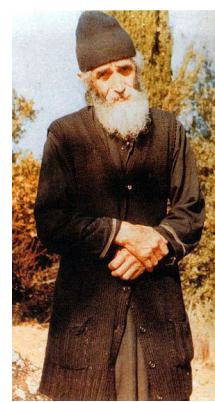
Κοντὰ στὸ παλάτι ἐτοιμάσανε ἓνα μεγάλο τραπέζι γιὰ τὸ σουλτάνο, κι' ἀφοῦ ἔφαγε, ἤπια πολὺ κρασί καὶ μέθυσε. Τότε πρόσταξε νὰ τοῦ πάνε τὸ ναύαρχο Νοταρὰ μὲ τὰ παιδιὰ του καὶ νὰ τοὺς ἀποκεφαλίσουνε. Πρῶτα σφάζανε τὰ παιδιὰ μπροστὰ στὸ συμφοριασμένον τὸν πατέρα, πῶλεγε ὀλοένα «δίκαιος εἶ, Κύριε!», κ' ὕστερα τὸν ἴδιον. Δὲν περάσανε λίγες μέρες καὶ πρόσταξε νὰ κόψουνε καὶ τὸ Χαλίλ πασά, πὸν τὸν ὑπωπευότανε πὼς εἶχε προδώσει τὰ μυστικά του στοὺς Γραικοὺς.

Τὸ τέλος τῆς Πόλης φαίνεται ἀκόμα πειὸ λυπητερὸ ἅμα συλλογισθῆ κανένας πὼς χαλάσθηκε τὸ μήνα Μάη, τὶς μέρες πὸν μοσκοβολούσανε οἱ πασκαλιᾶς κ' οἱ τριανταφυλλιᾶς. Ἀνήμερα πὸν σκλαβώθηκε ἡ Πόλη ἦτανε τῆς Ἁγίας Θεοδοσίας, πὸν τὴ γιορτάζανε πάντα οἱ Πολίτες στὶς 29 Μαγιοῦ μὲ μεγάλη δόξα στὴν ἐκκλησιά της, πὸν γίνηκε ὕστερα τζαμί. Μ' ὅλη τὴν ἀγωνία πὸν περνούσανε, οἱ γυναῖκες τὴν εἶχανε στολισμένη, κατὰ τὰ συνηθισμένα, μὲ στεφάνια καὶ μὲ περιπλοκάδες ἀπὸ τριαντάφυλλα. Τὴν ὥρα, πὸν μπήκανε μέσα οἱ Τοῦρκοι, ψέλνανε ἀκόμα οἱ ψαλτάδες. Τοὺς περάσανε ὅλους ἀπ' τὸ μαχαίρι, κι' ἀπὸ τότε βαστὰ ἡ ὄνομασία «Γκιουλ Τζαμί», δηλαδή «Τὸ Τζαμί μὲ τὰ τριαντάφυλλα», καὶ μ' αὐτὸ τὸνομα στέκει ὡς τὰ σήμερα. Μέσα σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἐκκλησιά λένε πὼς ὑπάρχει κ' ἓνα μνημόρι, ὁπῶχει ἀπάνω στὴν πλάκα τούρκικα γράμματα, πὸν λένε «Ἐδῶ κείτεται ἓνας μαθητῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ» καὶ πὼς αὐτὸς εἶνε ὁ τάφος τοῦ βασιλιὰ Παλαιολόγου.

Τοὺς Γενοβέζους τοῦ Γαλατὰ ὁ σουλτάνος δὲν τοὺς πείραξε, γιατί σταθήκανε φίλοι του στὸν πόλεμο, τοὺς χάρισε μάλιστα καὶ προνόμια. Τὸ φερμάνι πὸν τοὺς ἔδωσε ἀρχίζει μὲ τοῦτα τὰ λόγια: «Ἐγὼ ὁ μέγας αὐθέντης καὶ μέγας Ἀμυρᾶς σουλτάνος ὁ Μεχμέτ Μπέης, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ μεγάλου αὐθέντου Ἀμυρᾶ Σουλτάνου τοῦ Μουράτ Μπέη. Ὁμνύω εἰς τὸν Θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ εἰς τὸν μέγαν ἡμῶν προφήτην Μωάμεθ, καὶ εἰς τὰ ἑπτὰ μουσάφια ὅπου ἔχομεν καὶ ὁμολογοῦμεν, καὶ εἰς τὰς ρκδ' (124) χιλιάδας προφήτας τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ πρὸς τὰς ψυχὰς τοῦ πάππου μου καὶ τοῦ πατρός μου, καὶ πρὸς ἑμαυτὸν καὶ πρὸς τὰ παιδιὰ μου, καὶ στὸ σπαθὶ ὁποῦ ξώννομαι...».

Περὶ τῆς Ψευδο-Θεωρίας τῆς δι' Ἐξελίξεως Καταγωγῆς τοῦ Ἀνθρώπου

Γέροντας Παῖσιος ὁ Ἀγιορείτης, ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Μαρτυρίες Προσκυνητῶν», σελ. 113-118.



Ὡς γνωστὸν ἡ θεωρία αὐτὴ (ὄντως θεωρία, ὑπόθεσις, καὶ ὄχι ἀποδεδειγμένο συμπέρασμα) ἔχει ὑποστῆ ἀπὸ τῆς ἐμφανίσεώς της μέχρι σήμερα ἄπειρες ἀναθεωρήσεις. Ἐκεῖνο, ὅμως, πὸν δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ γίνῃ ἀνεκτὸν εἶναι τὸ γεγονὸς ὅ,τι ἀρκετὲς φορὲς ὑπερβαίνοντας τὰ ὄριά της (καὶ μὲ ὄχι τίμια μέσα) προσπάθησε νὰ περιβληθῆ τὸν τίτλο ἀποδεδειγμένης ἀρχῆς, καὶ ὡς τοιαύτη—τὸ καὶ χειρότερον— νὰ γίνῃ ὑλικὸν ἐκμεταλλεύσεως καὶ

ὄπλον στὰ χέρια ἀθέων καὶ ὑλιστῶν, γιὰ νὰ πολεμήσουν τὴν σχετικὴ ἀγιογραφικὴ διδασκαλία.

Στὶς ἀρχὲς τῆς δεκαετίας τοῦ '80, ἐξ ἀφορμῆς κάποιων εὐρημάτων, ἀλλὰ καὶ λόγῳ συμπληρώσεως ἑκατονταετίας ἀπὸ τὸν θάνατον τοῦ Καρόλου Δαρβίνου (1882), τοῦ πρώτου συστηματικοῦ ὑποστηρικτοῦ της, ἐπανῆλθε στὸ προσκήνιο καὶ στὴν δημοσιότητα.

Στὸν Ἑλλαδικὸν χῶρον τὴν προπαγάνδιζε δυστυχῶς κάποιος κληρικὸς, ὁ ὁποῖος, οὔτε λίγο οὔτε πολὺ, ἔφθανε νὰ ὑποστηρίξῃ τὴν ἐκ τοῦ πιθήκου δι' ἐξελίξεως καταγωγὴν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου! Προσπάθησε μάλιστα, διὰ νὰ ἀποφύγῃ τὶς ἀποδοκιμασίες τῶν πιστῶν καὶ τὴν ἐνδεχομένην ἐπίπληξιν ἢ καὶ καταδίκην του ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, μὲ (παρ)ἑρμηνευτικὰ τεχνάσματα νὰ συμβιβάσῃ τὶς πεποιθήσεις του μὲ τὴν διήγησιν τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης.

Ὁ μακαριστὸς Γέροντας Παῖσιος πόνεσε πολὺ μὲ τὸ ὀλισθημά του, ἀλλὰ καὶ διότι, λόγῳ τῆς ιδιότητός του καὶ τῆς σοφιστικῆς ἱκανότητός του, κινδύνευαν νὰ ὀδηγηθοῦν εἰς τὴν πλάνην ἀστήρικτες ψυχῆς. Ἀντέδρασε ἀπαντώντας καὶ ἀνασκευάζοντας τὶς παρερμηνεῖες, ἀλλὰ καὶ προτρέποντας καὶ ἄλλους ἀρμοδίους—κληρικοὺς, θεολόγους—νὰ λάβουν θέσιν, ὥστε νὰ προφυλαχθοῦν οἱ πιστοί. Εἶχε μάλιστα καὶ σὲ φωτοτυπίες συγκεντρωμένα κατάλληλα ἀποσπάσματα ἀπὸ τὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη ἢ ἀπὸ σχετικὲς Πατερικὲς ἐρμηνεῖες καὶ τὰ ἔδιδε στοὺς προσερχομένους διὰ νὰ ὑποβοηθοῦνται καὶ νὰ μὴν παρασύρωνται. Ὅταν πληροφορήθηκε ὅ,τι ὁ ἐν λόγῳ κληρικὸς παρέμενε ἀμετανόητος, χρησιμοποίησε πολὺ αὐστηρὴ γλῶσσα καὶ προειδοποίησε ὅτι, ἂν συνεχίσῃ, θὰ δεχθεῖ τὴν παιδαγωγικὴ ἐπέμβασιν τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἀκολουθῶς θὰ παρατεθοῦν ἐνδεικτικῶς λίγες περιπτώσεις πὸν διασώσαμε στὴν μνήμη μας, γιὰ νὰ φανῆ πιὸ συγκεκριμένα ἡ στάσις τοῦ Γέροντος.

(α') Πήγε να συνεορτάση την νύκτα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως (μᾶλλον τὸ ἔτος 1983 ἢ 1984) μὲ γνωστούς του πατέρες σὲ κελλι πὸν πανηγύριζε. Πρὶν ἀρχίση ἡ ἀνάγνωσις τῶν Πράξεων τῶν Ἀποστόλων, ἀνεφέρθη ἐκτενῶς καὶ μὲ ἔντονο τρόπο στὸ ἐν λόγῳ θέμα, πὸν ἦτο τότε πρόσφατον.

Ἵπογράμμισε ἰδιαιτέρως τὸ ἐξῆς εὐστοχότατον διὰ τὴν περίστασιν ἀπόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὴν πρὸ διημέρου ἀναγνωσθεῖσα, κατὰ τὴν Θεϊαν Λειτουργίαν τῆς μεγάλης Πέμπτης, περικοπὴν ἐκ τοῦ βιβλίου τοῦ Ἰώβ, τὸ ὁποῖον, παρὰ τὴν ἐπικαιρότητά του, εἶχε διαφύγει τῆς προσοχῆς ὄλων τῶν παρευρισκομένων: «Ἡ σὺ λαβὼν γῆν πηλὸν ἐπλασας ζῶον καὶ λαλητὸν αὐτὸν ἔθου ἐπὶ γῆς;» (Ἰώβ 38:14). Τόνισε κυρίως τὰ ἐξῆς δυὸ σημεῖα, «γῆν πηλὸν» καὶ «ζῶον... αὐτόν» (ἀρσενικοῦ γένους), διὰ τῶν ὁποίων σαφέστατα ἐμφαίνεται ἡ ἀπ' εὐθείας ἐκ «γῆς πηλοῦ» δημιουργία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

(β') Τοῦ μετεφέρθη ἀπὸ κάποιον τὸ ἀκόλουθο προβαλλόμενο σοφιστικὸ ἐπιχειρήμα: Ἡ ἐκ τοῦ πηθήκου προέλευσις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου δὲν ἀντιτίθεται στὴν διήγησιν τῆς Γενέσεως, ἀφοῦ μπορούμε στὸ σχετικὸ χωρίον «καὶ ἔπλασεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἀνθρώπον χοῦν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς» (Γέν 2:7) νὰ ἐννοήσωμεν ὅ,τι ὁ «χοῦς ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς», πὸν ἐχρησιμοποίησεν ὁ Θεὸς διὰ τὴν πλάσιν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἦτο ὁ πῆθος (!)

Καὶ ὁ Γέροντας ἀπάντησε ἀμέσως, ἀποστομωτικά καὶ μὲ ἱερὴ ἀγανάκτησιν μὲ τὰ ἐξῆς τρία ἐπιχειρήματα:

(1) Δὲν εἶχε ἀνάγκη ὁ Θεὸς ἀπὸ ἀνταλλακτικά!

(2) Ἄλλωστε ὁ τρόπος δημιουργίας τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Τὸ «ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν...» (Γέν. 1:26) καὶ τὸ «ἔπλασεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον» (Γέν. 2:7) διαφέρει κατὰ πολὺ ἀπὸ τὸν τρόπον δημιουργίας τῶν ζώων—«Καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Θεός· ἐξαγαγέτω τὰ ὕδατα ἐρπετά... ἐξαγαγέτω ἡ γῆ... τετράποδα...» (Γέν. 1:20-25). Ἡ διαφορὰ αὐτὴ δείχνει τὴν ἰδιαίτην μέριμνα τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ τὸ πλάσμα Του (τὸν ἄνθρωπον).

(3) Ὁ Λόγος τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὅταν σαρκώθηκε, ἔλαβε σάρκα ἀνθρώπου καὶ ὄχι σάρκα πηθήκου!!!

Πέραν τούτων, ὁ Γέροντας, προορώντας καὶ τὶς ἐπιπτώσεις ἀπὸ τὴν ἀποδοχὴν τοῦ ἀνωτέρω πονηροῦ σοφίσματος, λίγες ἡμέρες μετὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὴν τὴν συζήτησιν, ἐν ἱερᾷ ἀγανακτῆσει ἐπεξήγησε σὲ δυὸ Πατέρες:

- Τώρα στὴν ἀρχή, γιὰ νὰ μὴν ὑπάρχουν ἀντιδράσεις, λένε: «Δὲν ἀρνούμαστε τὸν Θεό, οὔτε τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή. Ἀπλά, γιὰ νὰ μὴν φαίνεται ὅ,τι πᾶμε ἀντίθετα σὲ ὅσα λένε μεγάλοι ἐπιστήμονες, παίρνουμε συμβολικὰ τὸν “χοῦν” καὶ λέμε ὅ,τι ὁ Θεὸς πῆρε πῆθος γιὰ σῶμα καὶ τοῦ “ἐνεφύσησε” τὴν ψυχὴ».

- Νὰ δῆτε ὅμως, στὴ συνέχεια, ὅταν τὸ δεχθοῦνε αὐτὸ πολλοὶ Χριστιανοί, πὸν τὰ ἐρμηνεύουν μὲ τὸ μυαλό, μετὰ θὰ μᾶς πούνε: «Ἐ, καλὰ τώρα... Ἐνεφύσησε ψυχὴ... Γιὰ ἓνα «φού», γιὰ ἄερα, θὰ συζητᾶμε; Εἶναι σοβαρὰ

πράγματα αὐτά; Ἀφοῦ ὁ πῆθος ἦταν ζωντανός! Εἶχε «πνοὴ ζωῆς». Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ ψυχὴ. Ἡ ζωὴ!

- Καὶ μετὰ μερικὰ χρόνια, ἀφοῦ τὸ δεχθοῦνε κι αὐτὸ [= οἱ “Χριστιανοί”], θὰ μᾶς πούνε: «Ποιὸς Θεὸς τοῦ Ἀδάμ καὶ τῆς Εὔας;... Ἐντάξει... Δὲν λέμε ὅ,τι γίνανε ὅλα ἀπὸ μόνον τους. Ὑπάρχει μίᾳ ἀνωτέρα Δύναμις. Ἡ Φύσις».

- Δηλαδή τελικὰ ἐκεῖ πέρα θὰ τὸ πᾶνε: «Οὔτε ψυχὴ, οὔτε Θεός!!!»

(γ') Γνωστός τοῦ θεολόγος εἶχε τιλοφορήσει ἓνα βιβλίον τοῦ ἀναφερόμενο στὸν ἄνθρωπον μὲ τὸν τίτλον «Ζῶον θεοῦμενον». Ὁ Γέροντας εἶχε στενοχωρηθῆ πολὺ καὶ εἶχε ἐκφράσει τὴν ἀντίθεσίν του. Οἱ δυὸ λέξεις, φυσικὰ, προέρχονται ἀπὸ σχετικὸ χωρίον τοῦ ἁγίου Γρηγορίου τοῦ Θεολόγου, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ἀποσπασματικὰ παρμένες ἀπὸ αὐτό. Ὁ πατήρ Παῖσιος ἐξήγησε σχετικὰ ὅτι, ὅπως εἶναι ξεκομμένες οἱ λέξεις ἀπὸ τὸ χωρίον καὶ ἐνωμένες μεταξύ τους, «μπορεῖ νὰ τίς ἐκμεταλλευθοῦν γιὰ νὰ ὑποστηρίξουν αὐτὲς τίς χαμένες θεωρίες, πὸν διαδίδουν στὶς ἡμέρες μας». Καὶ πρόσθεσε: «Ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος, ἂν ζοῦσε σήμερα, ἀλλοιῶς θὰ ἐκφραζόταν». (Ἐνν: Γιὰ νὰ μὴν δώση ἀφορμὴ γιὰ παρερμηνεῖς).

(δ') Κάποιοι νεαρὸς μοναχὸς εἶχε διαβάσει μερικὲς ὀρθολογιστικὲς ἀπόψεις, ὅσον ἀφορᾷ τὴν ἀγιογραφικὴ διήγησιν περὶ δημιουργίας, οἱ ὁποῖες ἐμμέσως ἔθεταν ἐν ἀμφιβόλῳ τὴν θεοπνευστία της. Συγκεκριμένα, ὑπεστηρίζετο ὅ,τι ὁ προφήτης Μωϋσῆς χρησιμοποίησε διάφορες παλαιότερες προφορικὲς παραδόσεις καὶ τίς γνώσεις τῆς ἐποχῆς του, γιὰ νὰ καταγράψῃ τὴν ἐν λόγῳ διήγησιν. Ἐπειδὴ ὁ συγγραφεὺς ἦταν κληρικός, ὁ ὁποῖος ἐφημίζετο διὰ τίς κατὰ τὰ ἄλλα, ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πλεῖστον, ὀρθόδοξες καὶ παραδοσιακὲς θέσεις του, ὁ μοναχὸς ἐπηρεάστηκε.

Σὲ σχετικὴ συζήτησιν ἀνέφερε στὸν πατέρα Παῖσιο αὐτὲς τίς ἀπόψεις. Ὁ Γέροντας ἐμφανῶς στενοχωρημένος ἀπάντησε:

- Βρὲ παιδάκι μου!... «Θεῖο καλυφθεῖς ὁ βραδύγλωσσος γνόφω...!!!» Καλὰ, ἀπορῶ! Τὰ ψέλνετε [σημειωτέον ὅ,τι ἦταν ἡμέρες Πεντηκοστῆς, πὸν ἐψάλετο ἡ ἀνωτέρω καταβασία] καὶ δὲν προσέχετε τί ψέλνετε!

(ε') Ἄλλοτε, περιπαίζοντας μὲ εὐθυμο, ἀλλὰ καὶ εὐφυέστατο, τρόπο τίς σχετικὲς θεωρίες περὶ δημιουργίας τοῦ ἀνθρώπου διὰ τῆς αὐτομάτου αὐτοεξελιξέως τῶν ὀργανισμῶν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀτελέστερους σὲ τελειότερους, ἀνέφερε: «Ἄν ἡ δεκαοχτοῦρα πῆ δεκαεννιά, θὰ τῆς βάλω εἴκοσι (ἄριστα)». Προφανῶς ὑπογραμμίζοντας τὴν διαφορὰν μεταξύ ἀλόγων ζώων καὶ λογικοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ἐνῶ, δηλαδή, ἡ δεκαοχτοῦρα—ὅπως καὶ ὅλα τὰ ἄλογα ζῶα—ἀπὸ τῆς δημιουργίας της ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ μέχρι σήμερα δὲν μπόρεσε νὰ προοδεύσῃ καὶ ἐξελιχθῆ ἔστω καὶ ἐλάχιστα (ἀπὸ τὸ 18, πὸν ἔλεγε, νὰ πῆ 19), ἐν ἀντιθέσει ὁ λογικὸς ἄνθρωπος ἔλαβε ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ τὴν δυνατότητα νὰ προοδεύῃ καὶ ἐξελίσσειται διαρκῶς.

Για την Πόλη μας

Του Παναγιώτη Μελικίδη.

Στις 29 Μαΐου 1453 η Κωνσταντινούπολη αλώθηκε για δεύτερη φορά—μετά την Δ΄ Σταυροφορία (1204)—από τους Τούρκους.

Νομίζω ό,τι θα ήταν ενδιαφέρον να δοῦμε συνοπτικά πῶς συνδέεται ἡ προσδοκία γιὰ τὴν ἀποκατάσταση τοῦ Γένους (δηλαδή ἡ ἀπελευθέρωση τῆς Πόλης) με τὴν λειτουργικὴ συνείδηση. Ἀφορμὴ παρατήρησης τῆς διάστασης αὐτῆς ἀποτελεῖ τὸ δημοτικὸ τραγούδι πὸν ἀναφέρεται στὴν τελευταία Θεία Λειτουργία πὸν τελέστηκε στὸ Ναὸ τῆς Ἁγίας Σοφίας:

**Φωνὴ τοὺς ἦρθε ἐξ οὐρανοῦ κι ἀπ' ἀγγέλου στόμα:
Πάψατε τὸ χερουβικὸ κι ἄς χαμηλώσουν τ' ἄγια,
γιατὶ εἶναι θέλημα Θεοῦ ἡ Πόλη νὰ τουρκέψη.
Μόν' στέιλτε λόγο στὴ Φραγκιά νὰ ῥθουνε τρία καράβια,
Τὸ νὰ νὰ πάρη τὸ Σταυρὸ καὶ τὸ ἄλλο τὸ Βαγγέλιο,
τὸ τρίτο τὸ καλύτερο τὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζά μας,
μὴ μᾶς τὴν πάρουν τὰ σκυλιὰ καὶ μᾶς τὴν μαγαρίσουν.**

Τὸ δημοτικὸ αὐτὸ τραγούδι ἐκφράζει τὴν λαϊκὴ εὐσέβεια, ἡ ὁποία ταυτίζεται με τὸν κανόνα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὅ,τι κάθε Λειτουργία πὸν ἀρχίζει πρέπει ὡπωςδήποτε νὰ τελειώνει. Στὴν προκειμένη περίπτωση, σύμφωνα πάντα με τὴν λαϊκὴ παράδοση, ἡ τελευταία Λειτουργία στὴν Ἁγία Σοφία δὲν περατώθηκε λόγω τῆς Ὀθωμανικῆς εἰσβολῆς καὶ ὁ ἱερέας μαζί με τὰ Τίμια Δῶρα ὀδηγήθηκε με τρόπο θαυματουργικὸ σὲ μυστικὴ κρύπτη τοῦ τείχους τοῦ Ἁγίου Βήματος.

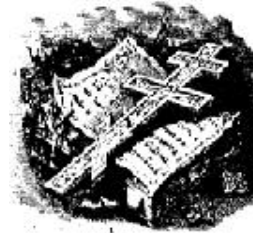
Ἔτσι ὁ Θεὸς στὴν συνείδηση τοῦ λαοῦ «ἐκβιάζεται» νὰ ἐλευθερώσει τὴν Βασιλεύουσα, προκειμένου νὰ ὀλοκληρωθεῖ τὸ ἡμιτελὲς μυστήριο πὸν διακόπηκε τὴν ὥρα τοῦ Χερουβικοῦ. Τὸ στοιχεῖο αὐτὸ μᾶς βοηθάει νὰ τοποθετήσουμε τὴν συγγραφὴ τοῦ δημῶδους ἄσματος κατὰ τὴν περίοδο τῆς τουρκοκρατίας καὶ στὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς παγίωσης τῶν ιδεολογημάτων πὸν ἀφοροῦσαν τὴν μελλοντικὴ ἐθνικὴ ἀποκατάσταση.

Τὸ δεύτερο ἐνδιαφέρον σημεῖο εἶναι ἡ περιγραφὴ τοῦ τρόπου διάσωσης τῶν ἱερῶν ἀντικειμένων. Ἡ φυγάδευση ἀναλαμβάνεται ἀπὸ φράγκικα καράβια. Ἐδῶ ἔχουμε ἐπέμβαση μεταγενέστερη στὸ κείμενο, ἀφοῦ τὸ πρωτότυπο ἀναφερόταν στὴ βίαη ἀρπαγὴ τῶν ἐν λόγω ἀντικειμένων ἀπὸ τοὺς Φράγκους κατὰ τὴν Δ΄ Σταυροφορία τὸ 1204. Ἔτσι στὴν μεταγενέστερη ἔκδοση τὸ παλιὸ ὑλικὸ τροποποιήθηκε, ὥστε ἡ ἀφαίρεση τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, τοῦ Σταυροῦ καὶ τῆς Τράπεζας νὰ παρουσιάζεται ἐπιβεβλημένη.

Σύμφωνα με νεώτερη Ἑρακικὴ παράδοση, ἡ ἁγία Τράπεζα ἔπεσε ἀπὸ τὸ πλοῖο στὴν θάλασσα ἢ ὅλο τὸ πλοῖο βυθίστηκε καὶ παραμένει ἀπὸ τότε στὸν βυθὸ τοῦ Ἑρακικοῦ πελάγους ἀναμένοντας τὴν ἀπελευθέρωση τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης, πὸν ὅταν πραγματοποιηθεῖ, με θεϊκὴ βούληση θὰ ἐμφανισθεῖ

στὴν παραλία τῆς Πόλης, γιὰ νὰ τοποθετηθεῖ ξανά στὴν ἀρχικὴ τῆς θέση.

Εἶναι πράγματι ἐνδιαφέρον τὸ γεγονὸς ὅ,τι οἱ θρύλοι τοῦ λαοῦ μας, πὸν σχετίζονται με τὴν ἄλωση καὶ με τὴν προσδοκία τῆς ἀποκατάστασης, συνδέονται πάντα με τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ, φανερώνοντας με ἀπλοϊκὸ τρόπο αὐτὸ πὸν διακηρύσσει ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Παράδοση τῶν ἁγίων Πατέρων τῆς, ὅ,τι ὁ Θεὸς προσωπικὰ διευθύνει τὴν ἱστορία, ὅπως ἐπίσης καὶ τὸ γεγονὸς ὅ,τι τὸ ἐνδιαφέρον τῶν λαϊκῶν παραδόσεων πὸν ἀφοροῦν τὴν πώση τῆς τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Πόλεως ἐστιάζεται στὸν λόγο: *Μὴ δῶτε τὸ ἅγιον τοῖς κυσὶ μηδὲ βάλητε τοὺς μαργαρίτας ὑμῶν ἐμπροσθεν τῶν χοίρων...* (Μαθ 7:6).



Ἡ Στενὴ καὶ Ἀνηφορικὴ Ὁδὸς

Πρεσβ. Διονυσίου Τάτση, ἀπὸ τὴν Ἑβδομαδιαία Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἐφημερίδα «Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος», 17 Ἀπριλίου 2009.

«Πολλὲς φορές οἱ κοσμικοὶ ἄνθρωποι ἔπροβληματίζονται γιὰ τὶς ἀντιθέσεις καὶ διαφορὲς, πὸν παρατηροῦνται στὴν κοινωνία καὶ διερωτῶνται, γιατί ὁ Θεὸς ἐπιτρέπει νὰ ὑπάρχουν πλούσιοι καὶ φτωχοί, ὑγιεῖς καὶ ἀσθενεῖς, χαρούμενοι καὶ κατηφεῖς, ἐνάρετοι καὶ ἀμαρτωλοί», εἶπα στὸ φίλο μου.

«Γιὰ ν' ἀπαντήσεις σ' αὐτὸν τὸν προβληματισμὸ καὶ νὰ πείσεις τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, χρειάζεται μιὰ πνευματικὴ θὰ ἔλεγα προϋπόθεση. Δηλαδή νὰ πιστεύουν ὅ,τι ὁ Θεὸς φροντίζει γιὰ τὸν καθένα χωριστὰ καὶ δημιουργεῖ τὶς κατάλληλες συνθήκες γιὰ τὴν πνευματικὴ τους πρόοδο καὶ τὴν ἀπόκτηση τῆς αἰώνιας ζωῆς. Συνήθως οἱ κοσμικοὶ δὲν πιστεύουν σ' αὐτὸ τὸ σχέδιο τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὅποτε δὲν δέχονται καὶ τὶς ἀπαντήσεις στὸν προβληματισμὸ τους. Ὡστόσο, ἂς ἀναλύσουμε τὸ θέμα, γιατί συχνὰ τίθεται, ἀπάντησε ὁ Νήφων.

«Τί εἶναι λοιπὸν καλύτερο γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο. Νὰ εἶναι φτωχὸς ἢ πλούσιος; Ποιὸς βρίσκεται πιὸ κοντὰ στὸ Θεό;», ρώτησα.

«Νομίζω ὅ,τι ὁ φτωχὸς στρέφεται εὐκολότερα στὸ Θεό. Ἐχει μεγαλύτερη ἐμπιστοσύνη στὴν πρόνοιά του. Ἐνῶ ὁ πλούσιος εἶναι πλεονέκτης καὶ φιλήδονος καὶ εὐκολα αὐτονομεῖται ἀπ' τὸ Θεό. Χάνει τὴ δυνατότητα νὰ βλέπει τὴ ζωὴ πνευματικὰ, με εὐαισθησία πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους κι εὐχαριστία πρὸς τὸ Θεό. Στὴν ἐρώτηση “ἂν οἱ φτωχοὶ γίνονταν πλούσιοι,” δὲν θὰ ἦταν καλύτερα; Ἀπαντῶ ἀρνητικὰ. Θὰ ξεχνοῦσαν τὸ Θεὸ καὶ τοὺς εὐεργέτες τους καὶ θὰ κατέστρεφαν τὴν ψυχὴ τους με τὶς κοσμικὲς

πολυτέλειες. Πρέπει πάλι να διευκρινίσω ὅ,τι ὁ φτωχὸς πρέπει νὰ εἶναι πιστὸς γιὰ νὰ ὠφεληθεῖ ἀπ' τὴ φτώχειά του. Διαφορετικὰ ἡ φτώχεια εἶναι δυστυχία. Γιὰ τὸν πιστὸ ὅμως ἡ φτώχεια εἶναι μιὰ προστατευτικὴ ἀσπίδα, γιὰ νὰ μὴ παρεμποδίζεται ὁ πνευματικὸς του ἀγὼνας.

Ὁ πλούσιος ἀντίθετα εἶναι στραμμένος καθ' ὄλοκληριαν στὰ υλικά ἀγαθὰ. Τὰ ἐνδιαφέροντά του ἐξαντλοῦνται στὴν αὐξηση καὶ διασφάλιση τοῦ πλούτου του. Τὸ πάθος τῆς πλεονεξίας τὸν ἔχει αἰχμαλωτισμένο στὴ γῆ. Ὁ οὐρανὸς εἶναι πολὺ μακριὰ γι' αὐτόν. Ἄν εἶχαμε ἀνάμεσά μας ἕνα θεοφώτιστο Γέροντα καὶ τὸν ρωτούσαμε τί θὰ συνέβαινε στὴν κοινωνία ἂν ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἦταν πλούσιοι, θὰ μᾶς ἀπαντοῦσε ὅ,τι κανένας δὲν θὰ θυμόταν τὸ Θεὸ καὶ ὅλοι θὰ γίνονταν ὑπερήφανοι καὶ φθονεροί. Μὲ ἄλλα λόγια ἡ κοινωνία θὰ ἦταν ἀφόρητη καὶ πολλοὶ θὰ ἐπέλεγαν τὸν ἀναχωρητισμὸ. Τώρα μὲ αὐτὴ τὴν ἀνισότητα ἔχουμε μιὰ ἰσορροπία, ὅταν μάλιστα στὴν κοινωνία ὅλα εἶναι ρευστὰ καὶ μποροῦν οἱ φτωχοὶ νὰ ξεπεράσουν τὴ φτώχεια καὶ οἱ πλούσιοι νὰ γίνουν φτωχοί», ἀπάντησε ὁ Νήφων.

«Υπάρχει κι ἕνας ἄλλος προβληματισμὸς, στὸν ὁποῖο πρέπει νὰ διατυπώσουμε κάπια ἀπάντηση. Λένε πολλοὶ: Ἔχουμε καλὴ προαίρεση, πιστεύουμε στὸ Θεό, θέλουμε ν' ἀκολουθήσουμε τὴν πνευματικὴ ζωὴ καὶ ν' ἀποκτήσουμε τὴν αἰώνια ζωὴ. Ὅμως ὅλα αὐτὰ εἶναι πολὺ δύσκολα καὶ τὰ ἐμπόδια σχεδὸν ἀνυπέβλητα. Γιατί ὁ Θεὸς δὲν μᾶς διευκολύνει, δὲν κάνει τὴ Χριστιανικὴ πορεία εὐκολότερη;».

Ὁ Νήφων μὲ παρακολουθοῦσε μὲ ἐνδιαφέρον καὶ μειδιώντας μοῦ εἶπε:

«Κανένας δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ φτάσει στὸν Παράδεισο μὲ ἄνεση καὶ καλοπέραση. Πρέπει οἱ Χριστιανοὶ ν' ἀποκτήσουν ἀθλητικὸ πνεῦμα. Τὰ ἐμπόδια, οἱ πτώσεις, οἱ πειρασμοὶ κ.λπ. σὲ τελευταία ἀνάλυση βοηθοῦν ἐκείνους, ποὺ πραγματικὰ θέλουν νὰ ζήσουν Χριστιανικά. Αὐτὸ λέει ἡ ἐμπειρία τῶν Ἁγίων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης τῆς Κρονστάνδης λέει σχετικὰ μὲ τὸ θέμα αὐτό: “Κι ἂν ὁ Κύριος σὲ ἔκανε σύντομα δίκαιο, θὰ ἦσουν πολὺ ὑπερήφανοι γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου. Ἡ ἀμαρτία ὅμως σὲ ταπεινώνει, σοῦ δείχνει τὶς ἀδυναμίες καὶ τὰ πάθη σου. Καὶ τότε νιώθεις τὴν ἀνάγκη νὰ ἐπικαλεῖσαι τὸ Θεὸ καὶ τὴ χάρι Του.”

Οἱ πνευματικοὶ ἀγωνιστὲς δὲν ἐνοχλοῦνται ἀπ' τὰ ἐμπόδια καὶ τοὺς πειρασμοὺς. Ἀντίθετα, χαίρονται ὅταν ξεπερνῶν τὰ ἐμπόδια καὶ μένουν ἀλώβητοι ἀπ' τοὺς πειρασμοὺς. Οἱ περισσότεροὶ ὅμως Χριστιανοὶ δὲν εἶναι ἀγωνιστὲς. Δὲν ὑποψιάζονται κἂν ὅ,τι χωρὶς ἀγὼνα δὲν μπορεῖ κανεὶς νὰ τηρήσει τὶς ἐντολὲς τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου καὶ ν' ἀποκτήσει τὶς ἀρετὲς. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ προβληματίζονται στὴν πρώτη δυσκολία κι ἐγκαταλείπουν κάθε προσπάθεια, ἡ ὁποία θὰ τοὺς ἔκοβε μερικὲς ἐνήδονες συνήθειές τους».

Οἱ Ἀσθένειες καὶ Ὁ Πιστὸς

Γερομονάχου Γρηγορίου, ἀπὸ το περιοδικὸν «Πηγὴ Ζωῆς», 30 Σεπτεμβρίου, 2007.

Ὄταν ὁ Θεὸς δημιούργησε τὸν κόσμον καὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον, τὰ ἔκαμε ὅλα καλὰ λίαν. Ἀπὸ ποῦ λοιπὸν προέρχονται οἱ ἀσθένειες καὶ οἱ σωματικὲς ἀναπηρίες; Ποιὰ εἶναι ἡ αἰτία ποῦ ὁ ἄνθρωπος πολὺ συχνὰ εἶναι ἄρρωστος;

Ὁ μέγας Βασίλειος ἀναφερόμενος στὸ θέμα αὐτὸ λέγει: «Ἡ ἀσθένεια δὲν εἶναι δημιούργημα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὅλα τὰ ζῶα πλάσθηκαν μὲ τὴν πρέπουσα κατασκευὴ, κατὰ φύσιν, καὶ ὁ Θεὸς τὰ ἔφερε στὴν ζωὴ πλήρη καὶ ἀρτιμελῆ. Ὄταν ὅμως παρεκτράπηκαν ἀπὸ τὴν φυσικὴ τους κατάστασι, ἀρρώστησαν». Τὸ ἴδιο συμπεραίνει καὶ ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς: «Οἱ ἀρρώστιες προέρχονται ἀπὸ τὴν προγονικὴ ἀμαρτία... Ἐξαιτίας τῆς ἐνδυσθήκαμε αὐτὸ τὸ ἀρρωστιάτικο καὶ θνητὸ καὶ πολύπαθο σῶμα... Ἡ ἀρρώστια εἶναι, κατὰ κάποιον τρόπο, ἕνας ἀνώμαλος καὶ ἀπότομος δρόμος, στὸν ὁποῖο ἡ ἀμαρτία εἰσήγαγε τὸ ἀνθρώπινο γένος, καὶ τοῦ ὁποῖου ὁ τελευταῖος σταθμὸς εἶναι ὁ θάνατος».

Ἡ προπατορικὴ ἀμαρτία ἔφερε στὸν κόσμον τὴν φθορά, τὶς σωματικὲς ἀσθένειες καὶ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν θάνατον. Τὸ γεγονός ὅ,τι οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἴμαστε εὐάλωτοι στὴν φθορά, στὸν πόνο καὶ στὶς ἀρρώστιες, «ὀφείλεται στὴν ἀμαρτία τῶν πρωτοπλάστων». Στὴν συνέχεια ἡ ἀμαρτία ἐπλήθυνε καὶ οἱ ἀσθένειες πολλαπλασιάσθηκαν.

Οἱ ἀσθένειες ποῦ μᾶς βρίσκουν εἶναι συνήθως καρπὸς τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν μας. Αὐτὸ τὸ συμπέρασμα βγαίνει ἀπὸ τὸν λόγο ποῦ εἶπε ὁ Χριστὸς στὸν παράλυτό της Βηθεσδα, ἀφοῦ τὸν θεράπευσε: «Πρόσεξε, ἐγίνες ὑγιής, μὴν ἀμαρτάνεις πλέον». Ἀπὸ αὐτὸ μαθαίνουμε ὅ,τι τὸ νόσημα τοῦ ὁ παράλυτος τὸ ἀπέκτησε ἀπὸ τὶς ἀμαρτίες του. Τὴν ἴδια σημασία ἔχει ὁ λόγος τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ στὸν ἄλλο παράλυτό της Καπερναοῦμ: «Ἐχε θάρρος παιδί μου, σοῦ συγχωροῦνται οἱ ἀμαρτίες σου». Ὁ Κύριος, ἐπειδὴ γνώριζε καλὰ ὅ,τι ἡ ἀσθένεια τοῦ σώματος ἦταν συνέπεια τῆς ἀσθένειας τῆς ψυχῆς, δηλαδὴ τῆς ἀμαρτίας, θεράπευσε πρῶτα τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ παραλύτου, δίδοντας τὴν ἄφεση τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν του, γιὰ νὰ ἀκολουθήσει στὴν συνέχεια ἡ θεραπεία τοῦ σώματος.

Ὁ ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος ἀναφέρει τὸν Κάϊν σὰν ἕνα ἀπὸ τὰ πρῶτα παραδείγματα ποῦ ἡ ἀσθένεια συνδέεται μὲ τὴν ἀμαρτία. Διότι μετὰ τὸν φόνο τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ του, ἄρχισε νὰ τρέμει τὸ σῶμα του. «Πραγματικά», συμπεραίνει ὁ Ἅγιος, «πηγὴ καὶ ρίζα καὶ μητέρα ὄλων τῶν κακῶν εἶναι ἡ φύση τῆς ἀμαρτίας. Αὐτὴ παραλύει τὰ σώματά μας, αὐτὴ φέρνει τὶς ἀρρώστιες».

Σὲ ἄλλο σημεῖο ὁ χρυσορρήμων Πατὴρ μᾶς ἐξηγεῖ ἀναλυτικότερα: «Ἡ ἀμαρτία εἶναι φοβερὸ πρᾶγμα, καὶ καταστρέφει τὴν ψυχὴ. Πολλὲς φορὲς μάλιστα τὸ κακὸ ξεχειλίζει, καὶ ἐπεκτείνεται καὶ στὸ σῶμα. Αὐτὸ συμβαίνει

για τὸν ἐξῆς λόγο: Συνήθως ὅταν ἡ ψυχὴ μας ὑποφέρει, ἐμεῖς παραμένουμε ἀναίσθητοι, ἐνῶ ὅταν τὸ σῶμα πάθει ἔστω καὶ μικρὴ βλάβη, καταβάλλουμε κάθε προσπάθεια νὰ θεραπεύσουμε τὴν ἀρρώστια, ἐπειδὴ ἀκριβῶς τὴν αἰσθανόμαστε. Γι' αὐτὸ πολλές φορές ὁ Θεὸς τιμωρεῖ τὸ σῶμα γιὰ τὰ ἁμαρτήματα τῆς ψυχῆς, ὥστε μὲ τὴν πληγὴ τοῦ κατωτέρου (δηλαδὴ τοῦ σώματος) νὰ τύχει κάποιας θεραπείας καὶ τὸ ἀνώτερο, δηλαδὴ ἡ ψυχὴ». Πραγματικά, ἡ ἀρρώστια θλίβει τὸν ἄνθρωπο, τὸν ταπεινώνει καὶ τὸν κάμνει νὰ θυμηθεῖ τὸν Θεό. Καταφεύγοντας δὲ στὸν Θεό, βρίσκει μαζί μὲ τὴν υγεία τοῦ σώματος καὶ τὴν υγεία τῆς ψυχῆς.

Ὁ ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος, τονίζει ὅ,τι «αἰτία τῶν σωματικῶν κακῶν εἶναι ἡ κακία τῆς ψυχῆς. Καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ φανέρωσε ὁ ἐπὶ τριανταοκτῶ ἔτη παράλυτος καὶ ὁ ἄλλος ποὺ τὸν κατέβασαν ἀπὸ τὴν στέγη». Ἄλλωστε «ἐὰν τὸ σπουδαιότερο ἀπὸ ὅλα, δηλαδὴ ὁ ἴδιος ὁ θάνατος, ἔχει τὴν ρίζα καὶ τὴν αἰτία του στὴν ἁμαρτία, πολὺ περισσότερο ἰσχύει αὐτὸ καὶ γιὰ τὶς περισσότερες ἀπὸ τὶς ἀρρώστιες».

Θὰ ἀναρωτηθεῖ ἴσως κανεὶς: «Καὶ τότε γιατί δὲν τιμωροῦνται ὅλοι οἱ ἁμαρτωλοί; Βλέπουμε πολλοὺς ἀσεβεῖς νὰ καλοπερνοῦν καὶ νὰ σφύζουν ἀπὸ υγεία». Ὁ ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος, ἀπαντώντας στὴν ἀπορία αὐτή, λέγει ὅ,τι πρέπει νὰ θρηνοῦμε περισσότερο γι' αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἄνθρώπους, ποὺ ἐνῶ ἁμαρτάνουν δὲν τιμωροῦνται. «Διότι τὸ ὅ,τι δὲν ἔπαθαν τίποτε σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ζωὴ γίνεται αἰτία μεγαλύτερης τιμωρίας στὴν ἄλλη ζωὴ. Ὅσα λυπηρὰ συμβαίνουν στὴν παρούσα ζωὴ εἶναι νουθεσία, ἐνῶ στὴν ἄλλη ζωὴ εἶναι τιμωρία».

«Ὅν ἀγαπᾷ Κύριος παιδεύει»

Ἄραγε ὅλες οἱ ἀρρώστιες ὀφείλονται στὶς ἁμαρτίες μας; Ἄν καὶ συνήθως αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ αἰτία, ὅμως δὲν εἶναι ἡ μοναδική. Ὑπάρχουν καὶ ἄλλοι λόγοι.

Κάποιες φορές ὁ Θεὸς παραχωρεῖ μία ἀρρώστια, γιὰ νὰ παιδαγωγῆσει καὶ νὰ ἐξαγιάσει τὰ ἀγαπημένα παιδιά Του. Κατὰ τοὺς Ἁγίους, «ὕπάρχει ἀρρώστια ποὺ παραχωρεῖται γιὰ νὰ δοκιμασθοῦμε. Καὶ ἡ δοκιμασία αὐτὴ δίδεται γιὰ νὰ ἀναδειχθοῦμε ἄξιοι (νὰ εἴμαστε παιδιά τοῦ Θεοῦ). Διότι, ἄνθρωπος ποὺ δὲν δοκιμάζεται ἀπὸ πειρασμὸ παραμένει ἄπειρος καὶ ἀνώριμος... Ἐνῶ αὐτὸς ποὺ δοκιμάζεται μέσα στοὺς κινδύνους γίνεται δόκιμος καὶ ἐπιτυχημένος, ὅπως γίνεται μὲ τὸν χρυσὸ ποὺ καθαρίζεται καὶ λαμπικάρεται μέσα στὴ φωτιά. Ἐπειδὴ, ἡ δοκιμασία δημιουργεῖ τὴν ἐλπίδα στὸν Θεό, καὶ ἡ ἐλπίδα δὲν διαψεύδει αὐτὸν ποὺ τὴν ἔχει». Στὶς περιπτώσεις αὐτές, ὁ ἄνθρωπος μὲ τὴν ὑπομονὴ ποὺ δείχνει ἀποθηκεύει οὐράνιο μισθό.

Ὁ Χριστὸς μᾶς διαβεβαίωσε ὅ,τι κάθε πιστός, ὅταν ἔχει πνευματικὸ καρπὸ, κλαδεύεται ὅπως τὸ κλῆμα, γιὰ νὰ φέρει ἀκόμη περισσότερο καρπὸ. Καὶ «ἐὰν γίνῃ κάποιο κλάδεμα στὰ κλήματα τῆς νοητῆς ἀμπέλου, δὲν θὰ συμβεῖ αὐτὸ χωρὶς πόνου... Ἄλλωστε μὲ πόνου καὶ θλίψεις μᾶς παιδεύει ὁ φιλάρετος Θεὸς μας... Ἀλλὰ ἡ μικρὴ αὐτὴ

θλίψη μᾶς κάμνει μακάριους, καθὼς προσφέρει θεϊκὴ παιδαγωγία. Καὶ μάρτυς ὁ προφήτης Δαυὶδ ποὺ λέγει: «Μακάριος ἄνθρωπος ὃν ἂν παιδεύσης, Κύριε».

Ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι ἀγάπη, καὶ οἱ τρόποι τῆς παιδαγωγίας Του πρὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπο εἶναι θαυμαστοὶ καὶ ἀνεξερεύνητοι.

Ὁ γέροντας Παῖσιος ἔδωσε μία παραστατικὴ εἰκόνα, ὅταν τὸν ρώτησαν, γιατί ὁ Θεὸς σὲ μερικοὺς ἄνθρώπους δίνει πολλὰ δοκιμασίες, ἐνῶ σὲ ἄλλους δὲν δίνει: «Τί λέγει ἡ Ἁγία Γραφή; Ὅν ἀγαπᾷ Κύριος παιδεύει, (δηλαδὴ, ἐκεῖνον ποὺ ἀγαπᾷ ὁ Κύριος, τὸν παιδαγωγεῖ μὲ θλίψεις).

Ἐνας πατέρας ἔχει λ.χ. ὀκτῶ παιδιά. Τὰ πέντε μένουν στὸ σπίτι, κοντὰ στὸν πατέρα τους, καὶ τὰ τρία φεύγουν μακριὰ του καὶ δὲν τὸν σκέφτονται. Σ' αὐτὰ ποὺ μένουν κοντὰ του, ἂν κάνουν καμμιά ἀταξία, τοὺς τραβάει τὸ αὐτί, τοὺς δίνει κανένα «σκαμπιλάκι» ἢ ἂν εἶναι φρόνιμα τὰ χαϊδεύει, τοὺς δίνει καὶ καμμιά σοκολάτα. Ἐνῶ αὐτὰ ποὺ εἶναι μακριὰ, οὔτε χᾶδι οὔτε σκαμπίλι ἔχουν.

Ἔτσι κάνει καὶ ὁ Θεός. Τοὺς ἄνθρώπους ποὺ εἶναι κοντὰ Του καὶ ἔχουν καλὴ διάθεση, ἂν σφάλουν λίγο, τοὺς δίνει ἓνα σκαμπιλάκι καὶ ἐξοφλοῦν ἢ, ἂν τοὺς δώσει περισσότερα σκαμπίλια, ἀποταμιεύουν. Σ' ἐκείνους πάλι ποὺ εἶναι μακριὰ του δίνει χρόνια γιὰ νὰ μετανοήσουν».



Σημεῖα Καιρῶν

Ἡ Μασωνία στὸ πολιτικὸ ἐπίπεδο καὶ ὁ Οἰκουμενισμὸς στὶς θρησκευτικὲς θὰ εἶναι τὸ ὑπόβαθρο ποὺ θὰ πατήσει ὁ Ἀντίχριστος ὅταν ἔλθει.

Αὐτὰ ὁ λέει ὁ π. Ἀθανάσιος Μυτιληναῖος σὲ μιὰ ἱστορικὴ του ὁμιλία τὸ 1991.

Καὶ κάπου 18 χρόνια ἀργότερα βλέπουμε πόσο πιὸ ἀληθινὰ εἶναι τὰ λόγια του. Τὸ 1991 δὲν ἦταν ἀπόλυτα ἀντιληπτὸ τί ἐστὶ οἰκουμενισμὸς· σήμερα ὅμως ἡ παναίρεση αὐτὴ ποὺ θὰ εἶναι καὶ ἡ τελευταία ποὺ θὰ ταλαιπωρήσει τὸν κόσμον πρὶν τὴν ἔλευση τοῦ Ἀντίχριστου ἔχει κυριαρχήσει καὶ ἔχουν πιαστεῖ στὰ δίχτυα τῆς καὶ οἱ ἐκλεκτοὶ. Σήμερα χειροπιαστὰ βλέπουμε μεγάλους κληρικοὺς νὰ ἔχουν προσχωρήσει σὲ αὐτὴν καὶ προφασιζόμενοι τὴν ἀγάπη μεταξὺ ἐτεροδόξων νὰ ὀδηγοῦνται στὴν πλάνη καὶ στὸ ψεῦδος.

Συμπέρασμα: Οἱ προφητείες βρίσκονται ἐν ἐξελίξει καὶ θὰ πρέπει νὰ προετοιμαστοῦμε γιὰ τὸν Ἀντίχριστο, δηλαδὴ νὰ δυναμώσουμε τὴν πίστη μας στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία.

Ὁ Θάνατος Τέκνου

Τοῦ Ἁγίου Βασιλείου τοῦ Μεγάλου—Ἐπιστολή 6^η, πρὸς τὴν σύζυγον τοῦ Νεκταρίου γιὰ νὰ τὴν παρηγορήσει γιὰ τὸ θάνατο τοῦ παιδιοῦ της.

Ἐσκόπευα νὰ σιωπήσω ἀπέναντι τῆς κοσμιότητός σου μὲ τὴν σκέψη ὅτι, μὲ τὴν ψυχὴ συμβαίνει ὅ,τι καὶ μὲ ἓνα μάτι πού πάσχει ἀπὸ φλεγμονή. Αὐτό, δηλαδή τὸ μάτι καὶ τὸ πὶδ ἀπαλὸ πράγμα νὰ τὸ ἐγγίσει ἐρεθίζεται. Ἔτσι αἰσθάνεται καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ πού ἔχει τραυματιστεῖ ἀπὸ βαριά θλίψη, ὅταν πάει κανεὶς νὰ τῆς μιλήσει. Γιατὶ τὰ λόγια ὅσο καὶ ἂν εἶναι παρηγορητικά ὅταν λέγονται τὴν ὥρα πού ἡ ψυχὴ πάσχει καὶ ἀγωνιᾷ, τίς φαίνονται πολὺ ἐνοχλητικά.

Ἐπειδὴ ὁμως σκέφθηκα ὅ,τι τώρα ἔχω νὰ κάνω μὲ Χριστιανὴ ἐκπαιδευμένη στὰ θεῖα ἀπὸ πολὺ καιρὸ καὶ πεπειραμένη στὰ ἀνθρώπινα, ἐνόμισα ὅ,τι δὲν θὰ ἦταν σωστὸ νὰ παραλείψω τὸ καθήκον μου. Γνωρίζω ποιά εἶναι τὰ σπλάγγνα τῶν μητέρων καὶ ιδιαίτερα ὅταν θυμηθῶ τοὺς δικούς σου καλοὺς καὶ ἡμεροὺς τρόπους πρὸς ὄλους, λογαριάζω πόσο μεγάλος πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ὁ πόνος γιὰ τὴ συμφορὰ πού σ' ἔχει βρεῖ τώρα. Ἐχασες γιό, τὸν ὅποιο, ὅσον ζοῦσε, μακάριζαν ὅλες οἱ μητέρες καὶ εὐχονταν τέτοιοι νὰ εἶναι καὶ οἱ δικοὶ τους γιοί. Καὶ ὅταν πέθανε, ἔκλαψαν σὰν νὰ εἶχε θάψει κάθε μία τὸν δικό της.

Ὁ θάνατος ἐκείνου ὑπῆρξε πλῆγμα στὶς δύο πατρίδες (ἐννοεῖ καὶ τοῦ πατέρα καὶ τῆς μητέρας του), τὴν δική μας καὶ τὴν χώρα τῶν Κιλικῶν. Μ' ἐκείνον μαζί ἔπεσε καὶ τὸ μέγα καὶ ἐνδοξον γένος (σημ, ἴσως τὸ πεθαμένο παιδί νὰ ἦταν μονάκριβο· ἔτσι μὲ τὸ θάνατό του ξεκληριζόταν ἡ γενιά τους), κατέρρευσε σὰν νὰ μετακινήθηκε ἡ βάση του. Ὡ συναπάντημα πονηροῦ δαίμονος! Πόσο τρομερὸ κακὸ κατώρθωσες νὰ προκαλέσεις!

Ὡ γῆ, πού ἀναγκάστηκες νὰ ὑποφέρεις ἓνα τέτοιο πάθος! καὶ ὁ ἥλιος ἀσφαλῶς θὰ ἔφριπτε, ἂν εἶχε αἴσθησι μπροστὰ σ' ἐκεῖνο τὸ σκυθρωπὸ θέαμα. Καὶ τί μπορεῖ νὰ πῆ κανεὶς ἄξιο νὰ ἐκφράζει ὅσα τοῦ ὑπαγορεύει ἡ ἀπελπισία τῆς ψυχῆς; Ἀλλά, ὅπως διδαχθήκαμε ἀπὸ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, τὰ ὅσα μᾶς συμβαίνουν δὲν εἶναι ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴ θεία Πρόνοια, γιατί οὔτε σπουργίτης δὲν πέφτει χωρὶς τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Πατέρα μας. Ὡστε ὅ,τι ἔχει συμβεῖ ἐγινε μὲ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Δημιουργοῦ μας. Καὶ ποιὸς μπορεῖ νὰ ἀντισταθεῖ στὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ; Ἄς δεχτοῦμε λοιπὸν τὸ συμβάν. Διότι μὲ τὴν δυσανασχέτησι οὔτε αὐτὸ πού ἔχει γίνε διορθώνουμε καὶ ἐπὶ πλέον καταστρέφουμε τοὺς ἑαυτούς μας. Ἄς μὴ κατηγορήσουμε τὴν δίκαιη κρίσι τοῦ Θεοῦ, διότι εἴμαστε πολὺ ἀμαθεῖς, γιὰ νὰ ἐλέγχουμε τίς ἀνέκφραστες κρίσεις Του.

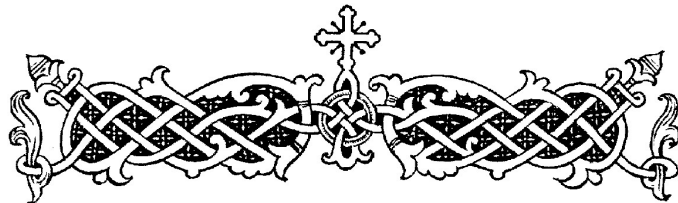
Τώρα ὁ Κύριος δοκιμάζει τὴν ἀγάπη σου σ' Ἐκεῖνον. Τώρα ἔχεις τὴν εὐκαιρία νὰ κερδίσεις μὲ τὴν ὑπομονή σου τὴν μερίδα τῶν Μαρτύρων. Ἡ μητέρα τῶν Μακκαβαίων εἶδε τὸ θάνατο ἑπτὰ παιδιῶν της καὶ δὲν ἐστέναξε, οὔτε ἔχυσε ἄσκοπα δάκρυα, ἀλλὰ ἐνῶ ἔβλεπε τὰ παιδιά της

νὰ φεύγουν ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τὴ ζωὴ μὲ σκληρὰ βασανιστήρια, εἶχε εὐχαριστιακὰ βιώματα πρὸς τὸ Θεό. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ κρίθηκε καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τέλεια καὶ καταξιωμένη Χριστιανή.

Μεγάλη ἡ συμφορὰ, τὸ ὁμολογῶ καὶ ἐγώ. Μεγάλοι ὁμως καὶ οἱ μισθοὶ πού ὁ Κύριος ἔχει ἐτοιμάσει γιὰ ὅσους κάνουν ὑπομονή. Ὄταν ἔγινες μητέρα καὶ εἶδες τὸ παιδί σου καὶ εὐχαριστοῦσες τὸ Θεό, γνώριζες ὅπωςδήποτε ὅ,τι εἶσαι θνητὴ καὶ ὅ,τι θὰ γέννησες θνητό; Τὶ τὸ παράδοξον λοιπόν, πού ὁ θνητὸς πέθανε; Μήπως σέ στενοχωρεῖ πού πέθανε πρόωρα; Δὲν μπορούμε νὰ ξέρουμε ἐάν δὲν ἦταν τώρα ὁ κατάλληλος καιρὸς νὰ φύγει. Γιατὶ ἐμεῖς δὲν ξέρουμε τί συμφέρει τὴν ψυχὴ μας οὔτε ὀρίζουμε προθεσμίες στὴν ἀνθρωπίνη ζωὴ.

Στρέψε τὰ μάτια σου γύρω σ' ὅλο τὸν κόσμον ὅπου κατοικεῖς καὶ θὰ κατανοήσεις ὅ,τι ὅλα ὅσα βλέπουμε εἶναι θνητὰ καὶ ὅ,τι ὑπόκεινται ὅλα στὴ φθορὰ. Κύτταξε ἐπάνω στὸν οὐρανὸ. Κάποτε καὶ αὐτὸς θὰ διαλυθεῖ. Κύτταξε τὸν ἥλιο. Οὔτε καὶ αὐτὸς θὰ παραμείνει. Τὰ ἀστέρια ὅλα, τὰ ζῶα τῆς ξηρᾶς καὶ τῶν ὑδάτων, αἱ ὠραιότητες τῆς γῆς, ἡ ἴδια ἡ γῆ, ὅλα εἶναι φθαρτά, ὅλα μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγο δὲν θὰ ὑπάρχουν. Ἄς εἶναι λοιπὸν ἡ σκέψις ὄλων αὐτῶν παρηγοριὰ γιὰ ὅ,τι σοῦ ἔχει τώρα συμβεῖ. Μὴ μετρᾶς τὴ συμφορὰ στὸ βάθος της, γιατί τότε θὰ σοῦ φανεῖ ἀφόρητη. Ἄν ὁμως τὸ συγκρίνεις μὲ ὅλα τὰ ἀνθρώπινα, τότε θὰ βρεῖς παρηγοριὰ.

Ἐπάνω δὲ ἀπὸ ὅλα ἔχω νὰ σοῦ πῶ ἐκεῖνο τὸ σπουδαῖο: Λυπήσου τὸν σύζυγόν σου. Νὰ παρηγορεῖ ὁ ἓνας τὸν ἄλλο. Μὴ κάμεις σκληρότερη τὴ συμφορὰ μὲ τὸ νὰ σέ βλέπει νὰ καταστρέφεις ἀπὸ τὴ στενοχώρια τὸν ἑαυτό σου. καὶ μὲ λίγα λόγια ἔχω τὴ γνώμη ὅ,τι δὲν ὑπάρχουν λόγια τέτοια πού νὰ μποροῦν νὰ χαρίσουν σ' αὐτὸ τὸν πόνο σας παρηγοριὰ. Πιστεύω ὅ,τι αὐτὴ τὴ δοκιμασία θὰ τὴν ξεπεράσετε μονάχα μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ. Εὐχομαι λοιπὸν ὁ Ἰδιος ὁ Κύριος νὰ ἀγγίξει τὴν καρδιά σου μὲ τὴν ἀνέκφραστη δύναμή Του καὶ νὰ ἀνάγει μὲ ἀγαθοὺς λογισμοὺς τὸ φῶς στὴ ψυχὴ σου, ὥστε νὰ βρεῖς μέσα σου τὴν παρηγοριὰ.



Ἐχομε μάθει ὅ,τι ἀπὸ τὴν ἐγκράτεια καὶ τὴν ταπεινώσι γεννιέται ἡ ἀπάθεια καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν πίστι ἡ πνευματικὴ γνώσι. Ἀπὸ αὐτὰ προχωρεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ στὴν διάθεσι καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη. Ἀφοῦ οἰκειοποιηθῆ τὴν θεία ἀγάπη, ἀνεβαίνει πρὸς τὸ ὕψος της μὲ τὰ φτερά της καθαρῆς προσευχῆς ἀκατάπαυστα, μέχρις ὅτου φθάσι στὴν πλήρη γνώσι τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ γίνῃ τέλειος ἄνδρας μὲ τὴν πλήρη τελειότητα, πού εἶχε ὁ Χριστός, ὅπως λέγει ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος (Εφ 4:13).

Ἅγιος Θεόδωρος Ἐδέσσης

UFOs: THE SHATTERING ASSAULT

By Fr. Alexey Young (this paper originally appeared in *Orthodox America*, Vol IX, #8 (issue 88), March 1989).

From the Editor: While this article is 20-years old, it is as timely today as it was at its time of authorship. Our society's continuing and increasing pre-occupation with the occult and UFOs and the increasing influence of New Agers is deleteriously impacting the hearts, minds, and souls of brethren world-wide and especially our well-meaning but extremely curious youth.



Let no man deceive you by any means... (2Thess 2:3)

It is no coincidence that the ancient pagan mystery religions as well as numerous mystical fraternities (such as the Theosophists and Rosicrucians) speak of an “elite”—sometimes called “the Great White Brotherhood,” the “Ascended Masters,” or the “Mahatmas” of Madame Blavatsky—a group of beings seeking to guide and control the destiny of mortal man. Sometimes this “elite” is seen as non-human, at other times as “highly evolved” or perfected humans.

The ancestor of this “elite” is the “daimon” of the ancient pagan Greeks—from which, in fact, we get the word demon and which prompted the Holy Fathers to say that “the gods of the pagans are demons.” Thus, from the Christian point of view, there can be no doubt that such an “elite” exists, and is known to the followers of Christ as the army of fallen angels, the demonic host. This host enters into our fallen world through sin and heresy, as well as by occult practices of all kinds (from apparently “innocent” things such as Ouija boards or the New Age practice of “channeling”). Now however, fallen angels have found a new and particularly dazzling way to enter the world of men.

Whereas a generation ago only “cranks” and the mentally emotionally distressed believed in UFOs, today more than half the population of the US, according to surveys, accepts the reality of alien visitors. In particular, “many New Agers believe in unidentified flying objects,” according to Time, “crewed by oddly shaped extraterrestrials who have long visited the earth from more advanced planets, spreading the wisdom that they created, among other things, Stonehenge and the pyramids of Egypt.”

Although UFO literature is proliferous, the most respected and listened-to UFO “convert” is Whitley Streiber, who has written two recent books on his own experiences, “Communion: A True Story” (1987) and its sequel, “Transformation: A Breakthrough” (1988). Both books have been on the best seller list and the author has appeared in numerous television interviews, partly because he writes well and has consulted many members of the scientific community.

Although Streiber says that he was never before interested in UFOs and had read practically nothing on the subject, “this is

the story,” he writes in the first book, “of one man’s attempt to deal with a shattering assault from the unknown. It is a true story, as true as I know how to describe it. To all appearances I have had an elaborate personal encounter with intelligent non-human beings. But who could they be, and where have they come from? Are unidentified flying objects real? Are they goblins or demons... or visitors?”

Beginning in December 1985, Streiber and his family experienced a series of dream-like lights, voices, touchings and “night visitors” with bug-like heads. “At first,” he said, “I thought I was losing my mind. But I was interviewed by three psychologists and three psychiatrists and given a battery of psychological tests and a neurological examination and found to fall within the normal range in all respects. I was given a polygraph... and I passed without qualification.... The visitors marched right into the middle of the life of an indifferent skeptic without a moment’s hesitation.”

The fact that Streiber’s first book *Communion* also contains official medical statements as to his normalcy and sanity, as well as transcripts of hypnotic sessions (used to focus details of his experiences) and that he acknowledges by name the help of prominent scientists in many fields, adds to the veracious tone of his frightening story.

Streiber speculates that his “visitors” could be: (1) “From another planet or planets;” (2) “from earth, but so different from us that we have not hitherto understood that they were even real;” (3) “from another aspect of space-time”—another dimension; (4) “from this dimension in space but not in time”—in other words, time-travel by our own descendants into their own past (our present); (5) “from within us;” (6) “a certain hallucinatory wire in the mind,” or (7) “an aspect of the human species”—perhaps ghosts or, better yet, “maybe you and I are larvae, and the visitors are human beings in the mature form.”

What makes Streiber’s account so compelling is his apparent objectivity: He projects himself as an innocent bystander, in no way responsible for this bizarre encounter. Beyond the pages of these books, however, one discovers that Streiber is also the author of several horror stories, which contain similarities to his real life experience. As one critic pointed out: “*Communion* seems like the end of a logical progression leading from fiction on the bestseller list to the non-fiction side” (Thomas Dirch in *The Nation*, March 14, 1987). What is even more revealing, Streiber studied for 15 years with the Gurdjieff Foundation, a cultish group whose teaching stresses “the development of powers latent in the human psyche,” and whose spiritual eclecticism is popular among today’s New Agers. Obviously, Streiber’s role was not as passive as he would lead his readers to believe, he had—unknowingly, no doubt—predisposed himself to cooperate with such an experience. And one can more readily understand why the “aliens” told him: “You are our chosen one.”

Although he brings a diverse array of theories from world religion and philosophy to bear on his subject—everything from Hindu mythology to the warfare of St. Anthony the Great with demons—religion and God in the traditional sense are conspicuously absent from his thinking and he comes down in favor of the popular modern idea that SCIENCE is the only “key”—if still primitive—to understanding the experiences. But, as Hiermonk Seraphim (Rose) wrote in his study of UFOs (in “Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future”): “Science fiction has given the images, evolution has produced the philosophy, and the technology of the ‘space age’ has supplied the plausibility for such encounters.”

Rather than a boundless thirst for God, we have instead a “great thirst for contact with superior minds that will provide guidance for our poor, harassed, hectic planet” (Jacques Vallee, quoted in ORF, p.138). Indeed Streiber is himself a fervent environmentalist with an apocalyptic sense of destruction man is bringing upon his little earth-home.

What is in Streiber’s books is that mind or thought control is being exercised on the human race by these “visitors” in a way that can only be described in the classic sense as occult. The Orthodox reader is chilled when, at one point, the author discovers that he can “call up” these “visitors” at will and experience a kind of “communion” with them (thus, the title of his first book) in a manner that is already mediumistic.

No Orthodox Christian even slightly versed in the lives of the saints and the writings of the Holy Fathers can fail to understand what is happening here. The similarities between Streiber’s experiences (and those of other UFO “contactees”) and the demonic warfare of the saints is compelling. The author himself even describes peculiar smells associated with his “visitors”—among them, a “sulfur-like” odor which he compares to the head of a matchstick. His “visitors” have frightening, insect-like heads with enormous eyes that he associates with statues of the pagan goddess Ishtar. In *Transformation* he writes: “I felt an absolutely indescribable sense of menace. It was hell on earth to be there and yet I couldn’t move, couldn’t cry out, and couldn’t get away. I lay as still as death, suffering inner agonies. Whatever was there seemed so monstrously ugly, so filthy and dark and sinister... I still remember that thing crouching there, so terribly ugly, its arms and legs like limbs of a great insect, its eyes glaring at me.”

In his second book Streiber concludes that many of the “close encounters” he has had (and is still having) are for the purpose of “shattering my belief in the accepted paradigm of reality. And it succeeded very well... I suspect that experiences such as these are the outcome of a fundamental shift of mind. They are what happens when people begin to abandon the old, *false* beliefs...” Truer words were never spoken.

Although Streiber now believes that his “visitors” are extraterrestrials and have a physical reality, he also calls them

“goblins” and “soul eaters,” who have the “ability to enter the mind and affect thought,” and much, much worse. He writes: “Increasingly I felt as if I were entering a struggle that might be a struggle for my soul, my essence, or whatever part of me might have reference to the eternal... It was clear that the soul was very much at issue. People [have] experienced feeling as if their souls were being dragged from their bodies. More than one person had seen the visitors in the context of near-death experience.”

In spite of all this, Streiber’s delusion is so great that he can enthusiastically say that “it is up to each one of us to seek our own contact [with the “visitors”], develop it if it occurs, and challenge ourselves to use it for... spiritual growth...”

By contrast, Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov wrote a century ago: “The perception of spirits with eyes of the sense always brings harm, sometimes greater sometimes less, to men who do not have spiritual perception... He will unfailingly be deceived, he will unfailingly be attracted, he will unfailingly be sealed with the seal of deception...the seal of a frightful injury to his spirit; and further, the possibility of correction and salvation is often lost. This has happened with many, very many. It has happened not only with pagans, whose priests were for the most part in open “communion” with demons; it has happened not only with many Christians who do not know the mysteries of Christianity... it has [also] happened with many strugglers and monks...” (quoted in *The Soul After Death*, Fr. Seraphim Rose, p.68).

When he wasn’t “seeing” them, Streiber nonetheless frequently “heard” their voices, “as if a small speaker just to the right of my head.” Without any difficulty at all he saw that this was similar to pagan oracles of old: “The oracles at Delphi and many other places in the ancient world were channels answering questions in trance... With the rise of Christianity the voice died... So the voice I was hearing, as also the voices heard by modern channels, was possessed by an ancient and lofty human heritage... I was still well within the tradition of human experience.”

Streiber also speaks of psychic gifts that also appear, unbidden, in people who have UFO experiences: “Precognition, apparent telepathy, out-of-body perceptions, and even physical levitation. Such people often find street lights mysteriously shutting down as they walk down the street.” (One wonders if he had ever seen the 1950’s film about modern-day witchcraft, *Bell, Book, and Candle*, in which a novice warlock is able to turn out the street lights as he passes by.) Streiber concludes benignly: “I do not think that we have even begun to comprehend the visitors. I suspect that we are a lot farther from understanding them than we are of understanding, say, the songs of whales...”

But Fr. Seraphim Rose wrote: “Such stories of demonic activity were commonplace in earlier centuries. It is a sign of the spiritual crisis of today that modern men, for all their proud

enlightenment and wisdom are becoming once more aware of such experiences—but no longer have the Christian framework with which to explain them... A true evaluation of UFO experiences may be made only on the basis of Christian revelation and experience, and it is accessible only to the humble Christian believer who trusts these sources.” (“Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future,” pp. 137-138).

Ever since the phenomenally successful movies, *Close Encounters* and *E.T.*, we have seen a resurgence of interest in UFO phenomena. It will doubtless continue to grow as Christianity wanes in the West and people instead tune their ears to ancient “voices” once stilled by the Son of God.

The Orthodox Christian, however must hold on to the redemption offered by Christ, for as Fr. Seraphim wrote, “he knows that man is not to ‘evolve’ into ‘something higher’, nor has he any reason to believe that there are ‘highly evolved’ beings on other planets; but he knows well that there are indeed ‘advanced intelligences’ in the universe besides himself; there are two kinds, and he strives to live so as to dwell with those who serve God (the angels) and avoid contact with the others who have rejected God (the demons)... he distrusts his own ability to see through the deceptions of the demons, and therefore clings all the more firmly to the Scriptural and Patristic guidelines which the Church of Christ provides for his life...” (“Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future,” pp. 144-145).

O Archangel of God, leave us not defenseless against the spirits of evil in the upper air!



The evil spirits use all kinds of deceptions. Sometimes they create bold images, or they change themselves to appear as angels of light. This is the way they appeared before a contemporary ascetic while he was praying.

It was at night, and he heard loud voices, drums playing, and dancing. He got up to see what was going on. He saw nothing. It was the devil. He had barely sat down on his stool again to continue his prayer when suddenly his room was filled with light. The roof of his cell was lifted up. He thought the light was reaching the sky. Where the light came to an end there appeared the face of a man, like Christ’s. He could see only half of the face, but as he stared at it he heard an inner voice saying “You have been honored to see Christ!”

His automatic response was the thought “Who am I, the unworthy, to see Christ?” And he crossed himself. Immediately the apparition disappeared, and the cell’s roof fell back in place.

From “Athonite Gerontikon”

A LESSON IN DISCERNMENT

From “*The life of St. Pachomius.*”

The father of a small monastery would often come to see our Elder Pachomius because he was a friend whom he loved very much; and the words of God he heard from his mouth he would repeat to his own monks so that they too might hear God’s commandments. It happened that a brother of his monastery asked for a certain rank, and he replied to the brother, “Abba Pachomius warned me not to do this because you are not yet worthy of that thing.” The brother grew angry and dragged him along, saying, “Come, let us go to him, and he shall have to prove that to me.” The other followed him in amazement and sorrow.

When they came to Abba Pachomius, they found him busy building a part of the monastery wall. The brother approached our Fr. Pachomius and said to him very angrily, “Come down and give me proof of my sin, O liar Pachomius!”

The man of God, Pachomius, thanks to his long suffering, gave him no word whatever in reply. The other went on and said to him, “Who compelled you to lie, you who pride yourself on clear vision while your light is darkness?” The man of God, Abba Pachomius, understood the wiles of the devil who was in that man, and he said to him respectfully, “I have sinned, forgive me. Do you never sin yourself?” And at once the brother’s wicked anger calmed down.

Then Fr. Pachomius took the father of that monastery aside and questioned him, “What happened to this brother?” He answered him, “Forgive me, this man asked me for a thing that he does not deserve. I knew that he would not obey me, so I quoted you to him by name so he might perhaps have nothing to say. For I know that nothing is hidden from you. And behold, he has added an evil deed to his wickedness.”

Then our Abba Pachomius said to him, “Listen to me; give him that office so that by this means we may snatch his soul out of the enemy’s hands. For if we do good to a bad man, he comes thereby to have a perception of the good. This is God’s love, to take pains for one another.” When they heard this teaching of our holy father Pachomius, they went away very comforted and giving thanks to God. When they arrived at their monastery, the father of the monastery gave the rank to the brother as he had asked, in accordance with our father Abba Pachomius’ instruction.

A few days later, that brother came to regret his fault. Then he went back to our holy father Abba Pachomius, kissed his hands and feet, and said to him, “Truly, O man of God, you are much greater than what we hear of you every day. For the Lord knows that if you had not been patient with me the day I insulted you, sinner that I am, and if you had spoken some harsh word to me, I would have rejected the monastic life and gone back to the world. Blessed are you, O man of God, my lord father, for thanks to your patience and graciousness, the Lord has brought me back to life.”

A HOMILY ON PRAYER

By St. Theophan the Recluse.



The Lord instructed us in various degrees and types of prayer, so that each, according to his strength, could be a partaker in the goodness of prayer. For the work of prayer is a great work. It is, as I have said, the testimony of the spiritual life, and also the food of the spiritual life. Therefore one must work towards perfection in prayer more than all other things.

Now I want to remind you, as a warning, that it is difficult, if not impossible, to succeed in prayer, if we do not at the same time work on other virtues.

If we compare prayer to a perfume, and the soul to a bottle for perfume, then we will understand that as perfume does not keep its fragrance in a container full of holes, also the soul cannot continue to pray if there is a lack of virtue. If we compare someone who prays to the whole body, then we see the following lesson: As it is impossible for a man without legs to walk, even if the rest of his body is healthy, so it is impossible to approach God, or reach God in prayer, without active virtue.

Look in the apostolic teachings, and you will see that in them prayer does not stand alone, but together with a whole host of virtues. For example, the apostle Paul arms a Christian in spiritual battle and dresses him in the full armor of God. Look at what this is: The belt is truth, the armor is righteousness, the shoes are the gospel of peace, the shield is faith, the helmet is hope, the sword is the word of God (Eph 6:14-17). Such weapons! After all of this he places his warrior in prayer as if in some sort of fortress: *Pray at all times in the spirit with all sorts of prayer and petition.* (Eph 6:18).

It is, of course, possible for prayer alone to defeat all enemies, but in order to be strong in prayer, one must be successful in faith, hope, truth, righteousness, and all the rest. In another place, the same apostle adorns the soul with bridal clothing as the bride of Christ, saying, *Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and*

spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Col 3:12-16).

In many other places in the word of God, prayer is bound up tightly with all the other virtues, as their queen, after which they all strive, and which draws all of them after itself, or even better, as their fragrant flower. As it is necessary for a flower to be covered with leaves as well as having a stem, branches and root, in order to attract attention, it is also necessary for prayer to be accompanied by other good spiritual inclinations and labors in order to blossom like a flower in the soul; faith is the root, active love is like a stem and branches, and labors of a spiritual-physical nature are like leaves. When such a holy tree is planted in the soul, then in the morning, and in the evening, and during the course of the day, according to its state, the flowers of prayer will freely blossom and fill all of our inner chambers with fragrance.

I remind you of all of this, so that no one would think: "I labor in prayer, and that is enough." No; one must work and be zealous for all things together, both praying and working at all the virtues. It is true that it is impossible to succeed in virtues without prayer, but it is also necessary to work at the virtues while praying, so that the prayer can show its cooperation in these virtues. In order to succeed in prayer, one must pray, but the labor of prayer should be used as the means to virtues. One must be concerned about all things, and always strive to be on the right side.

The same thing happens in a clock. A clock works properly and shows the correct time only when all of the gears and other parts inside are complete and in their correct place, and joined together properly. This is the same in our inner spiritual mechanism: The striving of the soul will be true like an arrow, directed straight toward God, when all other parts of the soul are whole and are established in their correct places, so to speak, put in place by virtue.

I will teach you what sort of virtues should surround your prayer, or what sort of prayerful, virtuous life a Christian should plant in himself, not in my own words, but in the words of the holy hierarch Dimitri of Rostov, who briefly lists these things in the following instructions (from "Christian Spiritual Instruction"):

(1) When you wake up, let your first thought be about God, your first word be a prayer to God your creator and keeper of your life, Who is always able to give life or destroy it, who can strike with illness and heal, and who can save or destroy.

(2) Bow and give thanks to God Who raised you from sleep, and Who did not allow you to perish in your sins, but with long-suffering awaited your repentance.

(3) Make a start for better things, saying with the Psalmist: *I said, now I have made a beginning.* (Ps. 76:11). For no one

completes the path to heaven except he who makes a good beginning every day.

(4) From the morning pray like the Seraphim, act like the Cherubim, and be surrounded with angels.

(5) Do not waste time any longer. Do only those things which are necessary.

(6) In all deeds and words, keep your mind in God; do not write anything in your mind except Christ, and let no image touch your pure heart except the pure image of Christ our God and Savior.

(7) Awaken yourself to the love of God in all things, whenever you are able, especially say to yourself with the Psalmist: *In my meditation a fire was kindled.* (Ps. 38.4).

(8) You desire to love God, Whose visitation you always see and gaze upon with your interior eyes, therefore turn away from all evil deeds, words, and thoughts. Do, say, and think all things honorably, humbly, and with the fear of a son.

(9) Let meekness with praise and humility with honor be together.

(10) Let your words be quiet, humble, honorable, and useful. Let silence decide the words that you say. From henceforth, let no empty or rotten word escape your lips.

(11) If something funny happens, allow yourself only a smile, and this not often.

(12) You will fall into prodigality through anger, wrath, and arguing: Keep yourself moderate in anger.

(13) Always observe moderation in eating and drinking.

(14) Be condescending in all things, and God will bless you, and people will praise you.

(15) You must pray about your death, which is the end of all things.

See what sort of wonderful life is taught to the praying Christian. It is true that in one place we have spoken more about prayer, that is, of mental and heart-felt turning to God, but in another place, other virtues have been mentioned, and yet without all of them together, it is impossible to get a foothold in prayer.

Let everyone strive in knowledge: Standing in prayer and exercising it according to your instruction. How can you stand to pray if you are weighed down with intemperance, or carried away with anger, or if you do not stand in peace, or you are distracted by work and lack of attention and so on? If we are to avoid these things, then we are to strive to attain the opposite; that is, virtue. For this reason, St. John of the Ladder speaks of prayer, saying that it is the mother and the daughter of virtues.

Hearing this, some might say, "What great demands! What a heavy burden! Where can I ever find time and the strength?" But be strong, brethren! Very little is necessary, and one must only take up one thing: Zeal for God and salvation in Him in your soul. By its nature, the soul has much good in it and it is only misdirected into all evil things. As soon as zeal for

salvation and the pleasing of God is born in one's soul, all of the goodness gathers around this zeal, and immediately no small amount of good appears in the soul. Then zeal, strengthened by the grace of God, with the help of this initial good, begins to find more goodness, and enriches itself with it, and all begins to grow by degrees.

Zeal itself has the beginnings of prayer already. It is fed at first by natural virtue, and then begins to feed on the works of virtue that it engendered, and grows and becomes strong, and blossoms and begins to sing and hymn God with a harmonious and prayerful song in the heart.

May the Lord help you succeed in this. Amen.



Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.

(Lk. 18:16)

And this age is weak in strength, feeble in intelligence, and immature in counsel. Thus, age is not preferred to age; moreover, it would be hurtful to grow up. What need is there for prayers that maturity of age ensue, if it is to take from me the merit of the Heavenly Kingdom? So did God give the course of life for vices and not for the increase of virtue? And why did He choose Apostles who were not youthful, but of mature years? But why does He say that children are fit for the Kingdom of Heaven? Perhaps, because they do not know malice, they have not learned to deceive, they dare not strike back, they neglect to search for wealth, they do not strive after honor and ambition.

But virtue is not to be ignorant of those things, but to despise them, nor is there praise of abstinence where there is integrity through weakness. For not childhood, but goodness rivaling childlike simplicity is meant. For it is not a virtue to be unable to sin, but to be unwilling so to do and to retain perseverance of will, so that the will imitates childhood and one man imitates nature. Finally, our Saviour Himself expressed this saying:

Unless ye be converted, and become as this boy, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of the Heavens.

(Mt. 18:3)

St. Ambrose of Milan

ON SAME SEX MARRIAGES

By Fr. Sergei Sveshnikov.

We have recently witnessed the heightening of passions in America over the so-called “same-sex marriages.” In those jurisdictions where such “marriages” have been approved (San Francisco, Portland, etc.), there were demonstrations, protests for and against, even to the point of arrests. At the same time, the overwhelming majority of Americans, having been reared on tolerance, look upon all of this with bewilderment. Television screens and newspapers are filled with images of men in passionate kisses and the stories of two older women who had spent their entire lives together, who only now have been given those “same human rights” which more traditional couples have had.

On the other hand, having already achieved the division of church from the state (unfortunately, not of the state from the church), Protestant movements suddenly, as one (well, almost, for each family has an ugly duckling), are calling upon judges and politicians to heed what is written in the Bible, or at least not to break centuries-old Christian traditions.

What are we to make of this turmoil? I do not wish to render an opinion on the position taken by the “gays” that they were ostensibly born this way and cannot do anything about it—I am not sufficiently educated in the natural sciences, but the dilettante in me feels that if we turn to the animal kingdom, we find that homosexuality is a clear departure from “the natural order of things” (what would happen if Butch loved Fido and not Lassie?) Such a “gay” pedigree would quickly end in nature.

It is not worth overloading the reader with quotes from the Bible, which clearly speak of homosexuality, or retell the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. People of faith know the Bible well even without reminder, and citing the Bible to atheists will not persuade them. Let us get to the gist of the matter: What is marriage and what is its place in contemporary Western society?

But first let us address the so-called “deprivation of rights” of the homosexuals. It is not difficult to see that all their statements on the problems associated with visiting the sick (has any one of us not visited sick friends?) and medical insurance are insubstantial; these hypothesized “problems” can be (and should be) resolved without constitutional amendments and legislation on marriage. The only question worthy of consideration is the very “right to marry.” But there is no such right, in nature or in society. One has the right to life, the right to work, the right to vote and even the right to smear everyone and everything (so-called “freedom of speech”), but a right to marry? In the United States, marriage is more of a privilege than a right: For to marry (and to drive an automobile, and to go fishing), one needs a license, while the “right to free speech” requires no license.

What is marriage? In Western society (both civil and religious), marriage is the name for a contract between two people. This contract is the means of expressing mutual promises such as: “I will love you always,” “So will I,” “I will leave the house to you when we get a divorce,” “You can have the car.” The marriage contract is made before witnesses—before God, a preacher or a judge. As with any contract, a marriage contract assumes the possibility of its nullification, for example, if one side or the other violates the conditions of the contract. In Protestant culture one cannot discern in what way a civil marriage is different from a church marriage, since in both one and the other, the “active ingredients” are two people who make various promises to each other. It is precisely for this reason that the decision of the civil authorities to issue marriage certificates to homosexuals is received by the Protestant world as the effort to undermine the institution of matrimony.

In a way, they are right. The fact is that the foundation of any culture is religion (even if it is atheism, or worldliness elevated to the rank of religious ideal). It is religion that determines the limitations of what is to be permitted. Indeed, what temporal logic can explain the ban on one man marrying several women (or the opposite)? If they wish to do so, then they were “born that way.” Does the civil government have the right to “suppress the rights” of polygamists? Let us set aside the matter of the potential “marriage” of John Doe and Lassie, since society will simply not allow it now, even if that means suppressing the rights of zoophiles. But pedophiles can try to exploit the crack in the judicial system and declare that no scientific findings show that the expression of “love” has any effect on the development of a child—there simply are none. And in fact, in India, marriages are often performed with 10- and 12-year olds, and that’s just the way the Indians live! In Russia in olden days, girls of the ages of 14-15 would marry and have children. It turns out that we are suppressing the rights of zoophiles and pedophiles, for they, too, were “born that way.”

Contemporary American society cannot find a good answer to this in jurisprudence: Jurisprudence cannot rely on such unscientific notions as “morality,” just as science cannot forbid marriage to pots and pans. One cannot rely on the field of morality since it always depends on religion, for there can be no other foundation. Left without a means of support, morality turns into immorality. And no mythical “human” values will help, because they simply do not exist. In strictly Muslim societies, for example, homosexuals are simply exterminated, while polygamy, and that which the West considers pedophilia, flourish there.

The fact of the matter is that Western European culture, since ancient times, was Christian. For this reason, laws and traditions are based on religion, which until fairly recently did not need to be defended or explained. Since the time of

the separation of church and state, the latter is undergoing a gradual de-Christianization, when the remnants of Christian underpinnings and traditions (for example, prayer in schools, Christian symbolism, traditional marriages, etc.) are attacked one after the other through the courts and removed, since there is no foundation for them in a godless society.

How should the Orthodox Church approach such changes in the world today? I should correct myself right away, because in the opinion of many Orthodox theologians, all these changes show the apostasy, the decay and the irreversible processes of the corruption of society. In the words of Deacon A. Kuraev (Ed., a professor at the Moscow Theological Academy), temporal history will end with Christianity almost completely defeated, with the triumph of evil and the reign of the Antichrist (just as the earthly life of Christ ended with the triumph of the devil and of theocides), before the Resurrection and the advent of the “day without eve” of the Kingdom of Heaven. So in this sense, this is to be expected anyway.

But while keeping this in mind, it should be noted that it is hard to remain indifferent to living in Sodom or Gomorrah. Every Orthodox Christian cannot but have a negative reaction when all that is holy is trampled and mocked, when the very bases of Christian life, built by Christians for centuries, traveling along the path of the cross to our day, are razed. For to destroy—not to build—does not take centuries. We must think of our children and protect them with all our strength from that which destroys the soul. If someone gives our child a bottle of poison, will we not leap up and cry out, will we not try to take it away? How can one look calmly upon this poison being poured into the souls of our children? For we must fear not those who can only destroy the flesh, but those who can also doom the soul to eternal Gehenna. It is difficult enough to rear a child in the Christian spirit in a society where “all roads are equal—choose your own at your pleasure.” Try, for instance, to explain to Johnny why he cannot pray in school, but you can meditate, why yoga is taught in college, but the Jesus prayer is not. Try to add to this why in contemporary society it is normal and lawful not only for Pete and Mary to have a family, but for Pete to marry Billy, for Mary to marry Elaine.

By the way, about marriage: It is specifically the Orthodox institution of marriage in this matter that continues to stand undisturbed. The Orthodox marriage is different from the Protestant marriage, or that of the “Western” type. Again, the Western marriage is a contract. The Orthodox marriage is a Mystery, that is, it is one of the Mysteries of the Orthodox Church, alongside Baptism, Communion, etc. For this reason it is not those entering into matrimony who perform the Mystery, for during the entire service, they promise nothing to anyone—not to God, not to each other—but it is God Himself Who performs it. That is, the newly-married take

the first steps towards the altar, “under the crown,” but the Mystery happens not by them but over them.

Compare, for example, the Mystery of the Eucharist; the person taking Communion does not transform the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, but piously approaches the Chalice and accepts the Holy Gifts. Of course, the one who partakes of Communion is not a soulless object upon whom some action is occurring—he is an active participant, but he is not the one who performs the act. In Protestantism, Communion is lowered to a purely symbolic act of the Protestants themselves, who swallow a biscuit and grape juice, throwing the remainder in the trash, while God Himself, in Whose “memory” this is done, plays no role in this action. The same applies to matrimony. The Orthodox marriage is a union of grace, blessed by God, while the Protestant or civil marriage is an action taken by mortals, and for this reason is without grace. Often such a marriage is considered unlawful in Orthodox literature, and is nothing more than sinful cohabitation. Of course, this determination applies only to unwedded Orthodox Christians. To state that a non-Orthodox person sins because he does not take Communion, does not make confession, cohabitates in a graceless civil union makes no sense—the problem lies much deeper than that.

And although the Orthodox Church sternly denounces the “gays,” the Orthodox Church has nothing to do with homosexual marriages, strictly speaking; there is nothing unusual about the godless acting in a depraved manner. It is more accurate to say that civil unions have no direct connection with the Orthodox Church, its Mysteries or institutions.

As one who is in service to the Orthodox Church, I wish to call upon all Orthodox Christians, especially those who live in “hot spots” of the United States, not to be troubled by the apparent victory of atheism in the world, and to struggle against it with a stricter attitude towards oneself, to one’s spiritual life, to protect yourselves and your children from worldly corruption through the Mysteries of the Church, and not to despair; even in Sodom and Gomorrah, which were infected with sin, Lot was able to protect himself and his family from this disease. How much stronger is the hope for salvation for us, who have *not an Ambassador, nor an Angel, but the very Lord Himself*. And *if God be for us, who can be against us?*”



Strive with all your might to bring your interior activity into accord with God, and you will overcome exterior passions.

Abba Arsenius
“The Sayings of the Desert Fathers”

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos (edited for length).

Theology in its authentic expression is the word of and about God. The more that theology is bound to the truth and to the vision of God, the more the word about God is true. Only he who has seen God and has been united with Him through theosis, has acquired the true knowledge of God. According to St. Gregory, true theologians are those who have reached “theoria,” having been previously cleansed of their passions; or being at least in the process of purification.

It is precisely this position that reveals that the theology of the Church is one, and that there is no separation into neptic and social theology. All theology is simultaneously both neptic and social. This signifies that the holy Fathers are also not sharply divided into neptic and social theologians.

A conventional distinction is made in speaking about the Fathers who lived all their life in the desert and those who were engaged in pastoral service. Yet, it should be said that even the so called social Fathers passed through “nepsis” and purification of the heart; and the neptic Fathers, who lived as hermits, practiced pastoral service indirectly through their prayers for all the world and by guiding pilgrims who visited them in order to be healed.

True theology heals the person. A real theologian knows the problem and is able to cure it; the actual sickness itself is the darkening of the nous. Thus, true theology is neptic, and the real theologian is in essence neptic; he must recognize all the secrets of the spiritual struggle and have discernment, which has been cultivated as a result of his own spiritual journey to health. Hence, all of Orthodox theology is neptic, since it aims at man’s cure. It cures man and liberates his nous from the tyranny of reason, of the environment and of the passions. This is accomplished by watchfulness and prayer.

Watchfulness (nepsis) is attentiveness, spiritual alertness. Christ said to his disciples: *Watch and pray.* (Mt 26:41). St. Paul also instructs his disciple Timothy: *Watch thou in all things.* (2Tim 4:5). Thus, watchfulness is spiritual attentiveness; it is the readiness of the nous not to accept any alluring thought.

According to the holy Fathers, watchfulness (nepsis) is the presence of reason at the gateway of the heart, guarding against the entry of temptation and the creation of any precondition that might result in committing a sin. Watchfulness is closely related to prayer. According to St. Maximos, watchfulness keeps the nous clear of any tempting suggestion, whereas prayer brings rich grace into one’s heart. This is why watchfulness is also called the sentinel of the heart. Thus, watchfulness and prayer, in other words attentiveness and prayer are the two spiritual weapons which constitute “philosophy in Christ”.

Practical philosophy, is not theoretical speculation, but inner noetic work through which a person becomes a proper

instrument of divine revelation. It is in this way that man becomes a bearer of revelation and knows God. The heart is freed from all thoughts (logismoi) and retains only one utterance, the unceasing prayer, *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.*

Rejection of logismoi is the deliverance of one’s nous, i.e., his heart. This is how the heart is cleansed and through prayer receives much grace from God. This whole process is called noetic hesychia-hesychnism. Hesychism is nothing else but the spiritual “method” through which the heart is cleansed so as to retain only the name of Christ within.

When a society, a family, is made up of healthy people severe social or family problems are practically non-existent. Perhaps, due to individual circumstances or the temperament of each person problems may arise, however a cured person recognizes what can be overcome and puts things in order. This can be seen in certain ascetics, who retain shortcomings, due to illness, age, or their character, yet even these defects seem “graceful,” i.e., do not provoke; they are considered as natural manifestations of a man who has the uncreated grace of God within him.

By establishing the following points it can be disclosed that the neptic man is the social man *par excellence* (is an example of excellence, the best or truest of a kind):

(1) The greatest and most significant social act in the history of humanity, was accomplished by the Mother of God. The Theotokos did not claim any office in the first church. She did not minister, as the Apostles did. Rather She occupied herself with silence and prayer. Nevertheless, She rendered a great pastoral service.

St. Gregory Palamas says that after Christ’s Ascension into Heaven, the Theotokos lived with patient endurance and many ascetic practices, praying for the whole world and admonishing the Apostles, who preached in the universe. For the Apostles the Theotokos was a pillar of support whose prayers they hearkened to and whose insights and contributions to the preaching of the Gospel they embraced.

The work of the Theotokos, though, is not confined to this area only. Panagia became the greatest missionary in history, for She prepared herself and reached theosis in the way She knew; She became “the most blessed” and in the end became worthy of begetting the Son and Word of God. She gave her flesh to the Second Person of the Holy Trinity in order for Him to be incarnate. She, therefore, on the one hand, showed us the path we must follow if we desire to draw near to the likeness of God; on the other hand, She offered to us the most powerful medicine for our illness: namely, She became the cause of the greatest happiness the world will ever know—She gave birth to the incarnate Christ.

This great work is beheld, of course, in the lives of the true hesychasts, as well. By being involved in the purification of their own hearts and the cure of their own personalities, they offer great comfort to humanity. The hesychasts bear testi-

mony throughout the ages to the work of missions by their mere existence, their prayers and teachings. They bless and sanctify the world even after their death, through their holy relics. Thus, it is within silence that the most dynamic action takes place.

(2) The person who is regenerated by divine grace becomes the most sociable being of all. A good example of this is the parable of the prodigal son, as interpreted by St. Gregory Palamas.

Possession and sustenance is our nous. When our nous relies on God, we are in a good state. Yet, when we open the door to our passions, then our nous “spreads” itself around and wanders constantly in the direction of worldly things, various pleasures, and impassionate thoughts. On our way it lures us away from true love, the love for God and love for our neighbor, and toward the desire for worthless things and the longing for vain glory. This is how love of pleasure, greed for money and ambition develops. Then, the person is taken ill, as St. Gregory Palamas expresses it, he becomes unhappy, and neither the sun’s radiance nor the breathing in of fresh air, gives him pleasure.

The “prodigal” nous, becomes enraged and fights against his fellowmen because his unreasonable desires cannot be satisfied. He becomes homicidal and he comes to resemble a wild animal. Therefore, the person becomes anti-social, whereas when the nous returns within the heart from its dispersion and then ascends to God, he becomes all the more social. A cured person is the health of his community.

(3) It follows that the person who is a bearer of Orthodox spirituality is inwardly integrated. He does not succumb to the tyranny of thoughts-logismoi. And it is well known that logismoi can create dreadful psychological problems, driving a person to insanity.

When we speak of logismoi we do not mean just simple thoughts but those rational suggestions associated with images and stimulations brought on by sight or hearing or by both together. For instance, an image comes to our mind concerning glory, wealth or pleasure. This image is accompanied by a thought: “If you do this, you will gain glory, money, you’ll be very powerful”. These rationalizations are called logismoi, and through their power of suggestion can evolve into sin.

“Coupling” is man’s conversing with the logismos, yet still hesitating whether or not to act upon it. “Assent” is a step beyond mere “coupling.” Man resolves now to act upon the specific logismos. Desire comes in the process and the commitment of sin is effected. Repeated acts of sin create passion. At the stage of coupling, the logismos aspires to incite pleasure so as to captivate the nous and consequently, to enslave the person.

Logismoi thus evolve into sin and passion. And passion is not only born of logismoi but also strengthened by them. It acquires powerful roots and afterwards a person experiences great difficulty in his own transformation. One’s logismoi

literally makes a person decay. They poison and defile the soul. Logismoi bring turmoil to the soul’s faculties. The holy Fathers not only attribute a person’s downfall to logismoi but also describe the disturbances they cause in interpersonal relationships. Moreover many physical illnesses are caused by the unrestrained presence of logismoi. Beyond all of this, however, a man possessed by logismoi loses his intimate communion with God.

Whoever follows the path of cure properly is freed from logismoi; he becomes inwardly balanced and behaves normally. He neither torments himself nor others. If we observe people who are psychologically imbalanced, we can see clearly that they are possessed by fixed ideas and patterns of thought and are unable to free themselves from them.

(4) Neptic life is social life; and it is in fact social life par excellence, because it helps a person to reclaim the natural faculties of his soul and to function, from this point on, “according to nature” (i.e., as God intended).

A person’s soul as far as the passions are concerned is divided into three faculties: The intelligent (reasoning), the appetitive (desire) and the irascible (affective). These three faculties must be directed toward God. When they turn away from Him and others, they become known as passions. For this reason, passion is movement of the soul contrary to nature.

Within the perspective of Orthodox spirituality when a person is liberated from self-conceit, which begets worldliness, avarice and ambition, he acquires love for God and love for men. He truly loves others. He sees in each person the image of God. And for this reason he becomes truly social. Who can deny the fact that the person himself is the one who corrupts social institutions, and in turn these corrupted social institutions make people all the more dysfunctional. When an unwell person assumes a position of authority, he creates enormous social problems.

An exception is the one who lives in the hesychastic tradition, being himself transformed, becomes a comforter to others who have problems and are tormented by them.

(5) One of the greatest existential, as well as social problems is death. It afflicts everyone by its very existence or when it touches our loved one. Death is terrible for man, because it disrupts the unity between soul and body and the union among beloved persons. It is the source of sin. Not only is it the offspring of sin but it also causes sin.

Man is born mortal and perishable. Consequently, he must inevitably face the exigencies of illnesses and the eventuality of death, which definitely creates great insecurity. Man actually experiences death when he tries to succeed in his life, to make his name, to earn a lot of money or to be insured in the best insurance companies and to be liked by many people. *Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.* (Rom 6:12). Also, *The string of death is sin.* (1Cor. 15, 56). And *But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing*

me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (Rom 7:23-24).

Another consequence of the decay and mortality in our nature is the passions of avarice and love of possessions. When a person experiences the tragedy of death in his more intimate environment, by losing one of his beloved persons, he feels its impact. He falls into despair and depression. The tragedy of death becomes more intense as a person feels himself steadily approaching it. If he does not believe in God it is difficult to overcome the painful moments that ensue.

The Christian, however, who lives the ascetic and sacramental life of Orthodox spirituality, overcomes mortality. Through Baptism and holy Communion he moves beyond his biological existence and acquires the well-known spiritual hypostasis. He has communion with the saints and is well aware of the existence of the Church triumphant, and that death has been abolished by the resurrection of Christ. He knows that there is also another life, beyond mortality and decay. He also knows that the bodies will be resurrected.

The mortality and decay in our nature generates a multitude of social problems, creating the desire for wealth, possessions, etc. The Church, through its shepherds, liberates man from these tormenting problems. She prepares him to cope with death with alertness, composure, and above all with faith in God. On the Holy Mountain one meets monks who do not fear death, as happens with all the saints. In his description of the death of St. Anthony, St. Athanasios says that after the brothers who were present, embraced St. Anthony, the saint, being overjoyed stretched out his legs and *fell asleep*.

(6) The healed and healthy person also cultivates all other cultural values. Our Church's saints left us an eminent cultural legacy, an offspring of their own sanctified personality; magnificent churches, monastic institutions, renowned in their time as well as in ours, iconography not easily reproduced by the contemporaries, superb hymnography of exquisite literary value, in addition to their deep faith and devotion; music appreciated by the great musicologists of our times. The person who is spiritually healthy produces "healthy" works, the fruits of his own regeneration.

(7) Because the bearer of Orthodox spirituality loves God and understands, through his illumined nous, the causes of beings, in other words he sees the uncreated energy of God in all creation, he treats nature and all the world properly. Thus one might also say that he contributes to the solving of the often referred to ecological problems.

Today overconsumption is creating the demand for overproduction. This excessive production has immense consequences for the earth, which is being violated for this purpose. It is no wonder then that a ravished nature, is "punishing" the inhabitants of earth. This pollution of the environment is not independent of the passions of pleasure-loving, avarice and

ambition. Today nature suffers more as a result of its oppression under the dominion of impassionate man. Now more than ever the ascetic way of life is a need.

The spiritual exercises of the Orthodox Church, as previously described, have a beneficial effect on the surrounding world. This is seen in the lives of many saints who respected nature exceedingly; not just emotionally did they love nature, but because they could see, through their purity, the energy of God in all of creation. Such cases are abundant on the Holy Mountain.

"Once I needlessly killed a fly. The poor thing crawled on the ground, hurt and mangled, and for three whole days I wept over my cruelty to a living creature, and to this day the incident remains in my memory.

Somehow it happened that some bats bred on the balcony of the storeroom where I was, and I poured boiling water over them, and once again I shed many tears on this account, and since then I have never harmed any living creature.

One day, going from the Monastery to Old Russikon-on-the-Hill, I saw a dead snake on my path which had been chopped into pieces, and each piece writhed convulsively, and I was filled with pity for every living creature, every suffering thing in creation, and I wept bitterly before God.

The Spirit of God teaches the soul to love every living thing so that she would have no harm come to even a green leaf on a tree, or trample underfoot a flower of the field.

Thus the Spirit of God teaches love towards all, and the soul feels compassion for every being, loves even her enemies and pities even devils because they have fallen away from the good." (Elder Sophrony, from "St. Silouan the Athonite").

Moreover, it is known that nature does not have a moral will. Consequently, it did not fall by itself but was swept along to decay by human beings. Adam's sin had immense consequences for nature too. For this reason every person's sanctity or sin reflects on creation, too.

Therefore, Orthodox spirituality is both neptic and social. And it is precisely because it is neptic in the fullest sense of the word that it can be social. The experience of community outside of the neptic life is in reality unsocial.



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A GOOD START TO FAMILY LIFE

By the Blessed Elder Paisios the Athonite, from "Family Life," published by the Sacred Hesychastirion of St. John the Evangelist, Souroti, Greece – 2002, translated by Fr. Luke Hartung – The Dalles, Oregon, U.S.A.

Geronta, a certain young man who has chosen the married life, asked me how one properly begins this.

- From the beginning, he should seek to find a good girl who will comfort him, as people are relaxed and find comfort differently with different people. He should not seek to find someone who is rich or beautiful, but above all simple and humble. In other words, he should give more attention to interior rather than exterior beauty. When a girl is a positive person and capable of dealing with men, without having more womanly character than is necessary, this greatly helps the man to find immediate understanding and not a lot of headaches. If she also has fear of God and humility then they are able to join hands and pass the evil current of the world.

If the young man is seriously considering a certain girl for a spouse, I think it is better that he first makes his intentions known to her parents through one of his relatives and afterwards he can discuss it himself with the young lady and her parents. Later, if they give their approval and the two are engaged—and it is better that the engagement not carry on too long—he should strive, throughout the passing time until marriage, to view her as his sister and respect her. If both of them struggle with *philotimo* and keep their virginity, then in the Mystery of marriage, when

the priest crowns them, they will richly take of the Grace of God. For, as St. John Chrysostom says, the crowns are symbols of victory against pleasure. [1]

Then, as much as they are able, they must strive to cultivate the virtue of love and always remain two united, with the Third, our Sweetest Christ. Naturally, in the beginning, until they get themselves together and become well acquainted with one another, they will have certain difficulties. This happens with every new beginning. Why, just the day before yesterday I saw a baby bird. It had just gone out to find food and could only fly about an inch above the ground. The poor thing didn't know how to catch insects and wasted an hour trying to catch just one, little bug to eat. As I watched it, I was considering how every beginning is difficult. When a student finally receives his diploma and begins working, in the beginning it is difficult. A novice in a monastery also has difficulties in the beginning. A young man, when he marries, again in the beginning is met with difficulties.

- Geronta, does it matter if the woman is older than the man?

- There is not a Church canon which says that, if a girl is two-three or even five years older than the young man, they are not able to be married.

† † †

[1] "Crowns are to be worn on the heads of bridegrooms, as a symbol of victory, foretelling that they approach the blessing (of Marriage) unconquered by pleasure." (St. John Chrysostom, "Commentary on the First Epistle to Timothy," Homily IV, PG 62, 546).

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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]

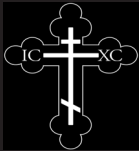
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HAS THE REIGN OF THE ANTICHRIST BEGUN?

From "The True Church in the Last Times," article no. 30 (May 20 / June 2, 2007, *Apodosis of Pentecost*).

For several decades now, beginning in some of the Protestant churches, and spreading to the Orthodox, there has been speculation that the reign of the Antichrist has begun, and that his servants are already being sealed with his seal and with the number "666."

There has been no agreement about what the seal of the beast really is, or about the meaning of his number. Nor has any Orthodox Church Council given an authoritative interpretation of the thirteenth to twentieth chapters of Revelation and their symbols—the first beast, the second beast, the horns and heads of the beast, his seal and image and number, the whore of Babylon, etc.

In spite of this absence of authoritative interpretation and guidance, schisms have already begun to appear on this soil in more than one Orthodox country. This is a tragic phenomenon and would appear to make a fresh attempt to achieve clarity and consensus on this question urgent.

However, we have to accept from the beginning: God may have deliberately concealed the interpretation of these texts because the time is not ripe, because the Antichrist in his last, personal incarnation, has not yet appeared. If so, then any attempt to fix the correct interpretation may be not only premature, but harmful and impious because it is bound to be mistaken. After all, did not the holy theologian, speaking in the Holy Spirit, say: *Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast.* (Rev 13:18)? In other words, a special gift of wisdom, of spiritual understanding, is required in order

to understand this mystery. And who, in our corrupt generation can claim to have that gift, which was not given to the Holy Fathers of earlier generations and has not been given to the leaders of the Church in the present generation?

It is precisely for this reason that no attempt will be made in this article to provide a definitive answer to the question: "Who (or what) is the beast, and what is the meaning of his number?" Instead, a different, but perhaps more necessary question will be addressed: "Do we have good reason to believe that we have reached the very last times of the world?" More precisely: "Have all the prophecies relating to the times **preceding** the appearance of the Antichrist already been fulfilled?"

One of the most recent saints of the Orthodox Church, the holy New Martyr James (Arkatov) of the Altai in Siberia (+1991), who had the gift of prophecy, once said in conversation with some Old Ritualists: "You have already been talking for an hour about the coming Antichrist, but allow me to ask you: To what seal or trumpet or cup, or in general to what powers, do you relate this [Soviet] regime under which we are living?" At first the guests were perplexed by the presence of a stranger, and even the master of the house was embarrassed. One of them said: "If you want to say something, say it."

Then St. James briefly expounded his understanding of the basic prophecies. "First, all the prophecies spoke not only about one time of the reign of the Antichrist, but about three sections of the last times: The first was called *the beginning of sorrows*, according to the prophetic word of the Saviour, or *apostasy*, according to the Apostle Paul, and in the Revelation of the Apostle John it is referred to as the coming out and reign of the beast from the sea with his head-followers. The second section of the last times is *the beast was and is not*

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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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or the time of the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world, and, finally, the third period, which is in fact the time of the enthronement of the Antichrist. The Saviour calls it *the end*, the beginning of which is the placing of *the abomination of desolation* or *the coming out of the beast from the abyss* (St. John the Theologian), who is the eighth in number in the dynasty of the beasts and is of the number of the seven, or the appearance of *the man of sin* (St. Paul the Apostle). As for the *whore*, is it not clear to you that this image refers to a traitor-church that has betrayed Christ, that which should be *the bride of Christ*, but which has been united with the scarlet beast.

“In the Apocalypse there are three *women*, and all three signify the Church, it is only by their clothes and their activity that we can distinguish them: On the way into the wilderness she is clothed in the sun, but there she is divided into her who is clothed in scarlet and her who goes out to meet Christ, clothed in pure white, which is the righteousness of the saints.”

And so the holy martyr divides the last times into three stages: (1) the Soviet period, which began in 1917 and has not fully come to an end yet (*Ed: the saint is referring to the Soviet era prior to its fall*); (2) the Triumph of Orthodoxy, which will see the spread of the True Faith throughout the world for a short time; and (3) the reign of the Antichrist.

St. James’ schema was not unique to himself: Many saints of the Russian Catacomb Church expressed similar thoughts. All agreed that the abdication of the tsar, *he who restrains*, according to St. Paul (2 Thes 2:7), marked the beginning of the last times, the reign of the Antichrist. However, Soviet power was not the Antichrist in the literal, personal sense, but the collective Antichrist. He had his own seals, the red star and the hammer and sickle, if not his own number.

But the Catacomb saints did not believe that the period of Soviet power, or the collective Antichrist, would be followed immediately by “the end,” the reign of the personal Antichrist, the false king of the Jews. On the contrary: they believed that after the violent overthrow of Soviet power, True Orthodoxy would be re-established in Russia under a True Orthodox tsar. Moreover, some also believed that this would lead to the spread of Orthodoxy throughout the world, in accordance with the words of the Lord: *This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the entire world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.* (Mt 24:14). For, as St. John Maximovich (+1966) once explained, this prophecy of the Lord has not yet been fulfilled. “The Gospel of the Kingdom” must refer to the Orthodox Gospel, and not to Catholic or Protestant heresies; and we cannot say that the Orthodox Gospel has yet been preached to all nations. In fact, if we include the pre-revolutionary saints who prophesied the fall and resurrection of Russia, we have a “great cloud of witnesses” who clearly imply that today, in the year 2007, we have not yet reached “the end,” the reign of the personal Antichrist, and that many great—and greatly joyful—events have to take place before his coming.

So why do people find it so difficult to believe that there can be any improvement before the end, and insist that the very last days, the reign of the personal Antichrist, are upon us already? Many saints believed that they were living just before the end. We may recall two fairly recent examples.

In 1848 St. Callinicus of Cernica in Romania decided not to build a church because he believed that the end was so near, and was only persuaded to build it by the appearance to him of Saints Nicholas and George. Again, St. John Maximovich believed that the Antichrist had been born in 1962...

Paradoxically, such a mistake is more characteristic of saints than of sinners because saints feel the growth of evil around them more acutely; their spiritual senses are trained to feel the increase in iniquity and the love of many growing cold, whereas sinners, being immersed in evil, are less sensitive to this. And there is no doubt that evil has grown today to unprecedented proportions. This fact, combined with the weakening of the Church on earth, and its ever-increasing divisions, must lead the deeply thinking Christian to wonder: how long can this continue? *How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?* (Rev 6:10).

These words were spoken by *the souls of them that were slain for the word of God* (Rev 6:9), and remind us of another fact that is too easily forgotten: that our age has produced not only the greatest evil, but also the greatest good—in the form of the hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of martyrs that have shone forth, especially in Russia, but also in other lands. Now in earlier ages periods of martyrdom have always been followed by periods of missionary expansion, in accordance with the principle: ***The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.*** Thus the martyrs of the Roman catacombs produced the vast expansion of the Church in the time of St. Constantine the Great, and the martyrs of the iconoclast period produced the conversion of the Slavic lands. Why should not the holy new martyrs and confessors of Russia bring forth a still greater harvest of souls—especially since some of the prophecies say that this is precisely what will happen?

One harvest of souls that is clearly prophesied before the end is that of the Jews. St. Paul writes: *Blindness in part is come to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles come in. And so shall all Israel be saved. As it is written: There shall come out of Zion the deliverer, who will turn away impiety from Israel.* (Rom 11:25-26). The fulfillment of this prophecy, the conversion of the Jews, has certainly not taken place yet.

Some argue that this is impossible because it is precisely the Jews who destroyed the Russian empire and who are controlling the present descent of the world into the depths of depravity and anti-Christianity. But does not the example of St. Paul himself persuade us that the Lord is capable of making the greatest sinners into the greatest saints? And would not the conversion of the Jews be the greatest demonstration of God's long-suffering mercy?

Again, others argue that the Jews will be converted only during the reign of the Antichrist. However, St. Paul says that the sign for the conversion of the Jews will not be the reign of the Antichrist but *the coming in of the fullness of the Gentiles*—that is, the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world.

This spiritual resurrection of the Jews will not be total, and a large part of them will again apostasize and follow the Antichrist; but the fact of the resurrection cannot be denied and must modify our attitude towards this race, which, though

cursed by God, has nevertheless not been totally abandoned by Him, and has been preserved in existence when many other nations have perished. And who will convert the Jews if not the Russians, who have suffered so much from them, but whose history and culture has become the history and culture of a large part of the Jewish race itself (one sixth of all Israelis are Russian Jews)?

If this seems fantastic in view of the present collapse of Russian civilization, let us remember the interpretation of a passage from the book of the Apocalypse given by the holy new Hieromartyr Bishop Mark (Novoselov): “[St. John] with complete clarity speaks about the conversion of the God-fighting people to the Church of Christ, when she, few in numbers and powerless from an external point of view, but powerful with an inner strength and faithfulness to her Lord (Rev 3:8) will draw to herself the remnant of the God-fighting tribe. *Behold*, says the Lord to the Angel of the Church of Philadelphia, *I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.* (Rev 3:9)

“Gazing with the eye of faith at what the Lord has done, and applying the ear of our heart and mind to the events of our days, comparing that which is seen and heard with the declarations of the Word of God, I cannot but feel that a great, wonderful and joyous mystery of God's economy is coming towards us: the Judaizing haters and persecutors of the Church of God, who are striving to subdue and annihilate her, by the wise permission of Providence will draw her to purification and strengthening, so as to present her [to Christ] as a glorious Church, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she should be holy and blameless. (Eph 6:27).

“And in His time, known only to the One Lord of time, this, according to the son of thunder's strict expression *synagogue of Satan* will bow before the pure Bride of Christ, conquered by her holiness and blamelessness and, perhaps, frightened by the image of the Antichrist. And if the rejection of the Apostle Paul's fellow-countrymen was, in his words, *the reconciliation of the world, what will be their acceptance if not life from the dead?* (Rom 11:15).”

The famous monarchist writer Lev Alexandrovich Tikhomirov agrees with this interpretation: “Is this conversion of the Jews that salvation of ‘all Israel’ which the Apostle Paul foretold? In the Apocalypse it is said that the saved will come ‘of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie’. But not the whole of the ‘synagogue’ will come, but only ‘of the synagogue,’ that is, a part of it. But even here, where the Apostle Paul says that *the whole of Israel will be saved*, he means only a part: *for they are not all Israel, which are of Israel... They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.* (Roms 9:6,8).

“The opinion is widespread among us that the conversion of the Jews will take place at the very appearance of the Saviour, when they shall cry out: *Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord*. But this is not evident from the Apocalypse. But if the Philadelphian conversion will bring all Israel that is to be saved to Christ, then this will, of course, be a great event, fully explaining the rejoicing of the Heavens. Israel is a chosen people with whom it will not be possible to find a comparison when he begins to do the work of God. The Jews will, of course, multiply the forces of Christianity for the resistance against the Antichrist. *If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, says the Apostle Paul, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?* (Rom II:15).”

And so our answer to the question: “Has the Reign of the Antichrist Begun?” is: “Not yet: many prophecies concerning the resurrection of Orthodoxy before the end have not yet been fulfilled, and even if it is difficult in the present, extraordinarily corrupt state of the world to see how this could possibly happen, it is necessary to believe the Word of God and the prophecies of the saints more than our own ears and eyes; for *with God all things are possible*.”

But the objection will arise: what about the bar-codes, the passports, the biochips—all the technology which seems, for the first time in history, to show in a concrete manner how the prophecy concerning the seal of the Antichrist could be fulfilled? We are not denying that the Antichrist, when he comes, may well use this technology, or its more sophisticated successor, to seal his servants. But ***the appearance of the technology is not the same as the fulfilment of the prophecy***. Here we must be wise, as the son of thunder warns. We must not take a shadow, or foreshadowing of the truth, for the truth itself.

Let us consider first: is the number “666” evil in itself? The answer, according to St. Gregory Palamas, is: no; this number, like all the other numbers, has been created by God, and so is good. What is evil is not the number itself, but the end to which it is used. How will it be used? We know from the Holy Fathers that the seal will be used as a sign that the person sealed willingly and consciously accepts and believes in the Antichrist. Thus, St. Nilus the Myrrh-gusher prophesied: “On the seal will be written the following: ‘I am yours.’ ‘Yes, you are mine.’ ‘I go willingly, not by force.’ ‘And I accept you in accordance with your will, and not by force.’ These are four utterances, or inscriptions, which will be written in the middle of this accursed seal...”

Now has anyone discovered that these four inscriptions are to be found on any modern technological device? As far as the present writer knows, the answer to that question is: no. In any case, such inscriptions make no sense before the appearance of the Antichrist himself. For what does “I am yours” mean if we do not know who “you” is? It

follows that before the actual appearance of the Antichrist, and the people’s willing and conscious acceptance of him as the true King of the Jews and God, the prophecy cannot be fulfilled.

At the same time, the appearance of the technology is undoubtedly *a sign of the times* (Mt 16:3), a sign that we are approaching the end, and that we must prepare ourselves spiritually for the coming of the Antichrist.

The world has probably been close to the end many times before—for example, in the time of Julian the Apostate, who tried to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. But each time the Lord has delivered the world from the Antichrist.

As L.A. Tikhomirov writes: “In history there have been times when the pressure of evil has been so strong that it seemed that there was no further reason for the world to exist, and if the anti-God mood had become finally entrenched then the end of the world would have come. The multitude of small ‘potential’ antichrists, of whom the Apostle John already spoke, would immediately have promoted from their midst someone capable of growing into the real Antichrist. Such epochs, of which ours is one, in their character truly constitute the last times. But are they chronologically the last? We cannot know that, because if the free will of men, amazed by the disgusting sight of the abomination of desolation in the holy place, strives again towards God, the Antichrist, already ready to enter the world, will again be cast into the abyss until conditions more favorable for him arise, while the Lord will again lengthen the term of life of the world so that new members should be prepared for the Kingdom of God.”

One day, however, the Antichrist will indeed come, and we will have to be prepared. And even if his coming is not “at the doors,” we must still be prepared, because we can receive the seal of one of his forerunners. So the appearance of signs of the times, and signs of the end, is God’s mercy to us, a wake-up call, and a call to vigilance which must not be ignored.

Let us recall the context of St. Paul’s words on the Antichrist in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians. Many Thessalonians were so convinced that the Second Coming of Christ was at hand that they had even stopped working. St. Paul considered this harmful, and asked them *not to be quickly shaken from your mind, nor to be disturbed, neither through a spirit, nor through a word, nor through a letter supposedly from us, that the Day of the Lord has come. Let no man deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless there is first the apostasy and the man of sin, the son of destruction, is revealed...* (1 Thes 2:2-3).

These words are a warning also for us. Although we are, of course, much closer to the reign of the Antichrist and the Second Coming of Christ than the Thessalonians in the first century, nevertheless we also must not “be shaken from our minds” and believe that these events are already upon us when

they are not. Technology alone can never separate us from Christ. *We can be separated from Christ only by willingly and consciously accepting a lie—a heresy like ecumenism, or an evil leader like the Antichrist.* The importance of the seal consists in its being an outward and visible sign of this inward and invisible apostasy. The seal will be destructive for those who receive it, because it will be a sign of their acceptance of the heresy of the Antichrist. But the seal has no power on its own—that is, before the appearance of the heresy and before anyone has consciously accepted it.

There is a danger that in our eschatological speculations we may, like the Jews, become fixated on the letter (or number) of the law while completely ignoring its spirit, its inner content, and so fall away from the true faith. That this is a real danger is shown by the fact that recently some zealot monks, in their zeal to avoid what they consider to be the seal of the Antichrist, have broken communion with a truly confessing bishop who does not accept their eschatology and joined a heretical bishop who does. In other words, in order to avoid a future heresy that has not yet appeared and has not yet been identified and condemned by the Church, they have embraced a past heresy (Apollinarianism) that was identified and condemned centuries ago! In the same way, many Orthodox Christians today claim to see the Antichrist in many phenomena—in new passports and globalization, in American foreign policy and the European Union—but completely fail to see that their ecumenist hierarchs are heretics who are leading them into the abyss of the Church's condemnation. Truly they are *blind guides who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.* (Mt 23:24)!

May the Lord grant us that most valuable of gifts, the gift of *discernment*, so that we may discern the signs of the times, not selectively and not in the wrong order, but in conformity with the witness of Holy Scripture and Tradition *as a whole*. For, as St. John Chrysostom says, *it is those who do not have this depth of Scriptural knowledge who will bow down to the Antichrist...*



My friends, what are you going to do when you keep filling your children up with chocolate, ice cream cakes, cream cheese and fresh butter? What is going to happen in a period of hunger? We need to teach the children to fast, to learn, even with all of today's technical means to withstand some mild suffering, so they will be able to survive some difficult days if they happen to come upon us. If they are trained in this way for the difficult days of their lives, like St. Paul they will say: *I know how to live with plenty and I know how to survive with next to nothing.*

Fr. Athanasios Mitilinaios (+2006)

REST WITH PRAYER, NOT WITH TELEVISION...

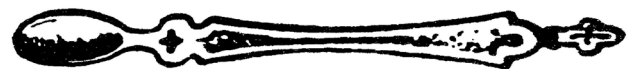
Archpriest Artemy Vladimirov of Russia.

We very much pity those Orthodox Christians who think that the best rest for their exhausted soul is to watch television news. This isn't a bad thing, perhaps, but it's a dead thing. You may spend all of the earthly time you have been allotted with such distractions, but you will never be at peace. If you want to calm your mind and ease your heart, try calling instead on the most holy name of Jesus Christ, without haste and with only one intent: to attract His attention and repent of your sins.

Try taking a walk for ten minutes as you invoke His miracle-working name, and you will see spiritual profit. Begin in a simple, humble manner, *Oh, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner.* You may even do this somewhat mechanically, knowing that this tradition has been sanctified by generations of saints, but as you walk and pray, try not to think of anything else. Just walk in the presence of God.

In these ten minutes, you will find that your fevered mind is soothed, that the noisy bazaar of your thoughts has become light, clear, and direct, and that your heart has begun to say other prayers in a manner that satisfies you. You pray, you breathe, you speak to God; you are not just repeating empty words. What does it mean to have your mind in your heart? It means that you are to control your feelings. You are not to admit invaders into your heart, but are to check your heart with your mind, to observe everything that takes place there. To have your mind in your heart is exactly what our Lord prescribes to us in His commandment: *When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.* (Mt 6:6).

If you make progress in this humble prayer, you will begin to understand that this commandment is very complete. Your heart will be filled with spiritual warmth that embraces the center of your feelings. You will come to understand what attentive prayer is, and that your heart has been created for ceaseless prayer. Ceaseless prayer is not a perpetual repetition of this or that word or phrase. The Holy Fathers say that it is the feeling of your heart. Just as you view the objects of this world with open eyes, so your heart, warmed by prayer to God, will partake of the spiritual world. This will be due, not to your piety, but to God's grace. Unceasing prayer may have no words, but you will walk and sleep in the presence of God.



Guard yourself against luxury as against a plague. It greatly weakens a Christian's soul. It teaches you to steal what is another's; to offend people, and to hold your hand back from giving alms as is required of a Christian.

St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (+1783)

WE ARE MEMBERS OF THE TRUE AND ORIGINAL CHURCH

By Rev. Dr. M.B. Efthimiou, protopresbyter of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

The traditions of men have starting points other than at Pentecost in the year 33 and at places other than Jerusalem. The fact that these traditions deviate from the teachings of Jesus Christ can be easily traced in history. These are the traditions God's people were warned about: Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. (Col 2:8).

The traditions of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the Apostles were meant to be kept, have been kept and will be kept in and by His Church until He comes again; this is what He promised: *Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.* (2 Thes 2:15); *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 16:18; *The Spirit of truth, is come, he 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). Thus, let us shortly remind all about the starting points of these other men:

If you are a Lutheran, Martin Luther founded your denomination in the year 1517 in Wittenberg.

If you belong to the Church of England, King Henry VIII founded your denomination in the year 1534 because the Pope would not grant him a divorce from his wife, Catherine of Aragon.

If you are a Presbyterian, John Knox founded your denomination in the year 1560 in Scotland.

If you are a Congregationalist, Robert Browne originated your denomination in Holland in 1582.

If you call yourself a Mennonite, your movement was named after Menno Simons who was part of the conservative Anabaptist wing; he lived in the 16th century in Friesland.

If you are a Baptist, you owe the tenets of your denomination to John Smyth, who launched it in Amsterdam in 1605.

If you are of the Dutch Reformed Church, you recognize Michaelis Jones as founder, because he originated your denomination in New York in 1628.

The Amish, started by Jacob Amman around 1693, are just one of many different church bodies within the Mennonite community in the United States.

If you are a Methodist, John and Charles Wesley launched your denomination in England in 1744.

If you are a Protestant Episcopalian, your denomination was an offshoot of the Church of England founded by Samuel Seabury in the American colonies in the 18th century.

If you are LDS or Mormon, that is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Joseph Smith Jr. started your religion in Palmyra, NY, in 1829.

If you are a Seventh Day Adventist, Mrs. Ellen Gould White inaugurated your group in the United States in 1860.

If you worship with the Salvation Army, your sect began with William Booth in London in 1865.

If you are a Christian Scientist, you look to 1879 as the year in which your religion was born in New England and to Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy as its founder.

If you are a Jehovah's Witness, Charles Taze Russell, who lived in Pennsylvania, invented your religion in 1874 and incorporated it in 1881.

If you are a worshipper at the Iglesia ni Cristo, Felix Manalo instituted your sect in the Philippines in 1914.

If you are a follower of the Church of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard originated your group in Washington D.C. in 1952.

If you are a believer at the Vineyard Christian Fellowship, Ken Guillickson and Keith Green started your denomination in 1974 in Santa Monica, California.

If you are a member of Calvary Chapel, Chuck Smith began your congregation in Costa Mesa, California in 1975.

If you belong to one of the religious organizations known as the Church of the Nazarene, Pentecostal Gospel, Pilgrim Holiness Church, your denomination is one of the many thousands of new sects and religions founded by men within the past few hundred years.

If you are Roman Catholic, you follow the ever-changing teachings of the papacy, since in 1054 the Pope of Rome broke away from the other four Apostolic Patriarchates, which are Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, by tampering with the Original Creed of the Church, and considering himself to be infallible. Thus, your church is about 1000 years old.

HOWEVER, if you are an Orthodox Christian, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, founded your religion at Pentecost in the year 33 in Jerusalem. It has not changed since that time. Our Church is now almost 2000 years old and it is for this reason that Orthodoxy, the Church of the Apostles and the Fathers is considered the true "one Holy Catholic and apostolic Church." This is the greatest legacy that we can pass on to young people in this new millennium.



FROM MY MOTHER'S WOMB, THOU ART MY GOD. (PSS 21:9)

By Fr. Demetrios Carellas (printed with permission).

Nearly nine months ago, Americans elected a new President. I assume that those of us who struggle to defend the right to life of the baby in the womb were saddened by the results: Nearly 53% of those voting chose Mr. Obama, who is the most “pro-choice” politician in our nation’s history. Among other things, he has promised that one of his first acts as President would be to sign the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA) into law. As I have expressed in previous articles, FOCA would—in essence—permeate the presence of the feminists’ ungodly sacrament of human slaughter into every fiber of our Nation’s existence. In his first 6 months of office, Mr. Obama has already taken over 30 pro-abortion actions, the most recent being his efforts to sign into law a bill that would provide free abortions in the DC area (June 26, 2009).

On November 6, 2008, after just two days of depressed feelings, I realized that Mr. Obama’s election is exactly what those of us, who claim to be pro-life, really needed. From a so-called realistic standpoint, the future for all the in-utero babies’ right to life is in the gravest condition possible: both houses of Congress now in the control of the “pro-choice” party; a filibuster-proof Senate; and a President who could not even support the Born Alive Infant Protection Act. However, as our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ told His disciples, *The things impossible with men are possible with God.* (Lk 18:27). It is now time for us to show our All-Merciful God, that we do indeed believe His words! Through prayer, fasting and our hands-on participation in the active defense of both the humanity and sacredness of every *womb-resident* baby, we must beg our Lord to intervene; and to deliver us from this genocide, before the millions of souls—who support and/or participate in this horrendous crime—have hardened their hearts to the point that they will never see the need to repent. God forbid, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus!

EXPOSING THE “PRO-CHOICE” LIE

Before the U. S. Supreme Court decision of January 22, 1973, which legalized the killing of pre-born children, the feminist movement had already developed the necessary terminology to make that ruling appear to be reasonable. Such phrases as: “product of conception” and “unwanted tissue” were used to describe the child in the womb. Other common phrases in the *feminist dictionary*, of de-humanizing terms to justify for the killing of the pre-born child, included: “removal of unwanted tissue,” “termination of the pregnancy,” “the need to protect the woman from having to seek a ‘back-alley’ abortion,” and “the elimination of the very dangerous ‘coat hanger’ self-induced abortions.”

However, the keystone phrase within the pro-abortion vocabulary is: “a woman’s right to choose.” Almost immediately, the term—*pro-choice*—became the mantra for those who supported the legalization of abortion; and this term was already in place before the ungodly January 22, 1973 decision was issued, thanks to the support of the Mainstream Media (MSM).

By the grace of God (because ONLY His grace could have allowed such an immediate challenge to that ruling), the *pro-life* movement was born around the same time. Local, state and national pro-life organizations began forming throughout our country. Unfortunately, the MSM—TV, newspapers and periodicals—never used the term, pro-life, to describe those groups. Instead, these defenders of this inalienable right for the child in the womb were (and continue to be) called, *anti-abortion*.

Of course, the prefix “pro”, is usually given a positive connotation; whereas “anti” is usually associated with something negative. It is safe to assume that many who support legalized abortion, especially during the 1st trimester of the child’s life, were influenced by the terminology used—by the MSM, and pro-abortion groups like Planned Parenthood and N.O.W.—to describe the two diametrically opposed philosophies concerning the pre-born infants.

However, here is a question that was never asked during the various polls that have been taken on this issue: What exactly does it mean to be pro-choice? Let us briefly offer a simple method to find its true meaning. If we were to ask someone, who is pro-abortion, for a definition, he/she would most likely say something like, “I support a woman’s right to choose.” Then, if we replied, “Choose what?” that person’s response would be similar to, “Choose whether or not to bring the pregnancy to full term.” (Note: a true supporter of abortion would never use the term “baby” or “child” in his/her response.) Finally, we would respond with this question: “Then what—in reality—does it mean, if the woman chooses not to bring the pregnancy to full term?” At this juncture, if the individual was truly honest with himself, he would have to agree that something has to be killed in order to end a pregnancy. And that “something,” my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is not animal, vegetable or mineral; it is a human being, created in the image and likeness of God!...

A Christian, by definition, must be pro-life. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ brought sanctity to our human nature, when He chose to take our flesh upon Himself in the virgin womb of His all-pure Mother, the Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary. The hymnology of the Orthodox Church clearly indicates this. For example, consider this portion of a hymn from the feast of the Annunciation on March 25th: *Today there are glad tidings of joy; it is the festival of the Virgin. Things below are joined to things above. Adam is renewed, and Eve is set free from her ancient sorrow; and the tabernacle of our nature [i.e.,*

our human flesh], which the Lord took upon Himself, deifying the substance He assumed, is become the Temple of God. O Mystery! ... Thus, the term, pro-choice Christian, is a classic oxymoron!

What follows is directed specifically to all Orthodox Christians throughout the world, since I am an Orthodox priest. However, anyone who reads this, and finds it beneficial, is welcome to apply these words to his/her own life as well: In the Holy Name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Who shed His Blood for the salvation of all mankind, I entreat you—who consider yourselves to be pro-choice—to rebuke and renounce this unchristian and ungodly philosophy. I pray that our Lord will grant you tears of repentance, so that you can go to your spiritual father and confess this sin against the One, Who formed our forefather, Adam, out of the earth; and breathed within his body *the breath of God*.

Dear and precious child of God, you should not receive Holy Communion until you have repented of this philosophy that supports the murder of God's innocent ones. By accepting this satanic belief, you have placed a deep wound in your soul; and only Confession can heal it. If you receive the precious and Life-giving Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus, while maintaining that the life of pre-born child—growing in the womb of his/her mother—is expendable, then you receive His Holy Flesh to your judgment.

Furthermore, as recompense to our All-Merciful Saviour, I encourage you to become involved in one of the local pro-life groups within your area. Stand up for those precious children, who are unable to defend themselves, and God will bless you for this! Later on in this essay, you will find other means by which you can promote the sacred right to life of all babies, from conception through their birth into this temporal world; as well as provide support for the needy mothers, who choose to give birth to their children.

TO THE MOTHERS, THE WOUNDED BUT PRECIOUS SOULS, WHO CHOSE TO ABORT THEIR BABIES

I beg your forgiveness, dear children of Christ Jesus, that I must place you into two groups, before I can begin my feeble, but heart-centered, attempt to reach out to you: those of you who have found blessed tears of repentance; and those of you who are still missing them.

I give thanks to God for you, dear mothers, who have mystically heard the *silent screams* of your little ones; and have run to the open arms of our All-Compassionate Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, seeking His forgiveness. Addressing specifically the Orthodox women who have now repented of this grave sin, I am sure that you have gone to your spiritual father and confessed; and received from him a penance, that blessed spiritual medication, which brings healing to the large and deep wound that the abortion placed within your immortal soul. Yes, my dear children, your penance is given to heal you, not to punish you.

In the Sacrament of Holy Confession, a repentant child of God receives both forgiveness and the necessary soul medicine to heal the wounds caused by our sins. When the wound is large, then more time is needed for spiritual therapy. Perhaps this illustration involving a major physical illness will help you to understand this more clearly: A person is diagnosed with a malignant tumor, in both his throat and stomach. The tumors are successfully removed through surgery. However, for the next several months, the person must observe a very restricted and simple food diet. If he were to try and maintain a normal diet, then he could die; since the wounds from the tumors were not given enough time to heal. In like manner, when a soul has a great wound, it is necessary for that person to observe a period of spiritual rehabilitation before receiving Holy Communion again.

Your spiritual father will prescribe certain soul medications for you to take, in order to nurture your soul as it heals. However, there are additional things that you can do in order to both expedite and enhance this healing process. For example, you could become involved at a pregnancy center, or with a local pro-life group. Furthermore, you are in a unique position to become God's instrument to convince another woman not to have an abortion. In fact, I suggest that you entreat our Lord Jesus to grant to you His grace to save at least one child in this manner. What a great blessing—and three-fold blessing—that will be for your soul: Not only will your soul receive divine comfort, but you will also become God's vessel to both save an innocent child from physical death and the soul of his/her mother from spiritual death.

To those mothers who have had abortions, and—although you realize that you have committed a great sin—do not seek forgiveness, because you do not feel worthy to be forgiven: Please remember that Jesus, the Word of God, took our flesh upon Himself, in order to call us sinners to repentance and lead us to Paradise; and that He shed His precious Blood for us upon the Cross, in order to redeem us and save us. As the father ran to embrace his prodigal son, upon seeing him returning from death to life, so also does our All-Merciful Lord Jesus, in His limitless and never-ending love for you, call you to return to Him; so that He can embrace your wounded soul, filling it with healing and forgiveness.

If you let me know where you live, I will find a brother priest near you, who can assist you in your return. If, at present, you simply are seeking an attentive ear to listen as you share your pain, you may contact this wretched sinner and unworthy priest (papadem@consolidated.net). If you wish that I give you a call, e-mail me your phone number and the best times to reach you. If you send me your first name, I will pray for you as well, everyday!

Finally, I now direct my words to those precious souls that have had an abortion (or abortions), but do not feel they have done anything wrong. With the help of the evil one, you have placed a wall around your heart; and, as a result,

the healing grace of our living God is not accessible to you at this time. I pain for you, dear child of God, I truly pain for you! Somewhere within your heart, there is a God-presence, calling you to acknowledge you sin, repent and return to the One, Who created you in His image. It is my prayer that you will speedily *hear this still small voice*; for then you can be granted the gift of tears of repentance, to wash away the wall of indifference, so that you can run—with haste—to the all-loving and forgiving embrace of your Most Sweet Lord Jesus. If you need help with your return, please contact me as noted above. Although I do not—as of yet—know you personally, be assured of my prayers for you!

Beloved and dear wounded mothers, I thank you for reading my heart-centered plea. Please forgive me, if I have said anything to offend you. May our Most Holy Theotokos, and Ever-virgin Mary, embrace your wounded souls!

TO THE PHYSICIANS, AND THEIR MANY ACCOMPLICES, WHO ARE PAID TO KILL THE PRE-BORN BABIES

This was the most difficult section for me to put into words. Being—in my core beliefs—a naive idealist, I cannot understand how physicians can become hired killers of innocent babies; and for profit! Furthermore, because there are so many types of accomplices to this infanticide, it was necessary for me to place them into a number of groups. May God have mercy on each one of them, and lead them all to blessed repentance!

To the abortionists: It truly grieves my soul that a number of men and women, who have received the grace from God to become healers of the body, have chosen instead to become hired killers, hit-men, who receive money for murdering innocent pre-born—and, occasionally, new-born—children. You have no excuse. You know that human life begins at conception, and yet you kill these babies at an average of 4,000 per day. What has happened to you? How can you sleep at night? Is your conscience so dead that the sight of the child you have just dismembered does not cause you any pain, any sorrow? You have lost the right to be called a physician. You are an abortionist.

Nevertheless, our All-Compassionate God, Who gave you the knowledge to become a healer, Who took upon our flesh and died on the Cross for you, is ready to forgive you! However, you must first stop performing these murders immediately; and acknowledge your grievous sin. I pray that you will be blessed with tears of repentance, so that you can seek forgiveness from our All-Merciful Lord Jesus; and dedicate the remaining time of your temporal life to being a physician that brings healing to others, instead of an abortionist that brings death.

In addition, I suggest that you estimate how much of your earnings have come from performing abortions; so that every month, until you die, you can give a substantial portion of this blood money to support unwed mothers and other worthy pro-life causes. Furthermore, I entreat you to speak out against

abortion; as your voice will have much influence. Beseech our Lord Jesus to allow you to become His instrument, until your last breath, to convince other doctors to stop participating in this satanic infanticide.

To the Orthodox Christian physicians-turned-abortionists: I grieve for you the most. At this moment, you are headed towards eternal damnation! Please stop murdering babies, immediately; and run to your priest to confess these terrible sins against God. From the first time you aborted a pre-born child, you excommunicated yourself from your Church. Therefore, do not receive Holy Communion; not until you have gone to confession, and have fulfilled the partaking of the medication (penance) that you will give and brought healing to your very sick and wounded soul.

Do not wait another moment, for no one knows when he will be departing this temporary life. And if you die before you have repented of this grave sin, where will you spend eternity? Please hear my sincere plea, in behalf of the salvation of your soul, and come back to Christ and His Church. If I can be of help in any way, please contact me.

To the nurses and pharmacists, who facilitate these murders: Although you did not perform the abortions, you share in the sin; as you are definitely active participants in them. Therefore, much of what I said to the abortionists, also applies to you.

Nurses, I pain for you. How can you pass those instruments of death to the abortionist, without experiencing great sorrow within you? How can you, for example, piece together all of the parts of a child—slaughtered during a D & E abortion—without realizing what had happened moments earlier? I pray that you will allow God to fill your heart with repentant tears; so that they will wash away the wall, which your indifference to human life has allowed the evil one to place therein.

To the pharmacists: To those pharmacists who—for example—fill prescriptions for the RU 486 pill, which induces an abortion, cannot escape direct culpability to the abortion. At the present time, you still have a right to refuse to dispense such medication, on the basis of your conscience, without losing your position. However, if—someday—there is a law that forces you to dispense abortion medications, or be fired, would you rather do it, and keep your temporal job, or refuse, and keep eternal your soul?

To the psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors and clergy, who advise women to go through with their abortions (or convince them that they have a “right to choose”): The innocent blood of those babies is also on your hands. As is the case with the doctors, nurses and pharmacists, you are aware that every abortion stops the beating heart of a tiny human being. You know, for example, that the “product” of the abortion of a 16 weeks gestation fetus is a dead baby girl or boy. May you find blessed repentance, and seek God’s forgiveness, while there is still time to do so. After you take your final breath in this life, you will no longer have that opportunity.

To the pro-abortion “Christian” clergy: I feel that I must give special attention to all those that consider themselves to be Christian clergy, but believe that abortion is a woman’s right/decision. What god do you profess to worship? I assure you, that it is not the Jesus Christ, Who shed His precious Blood on the Cross for you. Rebuke your false gods and repent, while there is still life in your body.

Forgive me, but I am compelled to reach out more specifically to any Orthodox priest, who has counseled any of his sheep to have an abortion. What has happened to you, my dear brothers in Christ Jesus? How can you stand before the Holy Altar knowing that you have innocent blood on your hands, knowing that you may have also caused the death of the souls of the mothers, whom you counseled to abort their children? And if you simply told the women something like, “It is your decision to make,” you are still culpable for your neglect of the Truth. When you call down the Holy Spirit down upon yourself, and then upon the Holy Gifts, what judgment are you calling down upon your suffering and wounded soul? I beg you to immediately go to your Bishop, and confess this grave sin. Please also contact the women, whom you mislead, beg their forgiveness, and do whatever you can to help bring healing to their souls.

To the fathers of the aborted children: You are just as responsible as your wife/girlfriend for the murder of your pre-born child, unless you did all that you could to stop her from having the abortion. In my opinion, those fathers who threatened to leave their girlfriends—unless they had an abortion—are even more accountable than their respective companions. A true father would never abandon his offspring, from conception onwards. Pray that our Lord Jesus will help you to feel the pain within your soul, caused by the deep wound that you placed therein, when you agreed to the death of your child. Then you will be given those blessed tears of repentance, and you will run to Him for forgiveness.

If you have no one to assist you in your “return” to your Saviour and Lord, please contact this unworthy priest. I pray that you will soon earn the right to be called a father again, by having other children, and by convincing at least one other man not to allow his pre-born child to be sacrificed upon the satanic altar of pride, privacy and convenience.

To the grandparents, siblings and/or friends, who either assisted in the abortion, through their words or actions; or chose “not to get involved:” You are—most assuredly—a participant in these murders, and will have to answer to God on that fearful Day. Beg our Saviour to fill—both your eyes and your heart—with tears if repentance. In addition to confession, you need to go to the child’s mother and beg her forgiveness for not trying to stop her from committing this terrible sin.

To the many politicians, lawyers and judges, whose actions support and/or uphold the legalization of this

“slaughter of God’s innocents:” In my opinion, you are as guilty as the abortionists that perform these murders. You are the ones that have placed the murder weapons in the hands of the abortionists; and have protected their indiscriminate use of them! You are the ones that created—and perpetuated—the multi-billion dollar industry, whose products are the slaughtered of 50 million little babies! You are the ones that have aided in the deaths of millions of adult souls—including your own—by your diabolical actions!

Somewhere within your severely wounded soul, I must believe that there is a divine “still small voice,” calling you to immediately change your demonic attitude, repent, and begin protecting *the right to life of every child in the womb*. O how I pray that you will soon “hear” this inner call of your Creator! If you choose to ignore it, then you shall learn—when your soul separates from your body—that the blood of millions of innocent babies is upon your soul. However, it will then be too late to repent. *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!* (Mt 11:15)

DOING OUR PART TO STOP THIS LEGALIZED INFANTICIDE, BEFORE OUR NATION ABORTS ITSELF FROM THE WOMB OF THE UNIVERSE

In the time it takes me to put this next section on paper, over 1,000 of pre-born babies will have been offered as sacrifices to the demonic, three-headed god of pride, privacy and profit. What has happened to us, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ? If any doctor was dismembering a baby that was a few minutes old, we would demand that he/she be put in jail for life. Yet, for the past 35 years, doctors have been legally killing babies in the womb at a rate of 4,000 per day, and most Americans do not seem to care.

Last night, the following Spirit-filled words from one of the Psalms of King David (105:36-38) convicted my soul: *And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils. And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood.* Could we not apply these words of the Holy Prophet to the condition in which we find ourselves in America today?

How can we give so much effort and concern to solving economic, educational, immigration, minority discrimination, national defense, and health care problems, while we ignore the silent screams of thousands of babies being murdered everyday? How ungodly! How inhuman! It is like a doctor that receives a person in the emergency room with a severed artery in his leg and superficial scrapes on his arms, but he chooses to ignore the severed artery; and instead, he devotes all of his effort to cleaning the scrapes! The result is the bleeding to death of the patient.

Today, our great nation is also about to bleed to death because we are putting all of our efforts on the “scrapes,” and ignoring the great quantities of innocent blood that is being shed in the hospitals and abortion chambers of our land on a daily basis. Several years ago, I read somewhere that the mighty Roman Empire fell 50 years after it legalized abortion. Is history about to repeat itself in the USA?

Even with all the misinformation being offered about what is really growing in a woman’s womb (*it is a human being, created in God’s image!*), more than half of our nation’s adults oppose abortion. Unfortunately, only a small percentage of that group is truly active in trying to save the babies, as well as their mothers, and/or work to remove that satanic law. However, even if all the tens of millions of citizens, opposed to abortion, begin taking action, it would not be enough.

In my opinion, we have now passed the point of being able to overcome this terrible crime through our actions alone, my dear friends. We must have God’s divine intervention! And if we expect our Lord to deliver us from this legalized infanticide of His most innocent ones, we must imitate the Jews of old: *And the children of Israel groaned because of their tasks, and their cry ... went up to God. ... And God looked upon the children of Israel, and was made known to them.* (Ex 1:23-25). In other words, we must all fall to our knees, daily, and beg our Lord to deliver us; and He will! Concurrently, it is important for us to become involved in local and/or national pro-life groups (a partial list is included at the end of this paper); and to vote for politicians that are solidly pro-life. It is of paramount importance that we send up our “groans”—for deliverance from this sin—to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

For the past few months, our Lord has helped me to form the following prayer, which I offer to Him each day, as near as I can, to the sixth hour of the day (noon). I have programmed my cell phone (for the next 10 years!) to remind me three times, beginning @ 11:45 AM to offer this prayer, wherever I may be. Here are the words that I believe He has sent into my heart, so that I can offer them to Him:

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who—at the 6th hour of the day—did shed Thy precious Blood upon the Cross for the salvation of all mankind: receive the souls of all the innocent pre-born babies, who have been, are being, or will be slaughtered today in the hospitals and abortion chambers throughout our Nation. And as their untimely deaths have prevented them from receiving the grace of Holy Baptism, I entreat Thee to accept their innocent blood as their Baptism (as Thou did with the early Martyrs); so that they can share eternity with Thee.

To the doctors, nurses, parents and hosts of accomplices responsible for this infanticide, grant tears of repentance; so that they can run to Thee for forgiveness and healing, and thus avoid the eternal death of their souls. I believe that all things are possible with Thee, O Lord. Therefore, I entreat Thee on this day—through Thy divine grace—to convince at least one mother in every state

to cancel her abortion and bring her child to full term; and to convince one doctor in every state to repent of his actions, and never again kill a child in the womb.

Receive my prayer, O Lord, even though it is offered to Thee from such a sinful and unworthy priest; and unite my entreaty with those of all the other brothers and sisters that are crying out today on behalf of all Thy little ones, who are now being formed in the wombs of their mothers. Deliver us and our Nation, O Lord, from this shedding of innocent blood! Forgive us! Heal us! Save us! Amen.

In the Book of Acts (12:3-10), it is stated that when Herod placed St. Peter in prison, binding him with chains between two soldiers, “earnest prayer was being made by the Church of God on his behalf.” (vs. 4) And God answered those prayers, by sending an Angel to free him. What if thousands of us—everyday—beg our Lord to deliver us from this infanticide? Do we not believe that our Most-sweet Lord Jesus would come speedily to deliver us? That is why I am now begging everyone who reads these words to join with me in daily prayer, for God to intervene and save us! Until we stop legally killing the child that He forms in his/her mother’s womb, this nation cannot be saved from destroying itself.

As we offer these daily prayers together, let us also be seeking His forgiveness for our sins; and let us not simply read His Gospel, but strive each day—through His grace—to become His Gospel, in all of our thoughts, words, and actions. Let us always keep the name of Jesus: on our lips, in our thoughts and within our hearts, the *name which is above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.* (Phil. 2:9-10)

Jesus is our only hope, my dear brothers and sisters. It is imperative that we now beg Him to intervene, while there is still time. Tomorrow, the innocent blood of another 4,000 of our sons and daughters will be shed in the hospitals and abortion chambers of our Nation. But how many “tomorrows” remain, before it is too late?

Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us!

+Fr. Demetrios Carellas

† † †

A Partial List of Pro-Life Organizations

1. Orthodox Christians for life – www.oclif.org
2. Zoe for Life – www.zoeforlifeonline.org
3. The National Right to Life Committee – www.nrlc.org
4. Pro-life Action League – www.prolifeaction.org
5. American Life League – www.all.org
6. People Concerned for the Unborn Child – www.pcuc.org
7. Nurturing Network – www.nurturingnetwork.org
8. Birthright – Help Centers – toll-free: 800-550-4900
9. Crisis Pregnancy Centers – toll-free: 800-848-LOVE
10. Real Alternatives – www.realalternatives.org
11. Bethany Christian Services – toll-free: 800-BETHANY
12. Children of God for Life – www.cogforlife.org

HOW CAN WE BEST HONOR THOSE WHO HAVE DEPARTED THIS LIFE?

By St. John (Maximovitch).



We often see relatives of the departed go to great lengths in arranging an elaborate funeral. Substantial sums are not infrequently spent on fancy tombstones. Relatives and friends spend lots of money on wreaths and flowers (even though the latter have to be removed from the coffin before it is closed, so as not to hasten the decomposition of the body). Some like to pay their respects to the departed

and express their condolences by placing a notice in the newspaper, although such a public display reflects the shallowness of their feelings and often their insincerity. One who is truly grieved will not advertise it; a personal expression of sympathy carries more warmth.

Whatever such arrangements we make, the deceased is not going to benefit. For the dead body it is all the same whether it lies in a plain or a fancy coffin, in a lavish or a humble grave. It does not smell the fragrance of the flowers that are brought; it does not need feigned expressions of sympathy. The body will be given over to decay; the soul lives, but it no longer experiences any feelings through the sensory organs. Another life has begun for the soul, and it has other needs.

Here is what it needs and what we must do if we indeed love the departed and desire to bring him our gifts. What, in fact, will bring comfort to the soul of the departed? First of all, sincere prayers on his behalf—prayers at home and especially the prayers of the Church, joined with the Bloodless Sacrifice, i.e., commemoration at the Divine Liturgy.

Many appearances of the deceased and other visions attest to the tremendous benefit which the departed receive from prayers on their behalf and from offering the Bloodless Sacrifice in their name.

Another thing that brings them consolation is almsgiving and other charity in their name. To feed a hungry man in the name of the departed, to help an indigent is to do the same for the deceased.

St. Athanasia (commemorated April 12), before she died, willed that for the forty days after her repose the poor be fed in memory of her. However, the sisters of the convent were lax and did so for only nine days. The Saint then appeared to them in the company of two angels and said, “Why did you

forget my will? Know that charity and the prayers of a priest, offered on behalf of a soul through the course of forty days, stir up God’s mercy: if the souls of the departed were sinful, the Lord absolves their sins; if they were righteous, those praying for them are rewarded with virtue.” Especially nowadays, when it is so difficult for everyone, it is senseless to waste money on useless things when, in spending it on the poor, one can do two good deeds at once—benefiting the departed and also the recipient of the charity.

Not long ago, on the first-year anniversary of nun Maria’s repose, in accordance with her will, donations were collected and a dinner for the needy was prepared on the grounds of the Archbishop’s residence. Some 150 people responded to the notice, and all were fed. A great good was thereby accomplished.

Even if one does not do good on such a big scale, if one feeds at least a few or even one hungry person, this is already something. To do this is not difficult; one has but to give a sum of money for a memorial repast to the Committee for Assistance to the Needy at the Archbishop’s church, or to the House of Mercy or the soup kitchen. With prayer for the departed, food will be given to the poor. They will be satisfied physically, and the departed will have their fill spiritually.



The greater miracle is to root out the tinder of luxury from one’s flesh rather than to drive unclean spirits from the bodies of others. A more resplendent wonder is restraint exercised over the wild stirring of anger by the virtue of patience, rather than the capacity to hold sway over the creatures of the air. Much more important is the exclusion of ravening gloom from one’s heart than the ability to drive out the sicknesses and the bodily fevers of someone else. Lastly, it is in many ways more remarkable and more sublime virtue to be able to heal the weaknesses of one’s own soul rather than the failings of another’s body. The more exalted the soul is by comparison with the body, the more its salvation is to be preferred; the more valuable and excellent its substance, the graver and more deadly its ruin.

This is what is said to the most blessed apostles concerning bodily cures: *Do not rejoice because demons submit to you.* (Lk 10:20). It was the invoked name which achieved this and not the power of the apostles. Therefore they are warned not to dare to lay claim to blessedness or glory because of what is done through the power and the virtue of God, but rather to make such a claim because the deep purity of their lives and hearts has earned them the right to have their names written in heaven.

St. John Cassian (+435)

Τὸ «Πάρτυ» τοῦ Ἐργένη

Τοῦ πρωτ. Θεμιστοκλέους Στ. Χριστοδούλου.

Ἡ Δύση φαίνεται ιδιαίτερα κατὰ τοὺς τελευταίους αἰῶνες ἦταν καὶ εἶναι μία πρόκληση γιὰ μίμηση ἐκ μέρους τῆς Ἀνατολῆς. Πρὶν ἀπὸ πολλοὺς αἰῶνες, ὅταν ἡ Δύση δὲν εἶχε ἀναπτύξει πολιτισμό, τότε συνέβαινε τὸ ἀντίθετο. Δηλαδή ἡ Δύση δανειζόταν πολιτισμὸ ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀνατολή. Πόσο ὅμως παράξενα εἶναι τὰ πράγματα! Οἱ φωτοδότες- Ἀνατολικοὶ νὰ γίνονται ἐξ αἰτίας τοῦ ἄκριτου μιμητισμοῦ μιμητὲς ξένων στοιχείων καὶ παραδόσεων πρὸς τὶς δικές τους παραδόσεις.

Ἐνα νέο φρούτο προέκυψε κατὰ τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια στὴν καθ' ἡμᾶς Ἀνατολή καὶ στὸ γάμο. Στὴν ἀποχριστιανοποιημένη καὶ ἄκρως ὕλιστική Δύση ξεκίνησε ἕνα ἔθιμο. Αὐτὸ τὸ ἔθιμο ἔχει τὸ ὄνομα «bachelor party» καὶ γίνεται τὴν προηγούμενη ἡμέρα τῆς τελέσεως τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ γάμου.

Τὶ εἶναι αὐτὸ τὸ «bachelor party»; Εἶναι μία θὰ λέγαμε «γιορτὴ» πρὸς τιμὴν τοῦ μέλλοντος γαμπροῦ ἢ τῆς μελλούσης νύφης σὲ κάποιο νυχτερινὸ κέντρο διασκεδάσεως ἢ ἀκόμη καὶ κάποια διοργανούμενη γιορτὴ στὴ μορφή τῶν πάρτυ σὲ φιλικὸ σπίτι. Αὐτὸ ὅμως τὸ πάρτυ δὲν ἔχει νὰ κάνει μὲ μία σεμνὴ γιορτὴ τοῦ τύπου ποὺ γνωρίζουμε, ὡς εἶναι τῶν γενεθλίων, ἀλλὰ ἔχει σχέση μὲ κάποιο πρόγραμμα ἄκρως πονηρὸ, σεξουαλικό. Οἱ διοργανωτὲς αὐτῶν τῶν πάρτυ σκεπτόμενοι μὲ ποιὸν τρόπο καλύτερα θὰ διασκεδάσουν τὸν μέλλοντα γαμπρὸ ἢ νύφη, φίλο ἢ φίλη τους, τοὺς προσκαλοῦν κατὰ τὴν τελευταία νύχτα τῆς ἀγαμίας τους νὰ ξεδώσουν καὶ γιὰ τελευταία φορὰ, νὰ ἐρωτοτροπήσουν ἐλεύθερα ἢ καλύτερα νὰ πορνεύσουν μὲ μία ἄλλη ὑπαρξή, ἔχοντας ὡς ἐλαφρυντικὸ τὴν αὐριανὴ δέσμευσή τους μὲ τὸ γάμο.

Φυσικὰ κάποιες φορὲς αὐτὰ τὰ πάρτυ γίνονται γιὰ νὰ ὀργιάσουν καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι οἱ διοργανωτὲς τους. Ἀντιλαμβανόμεθα τὸ μέγεθος τῆς κραιπάλης αὐτῆς τῆς γιορτῆς!

Ὡς πνευματικὸς ἐξομολόγος πολλὰς φορὲς ἀκουσα στὸ πετραχήλι μου νέους καὶ νέες, ποὺ διασκεδάσαν κατ' αὐτὰ τὰ πάρτυ πορνεύοντας μία ἀκριβῶς ἡμέρα πρὶν τὴν τέλεση τοῦ ἱεροῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ γάμου τους. Μπροστὰ λοιπὸν σ' αὐτὴν τὴν δαιμονικὴ διαστροφή ἀπαιτεῖται μία τοποθέτηση μὲ βάση τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη διδασκαλία καὶ τὴν Ἱερὰ Παράδοση τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας μας σὲ τέτοιου εἶδους ξενόφερτα ἔθιμα.

Τὸ ἱερὸ Μυστήριον τοῦ γάμου εἶναι θεοπαράδοτο. Ὡς ἐκ τούτου δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ προσεγγίζεται ἐπιπόλαια καὶ χωρὶς πνευματικὴ προετοιμασία. Ἡ πνευματικὴ προσέγγιση αὐτοῦ τοῦ μυστηρίου δὲν εἶναι ὑπόθεση μιᾶς συγκεκριμένης ὥρας, αὐτῆς ἐνν. τῆς στιγμῆς τῆς ἱερολογίας τοῦ μυστηρίου, ἀλλὰ ἀπαιτεῖ ἐκ μέρους τῶν μελλονύμφων, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν κουμπάρων, ἐξομολόγηση καὶ εὐλικρινὴ μετάνοια. Ἔτσι πρὶν τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ γάμου

προηγεῖται ἐκ μέρους τῶν μελλονύμφων μιὰ περίοδος πνευματικῆς γνωριμίας. Αὐτὴ ἢ γνωριμία συνίσταται στὸ δίπολο: α) πνευματικὸς-ἐξομολόγος καὶ μελλόνυμφοι, καὶ β) γαμπρὸς καὶ νύφη.

Στὴ μὲν πρώτη περίπτωση ὑπάρχει ἀπὸ κοινοῦ συγχὴ ἐπαφὴ μελλονύμφων μὲ ἐξομολόγο. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει κοινὸς πνευματικὸς ἀγώνας, ἄσκηση, ἐγκράτεια, προσευχή, κοινὴ θεία μετάληψη. Στὴ δὲ δευτέρῃ περίπτωση μεταξὺ τῶν μελλονύμφων ἀπαιτεῖται κοινὸς ἀγώνας, ὑπομονή, ἀλληλοκατανόηση, τήρηση τῶν Ἐντολῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλληλογνωριμία σὲ θέματα ψυχῆς, πίστεως, οἰκογένειας, γονέων, συγγενῶν καὶ φίλων.

Οἱ παράνυμφοι (δηλ. οἱ κουμπάροι) δὲν εἶναι οἱ κουμπάροι τῆς θεατρικῆς παράστασης, οἱ δωροθέτες ἢ οἱ πορτοφολάδες τοῦ ἱεροῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ γάμου, ἀλλὰ εἶναι οἱ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀδελφοὶ καὶ οἱ ἐγγυητὲς γιὰ τὴ θεμελίωση καὶ στερέωσή του. Ὡς ἐκ τούτου οἱ κουμπάροι καλὸν θὰ εἶναι νὰ κάνουν πνευματικὴ ζωὴ, νὰ εἶναι πιστοί, μὲ ἐξομολόγηση, τακτικὸ ἐκκλησιασμὸ καὶ μετοχὴ τῶν ἀχράντων Μυστηρίων. Κι αὐτὸ γιὰ τὴν οἱ παράνυμφοι μὲ τὴ συμβουλή καὶ τὸ παράδειγμά τους πολλὰ μποροῦν νὰ συνεισφέρουν πρὸς τὸ νέο ζευγάρι.

Γιὰ τὴν καλύτερη βίωση τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ γάμου καὶ τῆς Ἱερολογίας του ἀπαιτεῖται ἐκ μέρους τῶν μελλονύμφων προετοιμασία γιὰ μετοχὴ στὰ ἄχραντα Μυστήρια. Ἡ προσέγγιση στὸ μυστήριον τοῦ γάμου ἀπαιτεῖ ὄχι μόνον ἐξωτερικὴ καθαρότητα, ἀλλὰ πρωτίστως καὶ κυρίως ἐσωτερικὴ—πνευματικὴ. Αὐτὸ γιὰ νὰ γίνει, ὀφείλει τὸ μελλόνυμφο ζευγάρι νὰ συμμετέχει ἀνήμερα τοῦ γάμου τους στὸ ἱερὸ Μυστήριον τῆς Θείας Εὐχαριστίας. Δηλαδή ἐὰν ὁ γάμος εἶναι νὰ τελεσθεῖ τὴν Κυριακὴ τὸ μεσημέρι, ἐξυπακούεται ὅτι οἱ μελλόνυμφοι μποροῦν νὰ μεταλάβουν τὸ πρωὶ στὴν Κυριακάτικη Θεία Λειτουργία. Ἐὰν ὁ γάμος θὰ τελεσθεῖ τὸ Σάββατον τὸ ἀπόγευμα (σημ. καλὸν θὰ εἶναι οἱ γάμοι νὰ τελοῦνται κατὰ τὴν Κυριακὴ, ποὺ εἶναι ἡμέρα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως καὶ ὄχι τὰ Σάββατα, ποὺ εἶναι οἱ ἡμέρες τῶν κεκοιμημένων), οἱ μελλόνυμφοι θὰ μποροῦν νὰ προσέλθουν κατὰ τὴν Θεία Λειτουργία τοῦ Σαββάτου τὸ πρωὶ. Καὶ ἐὰν ἀκόμη δὲν ὑπάρχει Θεία Λειτουργία, μποροῦν οἱ μελλόνυμφοι νὰ ζητήσουν ἀπὸ τὸν ἐφημέριό τους νὰ τὴν τελέσει ἀνήμερα τοῦ γάμου τους προκειμένου νὰ μεταλάβουν.

Ὡς ἐκ τούτου μ' αὐτὴν τὴν πνευματικὴ προετοιμασία τοῦ γάμου εὐαρεστεῖται ὁ Θεὸς μας. Ἐν ἀντιθέτῳ περιπτώσει ὁ διάβολος χαίρεται, ὅταν πετυχαίνει βαπτισμένα μέλη τῆς Ἐκκλησίας νὰ παρασύρονται κι ἀντὶ νὰ οἰκοδομοῦν πάνω στὶς Εὐαγγελικὰς ἀρχὰς καὶ τὶς Ἱερὰς Παραδόσεις τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας μας, νὰ συμμετέχουν σὲ τέτοιου εἶδους δαιμονικὰ συμπόσια, ὄργια καὶ σαρκολατρικὰς ἐκδηλώσεις, ποὺ ἀντὶ νὰ ὀδηγοῦν σὲ ψυχοσωματικὴ ἔνωση τῶν μελλονύμφων, ὀδηγοῦν σὲ μελλοντικούς χωρισμοὺς καὶ διαζύγια.

Τέλος, ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία βλέπει τὴν προετοιμασία γιὰ τὸ γάμο ὡς μιὰ ἱερὴ σωτηριολογικὴ ὑπόθεση, πὺ ὀδηγεῖ σὲ ἀγάπη καὶ ἔρωτα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους μέχρι τοῦ βιολογικοῦ τοὺς θανάτου καὶ ἐπέκεινα στὴν Παραδείσια κατάσταση καὶ ὄχι ὡς μιὰ διασκέδαση, πὺ ἔχει ἡμερομηνία λήξεως, δηλ. μὲ τὸ τέλειωμα τοῦ γάμου καὶ τοῦ κέντρου τῆς διασκέδασης νὰ ἀκολουθεῖ τὸ διαζύγιο καὶ πολλὰ ἄλλα ἔκτροπα.

Γιὰ τὸν λόγο αὐτό, ἐπειδὴ τὸ ἔθιμο τοῦ «bachelor party» δὲν ἔχει καμμιά ἀπολύτως σχέση μὲ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Πατερικὴ σκέψη καὶ Παράδοση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι μιὰ πλάνη καὶ μιὰ ψευδαἴσθηση ὠραιοποιήσεως τῆς ἀμαρτίας, ἔστω κι ἂν αὐτὴ εἶναι πορνεία καὶ μάλιστα θεσμοθετιοτυπημένη, ἐπειδὴ αὐτὸ τὸ ἔθιμο μολύνει τὸν ἄσπιλο χαρακτήρα τοῦ ἱερολογημένου γάμου, συνιστοῦμε τὴν ἀποφυγὴ αὐτοῦ, ὡς ἐθίμου ξενόφερτου καὶ κακόγουστου, στὴν καθ' ἡμᾶς Ὁρθόδοξη Ἀνατολή καὶ Ἱερὰ Παράδοση καὶ προτρέπουμε τοὺς νέους μας, ἐκείνους πὺ ἀγαποῦν καὶ στηρίζονται στὸν ἑν Τριάδι Θεό μας, νὰ μὴ συμμετέχουν σὲ τέτοια πειρασμικὰ πάρτυ.

Ἐπιπροσθέτως σημειώνουμε κάποιες προσωπικὲς πνευματικὲς ἐμπειρίες μας. Κάποιοι νέοι, πὺ παρασύρθηκαν σὲ τέτοια πάρτυ κι ἐνῶ ἦταν ἀπὸ καιρὸ ἔτοιμοι μὲ τὸ μυστήριο τῆς ἐξομολογήσεως νὰ μεταλάβουν τῶν Ἀχράντων Μυστηρίων ἐφθασαν ψυχικὰ ράκη μπροστὰ στὸ μυστήριο τοῦ γάμου τους. Κάποιοι πάλι μελλοντοφύτοι μετανοημένοι ἐξ αἰτίας τῆς σαρκικῆς τους πτώσης πρὸ τοῦ γάμου τους προσέτρεξαν στὸν πνευματικὸ τους λίγα λεπτὰ πρὸ τῆς τελέσεως τοῦ γάμου τους ἐλεγχόμενοι συνειδησιακά, νὰ ἐξομολογηθοῦν τὶς σαρκικὲς ἔκτροπὲς τους χάνοντας τὴν ὠραία ψυχικὴ διάθεση, πὺ θὰ ἤθελαν νὰ ἔχουν γιὰ τὸ ἴδιο τὸ μυστήριο τοῦ γάμου τους. Ὑπῆρξε δὲ κάποια φορὰ, πὺ γαμπρὸς ἀντὶ νὰ χαίρεται κατὰ τὴν μοναδικὴ καὶ ἀνεπανάληπτη στιγμή τῆς ζωῆς του, πὺ ἦταν ὁ γάμος του, νὰ νυστάζει κατὰ τὴν τέλεση τοῦ μυστηρίου καὶ τὰ μάτια του νὰ κλείνουν ἀπὸ τὸ ξενύχτι, τὸ ποτὸ καὶ τὴν σωματικὴ κραιπάλη.

Ἀλλὰ δυστυχῶς σήμερα ἡ ὑλόφρονα κοινωνία μας ἐπικροτεῖ περισσότερο τέτοιες κραιπάλες καὶ υἰοθετεῖ ἄκριτα τέτοια ξενόφερτα ἔθιμα, παρὰ ἐπαινεῖ ἐκείνους τοὺς νέους, πὺ ἀγνεύουν καὶ εἶναι καθαροὶ σωματικῶς.

Οἱ γονεῖς, οἱ πνευματικοὶ πατέρες, ὅσοι ἔχουν φόβο Θεοῦ, πρέπει νὰ νουθετοῦν, νὰ συμβουλεύουν τὴ νεολαία μας καὶ ὡς πρὸς αὐτὸ τὸ θέμα. Ἡ δικαιολόγηση τέτοιων πάρτυ, ἀντὶ νὰ βοηθᾶ, ἐπιτείνει τὸ πρόβλημα τῆς διεστραμμένης κοινωνίας μας. Κι ἂν σήμερα ἡ διαστροφή θεωρεῖται ἄθλος, ἀντιλαμβανόμεθα ποῖο θὰ εἶναι τὸ ἐπόμενο ἔθιμο; Ἀραγε ἡ μείωση τῶν γάμων, ἡ αὐξηση τῶν διαζυγίων, ἡ ἐλεύθερη συμβίωση, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν μὴ ὑγιῶν σαρκικῶν συζυγικῶν σχέσεων μήπως ἔχει τὴν αἰτία του σὲ ξένους δαιμονικοὺς μιμητισμούς; Καιρὸς νὰ κάνουμε τὴν περισυλλογὴ μας.

Πραγματικὲς Ἱστορίες

Γέροντος Παΐσιου Ἀγιορείτου.

Κάποτε, ἓνας Ἀγιοπαυλίτης Μοναχὸς εἶχε πάει στὸν Ἅγιο Γεράσιμο στὴν Κεφαλληνία. Τὴν ὥρα τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας ἔμεινε μέσα στὸ Ἱερὸ καὶ ἔκανε κομποσχοίνι· ἔλεγε νοερὸς τὴν εὐχὴ Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ «Υἱὲ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς» ἐνῶ ἔξω ἔψαλλαν. Εἶχαν δὲ φέρει στὴν ἐκκλησία καὶ ἓναν δαιμονισμένο, γιὰ νὰ θεραπευθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἅγιο Γεράσιμο. Ἐνῶ λοιπὸν ἔλεγε τὴν εὐχὴ ὁ Μοναχὸς μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ Ἱερὸ, τὸ δαιμόνιο ἔξω καιγόταν καὶ φώναζε: «Μὴ τραβᾶς αὐτὸ τὸ σχοινί, ρὲ καλόγηρε, γιὰτὶ μὲ καίει». Τὸ ἄκουσε αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ Ἱερεὺς καὶ λέει στὸν μοναχό: «Κάνε ἀδελφέ μου κομποσχοίνι ὅσο μπορεῖς, γιὰ νὰ ἐλευθερωθεῖ τὸ πλάσμα τοῦ θεοῦ ἀπὸ τὸ δαίμονα». Τότε ὁ δαίμονας ὀργισμένος φώναζε: «Ρὲ παλιόπαπα, τί τοῦ λὲς νὰ τραβᾶει τὸ σχοινί; Μὲ καίει!» Τότε ὁ μοναχὸς μὲ περισσότερο πόνο ἔκανε κομποσχοίνι καὶ ὁ βασανισμένος ἄνθρωπος ἀπαλλάχτηκε ἀπὸ τὸ δαιμόνιο.

Κάτω ἀπὸ τὸν Ἅγιο Βασίλειο ἐκεῖ πὺ στρίβει ὁ Διακονητὴς τῆς Μεγίστης Λαύρας, ὁ ὁποῖος ἐπέβλεπε τοὺς τράγους πὺ εἶχαν γιὰ πάχυνση. Κάποτε τὶς ἀποκριὲς τῆς Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστῆς, ἐνῶ ἦταν πανσέληνος καὶ ὁ Διακονητὴς Πατὴρ Ἐφραίμ, ἀδελφός τῆς Μονῆς, ἔκανε κομποσχοίνι ἄκουσε ὀχλαγωγία μεγάλη χωρὶς φασαρίες, μόνο φωνές: «ὼχ! ὼχ!...» Ἀκούγοντας αὐτὸ ὁ πατὴρ Ἐφραίμ σκέφτηκε: «Θὰ εἶναι ξένοι αὐτοὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ εὐθυμοῦν». Βγαίνει λοιπὸν ἔξω στὸ φεγγάρι, ἀλλὰ τί νὰ δεῖ! Περίπου τριακόσιους δαίμονες νὰ ἀδημονοῦν καὶ ὁ ἀρχηγὸς τους νὰ λέει: «Γιὰ δὲς! Ἐνας σκελετωμένος καλόγηρος νὰ μᾶς καθυστερεῖ μέρες τὴν φάλαγγα καὶ νὰ μὴ μποροῦμε νὰ πᾶμε στὸν κόσμο τώρα γιὰ τὰ ἀποκριάτικα γλέντια καὶ ξεφαντώματα!»

Κάποτε εἶχε πάει ἓνας ψαρὰς στὸν εὐλαβέστατο πάπα-Μηνᾶ τῆς Σκήτης τῆς Ἀγίας Ἄννας φρέσκα ψάρια γιὰ τὴν Πανήγυρή του. Ὁ Γέροντας παραξενεύτηκε πότε τὰ ἔπιασε, γιὰτὶ ἦταν Κυριακὴ. Ρωτᾶει λοιπὸν τὸν ψαρὰ: «Πότε τὰ ἔπιασες»; Ἐκεῖνος ἀπάντησε: «Σήμερα τὸ πρωί. Εἶναι φρέσκα-φρέσκα!» Τότε ὁ πάπα-Μηνᾶς τοῦ λέει: «Παιδί μου, δὲν μπορῶ νὰ τὰ ἀγοράσω εἶναι ἀφορισμένα, γιὰτὶ τὰ ἔπιασες Κυριακὴ». Ὁ ψαρὰς δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ τὸ καταλάβει αὐτό. Τότε τοῦ λέει ὁ Γέροντας: «Θέλεις νὰ βεβαιωθεῖς γιὰ αὐτό; Δῶσε ἓνα ψάρι στὸ γάτο καὶ θὰ δεῖς ὅτι δὲ θὰ τὸ φάει». Πράγματι δὲν τὸ ἔφαγε τὸ ψάρι ὁ γάτος. Ἐδειξε ἀποστροφή. Αὐτὸ φυσικὰ συγκλόνησε τὸν ψαρὰ καὶ στὸ ἐξῆς σεβόταν τὶς Κυριακὲς καὶ τὶς μεγάλες ἑορτές. Ὁ πάπα-Μηνᾶς ἦταν πολὺ καλογοερικὸς καὶ διακρινόταν στὴν εὐλάβεια καὶ στὴν ἄσκηση. Ἐτρωγε μιὰ φορὰ τὴν ἡμέρα μετὰ τὴν ἐνάτη καὶ ἐκεῖνο ἄλαδο. Ἐπόμενο ἦταν νὰ κατοικεῖ μέσα τοῦ ἡθεῖα Χάρις, ἀφοῦ ἦταν καὶ πολὺ ταπεινός.

Δέν Ἄρκοῦν Μόνο τὰ Καλὰ Ἔργα

Ἀγίου Λουκά - Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Κριμαίας.

Μεταξὺ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ποὺ ζοῦν γύρω μας ὑπάρχουν καὶ αὐτοὶ ποὺ δὲν πιστεύουν στὸν Θεὸ καὶ ὅμως κάνουν πολλὰ καλὰ ἔργα. Συχνὰ ἀκούω τὴν ἐξῆς ἐρώτηση: «Αὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι ἄρκετό, δὲν θὰ σωθοῦν αὐτοὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι μὲ τὰ καλὰ τοὺς ἔργα»;

Πρέπει ὡποσδήποτε νὰ δώσω τὴν ἀπάντηση. Ὁχι, δὲν θὰ σωθοῦν μόνο μὲ τὰ καλὰ ἔργα. Γιατί δὲν θὰ σωθοῦν; Γιατί ἔτσι εἶπε ὁ Κύριος καὶ Θεὸς μας Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, ὅταν ἐπηρώτησεν εἰς ἐξ αὐτῶν, νομικός, πειράζων αὐτὸν καὶ λέγων· διδάσκαλε, ποία ἐντολὴ μεγάλη ἐν τῷ νόμῳ; ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς ἔφη αὐτῷ· ἀγαπήσεις Κύριον τὸν Θεόν σου ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ καρδίᾳ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ ψυχῇ σου καὶ ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ σου. Αὕτη ἐστὶ πρώτη καὶ μεγάλη ἐντολὴ. Δευτέρα δὲ ὁμοία αὐτῇ· ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν. (Ματθ. 22:35-39).

Ἄν ἡ πίστη στὸν Θεὸ καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη πρὸς Αὐτὸν εἶναι ἡ πρώτη καὶ ἡ σπουδαιότερη ἐντολὴ τοῦ νόμου· ἂν ἡ δευτέρα ἐντολὴ γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν πλησίον πηγάζει ἀπ' αὐτὴ τὴν πρώτη, καὶ ἂν ἡ ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν πλησίον παίρνει τὴν δύναμὴ της ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν Θεό, τότε αὐτὸ σημαίνει, ὅτι γιὰ νὰ σωθεῖ κανεὶς πρέπει μὲ ὅλη τὴν καρδιά του νὰ ἀγαπήσει τὸν Θεό, διότι αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ πρώτη καὶ ἡ σπουδαιότερη ἐντολὴ τοῦ νόμου.

Τι σημαίνει σωτηρία; Τὸ νὰ σωθεῖ κανεὶς σημαίνει νὰ κληρονομήσει τὴν αἰώνια ζωὴ, νὰ μπεῖ στὴν Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ νὰ γίνεῖ κοινωνὸς αὐτῆς τῆς Βασιλείας! Τι εἶναι ἡ Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τι εἶναι ἡ αἰώνια ζωὴ;

Ὁ Κύριος καὶ Θεὸς μας Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἶπε στοὺς Ἑβραίους ἕναν πολὺ θαυμαστὸ λόγο, ὅτι ὅλοι πρέπει νὰ τρῶνε τὸν Ἐπουράνιο Ἄρτο καὶ ὅτι ὁ Ἐπουράνιος αὐτὸς Ἄρτος εἶναι ἡ Σάρκα του, τὴν ὁποία Αὐτὸς δίνει γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία τοῦ κόσμου καὶ γιὰ νὰ ζεῖ ὁ κόσμος. *Εἶπεν οὖν αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν, ἐὰν μὴ φάγητε τὴν σάρκα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πῖντε αὐτοῦ τὸ αἶμα, οὐκ ἔχετε ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς.* (Ιω. 6:53).

Ποία ζωὴ; τὴν ζωὴ τὴν αἰώνια· δὲν θὰ ἔχετε τὴν αἰώνια ζωὴ, δὲν θὰ γίνετε κοινωνοὶ τῆς Βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ δὲν θὰ σωθεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ σας. Μπορεῖ νὰ ὑπάρχει κάτι πιὸ ξεκάθαρο ἀπ' αὐτὸ τὸν λόγο; Ἄν δὲν πιστεύουμε μὲ ὅλη τὴν καρδιά μας στὸν Θεό, ἂν δὲν βαπτίζομαστε, ἂν δὲν κοινωνοῦμε τοῦ Σώματος καὶ τοῦ Αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τότε ἡ σωτηρία γιὰ μᾶς δὲν ὑπάρχει.

Βλέπετε, μόνο τὰ καλὰ ἔργα δὲν ἀρκοῦν γιὰ νὰ σωθοῦμε!

Ξέρουμε ὅτι καὶ οἱ ἄπιστοι κάνουν καλὰ καὶ δίκαια ἔργα. καὶ τότε δημιουργεῖται ἡ ἐρώτηση· πῶς νὰ κρίνουμε τὰ καλὰ ἔργα ποὺ κάνουν οἱ ἄπιστοι, ποία εἶναι ἡ ἄξια τους; Βέβαια, ὅλα τὰ καλὰ ἔργα ποὺ κάνουν αὐτοὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἔχουν τὴν ἄξια τους, ἡ ὁποία εἶναι μεγάλη. Τὸ δεχόμαστε

ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ ξέρουμε ὅτι ὑπάρχει διαφορὰ μεταξὺ τῶν καλῶν ἔργων ποὺ κάνουν οἱ ἄπιστοι καὶ αὐτῶν ποὺ κάνουν οἱ ἄνθρωποι, οἱ ὁποῖοι μὲ ὅλη τὴν καρδιά τοὺς πιστεύουν στὸν Θεό.

Ποία εἶναι ἡ διαφορὰ; Ἡ διαφορὰ εἶναι ἡ ἐξῆς: Ὑπάρχει πλῆθος ἀνθρώπων, πολὺ δυνατῶν ἀνθρώπων, ποὺ θυσιάσαν ὅλα, ἀκόμα καὶ τὴν ἴδια τὴ ζωὴ τους, γιὰ χάρι τοῦ λαοῦ τους. Ὑπῆρχαν πολλοὶ τέτοιοι ἄνθρωποι ἀκόμα καὶ στὴ δικὴ μας ἐποχὴ. Ὑπῆρχαν λοιπὸν πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι ποὺ ἔδωσαν τὴ ζωὴ τους γιὰ τὸ καλὸ τοῦ λαοῦ τους καὶ τοῦ δικοῦ τους ἔθνους. Ὑπάρχουν ἐπίσης ἄνθρωποι ποὺ θυσιάζουν τὴ ζωὴ τους γιὰ χάρι τῆς δικῆς τους τάξης.

Ποιὸ εἶναι τὸ κοινὸ χαρακτηριστικὸ ὅλων αὐτῶν τῶν καλῶν ἔργων; Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγάπη τοὺς πρὸς τὸ λαὸ τοὺς ὅσο καλὴ καὶ νὰ εἶναι, εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη μόνο πρὸς τὸ δικό τους λαό. Καὶ ταυτόχρονα μ' αὐτὴ ὑπάρχει καὶ μῖσος πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους ἄλλων φυλῶν καὶ τάξεων. Ἡ ἀληθινὴ ὅμως καὶ γνήσια ἀγάπη, ἡ εὐάρεστη στὸν Θεὸ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἔχει μῖσος, αὐτὴ ἀγκαλιάζει τὰ πάντα, εἶναι καθολικὴ.

Χρειάζεται ἄσκηση, χρειάζεται κόπος, χρειάζεται νὰ ἀναγκάζουμε τὸν ἑαυτό μας νὰ κάνουμε τὸ καλὸ. Πρέπει νὰ ἀποστραφοῦμε τὸ κακὸ, τὴν ὁποιαδήποτε ἀδικία καὶ νὰ στραφοῦμε στὴν ἀλήθεια.

Χρειάζεται ἀγῶνας γιὰ νὰ κάνουμε καλὰ ἔργα. Μόνο τότε, ὅταν, μὲ μεγάλες καὶ ἐπίμονες προσπάθειες, καθαρίζουμε τὴν καρδιά μας καὶ ἔτσι προσελκύουμε τὴ χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ, τότε, ὅταν αὐτὴ ἡ χάρι ἀνάβει στὴν καρδιά μας τὴν θεία ἀγάπη, τὴν ἀγάπη πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἡ ὁποία δὲν μισεῖ κανέναν, μόνο τότε αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγάπη, μαζὶ μὲ τὴν πίστη, μᾶς ἀνοίγει δρόμο πρὸς τὴν Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Λοιπὸν, δὲν εἶναι ἄρκετὰ μόνο τὰ καλὰ ἔργα καὶ δὲν ἀρκεῖ μόνο ἡ ἠθικὴ, χρειάζεται καὶ ἡ πίστη. Διότι μόνο ἡ Θρησκεία, μόνο ἡ Πίστη στὸν Θεὸ καὶ ἡ κοινωνία μαζὶ Του μᾶς δίνει τὴ δύναμη νὰ κάνουμε γνήσια καλὰ καὶ εὐάρεστα στὸν Θεὸ ἔργα. Αὐτὴ τὴν δύναμη δὲν τὴν δίνει ἡ ἠθικὴ καὶ μεγάλο λάθος κάνουν αὐτοὶ ποὺ νομίζουν ὅτι μποροῦμε νὰ ἀντικαταστήσουμε τὴν θρησκεία μὲ κάποια ἠθικὴ διδασκαλία.

Πρέπει ἡ θεία χάρι νὰ κατοικήσει στὴν καρδιά μας γιὰ νὰ γίνεῖ αὐτὴ ναὸς τοῦ Παναγίου Πνεύματος. Ἀμήν.



Ἐνας Γέροντας εἶπε: Ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἔχει τὴν ἀρχὴ νὰ μὴν ἀδικεῖ τὸν πλησίον, τότε ἔχει παρρησία καὶ τὴν ἀκλόνητη ἐλπίδα ὅτι ἡ προσευχὴ του ἔγινε δεκτὴ ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό. Ἄν ὅμως ἀδικήσῃ κανεὶς τὸν πλησίον, ἡ προσευχὴ του εἶναι ἀποτρόπαιη καὶ ἀπαράδεκτη, γιατί ὁ στεναγμὸς τοῦ ἀδικημένου δὲν ἀφήνει τὴν προσευχὴ ἐκείνου ποὺ τὸν ἀδίκησε νὰ φτάσει ὡς τὸ Θεό.

Ἀπὸ τὸ Γεροντικὸν

Ὁρθόδοξη Ζωὴ κατὰ τοὺς Ἁγίους Πατέρες

Π. Μ. Σωτήρχος.

ΧΩΡΙΣ ΥΠΟΜΟΝΗΔΕΝ ΝΙΚΟΥΜΕ. Τὴν διδασκαλίαν αὐτὴν τὴν βρῆκα στὸ κείμενον τοῦ Ἁγ. Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ «Πρὸς τὴν Μοναχὴν Ξένην», ὅπου γράφει: «Χωρὶς ὑπομονὴν σ' ἐκεῖνα, ποὺ μᾶς βρίσκουν ἄθελά μας, οὔτε οἱ κόποι, ποὺ καταβάλλουμε μὲ τὸ θέλημά μας εὐλογοῦνται ἀπὸ τὸν Θεόν. Γιατί ἡ ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν δοκιμάζεται κυρίως μὲ τὴν θλίψη τῶν πειρασμῶν. Πρέπει λοιπὸν ἡ ψυχὴ νὰ κατορθώσῃ πρῶτον τὰ ἐκούσια, καὶ ἀφοῦ μὲ αὐτὰ ἐθιστοῦμε στὸ νὰ καταφρονοῦμε τὴν δόξα καὶ τὴν ἡδονή, τότε θὰ ὑποφέρουμε εὐκολὰ καὶ τοὺς ἀκούσιους πειρασμοὺς». Ὑπομονὴ λοιπὸν.

ΕΝΑ-ΕΝΑ ΠΟΛΕΜΗΣΕ ΤΑ ΠΑΘΗ. Αὐτὸ μᾶς συμβουλεύει ὁ Μ. Βασίλειος (Ἐπιστολὴ πρὸς Χίλωνα), λέγοντας: «Μὴ τεντώνῃς τὸν ἑαυτὸν σου ἀμέσως στὴν ἀκρότητα τῆς ἀσκήσεως, οὔτε νὰ ξεθαρρένησῃς στὸν ἑαυτὸν σου, γιὰ νὰ μὴ πέσης ἀπὸ τὴν ἀπειρία σου ἀπὸ τὸ ὕψος τῆς ἀσκήσεως. Εἶναι πολὺ καλύτερη ἢ προκοπὴ, ποὺ γίνεται σιγά-σιγά. Νὰ ἀφαιρῆς, λοιπὸν, λίγο-λίγο τὶς ἡδονές τοῦ βίου, ἐξαφανίζοντας ἀπὸ τὸν ἑαυτὸν σου κάθε συνήθεια, γιὰ νὰ μὴ φορτωθῆς πλῆθος πειρασμῶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἀπότομη ἀποκοπὴ καὶ τὸν ἐρεθισμὸν ὄλων μαζί τῶν ἡδονῶν. Ὅταν λοιπὸν νικήσῃς τὸ ἕνα πάθος τῆς ἡδονῆς κατὰ κράτος, τότε νὰ ἀντιπαραταχθῆς ἐναντίον ἄλλης ἡδονῆς καὶ ἔτσι ὅλες τὶς ἡδονές κατάλληλα θὰ τὶς κατανικήσῃς». Καλὴν ἀρχὴν στὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα.

ΠΟΤΕ ΜΑΣ ΕΙΣΑΚΟΥΕΙ Ο ΘΕΟΣ; Τὴν ἀπάντησιν στὸ ἐρώτημα αὐτὸ τὴν ἔδωκε ὁ Ἀββᾶς Μωϋσῆς στοὺς ὑποτακτικούς του λέγοντας: «Ἄν ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲν νοιώθει στὴν καρδιά του ὅτι εἶναι ἁμαρτωλός, ὁ Θεὸς δὲν εἰσακούει τὶς προσευχές του». Τὸν ρώτησε τότε κάποιος μαθητὴς του: «Τί σημαίνει τὸ νὰ νοιώθει κανεὶς στὴν καρδιά του ὅτι εἶναι ἁμαρτωλός;». Καὶ ὁ Γέροντας ἀποκρίθηκε: «Ὅποιος νοιώθει ὅτι εἶναι ἁμαρτωλός, δὲν βλέπει τὶς ἁμαρτίες τῶν ἄλλων». Συμπέρασμα: Δὲν κατακρίνουμε τοὺς ἄλλους.

ΠΩΣ ΓΙΝΕΤΑΙ ΑΦΟΒΗ Η ΨΥΧΗ. Ὁ Ἅγιος Νικήτας ὁ Στηθάτος γράφει (Β' Ἐκατοντάδα Κεφαλαίων) ὅτι: «Τίποτε ἄλλο δὲν εἶναι τόσον πῶς συγγενικὸ μὲ τὸ λογικὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ὅσον ἡ ἀγιότητα καὶ ἡ σωφροσύνη τῆς ψυχῆς. Μητέρα αὐτῶν τῶν δύο, δηλ. τῆς ἀγιότητος καὶ τῆς σωφροσύνης, εἶναι ἡ ἀγαπητὴ ἐγκράτεια, ἡ περιεκτικὴ. Πατέρας τῆς ἐγκράτειας εἶναι ὁ φόβος. Ὁ φόβος, ὅταν μεταβληθῆ σὲ πόθο καὶ ἐνωθῆ μὲ τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν τῶν θείων πραγμάτων, κάνει τὴν ψυχὴ ἀφοβὴ καὶ γεμάτη ἀπὸ ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ μητέρα τοῦ θείου λόγου». Ἄς γίνουμε λοιπὸν ὅλοι ἀφοβοὶ μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπον.

ΑΠΟ ΤΩΡΑ Η ΑΙΩΝΙΟΤΗΤΑ. Οἱ Ἁγ. Πατέρες μᾶς διδάσκουν ὅτι ἡ αἰώνιος ζωὴ ἀρχίζει ἀπὸ τώρα, ἀπὸ αὐτὴν τὴν ζωὴν, καὶ ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Καρπάθιος γράφει στὰ

«Παρηγορητικὰ κεφάλαια» του τὰ ἐξῆς: «Ἄν προτίμησες νὰ ντυθῆς τὴν ἀπάθεια, μὴ κάθῃσαι ἀμέριμνος, ἀλλὰ φρόντισε μὲ ὅλη σου τὴν δύναμιν νὰ τὴν ἐπιτύχῃς. Γιατί στενάζουμε ἐπιθυμώντας μὲ μεγάλο πόθον, νὰ φορέσουμε τὸ οὐράνιον κατοικητήριόν μας, ὥστε νὰ καταποθῆ ἡ θνητότητα τοῦ σώματός μας ἀπὸ τὴν θείαν ζωὴν (Β' Κορ. 8:2-4), ὄχι μόνον σωματικῶς, κατὰ τὴν συντέλειαν τοῦ αἰῶνος, ἀλλὰ καὶ νοητῶς ἀπὸ ἐδῶ ἤδη (ἀπὸ αὐτὴν τὴν ζωὴν), ὡσάν ἕνας ἀρραβῶνας. Ἐπειδὴ ἐξαφανίστηκε τελείως ὁ θάνατος καὶ κατανικήθηκε (Α' Κορ. 15:54), καὶ ὅλοι οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι, ποὺ μᾶς καταπιέζουν καὶ μᾶς καταδιώκουν, δηλαδὴ οἱ δαίμονες, θὰ ἐξαφανισθοῦν μέσα στὰ κύματα τῆς δυνάμεως, ποὺ ἐστάληκε ἀπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν».

ΤΙ ΣΕ ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΩΝΕΙ. Ὁ Ἅγιος Μάξιμος ὁ Ὁμολογητὴς γράφει (Α' Ἐκατοντάδα περὶ ἀγάπης) τὰ ἐξῆς: «Ἡ ταπείνωσις καὶ ἡ κακοπάθεια ἐλευθερώνει τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἀπὸ κάθε ἁμαρτία. Ἡ ταπείνωσις ξερριζώνει τὰ πάθη τῆς ψυχῆς, ἐνῶ ἡ κακοπάθεια ἀφαιρεῖ τὰ πάθη τοῦ σώματος». Αὐτὸ ἔκανε καὶ ὁ μακάριος Δαβὶδ, μὲ ἐκεῖνες τὶς εὐχές, ποὺ ἀπευθύνει στὸν Θεόν, λέγοντας *Πρόσεξε τὴν ταπείνωσιν καὶ τὸν κόπον μου καὶ συγχώρησε ὅλες τὶς ἁμαρτίες μου.* (Ψαλμ.ΚΔ' 18)».

Ο ΚΑΛΥΤΕΡΟΣ ΣΥΜΜΑΧΟΣ. Γράφει στὴν «Κλίμακά» του ὁ Ἅγ. Ἰωάννης ὁ Σιναΐτης γιὰ τὴν ταπεινοφροσύνη: «Ἐάν ἐξοπλίζῃσαι καμμία φορὰ ἐναντίον κάποιου πάθους, νὰ παίρῃς ὡς σύμμαχον αὐτὴν τὴν ἀρετὴν. Διότι αὐτὴ ἐπὶ ἀσπίδα καὶ βασιλίσκο ἐπιβήσεται, καὶ καταπατήσῃ λέοντα καὶ δράκοντα. (Ψαλμ. 90:13). Δηλαδὴ ὅπως θὰ ἔλεγα ἐγώ, ἐπὶ ἁμαρτίαν καὶ ἀπόγνωσιν ἐπιβήσεται καὶ καταπατήσῃ τὸν διάβολον καὶ τὸν δράκοντα τοῦ σώματος. Καὶ προσθέτει: «Ἡ ταπεινοφροσύνη εἶναι οὐράνιος ἀνεμοστρόβιλος, ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ ἀνεβάσῃ τὴν ψυχὴ ἀπὸ τὴν ἄβυσσον τῆς ἁμαρτίας στὰ ὕψη τοῦ οὐρανοῦ». Νὰ λοιπὸν ὁ ἄριστος σύμμαχος στὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα.

ΝΑ ΘΥΜΑΣΑΙ ΤΟΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΝ. Διαβάζω στὰ «Ἠθικά» τοῦ Μ. Βασιλείου: «Τί ξεχωριστὸν ἔχουν ἐκεῖνοι, ποὺ τρῶνε τὸν ἄρτον καὶ πίνουν τὸ ποτήριον τοῦ Κυρίου; Εἶναι γιὰ νὰ θυμοῦνται συνεχῶς τὸν Χριστόν, ποὺ ἀπέθανε καὶ ἀναστήθηκε γιὰ μᾶς». Ἄς μὴ ξεχνοῦμε ὅτι αὐτὸ εἶπε καὶ ὁ Θεάνθρωπος, παραδίδοντας τὸ μέγα Μυστήριον τῆς Θείας Εὐχαριστίας: *Τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν.* (Λουκ. 22:19).

ΚΑΛΥΤΕΡΑ ΝΑ ΤΡΩΣ ΚΡΕΑΣ... Βαρὺς ὅσον καὶ ἀληθινὸς ὁ λόγος τοῦ Ἀββᾶ Ὑπερεχίου, ποὺ βρίσκομε στὸ «Γεροντικόν» καὶ ἐπαληθεύεται δυστυχῶς καθημερινὰ στὴν ζωὴ πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων. Λέγει ὁ Ἅγιος Ὑπερέχιος: «Προτιμότερον εἶναι νὰ τρώγῃ κανεὶς κρέας καὶ νὰ πίνῃ κρασί, παρὰ νὰ τρώγῃ μὲ τὴν καταλαλιὰ τὶς σάρκες τῶν ἀδελφῶν». Καὶ σὲ ἄλλο σημεῖο τονίζει: «Ψιθύρισε τὸ φίδι καὶ τὴν Εὐὰ τὴν ἐβγαλε ἀπὸ τὸν Παράδεισον. Μὲ

ἐκεῖνο τὸ φίδι μοιάζει καὶ ὅποιος κατακρίνει τὸν πλησίον του. Γιατί τὴν ζωὴ αὐτοῦ, ποὺ ἀκούει, τὴν σπρώχνει στὴν ἀπώλεια, ἐνῶ τὴν δική του τὴν φυλάγει». Προσοχὴ λοιπὸν στὴν καταλαλιὰ καὶ τὴν κατάκριση τῶν ἄλλων, γιατί εἶναι μέγα τὸ ἁμάρτημα αὐτό.

ΑΠΟΡΘΗΤΟΝ ΦΡΟΥΡΙΟΝ Η ΕΛΠΙΔΑ. Σὲ μία Ὅμιλία του γιὰ τοὺς Ψαλμοὺς τοῦ Δαβὶδ, ὁ μέγας Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος γράφει γιὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα: «Εἶναι μεγάλη ἡ δύναμη τῆς ἐλπίδας στὸν Θεόν. Εἶναι φρούριον ἀπόρθητο, τείχος ἀκαταμάχητο, συμμαχία ἀκατανίκητη, λιμάνι γαλήνιο, πύργος ἀνίκητος, ὄπλον ἀήττητο, δύναμη ἀκατάβλητη, ποὺ βρίσκει διέξοδο ἀκόμη καὶ ἐκεῖ, ποὺ δὲν ὑπάρχει πέρασμα. Μὲ αὐτὴν ὑπερίσχυσαν ἄνθρωποι ἄοπλοι τῶν ὀπλισμένων καὶ γυναῖκες τῶν ἀνδρῶν καὶ παιδιὰ μὲ μεγάλη εὐκολία ἀποδείχτηκαν ἰσχυρότερα ἀπὸ ἐκείνους, ποὺ καταγίνονται μὲ τὰ πολεμικά». Ἄς θυμόμαστε ὅμως ὅτι ἡ ἀληθινὴ ἐλπίδα στὸν Θεὸν προϋποθέτει τὴν ἀληθινὴ πίστη στὸν Θεόν. Πρὶν ἀπ' ὅλα χρειαζόμαστε τὸν Χριστόν.

ΕΠΙΕΙΚΙΑ ΖΗΤΑ Ο ΘΕΟΣ. Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶπε: *Γίνεσθε οὖν οἰκτίρμονες, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Πατὴρ ἡμῶν οἰκτίρμων ἐστί.* (Λουκ. 6:36). Καὶ ὁ Ἅγ. Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος λέγει: «Ἡ ἐπιείκεια καὶ ἡ ὑποχωρητικότητα εἶναι γλυκύτερη ἀπὸ τὴν χολὴ τῆς ἀγανακτικῆς καὶ τῆς θρασυτικῆς. Καὶ δὲν εἶναι μόνον αὐτό, ἀλλὰ τὴν μὲν ἀγανάκτηση καὶ τὴν θρασυτικὴ τὴν ἐμπνέει ὁ διάβολος, ἐνῶ τὴν ἐπιείκεια τὴν διέταξε ὁ Θεός». Ἄς εἴμαστε λοιπὸν ἐπιεικεῖς καὶ ὄχι θρασεῖς.

ΠΟΤΕ ΝΑ ΟΡΓΙΖΕΣΑΙ. Ἐνας ἀδελφὸς ἐρώτησε τὸν Ἀββᾶ Ποιμένα: «Τί σημαίνει τὸ νὰ ὀργισθῆς χωρὶς λόγο στὸν ἀδελφὸ σου;». Καὶ ὁ Ἀββᾶς εἶπε: «Κάθε ἀδικία, ποὺ θὰ σοῦ κάνῃ ὁ ἀδελφός σου, γιὰ δικό του ὄφελος, καὶ ἐσὺ θὰ τοῦ ὀργισθῆς, ὀργίζεσαι χωρὶς λόγο. Καὶ ἂν ἀκόμα σοῦ βγάλει τὸ δεξιὸ μάτι καὶ σοῦ κόψῃ τὸ δεξιὸ χέρι καὶ ὀργισθῆς μαζί του, πάλι χωρὶς λόγον ὀργίζεσαι. Ἄν ὅμως σὲ χωρίζει ἀπὸ τὸν Θεόν, τότε νὰ ὀργισθῆς».

ΑΘΛΗΣΙΣ ΕΙΝΑΙ Η ΑΣΘΕΝΕΙΑ. Οἱ Ἅγιοι Πατέρες διδάσκουν ὅτι ἡ ἀσθένεια φανερώνει τὴν ἐπίσκεψη τοῦ Θεοῦ, γιὰ λόγους, ποὺ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κατανοήσῃ ἡ λογικὴ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος μᾶς ἐξηγεῖ ὅτι: «Οἱ δίκαιοι, δηλαδὴ οἱ ἀληθινὰ πιστοί, δέχονται τὴν ἀσθένεια ὡς ἀθλησιν, καὶ περιμένουν μεγάλα στεφάνια γιὰ τὴν ὑπομονή, ποὺ δείχνουν». Γι' αὐτὸ ἄς κάνουμε ὑπομονή καὶ ἄς εὐχαριστοῦμε τὸν Θεόν, ὁ ὁποῖος ποτὲ δὲν μᾶς ἐγκαταλείπει.

ΠΩΣ ΝΙΚΑΣ ΤΗΝ ΑΛΑΖΟΝΕΙΑ. Διαβάζω στὴν Γ' Ἐκατοντάδα Κεφαλαίων «Περὶ ἀγάπης» τοῦ Ἅγ. Μαξίμου τοῦ Ὁμολογητοῦ, ὅτι: «Ἐάν θέλῃς νὰ ἀποκτήσῃς σύνεση καὶ μετριοφροσύνη καὶ νὰ μὴ εἶσαι δοῦλος τῆς ἀλαζονείας, νὰ ζητᾶς πάντοτε νὰ βρῆς μέσα στὰ πράγματα, τί εἶναι ἐκεῖνο, ποὺ δὲν τὸ γνωρίζεις. Βρίσκοντας τότε πάρα πολλὰ καὶ διάφορα πράγματα νὰ τὰ ἀγνοῆς,

καὶ θὰ μείνης κατάπληκτος γιὰ τὴν ἄγνοια σου, καὶ θὰ κυριευθῆς τότε ἀπὸ μετριοφροσύνη. Καὶ ἀφοῦ ἀποκτήσῃς ἐπίγνωση τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ σου, θὰ κατανοήσῃς πολλὰ καὶ μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστὰ πράγματα. Διότι τὸ νὰ νομίζῃς ὅτι τὰ γνωρίζῃς ὅλα, δὲν σὲ ἀφήνει νὰ προκόψῃς στὴν γνώση». Ἄς προσέξουμε πολὺ σ' αὐτὸ τὸ θέμα, γιατί εἶναι πολὺ ὀλισθηρὸς ὁ δρόμος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ὁ ὁποῖος νομίζει ὅτι τὰ ξέρει ὅλα.

ΤΙ ΕΙΝΑΙ ΚΕΝΟΔΟΞΙΑ. Ἀντιγράφω ἀπὸ τὴν «Κλίμακα» τοῦ Ἅγ. Ἰωάννου τοῦ Σιναΐτου καὶ τὸν Λόγον του «Περὶ κενοδοξίας» τὰ ἐξῆς προσδιοριστικὰ τοῦ μεγάλου αὐτοῦ πάθους: «Ἡ κενοδοξία εἶναι, ὡς πρὸς μὲν τὴν μορφήν, μεταβολὴ τῆς φυσικῆς τάξεως καὶ διαστροφή τῶν καλῶν ἡθῶν καὶ παρατήρησις παντός ἀξιόμειπτου πράγματος. Ὡς πρὸς δὲ τὴν ποιότητα, σκορπισμὸς τῶν πνευματικῶν καμάτων, ἀπώλεια τῶν ἰδρώτων, δόλιος κλέπτῃς τοῦ πνευματικοῦ θησαυροῦ, ἀπόγονος τῆς ἀπιστίας, πρόδρομος τῆς ὑπερηφανείας, ναύαγιο μέσα στὸ λιμάνι, μυρμήγκι στὸ ἄλωνα, ποὺ εἶναι μὲν μικρὸ, ἀλλὰ ἀπειλεῖ νὰ κλέψῃ ἀθόρυβα ὅλον τὸν καρπὸν καὶ τὸν κόπον τοῦ γεωργοῦ». Καὶ στὴν συνέχεια λέγει μεταξὺ ἄλλων, ὅτι: «Παρατήρησε καὶ θὰ δῆς ὅτι αὐτὴ ἡ ἀνόσιος, δηλ. ἡ κενοδοξία, παραμένει ἀκμαία καὶ μέχρι τοῦ τάφου. Θὰ τὴν δῆς στὰ ροῦχα καὶ στὰ μύρα καὶ στὴν νεκρικὴ πομπὴ καὶ στὰ ἀρώματα καὶ σὲ ἄλλα». Γι' αὐτὸ προσοχὴ καὶ ἀποφυγὴ πάσης μορφῆς κενοδοξίας.



Ἡσελήνη, ἡ ὁποία μεγαλώνει καὶ πάλι μικραίνει, εἶναι τύπος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ὁ ὁποῖος ἄλλοτε πράττει καλὰ καὶ ἄλλοτε ἁμαρτάνει καὶ κατόπιν μὲ τὴν μετάνοια ἐπανέρχεται στὴν ἐνάρετη ζωὴ. Λοιπὸν δὲν χάθηκε ὁ νοῦς ὁποιοῦ ἁμάρτησε, καθὼς νομίζουν μερικοί, ὅπως τὸ σῶμα τῆς σελήνης δὲν λιγότεψε, ἀλλὰ μόνον τὸ φῶς της. Ἀποκτᾶ λοιπὸν ὁ ἄνθρωπος πάλιν τὴν λαμπρότητά του μὲ τὴν μετάνοια, ὅπως ἡ σελήνη μετὰ τὸ λιγότεμά της, καὶ μὲ τὴν Θεία Ἐξομολόγησι ξαναντύνεται πάλι τὸ φῶς. Γιατί ἡ Ἁγία Γραφή λέγει: *Ἐκεῖνος ποὺ πιστεύει στὸν Χριστόν καὶ ἂν πεθάνῃ, θὰ ζήσῃ* (Ἰωάν. 11:26) καὶ θὰ γνωρίσῃ ὅτι *ἐγὼ ὁ Κύριος μίλησα*. Ἰεζ. 17:24. Ποτὲ ἀπελπισία λοιπὸν ὅσον καὶ ἂν ἔχουμε ἁμαρτήσῃ. Μόνον μὲ μετάνοια καὶ πολλὴ προσευχὴ.

Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Καρπάθιος

Τὰ Τρία Εἶδη τῆς Ἀθεΐας

Τοῦ Ἀρχιμανδρίτου Μελετίου Ἀπ. Βαδραχάνη, Τεράς Μητροπόλεως Φλωρίνης Πρεσπῶν καὶ Ἑορδαίας.



Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς (1296-1359), ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Θεσσαλονίκης, σὲ ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ πρὸς «Τὸν εὐλαβέστατον μοναχὸν Διονύσιον» γράφει ὅτι τρία εἶναι τὰ εἶδη τῆς ἀθεΐας.

Α) Ἡ Πολυειδῆς Πλάνη τῶν Ἑλληνιζόντων Φιλοσόφων

Αὐτοὶ δέχονται ὅτι δὲν ὑπάρχει Θεὸς παρὰ μόνο οἱ κατ' αἴσθησιν ἡδονές (Ἐπίκουρος) ἢ ὑπάρχουν κάποια στοιχεῖα ὕλης (Ἐμπεδοκλῆς, Ἡράκλειτος, Ἀναξίμενης, Δημόκριτος) ἢ ὅτι ὑπάρχει πλήρης ἀκαταληψία τῶν ὄντων ἀπὸ ὄλους καὶ ὅτι σὲ ὅλα ἐπικρατεῖ ἡ δόκησις (Ξενοφάνης ὁ Κολοφώνιος) ἢ φαντάσθηκαν τὸν Θεό, ἀλλὰ πολὺ ἀμυδρά (Σωκράτης, Πλάτων). Ὁ αἰρετικὸς Βαρλαάμ τὸν ὁποῖο ἀντιμετώπισε ἐπιτυχῶς ὁ Παλαμᾶς ἀνήκει στὴ πρώτη αὐτὴ κατηγορία τῶν ἀθέων διότι ἰσχυριζόταν ὅτι ἡ ἄκτιστη οὐσία τοῦ Θεοῦ δὲν διαφέρει ἀπὸ τὴν ἄκτιστη ἐνέργεια. Αὐτὸς ὅμως ποὺ ταυτίζει οὐσία καὶ ἐνέργεια, κατὰ τὸν ἅγιο Ἰουστίνο τὸ φιλόσοφο καὶ μάρτυρα καὶ ἄλλους πατέρες, ἀναιρεῖ τὴν ὑπαρξὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Διότι αὐτὸ ποὺ δὲν ἔχει καμμία ἐνέργεια, οὔτε ὑπάρχει, οὔτε εἶναι κάτι.

Β) Ἡ Πολυσχιδῆς καὶ Πολύμορφος Πλάνη τῶν Αἰρετικῶν

Ἄλλοι θεωροῦν τὸν πατέρα ἄτεκνο (Ἰουδαῖοι), ἄλλοι τὸν θεωροῦν υἱό-πάτορα (Σαβέλλιος ποὺ δίδασκε ὅτι Πατὴρ, Υἱὸς καὶ Πνεῦμα εἶναι μία ὑπόστασις καὶ ἀπλῶς φέρει διαφορετικὰ ὀνόματα ἢ φορεῖ διαφορετικὲς μάσκες κατὰ καιρούς), ἄλλοι τὸν θεωροῦν ἄκτιστο πατέρα κτιστοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ πνεύματος (Ἄρειος, Εὐνόμιος, Μακεδόνιος) καὶ ἄλλοι ἄλλα. Ὅλοι αὐτοὶ δὲν διαφέρουν σὲ τίποτα ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀθέους. Λυμαίνονται τὴν τριαδικότητα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν θεία φύση τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ Πνεύματος. Αὐτοὺς ζήτησαν ὁ Βαρλαάμ καὶ ὁ Ἀκίνδυνος οἱ ὁποῖοι ἀφ' ἐνὸς ταύτιζαν ἄκτιστη οὐσία καὶ ἄκτιστη ἐνέργεια ὅπως προαναφέραμε, ἀφ' ἑτέρου στίς σχέσεις τοῦ Θεοῦ μετὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο δεχόταν κτιστὴ ἐνέργεια. Ἔτσι ἔκαναν τὸ Θεὸ κτίσμα ἀφοῦ δεχόταν κτιστὴ ἐνέργεια διότι ἀπὸ τὴν ἐνέργεια φαίνεται ἡ φύση λένε οἱ πατέρες.

Γ) Τὸ νὰ Ἀποφεύγει Κανεῖς νὰ Ἀναφέρει

ἽΟλα τὰ Δόγματα περὶ Θεοῦ

Αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος τῆς ἀθεΐας δὲν ἀπέχει πολὺ ἀπὸ τὴν προηγουμένη πονηρὴ δυάδα. Κι ὅμως τὸ μετέρχονται θεολόγοι καὶ κληρικοὶ καὶ δὲν ἀναφέρονται σ' αὐτὰ ποὺ εἶναι δύσληπτα στὸ μυαλὸ τῶν πολλῶν. Δὲν ἐξηγοῦν

τίς θεολογίες τῶν ἁγίων πατέρων σ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ δὲν τίς ξέρουν, προφασιζόμενοι ὅτι δὲν εἶναι εὐληπτες οὔτε ἐφικτὲς γιὰ τὸν πολὺ κόσμο. Κι ὅμως ἂν ἀποσιωπήσεις ἀκόμη καὶ μία δογματικὴ διδασκαλία καταστρέφεται ὁ δογματικὸς φράκτης τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας καὶ εἰσβάλλει ἔτσι τὸ δηλητήριο τῆς αἰρετικῆς διδασκαλίας. Οἱ αἰρετικοὶ φοβοῦνται καὶ δυσαρεστοῦνται ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνάπτυξη τῆς συνολικῆς δογματικῆς διδασκαλίας τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας. Διότι ἔτσι πέφτει τὸ προσωπεῖο τῆς ἀρετῆς καὶ τῆς εὐσεβείας ποὺ αὐτοὶ φέρουν.

Συνοψίζοντας: Πρῶτο εἶδος ἀθεΐας ὅτι δὲν ὑπάρχει Θεός· δεύτερο ὅτι ὑπάρχει ἀλλ' ὄχι ἀλάθητα· καὶ τρίτο ἡ ἔλλειψη παρουσίας τῆς εἰκόνας τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Αὐτὰ ἀναφέρει ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς στὴ περίφημη δογματικὴ τοῦ ἐπιστολῆ στὸν εὐλαβέστατο μοναχὸ Διονύσιο. Καὶ τώρα ἂς ἔλθουμε στὴν ἐποχὴ μας, κάνοντας κάποιες συγκρίσεις μετὰ τὰ ὅσα συνέβαιναν στὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ ἁγίου Γρηγορίου τοῦ Παλαμᾶ.

Ἀπὸ τίς ἀρχές τοῦ 20οῦ αἰῶνος ἀρχίζει μία προσπάθεια μεταξὺ τῶν χριστιανῶν τῶν διαφόρων «ἐκκλησιῶν» νὰ ἔλθουν σὲ μία ἐπαφή, ὥστε κάποτε νὰ τὰ βροῦν, καὶ νὰ ἐνωθοῦν ξανά. Στὴ προσπάθεια αὐτὴ συμμετεῖχε καὶ ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία. Ἀρχισε λοιπὸν ὁ λεγόμενος διαχριστιανικὸς ἢ οἰκουμενιστικὸς διάλογος.

Οἱ διαφορὲς πολλὲς καὶ μάλιστα σοβαρές. Δύσκολα βρισκόταν σημεῖο ἐπαφῆς. Ἀρχισαν οἱ τριβές καὶ οἱ πολώσεις. Ὁ διάλογος γιὰ νὰ συνεχισθεῖ ἀπὸ δογματικὸς κατέληξε σὲ διάλογο ἀγάπης. Ἀρχισε ἓνας δογματικὸς μινιμαλισμὸς· δηλαδὴ νὰ ἀρκεσθοῦν οἱ διαλεγόμενοι σὲ ἐλάχιστα δογματικὰ σημεῖα ποὺ συμφωνοῦν ἢ νὰ εἶναι ἐνωμένοι καὶ νὰ δέχονται τίς δογματικὲς ἰδιορρυθμίες τῶν ἄλλων. Παρουσιάσθηκε ἡ «θεωρία τῶν κλάδων», ὅτι δηλαδὴ ἔχουμε κοινὴ ρίζα καὶ εἴμαστε διαφορετικὰ κλαδιὰ τοῦ ἰδίου δένδρου. Ἐπίσης ἡ θεωρία τῆς «περιεκτικότητας», ὅτι δηλαδὴ ἡ Ἐκκλησία μπορεῖ νὰ περιέχει διαφορετικοὺς χριστιανισμοὺς θὰ λέγαμε.

Ὁ διαχριστιανικὸς διάλογος ἀργότερα γιὰ λόγους πολιτικούς, διπλωματικούς, ἐθνικούς, ἀνάγκης, παγκοσμιοποιήσεως, ἐξελίχθηκε σὲ διαθηρσκειακὸ, καὶ σὲ πρώτη φάση γίνεται μετὰ μονοθεϊστικὲς θρησκείες. Θεωρεῖται μεγάλο πρᾶγμα ἡ πίστη σ' ἓνα Θεὸ τῶν μωαμεθανῶν καὶ τῶν ἰουδαίων. Οἱ «θεολογικές» κορῶνες ὅμως συνεχίζονται. Ὅλες οἱ θρησκείες ὁδηγοῦν στὸν ἴδιο Θεό. Ὅλες ὑπηρετοῦν τὸν ἄνθρωπο. Ὅλες ἔχουν μέσα τοὺς κάποια ἀλήθεια. Ἔτσι ἄρχισαν νὰ γίνονται διαθηρσκειακὲς συναντήσεις μετὰ θρησκείες κάθε εἴδους καὶ ὄχι ἀναγκαστικὰ μονοθεϊστικὲς. Καὶ ὁ κατήφορος δὲν ἔχει τέλος!

Καὶ τίθεται τὸ ἐρώτημα: Ποῦ βαδίζουμε; Ξεχάσαμε ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι τὸ Φῶς τοῦ κόσμου (Ἰω.8,12), ἡ μόνη ὁδὸς ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ βαδίσει ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ (Ἰω.14,6), καὶ κανεῖς ἄλλος δὲν εἶναι πραγματικὸς καὶ ἀληθινὸς Θεός; Ξεχάσαμε ὅτι οἱ θεοὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν δαιμόνια

(Ψαλμ.95:5); Ξεχάσαμε ότι τὸν εἰδωλολάτρη ἑκατόνταρχο Κορνήλιο (Πράξ.10ον κεφ.) ποὺ ἦταν εὐσεβής, καὶ ζοῦσε μὲ νηστείες καὶ ἐλεημοσύνες καὶ προσευχές, δὲν τὸν ἄφησε ὁ Χριστὸς στὴ θρησκεία του, οὔτε εἶπε ἀφοῦ ἔχει ἀγία ζωὴ θὰ σωθεῖ, ἀσχέτως ποὺ εἶναι εἰδωλολάτρης, ἀλλὰ ἔστειλε ἄγγελο καὶ τοῦ εἶπε νὰ καλέσει τὸν Πέτρο νὰ τὸν κατηχήσει στὴν ὀρθὴ πίστη;

Τὸ ἴδιο ἔκανε καὶ στὸν εὐνοῦχο τῆς βασίλισσας τῶν Αἰθιόπων τῆς Κανδάκης (Πράξ.8:26-40) ποὺ ἦταν εὐσεβής Ἰουδαῖος καὶ ὑπεβλήθη στοὺς κόπους καὶ τοὺς κινδύνους μακρινοῦ ταξιδιοῦ γιὰ νὰ ἔλθει καὶ νὰ προσκυνήσει στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα, καὶ μέσα στὸ ἀμάξι του, ἐνῶ ἦταν μεσημέρι, καὶ συνεπῶς ἔπρεπε νὰ φάγει καὶ νὰ κοιμηθεῖ, ἢ νὰ ἀπολαύσει τὴ ὁμορφιὰ τῶν τόπων ποὺ περνοῦσε, αὐτὸς διάβαζε τὸν προφήτη Ἡσαΐα. Καὶ ἐνῶ τὸ ἀμάξι τρανταζόταν καὶ τὸ διάβασμα δὲν ἦταν εὐκολο, καὶ ἐκτὸς τούτου δὲν καταλάβαινε αὐτὰ ποὺ διάβαζε, ἐν τούτοις γεμάτος ὄρεξη καὶ πάθος νὰ καταλάβει τὰ νοήματα τοῦ Ἡσαΐα συνέχιζε νὰ διαβάζει.

Κι ὅμως τὸν εὐλαβέστατο αὐτὸν Ἰουδαῖο ὁ Θεὸς δὲν τὸν ἄφησε στὴν θρησκεία του, οὔτε εἶπε ὅτι θὰ σωθεῖ ἐπειδὴ εἶναι τόσο ζηλωτής, ἀλλὰ ἔστειλε τὸν ἀπόστολό του Φίλιππο γιὰ νὰ τὸν κατηχήσει. Κι αὐτὸ διότι ὁ ἰουδαϊσμός δὲν πιστεύει σὲ Τριαδικὸ Θεό, οὔτε στὴ θεία φύση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, οὔτε στὴν ἀειπαρθενία τῆς Θεοτόκου, οὔτε σὲ εἰκόνες, καὶ τὸ σπουδαῖο, καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ Μεσσία τὸν περιμένε καὶ τὸν περιμένει ὡς κοσμικὸ ἐθνικὸ μεσσία ποὺ θὰ ἔλθει νὰ σώσει ὑλικά τὸ Ἰσραήλ.

Στὰ ἴδια αἰρετικά δόγματα πιστεύει καὶ ὁ μουσουλμανισμὸς καὶ ἐπιπλέον ὀδηγεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπο σὲ γενετήσια ἀκράτεια καὶ σὲ σφαγὴ ὧν δὲν πιστεύουν στὸ Ἰσλάμ. Ποῦ εἶναι λοιπὸν ἡ ἀξία τῶν μονοθεϊστικῶν θρησκευτῶν καὶ ποῦ ἡ ἀξία—πολὺ περισσότερο—τῶν εἰδωλολατρικῶν;

Νὰ προχωρήσουμε καὶ στοὺς αἰρετικούς χριστιανούς. Ποιὰ ἡ ἀξία τοῦ παπισμοῦ ποὺ πιστεύει καὶ αὐτὸς σὲ κοσμικὸ μεσσία καὶ ἔχει κράτος, πρεσβεῖες, διπλωματία, στρατό, ἀστυνομία, τράπεζες καὶ πάει λέγοντας; Ποῦ ἔχει διαστρέψει τὸ τριαδικὸ δόγμα μὲ τὴν προσθήκη στὸ «Πιστεύω» τῆς ἐκπορεύσεως τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος καὶ ἐκ τοῦ Υἱοῦ, ποὺ θεοποίησε καὶ ἔκανε ἀλάθητο τὸν ἄνθρωπο πάπα, θεοποίησε τὴν Παναγία μὲ τὸ δόγμα τῆς ἀσπίλου συλλήψεως, χρησιμοποιοῦ ἄζυμο ἄρτο στὴ θεία εὐχαριστία καὶ τόσα ἄλλα;

Ποιὰ ἡ ἀξία τῶν προτεσταντῶν ποὺ ἀρνοῦνται τὴν παράδοση, τὶς εἰκόνες, τὸν σταυρό, τοὺς ἁγίους καὶ τὶς μεσιτεῖες τους, τὴν εἰδικὴ ἱερωσύνη, τὸ μυστήριό τῆς ἐξομολογήσεως, τὰ ἄλλα μυστήρια καὶ τόσα ἄλλα; Ὅρισμένοι δὲ ἐξ αὐτῶν προχώρησαν σὲ χειροτονίες γυναικῶν, ἀναγνώριση καὶ χειροτονία ὁμοφυλοφύλων, καὶ ἄλλες παρατυπίες;

Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος μᾶς προειδοποιεῖ: «Καταντήσατε ἄθεο». Θὰ τὸν ἀκούσουμε;

Οἱ Νέοι Στόχοι τῶν Ἐν Ἑλλάδι Παπικῶν.

Μὲ στόχον τὴν νομικὴν των ἀναγνώριση, ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία ἄς προετοιμάζεται διὰ τὴν νέαν «ἀναμέτρησιν».

Ἀπὸ τὸν ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΟ ΤΥΠΟ τῆς Παρασκευῆς, 30/1/2009.

Οἱ ἐν Ἑλλάδι Παπικοὶ καὶ Εὐαγγελικοὶ συνεκρότησαν κοινὸν μέτωπον μὲ σκοπὸν τὴν νομικὴν ἀναγνώρισίν των. Εἰς τὸ πλαίσιον αὐτὸ ὀργανώνουν ἡμερίδα εἰς τὸ ξενοδοχεῖον «Τιτάνια» τῶν Ἀθηνῶν. Εἰς τὴν ἡμερίδα θὰ ὁμιλήσουν ὁ κ. Ἰωάννης Κτιστάκης, Λέκτωρ τῆς Νομικῆς Σχολῆς τῆς Κομοτηνῆς, Δικηγόρος, κ.κ. Ἄλτανα Φίλου, ἐρευνητῆς τοῦ Max-Planck Institute τῆς Χαϊδελβέργης διὰ τὸ δημόσιον Διεθνὲς καὶ Συγκριτικὸν Δίκαιον, Γεώργιος Κωνστάντες, Δικηγόρος, μέλος τοῦ Νομικοῦ Συμβουλίου τῆς Καθολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος, Χρήστος Παπατσώρης, δικηγόρος, Νομικὸς ἐκπρόσωπος τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Εὐαγγελικῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Τὴν συζήτησιν θὰ συντονίσῃ ὁ Δρ. Δημοσθένης Κατσάρκας, Διευθυντῆς τῆς Κλινικῆς «Ἅγιος Λουκάς», ὡς ἐκπρόσωπος τοῦ Πανελληνίου Εὐαγγελικοῦ Συνδέσμου.

Εἰς ἀνακοίνωσιν τύπου τονίζουν ὅτι οἱ «Μεγαλύτερες Χριστιανικὲς Ἐκκλησίαι τῆς Εὐρώπης, ἡ Καθολικὴ καὶ ἡ Διαμαρτυρομένη (Εὐαγγελικὴ) δὲν ἔχουν νομικὴ ὑπόστασις στὴν Ἑλλάδα». Ἐκ τῶν ἀνωτέρω προκύπτει ὅτι ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία θὰ εὐρεθῇ ἀντιμέτωπος μὲ νέας ἐπιθέσεις τόσον ἀπὸ τὸ μέτωπον τῶν χριστιανικῶν αἱρέσεων ὅσον καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ψευδοπροοδευτικούς. Ἦδη οἱ ἐκπρόσωποι τοῦ «μετώπου» ἔδωσαν καὶ τὸ πλαίσιον τοῦ ἀγῶνος τους. Ἐπικαλοῦνται τὴν Μεταρρυθμιστικὴν Συνθήκην τῆς Λισσαβῶνος, εἰς τὴν ὁποῖαν ἡ Εὐρωπαϊκὴ Ἐνῶσις δεσμεύεται νὰ προστατεύσῃ τὰς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τὰς θρησκευτικὰς κοινότητες, ὅσας ἔχουν τὴν νομικὴν ἀναγνώρισιν βάσει τῶν Ἐθνικῶν νόμων ἐκάστου Κράτους μέλους, ἀναδεικνύοντες δι' αὐτοῦ τοῦ τρόπου τὸν πολιτιστικὸν πλοῦτον τῶν Κρατῶν. Ἡ Μεταρρυθμιστικὴ ὅμως Συνθήκη δὲν ἔχει γίνῃ ἀκόμη «νόμος τῆς Εὐρωπαϊκῆς Ἐνώσεως», διότι ἡ τελικὴ μορφή της δὲν ἔχει ψηφισθῆ ὑπὸ τῶν ἐκπροσώπων τῶν Κρατῶν—μελῶν τῆς Εὐρωπαϊκῆς Ἐνώσεως. Δι' αὐτὸ σπεύδουν νὰ θέσουν τὸ θέμα ἐγκαίρως, διὰ νὰ λάβουν νομικὴν ὑπόστασιν. Λησμονοῦν ὅμως ὅτι ἔχουν ὀλίγους ὁπαδοὺς εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα.

Ὁ Παπισμὸς προσφάτως ἐνισχύθη ὑπὸ τῶν λαθρομεταναστῶν καὶ ἠῤῥησεν ἐλαφρῶς τὰς δυνάμεις του. Ἐνῶ ὁ Προτεσταντισμὸς εἰς ὅλας τὰς μορφάς του διέρχεται βαθυτάτην κρίσιν καὶ πολυδιάσπασιν. Εἰς τὴν χώραν μας ἀναγνωρίζονται ἐπιζήμως ὑπὸ τῆς Συντεταγμένης Πολιτείας ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Θρησκεία, ἡ θρησκεία τῶν Ἑβραίων καὶ ὁ Μωαμεθανισμὸς ἐξ αἰτίας τῶν Μουσουλμάνων τῆς Θράκης καὶ ἄλλων περιοχῶν. Ἡ ἀναγνώρισις τῶν Παπικῶν καὶ τῶν Εὐαγγελικῶν προϋποθέτει ἀλλαγὴ τοῦ

Συντάγματος ἢ ψήφισιν τῆς Μεταρρυθμιστικῆς Συνθήκης. Ἡ προηγούμενη Μεταρρυθμιστικὴ Συνθήκη, ἡ γνωστὴ ὡς «Εὐρωσύνταγμα» ἐτέθη εἰς τὰ χρονοντούλαπα τῆς ἱστορίας λόγω ἀντιδράσεων τῶν Εὐρωπαϊκῶν πολιτῶν. Ἄγνωστον εἶναι ἐὰν θὰ «ἐπιζήση» καὶ ἡ παροῦσα ἕως τῆς «ψηφίσεως» τῆς ὑπὸ τῶν Εὐρωπαϊκῶν Κρατῶν. Τὸ δὲ Σύνταγμα, τὸ ὁποῖον ἀναγνωρίζει τὰς τρεῖς προαναφερθεῖσας θρησκείας καὶ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξον Ἐκκλησίαν ὡς ἐπικρατοῦσαν, διὰ νὰ ἀλλαξὴ χρειάζεται Βουλὴ, ἡ ὁποία θὰ δρομολογήσῃ Συνταγματικὴν Ἀναθεώρησιν. Καὶ ἐν συνεχείᾳ Βουλὴν ἢ ὁποία θὰ ψηφίσῃ τὸ ἀναθεωρημένον Σύνταγμα. Εἰς ἐκάστην περίπτωσιν ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία ὀφείλει νὰ προετοιμάζεται διὰ τὴν νέαν «ἀναμέτρησιν»!



Οἶδε γὰρ ὁ Πατὴρ Ὑμῶν Ὅν Χρείαν ἔχετε...

Μιά ἱστορία ἀπὸ τὸν ἅγιον Βαρσανούφιο.

Ενας ἀδελφὸς ρώτησε τὸν ἀββᾶ Ἰωάννη τὸν προφήτη:

—Ἄν παρακαλέσω τοὺς ἁγίους (νὰ μεσιτεύσουν στὸ Θεό) γιὰ τὴν ἀπαλλαγὴ μου ἀπὸ ψυχικὸ πάθος ἢ σωματικὴ ἀσθένεια, καὶ πιστέψω ὅτι θὰ θεραπευθῶ ἀμέσως, ἄραγε θὰ γίνῃ ἔτσι, κι ἂν ἀκόμα δὲν με συμφέρει ἢ ἄμεση θεραπεία;

—Ἀδελφέ, ἀποκρίθηκε ὁ Γέροντας, δὲν εἶναι καλὸ νὰ προσεύχεσαι κανεὶς ἀπαιτητικὰ γιὰ τὴν θεραπεία του, ἀφοῦ δὲν γνωρίζει ἂν αὐτὴ τὸν συμφέρει ἢ ὄχι, ἀλλὰ νὰ θυμᾶται Ἐκεῖνον ποὺ εἶπε: «Οἶδε γὰρ ὁ πατὴρ ὑμῶν ὅν χρείαν ἔχετε πρὸ τοῦ ὑμᾶς αἰτῆσαι αὐτόν» (Ματθ. 6:8). Ἐστὶν λοιπὸν νὰ προσεύχεσαι στὸ Θεὸ ἔτσι: «Κύριε, στὰ χέρια Σου βρίσκομαι, ἐλέησε με σύμφωνα με τὸ θέλημά Σου• καὶ ἂν με συμφέρει, θεράπευσε με σύντομα». Με τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο νὰ παρακαλέσεις καὶ τοὺς ἁγίους νὰ προσευχηθοῦν (γιὰ σένα), πιστεύοντας ἀδίσταχτα ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς θὰ κάνει αὐτὸ ποὺ σὲ ὠφελεῖ. Καὶ σὲ κάθε περίπτωσιν νὰ Τὸν εὐχαριστεῖς, σύμφωνα με τὸ ἀποστολικὸ παράγγελμα: «Ἐν παντὶ εὐχαριστεῖτε» Α΄ Θεσ. 5:18). Ἔτσι θὰ ὠφεληθεῖς τόσο ψυχικὰ ὅσο καὶ σωματικὰ.

—Καὶ ὅταν παρακαλοῦμε τοὺς πατέρες, εἶπε ὁ ἀδελφός, νὰ προσευχηθοῦν γιὰ κάποιον πειρασμὸ μας, ἐκεῖνοι τί ζητοῦν; Τὴν ἀπαλλαγὴ μας ἀπὸ τὸν πειρασμὸ, δηλαδὴ τὸ πάθος, ἢ τὸ συμφέρον μας; Καὶ ἂν ζητοῦν τὸ συμφέρον, τότε πῶς ὁ ἀββᾶς Σισώης καὶ ἄλλοι πατέρες παρακάλεσαν τὸ Θεὸ ν' ἀπαλλάξῃ τοὺς ὑποτακτικούς τους ἀπὸ πειρασμούς; Καὶ πῶς θὰ ἐννοήσουμε τὸ «πάντα δυνατὰ τῷ πιστεύοντι» (Μάρκ. 9:23); Καὶ ἀκόμα, (πὲς μου,) ἂν πειράζεται κανεὶς

παραπάνω ἀπ' τὶς δυνάμεις του (πρβλ. Α΄ Κορ. 10:13), ἂν οἱ πειρασμοὶ συμβαίνουν πάντα πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον μας καὶ ἂν ὠφελοῦν οἱ προσευχὲς τῶν ἁγίων.

—Ἀδελφέ, ἀποκρίθηκε ὁ Γέροντας, οἱ τέλειοι πατέρες προσεύχονται γιὰ νὰ κάνει ὁ Θεὸς ἐκεῖνο ποὺ συμφέρει στὸν ἄνθρωπο. Ἄν λοιπὸν τὸν συμφέρει, ἀφήνει πάνω του τὸ πάθος γιὰ ὑπομονή. Ἄν ὅμως τὸν συμφέρει ν' ἀπαλλαγῇ ἀπ' αὐτό, (τοῦ τὸ παίρνει). Καὶ τοῦτο τὸ ἀποδίδουμε στὴν πρόνοια τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὁ ἀββᾶς Σισώης λοιπὸν πληροφορήθηκε πρῶτα (ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό) νὰ προσευχηθεῖ γιὰ τὸ μαθητὴ του, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ προσευχήθηκε. Καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς Γέροντες προσεύχονταν ὅμοια μετὰ ἀπὸ πληροφορία. Ἐπίσης, τὸ ὅτι ὅσα συμβαίνουν στὸν ἄνθρωπο τὰ παραχωρεῖ ὁ Θεὸς γιὰ τὸ συμφέρον του, εἶναι φανερὸ ἀπ' αὐτὸ ποὺ λέει ὁ ἀπόστολος: «Ἐν παντὶ εὐχαριστεῖτε» (Α΄ Θεσ. 5:18). Ὅσο γιὰ τὸ «πάντα δυνατὰ τῷ πιστεύοντι» (Μάρκ. 9:23), σημαίνει τὸ νὰ σηκώνουμε τὴ θλίψη τῶν παθῶν με ἐλπίδα, νὰ κάνουμε ὑπομονή, νὰ ἔχουμε μακροθυμία, νὰ ὑποφέρουμε τὰ πάντα με γενναιότητα, σὰν τὸν Ἰώβ. Ὁ Θεὸς δὲν ἐπιτρέπει σὲ κανένα πειρασμὸ νὰ ξεπεράσῃ τὴν ἀντοχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ἄν ὅμως δὲν ἔχει ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὴ βοήθεια τῶν προσευχῶν τῶν ἁγίων, γίνεται προδότης ἐξαιτίας τῆς χαυνότητός του.



Οπου ὑπάρχει ταπείνωσις, ὅπου ὑπάρχει μνήμη Θεοῦ, ποὺ ἀποτελεῖται ἀπὸ νήψη καὶ προσευχή, καὶ ὅπου ὑπάρχει συνεχὴς προσευχή, ἢ ὁποία στρέφεται κατὰ τῶν ἐχθρῶν δαιμόνων, ἐκεῖ ἀσφαλῶς εἶναι ὁ τόπος τοῦ Θεοῦ, δηλαδὴ καρδιακὸς οὐρανός, ὅπου ἡ φάλαγγα τῶν δαιμόνων φοβᾶται νὰ παραμείνῃ, ἐπειδὴ στὸν τόπον αὐτὸν κατοικεῖ ὁ Θεός.

Ἅγιος Φιλόθεος ὁ Σιναΐτης



Ἡ ἀδελφότης «ΟΣΙΟΣ ΠΟΙΜΗΝ», με τὴν πρόνοια τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ τὴν ὑλικὴν συμπαράσταση διαφόρων Ἑλληνορθοδόξων, διαθέτει ΔΩΡΕΑΝ πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς ἐνδιαφέροντας Χριστιανούς τὴν σειρὰ τῶν ὁμιλιῶν τοῦ εὐγλωττοτάτου Μητροπολίτου Λεμεσοῦ Ἀθανασίου ἐπὶ πολλῶν καὶ διαφορῶν θεμάτων.

Οἱ ὁμιλίες εἶναι σὲ τύπο mp3. Πρέπει νὰ ἔχετε DVD player ποὺ νὰ παίζει mp3 files (σὰν μερικὰ mini-DVD players ἢ DVD home theater systems), ἢ ἓνα ἠλεκτρονικὸ ὑπολογιστὴ με Windows operating system, ἢ ἓνα ἀπὸ τοὺς mini mp3 players σὰν, π.χ, τὸ δημοφιλὲς iPod.

ST. GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN'S ADVICE TO A NEW BRIDE

Source: From the monthly publication «Ενορία Νέα» ("Parish News"), St. George Dionysou parish (northern Athens), translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen the Great.

We are in Constantinople, in 384 AD. There is a festive event taking place: the wedding of two well-known youths of that time. They are both from upper class families.

The bride, Olympiatha, is a remarkable young lady, quite wealthy and a descendant of the imperial family. She is an orphan whose uncle Prokopios (an eparch of the Imperial State that is also her protector) undertook the responsibility for all of the wedding arrangements, including the invitation list. Olympiatha is marrying a wonderful man by the name of Nevriathios who is the eparch of Constantinople and overseer of the imperial fields.

According to the historians of that time, all of the "who is who" are in attendance of the wedding ceremony, including a sizeable group of bishops. St. Gregory the Theologian (the Patriarch of Constantinople and spiritual father of the bride) is unable to be present due to personal illness. He sent a personal letter to Prokopios expressing his regrets for being unable to attend due to illness. As the spiritual father of Olympiatha, he is pleased about the wedding and passes in writing his immense joy about the wedding of the "golden Olympiatha." He calls her golden not because of her immense family wealth but rather her golden heart that is evident in the bride's character and demeanor. In his letter, St. Gregory refers to her as "my child," i.e., my spiritual child; as such, he is in position to know the depth of her character and quality of her soul as no one else.

Within his letter to Prokopios, he writes that "I am next to you, celebrating the event, and with you I place the right hand of the one youth upon the right hand of the other and then both of them upon the hand of God."

Later on, St. Gregory sends to the young bride an original wedding gift: a poem with 111 verses, written in ancient Greek and with quite old-fashioned language (even for that time). Through this gift, he passes to his spiritual daughter the wisdom of pertinent advice and thus paints the ideal type of an Orthodox Christian wife. The poem is being translated in open format, and I pray that the saint forgives this transgression for taking such freedom with his wise writings.

† † †

My daughter,

For your wedding, I, your spiritual father Gregory, offer you this poem as a gift. And I consider it to be the best possible advice a father could offer to his beloved daughter.

Listen to me Olympiatha: I know that you desire to be a true Christian. As such, be aware that a true Christian must not only be one but she must also appear accordingly. This is why I ask you to pay special attention towards your personal appearance. You must be simple! Gold, attached to precious stones, does not add any value to women of your stature. This is even more so with make-up. It is very improper for you to alter your face, which represents an image of God, for the sole purpose of attraction and admiration by others. Know that this constitutes vanity that is unbecoming of a young lady of your character. I therefore ask that you overcome the feminine vanity that is abundant among young ladies of our time and remain simple in your appearance. The expensive and fancy dresses must remain for those women that have no desire for the life beyond and do not know what the meaning of spiritual struggle and attainment of virtues is all about; this type of woman cannot possibly comprehend the spiritual radiance and brilliance of a life in Christ. You have aimed towards greater goals and for a higher purpose for your life. These goals demands your full and undivided attentiveness and care.

First of all, you must respect and love God and immediately after Him you must respect and love your husband in the same manner as our Lord and Savior and in accordance with the instructions of our Holy Gospel. I thus ask you, how is it possible for a woman to love her husband in this manner if she has not met, has not respected and has not loved Her Lord and Creator in this same manner?

In your marriage, fondness, affection and love must be strong and persistent for him whom God has selected to be your life partner. This man is now the eye of your life and the delight of your heart. And if you ever perceive that your husband possibly loves you more than you love him, do not take advantage of his feeling by attempting to gain the upper hand in your marriage. That is plainly wrong as it is totally against the writings of the Holy Gospel!

You must respect him and love him unconditionally, as you love God. Be aware that you are a woman and you have an important and great purpose and destiny; however, your purpose and destiny is different than that of your husband who must be the head of your household. Set aside the silliness of equality among the sexes, that some of your contemporaries preach, and attempt to comprehend the obligations of marriage. In the realization of these obligations you will discover the great patience and endurance that is necessary to fulfill your family duties; it is in this manner that you will also discover the great strength that you as a woman possess.

You must surely be aware of how easily anger overtakes men. They cannot maintain and they often appear as wild lions. It is at this exact moment that a woman must remain stronger and display her superiority. You must play the role of the lion-tamer. What does a lion-tamer do when the beast

starts roaring? He becomes even calmer than usual and through kindness and persistence he overcomes his wrath. He speaks to him kindly, in a soft but firm voice, he caresses it, he attends to it, he pets it and little by little calmness is restored.

You must never criticize, scold or become derogatory towards your husband for something that he has erred. Likewise, you must avoid any contempt towards any inaction or indecision by your husband, even when the outcome is not favorable or something that you greatly desire or consider proper. Be aware that demons are always around attempting to penetrate your household, and break up the couple's harmonious spiritual cohabitation.

You must share everything, joys and sorrows alike. The Holy Sacrament of Marriage has indeed made all common to both of you. This is equally important towards the daily obligations and duties as they apply to running the household; it is the only way that a strong foundation will be built for your marriage. Let both of you provide your views and opinions; in the end, however, allow your husband to have the final say.

When you observe your husband to be sorrowful, share in his sorrow and provide him the needed relief; the support of the person closest to you in moments of sorrow and despair is of great value and relief. Immediately, however, let your facial expressions become calm, clear and collected; let peace prevail upon your demeanor and forego the temptation of any thoughts of despair. The wife is the calm harbor for the sea wave-stricken husband.

Your presence within your home is irreplaceable; you must accordingly love your home with all the cares and concern of a dedicated housekeeper. You must view it and consider it as your kingdom and you should be judicious about how often you exit its entrance. Let your husband take care of many of the outside cares and obligations while you concentrate towards those within the home.

Be extremely careful with whom you associate and the company that you keep. Be especially careful of the social gatherings that you may be participating in. Do not allow yourself to enter entertainment centers of questionable background; these represent extreme danger towards your purity and the sanctity of your marriage. These types of social interactions remove the instinct of shame, eyes cross with eyes, and once shame is not there to guard from any impropriety, the demons are able to exercise their influence and give rise to evils of unspeakable magnitude.

On the other hand, social interactions with friends of substance and of firmly grounded spiritual state must be pursued. In this manner, words of value get implanted within you and you either benefit from them or are able to confront and resolve any weaknesses that you may recognize. Concurrently, you are able to cultivate social interests and get

to know people who will benefit your household's spiritual state.

Do not be anxious to keep company or even appear in public and in the company of others for no reason. You should instead dedicate your precious time in the company of your wiser and more prudent relatives, priests, and seriously-minded people, young and old alike.

Stay away from conceited and ostentatious women whose mind is pre-occupied with external appearances and social circles, all for the purpose of vainglory and public display. This should be the same for any men that you consider respectful and spiritual but whom your husband has not allowed to enter your home, irrespective of how highly you may regard them. For is there anything more precious for you than your good husband whom you love so dearly?

Your thoughts must aim high but you must never behave as intolerable or snobbish.

I applaud women that are known by only a few men. Do not run towards worldly feasts and celebrations, even when those are for weddings or birthdays. It is around those types of gatherings that the passions of the flesh are aroused with the many dances, the drinking, the laughter and the false joys that are capable of deceiving and misleading even the pure and the wise. Always remember that purity is extremely fragile—it is like bee wax exposed to the rays of the sun. It would be prudent to limit and at times avoid the worldly feasts, even within the confines of your own home. If we were capable of controlling the desires and many appetites of the stomach we would be well served in our struggles against the many passions of our flesh; we would be in a position to conquer them instead of being subdued by them.

Keep your face calm and collected and do not alter it with extreme laughter or with grimaces of dismay, anger or disappointment towards others. Your ears should be decorated not with pearls but instead with the sounds of proper language and with locks for all the improprieties that may enter your nous through them. Thus, whether they are open or closed your sense of hearing will remain pure.

As far as your eyes, they are the ones that display the contents of your soul. Let them be the source of blush and virgin purity that pours below your eye lashes. This way, your presence and eyesight will invoke modesty, decency and the shame of innocence to all that lay their eyes upon you, perhaps even your husband! It is best and for many reasons that you keep your eyes closed or indifferent to the events around you and you should make it a habit to always maintain your sight low.

And now for your tongue. Your husband will always be your enemy for as long as your tongue is uncontrolled, even if you are to be blessed with thousands of other talents. A foolish tongue often endangers even the most innocent of people. It is preferred to maintain quiet, even in cases that you are correct. This is because you risk the expression

of an unintended improper word or characterization. No matter how greatly you desire to say a lot, it is best that you limit your words and instead choose your presence to be a quiet one.

Be attentive even of the manner that you walk; it matters greatly towards a prudent presence.

And now pay close attention and be mindful of the following advice: You must never exemplify or maintain an uncontrollable desire for the flesh. Persuade your husband to respect the holy days of the Church and the fasting periods. This is because God's laws are of much greater importance than the image of God. Be mindful that the institution of marriage was established by the Son of God to aid His creation so that a balance is maintained, as some depart this world while others arrive.

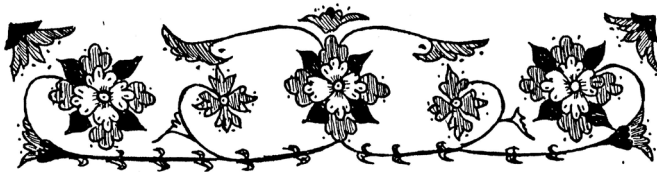
If you have benefited from this old man through some spiritual words of value I ask that you keep these words and advice guarded well within the depths of your soul. In this manner, through everything that you have benefitted and through the grace of your moral stature, you will be capable of healing your excellent husband and well known politician from the evils of vainglory and pride that constantly surround him.

This is my gift and heirloom that I offer to you. And if you desire my blessing, I pray that you become a vineyard of descendants, with many children, and many children from these children, so that our God may be glorified by more of us, for it is for Him that we are born and to Him that we should aim our earthly paths.

Your spiritual father,

+Gregory

Patriarch of Constantinople

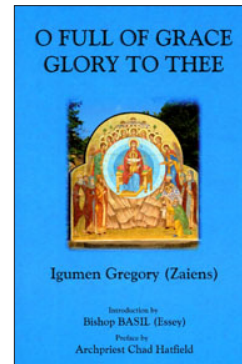


If you wish to gain victory over the passions, enter within yourself through prayer and God's help; then descend into the depths of your heart and there track down these three powerful giants—forgetfulness, laziness, and ignorance. It is these three who uphold the ranks of our spiritual adversaries: supported by these three, all the other passions, returning to the heart, act, live, and gain strength in self-indulgent and uninstructed souls. But if by means of great attention and persistence of mind, and with help from above, you find those evil giants that are unbeknown to many, you will easily drive them away with the weapons of righteousness—with the remembrance of what is good, with the eagerness that spurs the soul to salvation, and with knowledge from heaven.

St. Mark the Monk (a 5th century ascetic)

A NEW BOOK: O FULL OF GRACE GLORY TO THEE

By Igumen Gregory (Zaiens). Introduction by Bishop Basil (Essey).
Preface by Archpriest Chad Hatfield.

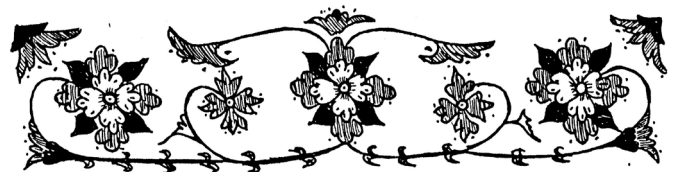


This publication gives to the reader a magnificent portrayal of the holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary. It is a most impressive biographical sketch of the one, unique person who became the pure and holy vessel through whom God entered into His creation to make it eternally divine. The author, following a chronological path from the birth of the holy Mother of God through her earthly life, and using historic sources and services, bridges the three hundred year period wherein there was no New Testament and proceeds down through the centuries to the present day. Whether deliberate or not, the author brings to our attention the fact that we cannot recognize the uninterrupted continuity of the Church without the person of the Ever-Virgin Mary, our mother. Consequently, the reader of this book will realize the significance of the divinely inspired words coming from her when she said, "Henceforth, all generations will call me blessed." In this publication, we see in her the love of God, the God of extreme humility who recognized Himself in the total humility of the holy Theotokos.

[Review by Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver].

ISBN 9780982250204 // 97 pages.

Available from St Vladimir's Seminary Press and Bookstore
(<http://www.svspress.com/> — 1-800-204-BOOK)



If you possess love, you feel no jealousy or envy. You are not boastful, carried away by reckless pride. Nor do you put on airs with anyone. Nor do you act shamefully towards your fellow beings. You seek, not simply what is to your own advantage, but what also benefits your fellow beings. You are not quickly provoked by those who are angry with you. You are not resentful if wrong is done to you, nor do you rejoice if your friends act unjustly, though you do rejoice with them over the truth of their righteousness. You put up with disagreeable eventualities. You believe all things in simplicity and innocence, and hope to receive everything promised to us by God. You patiently endure all trials, never rendering evil for evil. And you never waver in your love for your fellow beings.

Nikitas Stithatos (an 11th century ascetic monk)

THIS IS THE AMERICA WE LOVE!

For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels.
(Lk 9:26).



This is a statement that was read over the PA system at the football game at Roane County High School, Kingston, Tennessee, by school Principal, Jody McLeod:

“It has always been the custom at Roane County High School football games, to say a prayer and play the National Anthem, to honor God and Country.

Due to a recent ruling by the Supreme Court, I am told that saying a Prayer is a violation of Federal Case Law. As I understand the law at this time, I can use this public facility to approve of sexual perversion and call it “an alternate life style,” and if someone is offended, that’s OK.

I can use it to condone sexual promiscuity, by dispensing condoms and calling it, “safe sex.” If someone is offended, that’s OK...

I can even use this public facility to present the merits of killing an unborn baby as a “viable means of birth control.” If someone is offended, no problem...

I can designate a school day as “Earth Day” and involve students in activities to worship religiously and praise the goddess “Mother Earth” and call it “ecology” for that’s OK...

I can use literature, videos and presentations in the classroom that depicts people with strong, traditional Christian convictions as “simple minded” and “ignorant” and call it “enlightenment” and that’s OK...

However, if anyone uses this facility to honor GOD and to ask HIM to Bless this event with safety and good sportsmanship, then Federal Case Law is violated! This appears to be inconsistent at best, and at worst, diabolical. Apparently, we are to be tolerant of everything and anyone, except GOD and HIS Commandments. Nevertheless, as a school principal, I frequently ask staff and students to abide by rules with which they do not necessarily agree. For me to do otherwise would be inconsistent at best, and at worst, hypocritical. I suffer from that affliction enough unintentionally. I certainly do not need to add an intentional transgression. For this reason, I shall “Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s,” and refrain from praying at this time.

However, if you feel inspired to honor, praise and thank GOD and ask HIM, in the name of JESUS, to Bless this event, please feel free to do so. As far as I know, that’s not against the law—yet.”

One by one, the people in the stands bowed their heads, held hands with one another and began to pray. They prayed in the stands. They prayed in the team huddles. They prayed at the concession stand and they prayed in the Announcer’s Box!

The only place they didn’t pray was in the Supreme Court of the United States of America- the Seat of “Justice” in the “one nation, under GOD.”

Somehow, Kingston, Tennessee remembered what so many have forgotten. We are given the Freedom OF Religion, not the Freedom FROM Religion.

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.
(Mt 11:15)



For Lazarus also, whom the Lord raised up, exuded so fetid an odor that no one could approach his tomb, as a symbol of Adam whose soul exuded such a great stench and was full of blackness and darkness. But you, when you hear about Adam and the wounded traveler and Lazarus, do not let your mind wander as it were into the mountains, but remain inside within your soul, because you also carry the same wounds, the same smell, the same darkness.

We are all his sons and we all inherit the same stench. Therefore, the passions that he suffered, all of us, who are of Adam’s seed, suffer also. For such a suffering has hit us, as Isaiah says: *It is not a wound, nor a bruise, nor an inflamed sore. It is impossible to apply a soothing salve or oil or to make bandages.* (Is 1:6). Thus we were wounded with an incurable wound. Only the Lord could heal it. For this He came in His own person because no one of the ancients nor the Law itself nor the prophets were able to heal it. He alone, when He came, healed that sore, the incurable sore of the soul.

Let us, therefore, receive God the Lord, the true Healer, Who alone can come to heal our souls, after He has borne so much on our behalf. For He is always knocking at the doors of our hearts in order that we may open up to Him and that He may enter in and take His rest in our souls, and that we may wash His feet and He may take up His abode with us. For this purpose He endured many sufferings, giving His body over to death and buying our ransom from slavery so that He, coming to our soul, might make His abode there.

St. Macarius the Great

THOUGHTS CONCERNING THE CHURCH

By New Martyr Patriarch Tikhon (+1925), from various sermons delivered while he was Bishop of North America and the Aleutian Isles.



St. Patriarch Tikhon was the great and holy Patriarch of the Russian Church during the last days of Holy Russia, and the terrible and fateful days of the Revolution. The Saint's English language biographer Jane Swan, has written: "It is difficult to assess the greatness of Tikhon... His spiritual growth was far beyond that of the ordinary mortal."

His spirituality is best exemplified through the following prophetic words that St. Tikhon used in greeting the news that he had been elected to ascend the patriarchal throne:

"Like the ancient leader of the Hebrew people, I shall also be calling to God, exclaiming, 'Wherefore hast Thou afflicted Thy Servant? And wherefore have I not found favor in Thy sight that Thou layest the burden of all these people upon me?' From now on my duty shall be to take care of all the churches of Russia, and to die for their sake every day."

He knew full well that he was being handed a bitter cup: the throne was his Cross and the white patriarch's hood, his crown of thorns. For nearly eight years he was to endure great sufferings which fell to him as the head of the Russian Church during one of the most difficult periods in her history.

† † †

And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains ... and all nations shall flow unto it ... and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks ... neither shall they learn war anymore. But they shall sit every man under his vine; and none shall make them afraid... (Is 2:2, 4; Mic 4:3-4).

This kingdom of peace on earth, foretold by the Old Testament prophets, is the Church of Christ, and it is in her that one must seek peace. It is here that a man is given peace with God, for it is through the Holy Mysteries that he is cleansed of sin and becomes a beloved child of the Lord.

Here in the Divine services, in the Mysteries, in the life of the Church, a Christian acquires peace and joy and tranquility for his soul; his nature is regenerated, renewed, and in this meek, gentle, submissive, merciful and loving soul, there comes to abide the God of peace and love. And then the Christian experiences the highest degree of blessedness,

which surpasses any and every earthly good. Nothing, no suffering can cloud this blessed peace within the Christian soul. On the contrary, we know from the history of the Church that holy people even rejoiced in sufferings and boasted of their trials, of being bound and imprisoned. In deserts and in caves and in the face of all manner of deprivation they were as content and serene as perhaps never are people who live with all manner of comfort and sufficiency. Even death did not frighten them; they serenely anticipated its approach and in peace departed to the Lord.

In Christ's Church peace is spread abroad. Here we pray for the peace of the whole world, for the union of all; here everyone calls one another brother, they help one another. Christians are called to love everyone; they even forgive their enemies and do good to them. And when Christians are obedient to the voice of the Church and live according to its precepts, then they truly experience peace and love. Let us only recall the first Christians, who had one heart, one soul, who even owned what they had in common (cf. Acts 4:32). By contrast, when people distance themselves from the Holy Church and live according to their own will, then there reigns self-love, divisions, discord, wars.

Ought we not to rejoice and thank the Lord that He, in His merciful kindness, regards His Church and preserves her unharmed and invincible even to this very day? After all, it was not only in the first centuries of her history that Christ's Church endured various troubles and was subject to persecutions, and it was not only during the time of the Ecumenical Councils that she was attacked by false teachers, who elevated their minds above the mind of God.

From the first days of its existence and to the end of time she will be like a ship with passengers, sailing upon a tempestuous sea that is ready at any minute to capsize the ship and swallow its cargo. And it seems that the further the ship sails, the more fiercely the waves lash against it. In the early centuries the Christians endured persecution from without, from the pagans. But when the Church proved victorious over them, an even greater danger arose, this time from another side: while troubles from the pagans ceased, there arose troubles from her own, troubles from false brothers, attacks from within.

From within the bosom of Christianity itself there appeared one heresy and schism after another. Of course, the truth of God vanquished human falsehood, but members of the Church can never retire their weapons. They must wage war no longer against ancient heretics, but against new enemies: against unbelievers, against those who deny the truth, against those who pretend to be representatives of a powerful science. And we cannot say that with the passage of time this war has abated; no sooner does the Church manage to conquer one foe, than she is confronted with a new antagonist. Evil

is like some hydra; as one head is decapitated, another appears in its place.

In the last times evil will intensify all its forces and in the person of Antichrist it will engage the Church of God in the most violent battle. In those days there will be a great tribulation for the Church, such as never was since the world began (cf. Mt 24:21). And just as in the past some flourishing and formerly renowned local churches became impoverished and desolate, before the end there will be an even greater falling away.

But there never was a time, and we believe, in accordance with the word of the Lord, that there will never come a time when the entire universal Church of Christ will disappear from the face of the earth. No: *the foundation of God standeth sure* (2 Tim. 2:19). Christ's Church *is founded upon an immovable rock, and the gates of hell will not prevail against her.* (Mt. 16:18). The more furiously the waves beat against this immovable rock, the farther they recoil from it.

At times the enemies of Christ's Church are ready to celebrate a complete victory over her; it seems to them that they have put an end to her. But what do they discover? Just as swelling waves beat against a ship only to fall back into the sea to merge and become indistinguishable from other waves, so, too, the enemies of Christ, having launched an attack against the Church, again return to that nothingness from which they emerged, while the ship of the Church continues as before to advance in its victorious voyage.

Every year that passes serves to affirm the certainty that the truth of the Lord abideth forever, and that even the gates of hell will not prevail against Christ's Church.

How can we not rejoice on seeing that Christ's Church—a kingdom not of this world, a kingdom that has no worldly means at its disposal, no earthly enticements; a kingdom that is despised, persecuted, powerless—has not only not perished in this world, but has grown and has conquered the world. How can we not rejoice at the thought that in spite of all manner of coercion, attacks, and opposition, the Orthodox Church has preserved the faith of Christ as a precious treasure, in its original purity and entirety, unharmed, so that our faith is the faith of the apostles, the faith of the fathers, the Orthodox faith....

The holy Apostle Paul wisely compares the Church of Christ to a body. Now, in a body *there is not just one member but many* (1 Cor 12:14), and these members *do not all have the same function* (Rom 12:4), but each has its own: the eye has its function, the hand its function, and each member is necessary and cannot manage without the other; *they all contribute to the good of one another, and there is no division within the body* (1 Cor. 12:25-26). Even so are you, brothers, the body of Christ and *members in particular* (v. 27). *Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ* (Eph. 4:7), *for the perfecting of the saints, for*

the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. (v. 12).

Therefore, do you all with unfeigned love grow up into Him, from Whom the whole body fitly joined together by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, *maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.* (v. 16).

Again, Saint John Chrysostom said, "Do not cast all responsibility upon the religious; you yourselves are capable of a great deal, you know one another better than we..." Therefore, *brethren, edify one another, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men.* (1 Thess 5:14-15). *And the God of all grace, ... make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you. To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.* (1 Peter 5:10-11).



Certainly, when it is said that *the kingdom of heaven is like to the ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom* the meaning is that all of them entered upon the same path of life, for this is signified by the letter 'I.' They went forth all equally pledged to the same life, and this is why they are said to be ten, for they chose the same purpose. But they did not all go forth to meet the bridegroom in the same way: some had provided themselves with abundant fuel, enough even for the repeated replenishing of their oil lamps; the others had been careless, thinking only for the present.

And so they are divided equally, five and five: that is to say, the first group kept their five senses, which are generally called the portals of wisdom, virginally pure of sin; the second group, on the contrary, mingling their senses with wickedness, dishonored them with innumerable sins.

They practiced their abstinence and sobriety by keeping away from justice, and only reaped a greater harvest of transgressions; and hence, of course, it happened that they were locked out and excluded from the divine precincts. For whether we act virtuously or commit sin, it is through these our senses that our deeds, both good and evil, are strengthened.

St. Methodius (+884)

“THINK OF YOUR CHILDREN” FAMILY OF THE NATION’S LARGEST PRIVATELY OWNED ABORTION CHAIN, DIES IN MONTANA PLANE CRASH, 500 FEET AWAY FROM THE “TOMB OF THE UNBORN”

By Gingi Edmonds (www.gingiedmonds.com), Media Advisory, Mar. 24, 2009, Christian Newswire; Gingi Edmonds is a freelance pro-life activist, writer and photographer based out of Hanford, California. Gingi writes a bi-monthly ProLife Opinion Column.

Some of you may have seen the major news story of the private plane that crashed into a Montana cemetery, killing 7 children and 7 adults.

But what the news sources fail to mention is that the Catholic Holy Cross Cemetery owned by Resurrection Cemetery Association in Butte—contains a memorial for local residents to pray the rosary, at the “Tomb of the Unborn.” This memorial, located a short distance west of the church, was erected as a dedication to all babies who have died because of abortion.

What else is the mainstream news not telling you? The family who died in the crash near the location of the abortion victim’s memorial, is the family of Irving “Bud” Feldkamp, owner of the largest for-profit abortion chain in the nation.

Family Planning Associates was purchased four years ago by Irving Moore “Bud” Feldkamp III, owner of Allcare and Hospitality Dental Associates and CEO of Glen Helen Raceway Park in San Bernardino. The 17 California Family Planning clinics perform more abortions in the state than any other abortion provider—Planned Parenthood included—and they perform abortions through the first five months of pregnancy.

Although Feldkamp is not an abortionist, he reaps profits of blood money from the tens of thousands of babies that are killed through abortions performed every year at the clinics he owns. His business in the abortion industry was what enabled him to afford the private plane that was carrying his family to their week-long vacation at The Yellowstone Club, a millionaires-only ski resort.

The plane went down on Sunday, killing two of Feldkamp’s daughters, two sons-in-law and five grandchildren along with the pilot and four family friends. The plane, a single-engine turboprop flown by Bud Summerfield of Highland, crashed into the Catholic cemetery and burst into flames, only 500 feet from its landing destination. All aboard were killed.

The cause of the crash is a mystery. The pilot, who was a former military flier who logged over 2,000 miles, gave no indication to air traffic controllers that the aircraft was experiencing difficulty when he asked to divert to an airport in Butte. Witnesses report that the plane suddenly nosedived toward the ground with no apparent signs of a struggle. There was neither a cockpit voice recorder nor a flight data recorder onboard, and no radar clues into the plane’s final moments because the Butte airport is not equipped with a radar facility.

Some speculate that the crash was due to ice on the wings, but this particular plane model has been tested for icy weather and experts have stated that ice being the cause is unlikely.

In my time working for Survivors of the Abortion Holocaust, I helped organize and conduct a weekly campaign where youth activists stood outside of Feldkamp’s mini-mansion in Redlands holding fetal development signs and raising community awareness regarding Feldkamp’s dealings in child murder for profit. Every Thursday afternoon we called upon Bud and his wife Pam to repent, seek God’s blessing and separate themselves from the practice of child killing.

We warned him, for his children’s sake, to wash his hands of the innocent blood he assisted in spilling because, as Scripture warns, *if you did not hate bloodshed, bloodshed will pursue you.* (Ezek 35:6)

A news source states that Bud Feldkamp visited the site of the crash with his wife and their two surviving children on Monday. As they stood near the twisted and charred debris talking with investigators, light snow fell on the tarps that covered the remains of their children.

I don’t want to turn this tragic event into some creepy spiritual ‘I told you so’ moment, but I think of the time spent outside of Feldkamp’s—Pam Feldkamp laughing at the fetal development signs, Bud Feldkamp trying not to make eye contact as he got into his car with a small child in tow—and I think of the haunting words, ‘Think of your children.’ I wonder if those words were haunting Feldkamp as well as he stood in the snow among the remains of loved ones, just feet from the “Tomb of the Unborn?”

I only hope and pray that in the face of this tragedy, Feldkamp recognizes his need for repentance and reformation. I pray that God will use this unfortunate catastrophe to soften the hearts of Bud and Pam and that they will draw close to the Lord and wash their hands of the blood of thousands of innocent children, each as precious and irreplaceable as their own.

I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then. (Deut 30:19).



Do not be one who holds his hand out to take, but shuts it when it comes to giving. If your labor has brought you earnings, pay a ransom for your sins. Do not hesitate to give and do not give with a bad grace; for you will discover who He is that pays you back a reward with a good grace. Do not turn your back on the needy, but share everything with your brother and call nothing your own. For if you have what is eternal in common, how much more should you have what is transient!

The Didache, c. AD 100

HE WHO WAS AMONGST US (IN MEMORY OF BLESSED METROPOLITAN ANTONY KHRAPOVITSKY, +8/10/36)

By St. Justin (Popovich).



The Most Blessed Metropolitan Antony passed into the other world prayerfully and peacefully. He was not of this world but belonged entirely to that other world, even while he was in this world. He walked upon this earth but his inner life was concealed with Christ in God. He contemplated on what was above, and by heavenly means he measured what was earthly, and what was temporary; he evaluated in comparison with the eternal.

Death has uncovered the reliquary of his body, and he has joyously been translated into the heavenly realm, eternal and not made by hands. It was only for this that he dreamt. For he lived in this life like a traveller who, while crossing this world, hastens to his eternal homeland, to the heavenly realm in which the sun is Christ, radiating truth and love, shining without setting or being extinguished.

If anyone in this world always lived in unity *with all the saints* (Hb. 3:18), it was assuredly this Most Blessed Metropolitan. He was always in holy “community” which is nourished by prayer, love and faith. This is his sacred amity in which, with pious, tireless sensitivity and prayerfulness, he associated with the holy fathers, contemplating them, speaking from them. He belonged to them with his whole soul and whole heart; it was with their eyes that he gazed upon this world. In unity with them, he lived in this world and thus he was mighty in the patristic faith, in deeds, in life itself. And now he is with them and amongst them. There can be no doubt that his soul now joyously makes prostrations before St. Chrysostom, St. Basil, before St. Gregory and the rest of the hierarch-saints. He makes such prostrations while praying for all of us, his children.

A martyr — by his death he joined the martyrs. Was he not a martyr? He who burdened himself with severe moral struggle? Yet in the dawn of his monasticism he tormented himself with Christ’s suffering, day and night placing upon himself the labours of fasting, prayer, tears, meekness, almsgiving, love, love of one’s neighbor, love of God. Truly a martyr, for he exhausted his body and subjected his soul to ascetic labours, restraining from everything worldly to attain the wondrous kingdom of his Lord Jesus Christ.

A confessor — by his death he joined the confessors. Sel-

dom in our age has anyone proclaimed the Gospel truth with such fearless confession. His divinely wise voice rang out not only in the vastness of Russia. It sounded forth with its life-creating strength resurrecting dead souls, comforting those who sorrowed; it laid low those who fought against Christ, and silenced the lips of the evil-minded. Fearlessly, he strode toward Christ’s truth by the most direct path. With apostolic courage and daring he defended the Orthodox Church before the powerful of this age. And he did so at the price of heavy sufferings. But in all these sufferings he was kind and peaceful, as according to the Apostle, *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.* (2 Cor 12:10) Nothing could force him to silence or even deter, his Pauline eloquent zeal for Orthodoxy.

Unmercenary — through death he united with the holy unmercenaries. For, who was so generous as he? Who else was as tenderly merciful? Who, if not he, was so evangelical a co-sufferer? Truly, seldom has anyone so decisively, so sincerely and so firmly come to love poverty for Christ’s sake. All that he had belonged to everyone. I am certain that after his death he left no money and no possessions aside from some books and a donated cassock. Unmercenary, he fed the spiritually hungry as well as their bodies. No one who ever spent a few moments with him left without being consoled, inspired, reassured. From him a stream of grace flowed unseen into the souls of those who conversed with him. Whether he spoke, or kept silent, or smiled upon us, he miraculously acted upon us, and often he stirred up a trembling in your entire being.

An ascetic — through death he united with the holy ascetics. Together with the holy ascetics he perceived and understood Christianity as a moral struggle, a struggle by which a person is transformed into an eternal, deified being. Our the Most Blessed Abba Antony was a leader and guide for us. There is nothing lifeless, nothing scholastic in his perception and understanding of Christianity, while all round, in rationalistic and scholastic Europe, the dead are burying their own dead. The blessed Abba received every commandment of the Saviour as a calling to struggle, and all the commandments together as an incarnate asceticism. Indeed, not a single word of the Saviour, not a single commandment of the Saviour can be fulfilled without effort, without labour, without struggle. Thus, it is said: *The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.* (Mt. 11:12) and our Most Blessed Metropolitan was always engaged in a labour of evangelical toil. He turned his ascetic life into a sermon: the Gospel is a moral struggle, Christianity is a moral struggle. This great metropolitan, from beginning to end, was a tireless ascetic, filled with prayer, tender mercy, tears, love, forgiveness, all-encompassing love.

A man of prayer — by death he joined the saints of prayer. Truly, our Blessed Vladika lived by prayer on earth. It could not have been otherwise. The one who is most faithful to

the Gospel on earth is, at the same time, the most prayerful. This is so because he is sensitive to the measureless tragedy of life, which arises from that sinfulness and evil which have arisen in this world.

An evangelical person is aware with his whole being that only the Almighty Lord can destroy wickedness and the devil from among mankind. In the evangelical soul of our blessed metropolitan, every person called forth prayer from his heart. He treated everything prayerfully. Thousands and millions of human beings perish in the sea of life, being tossed about by the storms of evil. How could this visionary metropolitan not cry out with unceasing prayer and not call for the help the One Who alone can save us from the evil-one, from sin? A true Christian inevitably is a true praying person. If he has any kind of a calling, then here is his calling both in this world and the one that is to come.

And what now? Now, over our sorrowful world, there is yet another martyr amongst the holy martyrs. Yet another unmercenary amongst the holy unmercenaries, yet another ascetic amongst the holy ascetics, yet another one of holy prayer amongst the holy-ones of prayer. And this means that there has increased the number of eternally vigilant and untiring holy ones praying for our bitter world. Thus our grief over the departure of our Most Blessed Metropolitan Antony turns into joy, for now he will love us even more strongly, even more will he help us, even more sincerely will he support us on the Gospel path, even more penetratingly will he lead us through the darkness of this world into the azure splendor of the Saviour's wondrous eternity.

O Lord All-Merciful, have mercy on us by the prayers of our father, Blessed Metropolitan Antony.



This I give you to share, and to defend all your life: the One Godhead and Power, found in the Three in unity, and comprising the Three separately—not unequal in substances and natures, neither increased nor diminished by superiorities or inferiorities; in every respect equal, in every respect the same...

No sooner do I conceive of the One, than I am illumined by the splendor of the Three. No sooner do I distinguish Them, than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three, I think of Him as the Whole; and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that One, so as to attribute a greater greatness to the Rest. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch; and cannot divide or measure out the Undivided Light.

St. Gregory the Theologian

ICON OF THE MOTHER OF GOD “THE UNBURNT BUSH”



The Unburnt Bush Icon of the Theotokos is based on the miracle witnessed by Moses in the Old Testament. God calls Moses on Mt. Horeb from the midst of a bush which *was burning, yet it was not consumed.* (Exod 3:2). Moses is informed that he will lead the Hebrews out of their slavery in Egypt, and then God tells him His name, *I am that I am.* (Exod 3:14).

The Church has always regarded the Unburnt Bush on Horeb as a type of the Most Holy Theotokos giving birth to the Savior Christ, while remaining a Virgin. This imagery is to be found in the Church's hymnography (for example, the Dogmatikon at Saturday Vespers in Tone 2), and also in iconography.

One of the earliest depictions of the Mother of God as the Unburnt Bush shows her holding her divine Son in the midst of a burning bush. Moses is shown to one side, removing his sandals, *for that place was holy.* (Exod 3:5).

Most icons now depict the bush in a symbolic fashion. There are two overlapping diamonds: one red (representing the fire), the other green (representing the bush), forming an eight pointed star. The Theotokos is shown in the center.

In the four corners of the green diamond are the symbols of the four Evangelists: a man (St Matthew), a lion (St Mark), an ox (St Luke), and an eagle (St John). These symbols are derived from Ezekiel 1:10 and Revelation 4:7. Archangels are depicted in the four corners of the red diamond.

The design of the icon has become more complex over time. Now we can see archangels, Moses and the burning bush (Exod 3:2), Isaiah and the seraphim with the burning coal (Isa 6:7), Ezekiel and the gate through which only the Lord may enter (Ezek 44:2), and Jacob with the ladder (Gen 28:12). The Theotokos is shown holding Jacob's ladder which leads from earth to heaven. Sometimes the Root of Jesse (Isa 11:1) is shown in the center of the icon's lower border.

There is an old story about a fire which was consuming several wooden buildings. In the midst of the fire an old woman stood in front of her house holding an icon of the “Unburnt Bush.” A witness happened to see her there, and marveled at her faith. The next day he returned to the spot and was astonished to see the old woman's home completely unscathed by the fire, while all the other houses around it were destroyed. This may explain why the Mother of God, through her Icon of the Unburnt Bush, is regarded as the protector of homes from fire.

THE HARMONY OF GOD IS HIDDEN WITHIN A DIVERSITY OF PERSONALITIES

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.



One day a man came to my kalyve (hut) and told me that he was very worried because he was not of the same mind with his wife. I saw, however, that there was nothing serious between them. He just had a few rough edges, his wife had a few others, and they couldn't deal with one another. They needed a little sanding. Take two planks of wood before sanding them. One has a knot here, the other has a knot there; if you try to join the planks there is an empty space left between them. If,

however, you sand one a little here and the other a little there, using the same tool, they join perfectly. [1]

Some men tell me: "I don't see eye to eye with my wife; we have opposite personalities. She has one temperament, I have another! How can God do such strange things? Couldn't He have arranged a few things so that couples matched, and they were able to live more spiritually?"

I tell them, "Don't you understand that the harmony of God is hidden within a diversity of personalities? Different temperaments actually create harmony. Alas, if you had the same personalities! Think what would have happened if, for example, you both got angry easily: you would destroy your house. Or, consider if both of you had mild temperaments: you would sleep standing up! If you were both stingy you would get along, yes, but you would both end up in hell. Likewise, if both of you were open-handed, would you even be able to keep your house? No. You would disperse everything, and your children would be turned out to the streets.

If a spoiled brat marries a spoiled brat, between themselves they get along fine, right? But, one day someone is going to kill them! For this reason God arranges it so that a good person marries a spoiled brat, that the latter may be helped. It may be that he or she has a good disposition, but was never instructed correctly when young."

Little differences in the characters or personalities of spouses actually help couples to create a harmonious family, for the one completes the other. In a car it is necessary to use the gas pedal to go forward, but also the brake pedal to stop. If the

car only had brakes it wouldn't go anywhere; and if it only had gears, it wouldn't be able to stop.

Do you know what I said to one couple? "Because you are similar, you don't match!" They are both sensitive. If something happens at home, both of them lose it and start-up: The one, "Oh, what we suffer!" The other, "Oh, what we suffer!" In other words, the one causes the other to lose hope even more! Neither is able to comfort the other a little by saying, "Hold on, our situation is not that serious". I've seen this in many couples.

When spouses have different personalities it helps in the raising of children even more. One spouse wants to put on the brakes a little, but the other says, "Give the children a little freedom". If they both are overbearing they will lose their children. If, however, they leave them on their own, again their children will be lost. Therefore, when the parents have different personalities, the children enjoy a certain stability.

What I'm trying to say is that everything is needful. Naturally, one's personality quirks shouldn't go beyond their limits. Each spouse should help the other in his own way. If you eat a lot of sweets, you'll want also to eat something a little salty. Or if you eat, let's say, lots of grapes, you'll want a little cheese to cut the sweetness. Vegetables, if they are very bitter, are not eaten. But a little bitterness helps, as does a little sourness. Some people, however, are like this: If someone is sour, he says: "Let everyone become sour like me." And whoever is bitter says, "Let everyone become bitter." Likewise, those who are salty say, "Everyone should become salty." Bridges aren't built like that! [2]

† † †

[1] Elder Paisios means that this work is done by the spiritual father and it is effective, only as long as the two spouses have the same spiritual father, in order that the sanding happens "using the same tool."

[2] Obviously, the Elder is using a metaphor: "Bridges (i.e. relationships) aren't build like that!"



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THE MIRACULOUS POWER OF THE SIGN OF THE CROSS

THE SIGN OF THE CROSS AND ORTHODOX PRAYER ARE CAPABLE OF KILLING MICROBES AND CHANGING THE OPTICAL PROPERTIES OF WATER - A STUDY.

Moscow, Interfax News Service.

Scientists have proved experimentally the miracle-working properties of the sign of the cross and prayer. “We have ascertained that the old custom to make a sign of the cross over food and drink before a meal has a profound mystical meaning. Standing behind it is the practical use: the food is purified literally in an instant. This is a great miracle, which happens literally every day,” physicist Angelina Malakhovskaya said as cited by the Zhizn newspaper on Friday.

Malakhovskaya has studied that power of the sign of the cross with the blessing of the Church for nearly ten years now. She has carried out a great number of experiments, which have been repeatedly verified before their results were made public.

She has discovered in particular the unique bactericidal properties of water after being blessed by an Orthodox prayer and a sign of the cross. The study also revealed a new, earlier unknown property of the Word of God to transform the structure of water, increasing considerably its optical density in the short ultra-violet spectral region, the newspaper writes.



The scientists have verified the impact the Lord’s Prayer and the Orthodox sign of the cross make on pathogenic bacteria. Water samples from various reservoirs—wells, rivers, lakes—were taken for the research. All the samples had goldish taphylococcus, a colon bacillus. It turned out however, that if the Lord’s Prayer is said and a sign of the cross is made over them, the number of harmful bacteria will decrease seven, ten, hundred and even over thousand times.

The experiments were made in such a way as to exclude a possible impact of mental suggestion. The prayer was said by both believer and non-believers, but the number of pathogenic bacteria in various environments with different sets of bacteria still decreased as compared to the reference templates. The scientists have also proved the beneficial impact that the prayer and the sign of the cross have on people. All the participants in the tests had their blood pressure stabilized and blood indexes improved. Strikingly, the indexes changed towards the healing needed: hypotensive people had their blood pressure raised, while hypertensive people had it reduced.

It was also observed that if the sign of the cross is made off-handedly, with the three fingers put together unscrupulously or placed outside the necessary points—the middle of the forehead, the center of the solar plexus and the recesses in the right and left shoulders—the positive result was much weaker or absent altogether.

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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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ON THE ORTHODOX DOCTRINE OF CAUSALITY

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

One of the fundamental points of doctrine in which our Orthodox Faith differs from all the philosophical systems as well as from some non-Orthodox denominations is the conception of causality, i.e., of causes. Those outside are prompt to call our faith mysticism, and our Church, the Church of mystics. By the non-Orthodox theologians we have been often rebuked on that account, and by the atheists, ridiculed. Our learned theologians neither denied nor confirmed our mysticism, for we never called ourselves mystics. So, we listened in wonderment and silence, expecting the outsiders to define clearly their meaning of our so-called mysticism. They defined it as a kind of oriental quietism, or a passive plunging into mere contemplation of the things divine. The atheists of our time do not call any religion by any other name but mysticism which for them means superstition. We listen to both sides, and we reject both definitions of our Orthodox mysticism, which is neither quietism nor superstition.

It is true, however, that contemplative practice—not quietism though—is a recommendable part of our spiritual life, but it is not an all embracing rule. Among the great saints we find not only the contemplative Fathers of the desert and seclusion, but also many warriors, benefactors, missionaries, sacred writers, sacred artists, and other persons of great activities and a sacrificial mode of Christian life. . . . And what is our answer to the atheists who call our mystical Faith superstition? Least of all, they have the right to call it superstition since, by denying God and the soul and all the

higher intelligences, they are indeed bearers of a thoughtless and nefarious superstition which never existed in the history of mankind, at least not on such a scale and with such fanaticism. Now, while those who speak of our mysticism are unable to give a satisfactory explanation of this word, let us ourselves look to it and explain to them from our point of view how they should understand our so-called mysticism. Our religious mysticism is nothing misty, nothing nebulous, nothing obscure or mystified. It is our clear and perennial doctrine of causality. If we have to call this doctrine by an “ism,” we may call it personalism.

Everyday and everywhere people talk of causes. They say: “This is caused by that, and that is caused by this.” That is to say: the next preceding thing, or event, or fact, or accident is the cause of the next succeeding one.

This is indeed a superficial and short-sighted notion of causality. We do not wonder about this superficiality of some ignorant persons, especially of the busy people of great cities who have little time for deep and calm thinking. But we are astonished to find the same superficiality with the learned and philosophically minded, as the materialists, naturalists and even deists. And because we call their theory of causes naive and fatalistic, they call us mystics. We consider that all those persons be they ignorant or learned, who believe in natural and physical causes as definite, are fatalists. Both naturalism and materialism are teaching a blind fatalism without a smallest door of escape or a smallest window for sunshine. We Orthodox Christians must resist this blind fatalism, as all Christians should do, and defend our intelligent doctrine of personal causality of and in the world.

This doctrine means that all causes are personal. Not only the first cause of the world is personal (as the deists think), but personal are all the causes of all

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things, of all facts, of all happenings and changes in the entire world. When we say personal, we mean intelligent, conscious and intentional. Yea, we mean that some sort of personal beings are causing all, or better to say, are the causes of all. That is what personal means. I know that at this my first statement some non-Orthodox would remark: “That doctrine you are probably drawing from your copious Orthodox tradition, for which we do not care, and not from the Holy Scripture, which we take as the only infallible source of all truths.” To this I answer: no, not at all; this doctrine is so evident in the Holy Scripture, from the first page to the last, that I have no need this time to quote our tradition at all.

On the first pages of the sacred Bible a personal God is specified as the First cause, or better to say the First Causer of the world visible and invisible. That God the Creator is personal; this is a professed and upheld dogma not only by all Christian denominations, but by some other religions too. We Christians, however, are privileged to know the inner being of God, i.e., God as Trinity in persons and Oneness in essence. We have learned to know this mystery through the momentous revelation in the New Testament. The dogma of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost means that God is trebly personally, yea supremely personal.

But not God alone is personal. Personal are also the angels, personal is Satan with his perverse hosts of demons, and finally personal are men. If you carefully read the Bible, without the prejudices of so-called “natural laws” and the supposed “accidental causes,” you will find three causal factors, and all the three personal. They are: God, Satan and Man. They are, of course, not equal in personal attributes, and there is no parity among them. Satan has lost all his positive attributes of an angel of light, and has become the chief enemy of God and

Man, but still he has remained a personal being, bent though to do evil. Man, since the original of sin, has darkened his glory and deformed God’s image in himself; yet, he has remained a personal being, conscious, intelligent and purposefully active, wavering between God and Satan, with his free choice to be saved by the first or destroyed by the second.

God is activity itself. Not only He interferes now and then with His wonders and miracles in the life of men and nations, but He is constantly and unceasingly active in supporting and vivifying His creation. *Being near to everyone of us*, (Acts 17:27) and *knowing even the thoughts of man*, (Pss 94:11), He eagerly acts and reacts in human affairs: giveth or withholds children, giveth or withholds good harvest, approves or threatens, grants peace to the faithful and excites war against the devil worshippers. He commands all the elements of nature, fire and water, hail and storms, either to aid the oppressed righteous or to punish the godless. He calls the locust, caterpillars and worms *my great army*, (Joel 2:25) which He orders to devour the food of the sinners. He is *able to destroy both soul and body in hell*. (Mt 10:2). He knows *the number of our hairs*, and *not a sparrow shall fall on the ground* without His will and His knowledge. All this is testified by many instances in the Bible. And this is not all.

There is no page in the Scripture which does not refer to God, yea a personal God, His will and His diverse activities. The whole Bible affirms that God is not only the First Causer of the world but also that He is all the time the personal Allkeeper—Pantokrator—of the world, as we confirm in the first article of our Creed.

Another causal factor is Satan, God’s adversary, with his hosts of fallen spirits. He is the personal causer of all evil. Ever since his fall as Lucifer from the glory of *an anointed cherub*

(Eze 28:14) to the dark pit Hell, he is unceasingly trying to infiltrate evil and corruption into every part of God's creation, especially into man. Envious of God and man, he is the hater of both. Christ called him *a murderer from the beginning* (Jn 8:44) and also *a liar and the father of it*. He is a mighty ruler of evil and darkness, but still subordinate, unwillingly though, to the all powerful God. Only with God's permission he is able to harm men and to cause illness, confusion, pain, discord, death and destruction.

But the more a person or a people sin against God, the greater power Satan gets over that person or that people. At the Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ the whole world was lying in evil because of Satan's terrible grasp over the bedeviled mankind. The world then was teeming with evil spirits as never before. Therefore, Satan dared to offer Christ all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them as his own. A robber and liar!

The third causal factor in this world, according to the Bible, is man. With all his littleness and weaknesses man is the greatest prize for which Satan is relentlessly and desperately fighting, and for which God from the beginning was ready to die. Staggering between God and Satan, man is supported by God and beguiled by Satan, vacillating hither and thither, groping for light, life and happiness in his short span of existence on this planet. Yet, with all his seeming insignificance in this mammoth universe, man is able to change it by his conduct. Confucius said: "The clouds give the rain or give it not according to men's conduct." Much more valid is this observation in Christianity with its belief in a personal God, the Giver of rain.

By his faith and virtues, especially by his obedience to God, man regains the dominion over all the created nature as God in creating him entrusted to him. But by his apostasy and corruption he dethrones himself and comes under the dominion of physical nature and becomes its slave. Instead of commanding he is obeying the mute nature, and fighting it for his mere existence, as you see it still now happening in our own generation. And instead of having God as his only Master, he got two masters over himself, Satan and nature, both tyrannizing him...

By his faith and virtue, man could have removed the mountains, tame the wild beasts, defeat the aggressor, shut the heaven, stop calamities, heal the sick, and raise the dead. And by his sins and vices, especially by his apostasy from God, his only loving and powerful Friend, he could have caused the destruction of cities and civilizations, the earthquakes, floods, pestilence, eclipse of the sun, famine and all the innumerable evils, pleasing Satan and saddening God.

Thus, following God, man becomes god, and following the devil, he becomes devil. But be he with God or with God's adversary, man has been from the beginning and is now the focus point of this planet and one of the three most important causes of events and changes in the world. And thus, what-

ever happens on this world's stage, it happens either by God's benevolent will, or by Satan's evil will, or by man through his free choice between good and evil, right and wrong.

Now, when we mention only these three causal factors, God, Satan, and Man, you should not think of mere three persons, but of terrific forces behind each of them. Behind God, a numberless host of angels of light, so much so, that each man and nation have their own angel guardian; behind Satan a horrible locust of evil spirits, so much so, that a whole legion of them are used to torment one single man, that one of Gadara; behind Man, since Christ's emptying of Hades and His Resurrection, there are by now billions of human souls who from the other world, from the Church Triumphant, by their intercession and love, are helping us, many millions of Christ's faithful, still fighting against the Satanic forces for Christ and our own salvation.

For our chief fight in this world is not against natural and physical adversities which is comparably a small fight befitting more animals than men-but as the visionary Paul says: *Against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world* (Eph 6:12) i.e., the satanic forces of evil. And we Christians have been, and always shall be, victorious over these satanic forces through Jesus Christ our Savior. Why through Him? Because love is the greater power of all other powers, visible and invisible. And Christ came to the earth and went down below to the very hellish nest of the satanic hosts to crush them in order to liberate and save men for sheer love of men. Therefore, He could at the end of His victorious mission say: *All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth*. (Mt 28:1). When He says all power, He means it literally, all power, in the first place the power over Satan and his satanic forces, then the power over sinners, sin and death. First of all over Satan, the causer of sin and death. *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil*. (I Jn 3:8). Therefore, we rejoice in our belief that our Lord Jesus Christ is the irresistible Lord. We are acknowledging this belief in every liturgy by stamping the sacred bread for the Holy Communion with the words IC-XC-NI-KA.

Read the Gospel as much as you like; you will find in Christ's words not a slightest suggestion of natural and physical causes of anything and any happening. Clear as the shining sun is Christ's revelation and teaching, that there are only three causal factors in this world: God, Man and Satan. His chief obedience was to His heavenly Father; His chief loving work was the healing of men's bodies and soul, and His chief dispute with the Pharisees was about His power of driving the evil spirits out of men and the forgiving of sins.

As to the nature and so-called natural order and laws, He showed an unheard of absolute dominion and power. He vigorously impressed His followers that they "were not of the world," but, said He, *I have chosen you out of the world*. (Jn 15:19) Now, since the Christians are not of this world, they

certainly cannot accept the theory of the men of this world about the impersonal, unintelligent and accidental causes of the process of things and events. Also in our liturgical book you find the same three personal causal factors as in the Gospel. The same in the Life of Saints too. The same in the conviction and consciousness of the masses of our Orthodox people.

Therefore, whoever speaks of impersonal causes of things, happenings and changes in this world, is limiting God's power, ignoring the powers of darkness, and despising the role and significance of man. The Scripture does not know, and does not mention any impersonal and blindly accidental cause of anything in the world. The Bible teaches us quite clearly, that the causes of all things, facts, happenings and changes, come from higher personal beings and personal intelligences. And we stick to this teaching of the Holy Book.

Therefore we make no concessions to the secular, or scientific theories about impersonal, unintelligent, unintentional or accidental causality in the world. When I say we, I do not think only of the great Fathers of the Church, nor of the Doctors of Divinity, nor of the learned teachers of religion, but also of the masses of our Orthodox people all over the world. Our Orthodox people would not say: a wolf caused the death of somebody's sheep; nor a falling stone caused the injury of a boy; nor a tornado was the cause of the destruction of somebody's house; nor good weather was the cause of an abundant crop.

Our people look through the screen of the physical world into a spiritual sphere and there seek the true causes of those happenings. They always seek a personal cause, or causes. And though this is in per accord with the Bible's teaching, some outsiders call us mystics, and our Faith mysticism or superstition. In fact, our mysticism is nothing else as a deeper insight into the spiritual realities, or intelligences, which are personally causing whatever there is or happens, using the natural things and elements only as their instruments, tools, channels, symbols, or signals.

All this leads us to the following conclusions: First of all, Christianity is a religion not so much of principles, rules and precepts, but primarily and above all of personal attachments, in the first place an affectionate attachment to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and through Him to other members of His Church, the living and the dead.

Secondly, our Orthodox doctrine of personal causality on the whole range of nature and world's history is beyond any doubts the biblical doctrine. It was wholly adopted and explained by the Fathers of the Church, and it is kept lucidly in the consciousness of the Orthodox people.

The benefits we are drawing from such personalism in the doctrine of causality are manifold. By it we are stirring our mind to pierce through the visible events into the realm of invisible intelligences causing and dominating all the drama of the world. It sharpens more than anything else our thinking

power, our own intelligence. By it we are constantly aware of the presence of our Friend, Christ the Saviour, to whom we are praying, and also of our arch enemy, Satan, whom we have to fight and avoid. It helps us enormously toward educating and forming the strong personal, or individual, characters. It inspires us with spirit of optimistic heroism in suffering, self-sacrificing, and in enduring martyrdom for Christ's sake beyond description, as testified by our Church history.

All these and other benefits do not possess the follower of the doctrine of impersonal causality; not even the greatest of all benefits—the knowledge of the truth.



What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands... we proclaim now to you. (1 Jn 1:1:3).

Behold, such is the apostolic preaching! The apostles speak neither as worldly sages, nor like philosophers and even less as theoreticians who make suppositions about something in order to discover something. The apostles speak about things which they have not sought but which unexpectedly surrounded them; about the fact which they did not discover but, so to speak, unexpectedly found them and seized them. They did not occupy themselves with spiritual researches nor have they studied psychology, neither did they, much less, occupy themselves with spiritism. Their occupation was fishing, one totally experiential physical occupation. While they were fishing, the God-Man appeared to them and cautiously and slowly introduced them to a new vocation in the service of Himself.

At first, they did not believe Him but they, still more cautiously and slowly with fear and hesitation and much wavering, came toward Him and recognized Him. Until the apostles saw Him many times with their own eyes and until they discussed Him many times among themselves and, until they felt Him with their own hands, their experienced fact is supernatural but their method of recognizing this fact is thoroughly sensory and positively learned. Not even one contemporary scholar would be able to use a more positive method to know Christ.

The apostles saw not only one miracle but numerous miracles. They heard not only one lesson but many lessons which could not be contained in numerous books. They saw the resurrected Lord for forty days; they walked with Him, they conversed with Him, they ate with Him, and they touched Him. In a word: they personally and first handedly had thousands of wondrous facts by which they learned and confirmed one great fact, i.e., that **Christ is the God-Man, the Son of the Living God, the Man-loving Savior of mankind and the All-Powerful Judge of the living and the dead.**

THE GOLDEN STRUGGLES AT THE CAVES OF ST. ANNE

From "The Elder Joseph the Hesychast (+1959): Struggles, Experiences, Teachings," by Elder Joseph (of Vatopaidi), Mount Athos: The Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopaidi, 1999.

It would be an omission if we were to conceal the full truth in order to please people at large, and thus downplay the reality of how men of God think and act. The Elder knew the inner state of each one of us, and explained to us in detail how and why each thing happened to us, whether it was our own thoughts or the result of our passions or even the gift of grace; and he also revealed the ways to be cured and thus free ourselves of the unwanted things that happened to us. He was full of God's grace, truly illumined, and gave abundantly his heart, without contrivance or effort or specialized qualifications but out of the treasure of his life experience, and in a way that was simple and convincing. He offered this to each individually according to what was revealed to him about our state; and when some of his advice and teachings exceeded the disciple's capacity to receive them, he would supplement them with his prayer. The ever-memorable Elder also had the invariable practice never to undertake anything without prayer and the receipt of divine guidance; accordingly, whenever we asked him about something we were considering undertaking, we never received an immediate answer.

As at St Basil, so also there—in the caves of St. Anne—we had difficulties because of the lack of space and also because of the strict rule of our daily life; the Elder took particular care to avoid the introduction of any comfort and ease. The permanent norm in our life was the makeshift, the temporary, the cheap and whatever involved little care and could be done simply. He laid stress and placed value on an orderly life, and for that reason he paid minute attention to rules and insisted that they were kept at all times. Sometimes, when we raised the question of economy for the sake of those who were unable to "accommodate" our life style, he would give a precise answer, both from personal experience as well as from the sayings of the Holy Fathers, which he understood and applied in detail. He was by nature mild, peaceful and extremely sympathetic towards his neighbor; with himself, however, he was uncompromising and harsh to an incredible degree. It was due to this that he persevered along the lines of his initial fervor, right up to the end of his life.

The bitter struggles of his early life, the constant deprivations that he imposed upon himself, the other hardships created by the restricted surroundings in which he liked to live, and

his refusal to compromise over the smallest and most simply provided conveniences which could have brought him some solace, all this caused his state of health to deteriorate to such a degree that he looked like a worn-out old man. His legs got even worse so that he could scarcely stand or walk at all, except short distances and with breaks. He suffered from fluctuating swelling throughout his body, and he had glaucoma. When on occasion he cut his hands, particularly on the upper part, water came out instead of blood. Even mild fatigue resulted in breathing difficulties. He maintained a strict dietary rule each and every day, as he had been accustomed to do from the beginning; he would never break it no matter what happened. He would not consume any food outside of the appointed time. We also observed his great exhaustion whenever his body was all worn out, and noted that he could not sleep at his usual hour.

Later, when our brother Ephraim came and then Haralambos, we stopped doing outside jobs and started our handiwork. At that time we set about putting together some sort of household, because if I described what and how I found them when I first went there, today's generation would never believe me. Every household deficiency would be tolerated on the basis of the Elder's spirit of frugality which we tried to follow to the extent that we could. But, on the question of shelter there was no leeway for economy, because there was simply no room and we had to build something ourselves. I dare not describe what immense difficulty this presented, for fear that it might happen again! As for the sort of means we had to use and the conditions



under which we constructed those dwellings, makeshift as they were, God alone knows. Work like this, under the most difficult of conditions, can be done only by the beginners' youthful fervor of those in whom divine grace has covered their eyes and made their hearts drunk for God, so that they have become "like deaf men and heard not, and ones that are dumb," in the words of the Psalm.

In addition to the fasts appointed by the Church, the Elders also had their own rules so as to intensify their struggle. They continued this practice of theirs when they were at the caves, where we lived with them, with the difference that they did not allow us younger monks to follow this stricter fast rule. Haralambos was not there then when my younger brother Ephraim and I put great pressure on the Elder to let us follow their regime as well. It was the beginning of Great Lent, and our rule required strict silence except on Saturday and Sunday and severe fasting, which took a different form each year. At that time the regime was 25 drachms (about 75 grams) of ordinary flour. We would each boil this up with a

little water in a tin can, and add a little salt. This would be consumed after Vespers, at about the ninth hour Byzantine time (three hours before sunset). During the weekend there were meals, but again the bread according to measure, not just as much as one wanted. That was the rule for that Lent. When we had persuaded the Elder to agree to our following the same rule with them, we jumped for joy and started off after the Wednesday of the first week of Lent. All went well until about the fifth week, when our exhaustion and loss of strength became very palpable. One morning, towards the end of that week, we failed to wake up at the usual time, despite the fact that Father Arsenios knocked at the window. The Elder asked why we were not stirring as usual, and Father Arsenios told him we were ill and could not get up. "No, Arsenios; he said to him, "don't be naive. There's nothing wrong with them. Just give them a bit of bread and they will be cured immediately, no question about it." Indeed, when we took this 'medicine' we were cured at once! Thus we learnt to stay within our own measure, and not extend ourselves beyond our strength.

I shall never forget those days which were really the golden age of my life. I feel such nostalgia for those heavenly days; and if it were possible, how I would like to relive those calm and untroubled moments! In such a calm and untroubled life our youthful and innocent souls could frolic within the embrace of a truly fatherly love and guardianship. With the Elder's care, the fruits of stillness and the sense of security which we felt gave us every assurance of an unimpeded continuity, successful in every way. It is one thing to struggle and make an effort with the help of good intentions and knowledge from reading, and quite another to stand near, indeed side by side, with a craftsman and teacher, who in a certain way directs your every move.

It was a marvelous thing about the ever-memorable Elder that, while he had none of the "external competence" afforded by human knowledge, he could readily make himself clear on whatever he wanted to explain. He also fully understood the meaning of the Bible and the Holy Orthodox Fathers. This is also evident from the few letters of his which have been published by our brothers of Philotheou Monastery in the book "Monastic Wisdom."

When a person explains a problem and answers a question along broad and general lines, what he says is of course true; but he does not readily inform and convince others because the terms in which he is speaking are not entirely specific. But, in the Elder's case, it would happen that he would give a clarifying explanation, in minute detail and beyond what was asked, even things that the person concerned had been unable to pinpoint for lack of experience. The teacher would then

place that person's finger in the print of the nails, and with living proofs cast light on all the obscure points of his concern or his path. Even where the disciple had difficulty because of lack of faith, the Elder would bring him to full understanding, banishing the slightest hesitation, in the name of grace from his own abundance. Then we would cry out rejoicing, *Come, we have found Him who is awaited, of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote.* (Jn 1:45).

Neither the austerity of the regime, nor the lack of basic necessities, nor the rugged and impossible terrain, nor the necessity of carrying loads so as to maintain six or seven people could make our purpose lose its drive, since by the mercy of God grace gave us full assurance through the prayers of the Elders. But our nature of clay shrank back, and the Lord's saying was fulfilled, that *the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.* (Mt 26:41).

I personally suffered increasingly from coughing up blood and stomach hemorrhages, but my ardent intent and the experience of grace which accompanies the good fight covered all these weaknesses, for we had as our prime model the Elder, who looked at everything through faith and not through reason. In this small experiment of our life and under the care of the Elder, the repeated aid from divine goodness, the continuing mysterious protection of grace, and the constant sense of security in all directions oblige us to believe and proclaim that success in monastic life depends for the most part on the support of a spiritual guide; and *he who has ears to hear, let him hear.* (Mt 11:15). Certainly there is nothing novel in this opinion nor is it some new discovery, but simply a confirmation of the patristic tradition; thus, blessed is the disciple *who will keep these things, and will discern the mercies of the Lord.* (cf. Hosea 14:9).

With persistent efforts, as I have said, we somewhat improved our surroundings and our life in general, but there were still many things we lacked. Until we were better organized, we also lacked, most of all, our health, while at the same time the Elder was all worn out; any movement caused him difficulty, and his whole life had become an immense trial. The Elder loved working and did not stop at all during the hours when his rule allowed it. Our handiwork was making little carved crosses, which he carved with great facility and speed, while we prepared the wood. He lived alone in the little hut we had built him at some distance from us, and we would go to see him at midday and then leave on our own.

The place where we were living was isolated and quiet but very exposed to the elements. Thus, the cold was more intense, to the point where we persuaded him to let us put in some



heating for him with a stove. I measured up and prepared the materials to build it, with iron plate on the outside and clay inside. I got ready for the next day, as I had promised him the evening before, and in the morning I gathered up my tools and the materials and went to a place nearby to build it with a plan to install it later. I made a prostration, as always, and started off in fine weather, because I was working out doors. As soon as I had measured up and cut out the component parts and begun work, the weather broke abruptly. Then I kept finding extraordinary difficulty in whatever I tried to do. There was a curious wind blowing, which did not have any particular direction; it just stirred up everything against me and blew in my face whatever was around—iron plate, boards, waste paper and sand. In a strange way my tools would desert me and roll away for no reason, because the area was not altogether on a slope. Nails went in crooked for no reason, at the slightest touch; drills broke; my plans were altered, when I had measured them up and cut them out with precision.

In the beginning I took no notice, and hurried to put things back in order and get on with the job. After a while, however, it became very obvious that something was afoot. I stopped for a while, because I had literally smashed all my fingers to pieces, and I felt a strange inner disquiet, arousing anger, confusion, and impatience. "It's a strange thing," I said to myself; "something's going on!" In the meantime the weather had worsened as well and that forced me to stop all work and go to the Elder. My little project was a two-hour job, three at the most; yet more than six hours had gone by without achieving anything. Then I remembered something the Elder had said to me in the morning when I started off, but I had not taken much notice. "Let's see, then," he had said to me; "will you get anything done today?" I did not pay much attention to the meaning of those words; I thought he had said it to humble me, perhaps, because I was familiar with that sort of work. Indeed, I was eager to have it finished as soon and as successfully as possible so as to make things easier for him, and with the secret joy that he had allowed us to put in heating for him, and I was going to do it all by myself!

So I went and knocked on his door and he opened it. As soon as he saw my state of agitation, he started to laugh.

"What's going on here, Elder?" I asked. "And why did you say to me this morning, like a prediction, 'If I finish anything?' Because you know that this was child's play for me."

"What did you conclude it was?" he asked playfully.

"A trial," I told him; "the work of Satan."

"That it was," he replied. "Listen, I'll explain this mystery, as it appeared to you. In the evening during my prayer, when I had finished and wanted to rest, I saw Satan threatening to put obstacles and trials in the way of my decision and my plans. And I said to our Christ, 'Lord, don't stop him, so that I can show him that I love You and will endure the cold as long as You allow it.' So that was why all this happened, my boy, so that I shouldn't have heating quickly, as you wanted me to."

Having been a witness to this drama, when I heard these details and the mysteries of hidden providence by which the spiritual law operates, I was lost in amazement, and silently confessed, *Great art Thou, O Lord, and marvellous are Thy works, and no word sufficeth to hymn and glorify Thy wonders!*" This incident helped me to understand the power of the word of the Elders, who—according to Abba Poimen and Abba Dorotheos—conceal within themselves the power and operation of grace, as a sign of their personal state and experience. Like so many other Elders in the patristic hierarchy, those two luminaries base their advice and instruction on patristic texts rather than the Bible – the patristic tradition being in essence the Bible analyzed.



Despite the austerity of the regime which the Elder adapted to our surroundings, he maintained undiminished his sympathy and love for his neighbor and showed it in practice towards the infirm and poor, be they fathers or lay people. I recall that there were some infirm elders, particularly in Karoulia, whom he looked after more or less permanently, often sending them what they needed and in particular food ready

prepared. Sympathy, as the first fruit of a soul that loves God, and faith as a sure stronghold, were the reasons why he left nothing in our modest huts, to the point where it was hard for us to endure, inexperienced as we were in the operation of faith. He gave whatever we had to those who asked, and left us with hopes, as the saying goes. And yet, in this way he helped us to enter quickly into the providence of faith, which gave us so much support in our later life.

When on occasion we came back from some errand and recounted some mishap or trouble which we had heard about or seen happening to someone, he would weep and, if he happened to be eating, would stop his meal. Again, if anyone did him some kindness, directly or indirectly, he would never forget it, but would look for ways and opportunities to repay it, if at all possible, with something more. But the way he expressed his gratitude and sympathy most fully was in prayer. For hours on end he would pray with tears for the world and he truly shared in the pain of all

mankind, especially of people known to him who asked him to pray for them. Sometimes I would see him in acute distress and ask what was the matter, and he would reply with anguish that someone of the people we knew was suffering and was asking for help.

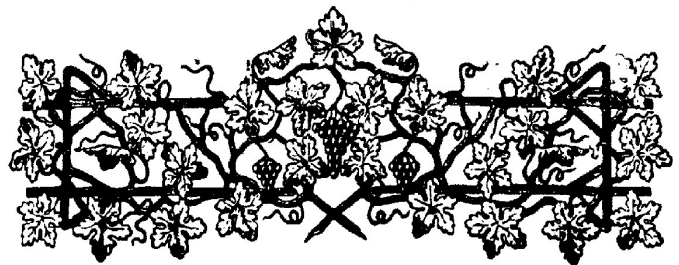
When on occasion we asked him out of curiosity about the “law of influence,” how this mystery of contact works so that a soul can communicate with another person far away, he avoided explaining it to us directly because of our curiosity. But on another occasion, when the same subject came up and it was a matter of strengthening us personally, he explained it to us according to the measure of our smallness so that we could understand.

Our brother Athanasios was with us, the Elder’s brother according to the flesh, who more than all the rest of us would travel here and there taking care of the community’s jobs and responsibilities. In order to avoid contact and meetings with too many people and to also forego the heat of the day, since he was almost always carrying a large load, he would travel either very early in the morning or, more usually, late in the afternoon, in which case there was not much time before he would be walking at night. This happened almost always, particularly in the summer. I was amazed on one occasion, when the Elder waited for him with particular interest, until he had arrived, what he was carrying an immense load and had experienced great difficulties getting back to our caves.

On another occasion, I showed particular insistence on finding out how he received his information, and this was what he told me: “It would be better for me to pray for you to experience it, rather than to learn how it happens as a mere piece of knowledge. But since you insist, listen. I was kneeling here at the window on my rags, saying the prayer. At one moment, as I was in deep prayer—which divine grace brings about with its divine illumination—the light increased and my mind began to broaden out and overflow so that everything became luminous for me and I saw the whole of the surrounding area, from Katounakia to the monasteries down below as far as Daphne, and behind me as well, and nothing was invisible or unknown to me. The light was not as much as this natural light from the sun or the artificial, man-made light, but it was a wonderful light, white and immaterial, which is not only external, like the natural light which allows those who have sight to see. This light is also within man and he experiences it like his own breath, and it fills him like nourishment and breathing and relieves him of his natural weight and transfigures him so that he would not know that he had a body or weight or any restriction. Then,” he told us, “I saw Athanasios coming towards us on the road from St Paul’s, carrying his huge load, and I remained observing him until he arrived here. I saw all his movements, where he sat down to rest or put down his load, the spring of St. Anna at the mill where he stopped for a drink of water, up to the point when he reached our door

and took the key and opened it and came in and came up to me and made a prostration.

But what is it that amazed you so? When man’s mind is purified and illumined (aside from the fact that even without the addition of divine grace it has its own illumination, with which it sees further than the demons, as the Fathers say), it then receives in addition the illumination of divine grace, so that grace can reside in it permanently, and grace then takes it up into contemplation and visions, in a manner and to a degree known to itself. But it is also possible for the person himself to ask in his prayer when he wants to see or find out something that interests him, and grace will operate to fulfill his request, because he asked it. But I think that devout people avoid asking such a thing except in great need. However, the Lord ‘will do the will of them that fear Him and will hearken to their prayer.’ ”



OUR PURPOSE IN LIFE

Metropolitan Augoustinos N. Kantiotis, from “On the Divine Liturgy: Orthodox Homilies.”

What, dear friends, is our purpose for living? According to the inspired teaching of the Holy Scripture, the purpose of our lives is sanctification; that is, to throw away the old man, the evil in us, and put on the new man—virtue—to live a Christian life, one as Christ did, and to be awarded the Kingdom of Heaven. This purpose in life is not felt by many people, however.

Most people live for other purposes. Some live for riches, others, for pleasures and amusements, some for fame and worldly glory; and still others for knowledge. There is no thought of sanctification or eternal life. Others, however, believe in Christ and listen to His divine teaching, for they know that beyond any worldly purpose, there is a divine purpose for living, i.e., to become holy. *Be ye holy; for I am holy.* (I Pet 1:16).

Sanctification is the greatest purpose for living. Without sanctification, everything else is vain and perishable. Life only has meaning when it is intent on this purpose. To be sanctified, to become like a small Christ on earth and be given the Kingdom of Heaven! The beast which lives inside us, the proud ego, has to be annihilated, and we must become Christs to destroy the hells which our lives now are, and make them into heavens.”

THE WONDROUS AND VARIED WAYS OF ATHONITE LIFE

From an Orthodox pamphlet (author unknown).

Elder Nikodimos (+1867)

Father Nikodimos was born in 1807. He found no satisfaction living in the world with all its vanities, and when he was thirty-two he went to Mount Athos. After spending a short time at New Skete, he followed the advice of his spiritual father and moved to Kavsokalyvia, where he settled in a small cell and began to lead a strict life of prayer. He did not undertake any handiwork until he began to accept disciples, when it became necessary to have some means of support. Then, too, came various responsibilities attendant upon skete life, that bitterly constrain those who are engaged in mental prayer. He ate only bread, not even vegetables.

The envier of our salvation could not tolerate his rapid spiritual progress, and laid out for him various snares: there appeared to him dreadful apparitions, terrifying specters, and radiant visions. But, guided by an experienced elder, he vanquished the enemy and all his hordes.

Once the snow was piled so high around his cell that he was unable to leave it. His supply of rusks gave out and for a long time he was without food, so that he became weak with hunger. At this time a demon appeared to him in dazzling brightness, sitting on a throne, as if in the guise of the Holy Trinity, and said to him: "I am the holy trinity, bow down before me. You will be filled with grace and you will eat!" At that moment the famished elder saw before him tables laden with various dishes, whose aroma tantalized the hungry man's sense of smell. He fell to the ground and prayed that the Lord preserve him from the derision of the enemy. He prayed for a long time, and the Lord regarded the elder's humility and banished the demon. Only then did the elder arise when the aroma of the foods had disappeared.

Toward the end of his life, Elder Nikodimos was afflicted by five large open sores, and for three months he was racked by pain. At first he could, although with difficulty, crawl out of his cell, but later he had to lie immobile, and his disciples strained to turn him periodically from one side to the other. His disciple Nilus served the elder day and night, becoming so exhausted as to resemble a dry stick. The elder was unable even to sleep, but in spite of all he maintained a benign humor and continually thanked God, saying nothing about the excruciating pain. During this time one of the skete dwellers came and began to commend the elder for such an illness, which he desired to have himself for the sake of the cleansing of his sins and for future reward. The elder replied, "You do not know what you are saying. If you knew what kind of illness this is and what you have to endure, you would never say such a thing!"

Not long before he died, the elder had a revelation concerning the reward prepared for him and the coming of angels to take his soul. He took the hand of his disciple, Nilus, and, brimming with spiritual joy, said to him firmly, "My son, keep to the path that I have shown you and you will receive that which is now mine!" The elder was in such a state of ineffable joy that he was unable to continue speaking, and his soul flew to the Lord.

But at that very moment his disciple exclaimed sorrowfully: "Father, are you really dying?" and with these words he delayed the elder's soul just long enough for him to answer: "Yes, I am dying!" and he closed his eyes. This was in 1867.

In instructing his disciple Nilus in the prayer of the heart, the elder told him to engage in it as continuously as possible, and not to believe in any dreams. "Even if Christ Himself should appear to you, do not believe the vision and say: 'I do not want to see Christ in this life but rather in the life to come!'"

Remembering his elder, Nilus said sorrowfully, "There are no comparable elders left. Not long ago, after his death, I was preparing to receive the Holy Mysteries, and I was saying the preparatory rule with my eyes closed when suddenly the thought came to me: I have been struggling for so many years and I never see anything! At the next instant there appeared before my eyes an image of the icon Not-Made-by-Hands. I opened my eyes and I saw the same thing: before me there was an icon of the Saviour, surrounded by a great light. Thanks to the elder's teachings, I understood that the vision was from the devil. I closed my eyes and continued to pray, and the vision disappeared!"

Elder Leonty (+1876)

Father Leonty was born in Ukraine. He was a year old when his mother died, and his father gave him into the care of a wealthy, childless Moldavian. At the age of twenty-two Leonty ran away from his guardian and hid away in a monastery some fifteen miles from Bucharest. After sixteen years he made his way to Mount Athos together with his friend the monk Anthony, whom he later tonsured to the great schema, thereby becoming his elder. They settled in the Moldavian skete of Lak, where Father Leonty remained until his death, thirty-five years later.

Concerning his monastic life, Elder Leonty related:

When I first entered upon the monastic path, my elder instructed me: in addition to the first confession before tonsure concerning what I had done while living in the world, I was to reveal my thoughts daily and to practice absolute obedience. I was to regard all the brethren as angels and to serve them in obedience as God Himself. Thus the elder further instructed me how to guard the senses and the mind from harmful thoughts.

Soon he was ordained to the diaconate. His cell rule was as follows: 300 prostrations with the Jesus Prayer daily, and, in place of bows from the waist, to read the Gospels. He continued the prostrations even unto old age, even though these were superfluous for one who had attained unceasing prayer. The elder, however, while he still found strength, continued his physical acts of asceticism as well.

“One person,” he would say, “can make a thousand prostrations without feeling physically tired, while others can scarcely breathe after fifty, but these latter are equal to those who make many!”

“And here we are,” said his interlocutor, “we drink a lot, we eat a lot, we sleep a lot, and our powers are only moderate.”

“If you do not give your nature what it requires, you will become still weaker. Saint Paisios, who spoke with the Lord Himself, once saw a brother lying on the ground, weak with exhaustion after fasting only two days, and he was surprised, for he had fasted sixty days without growing weak. The Lord appeared to him and said, ‘Do not think thus: you were able to do so thanks to my Grace, but he spent his own strength and fasted with extreme effort.’ ‘And what reward will he receive?’ asked Paisios. ‘The same as you!’ said the Lord.

“Here at the skete we have those who fast two and three days, even a week at a time - they have the help of grace.

“If you desire, says Saint Anthony the Great, to test a man of repute, whether he is spiritual, revile him, humiliate him; if he endures it, he is indeed a spiritual man, but if not, he has nothing. When someone humiliates you and your love for him does not falter, you are on God’s path!”

When the elder had to leave his cell in order to take care of necessities - to the skete, or to the monastery, or elsewhere - he would make several prostrations before an icon of the Mother of God, asking that whatever should befall him, that he would endure it all without experiencing any inner disturbance. Once he came to Karyes, to a Bulgarian acquaintance, who welcomed him with love and invited him to stay in the guest quarters until he had finished his business. The elder entered with a prayer and, as was his custom, said with a bow, “Bless!” There was a monk lying there, and he suddenly threw himself at Father Leonty and began upbraiding him. The perplexed elder said only, “Yes, father, just so. You’re right!” The monk looked around for a stick, but there was nothing of the kind in the room, so he dashed outside.

Awaiting his return, the elder sighed to the Mother of God and said to himself, “Well, Leonty, show how well you have been preparing yourself.” His faith in the Mother of God did not desert him; he hoped that she would strengthen him enough that his patience would not run out before his offender had tired of beating him. The elder expected that the monk would attack him, but when he returned he threw himself at Father Leonty’s feet and began asking his forgiveness. Some Wallachian, who resembled the elder, had

offended the monk, and the latter had mistakenly taken the elder for his offender. However, when he ran down in search of a stick he ran into the guest-master, who asked after Father Leonty. Only then did the monk realize his mistake. The meek elder, seeing the monk’s humility and contrition, said, “God forgives; only fulfill the short canon: make a hundred prostrations to the Mother of God.” The monk had just begun to make the prostrations when the elder, seeing the sincerity of his repentance, said, “All right, that’s enough.”

There were many such incidences. “Had I not prepared myself earlier,” said the elder, “for all kinds of humiliations and beatings, what would have happened? I would have retaliated, he would have done likewise, and we would have come to blows. One must always be prepared for everything.” Father Leonty was well read, wise, and kindly. He remedied all those who came to him for confession, and comforted them in such a way that they went away with joy.

Even before coming to Mount Athos, Father Leonid had heard about the renowned Athosite ascetic, Elder Hilarion, the Georgian, and the first thing he did when he arrived was to go, with a translator, to see him. The elder gave Father Leonid a rule for mental prayer and explained how he should conduct himself in following this path. Until this time Father Leonid had not practiced mental prayer, although he had desired it, but he did not dare to undertake it without an experienced teacher. Afterwards he always turned to Elder Hilarion for counsel, and Elder Hilarion sometimes came to him. Father Leonty became adept practitioner of mental prayer, and later trained the Moldavian, Father Antipas, in the art. (Father Antipas later moved to Russia and reposed in the monastery of Valaam.) In a noisy monastery, where there are many monks, all with different characters, it is difficult to maintain inner vigilance, but if one practices absolute obedience and frequent revelation of thoughts, this too can bring salvation.

Whatever one is doing, wherever one goes - one should always have the Jesus Prayer. Our Saviour Himself, during his 33 years on earth, showed obedience to Joseph and to His Mother. No one saw Him laughing, but several times He was seen to weep, thereby indicating how we should go on the path to salvation. A cleansed conscience itself shows the superiority of the inner life over the external.

In the battle against the passions, the elder advised: “If you should be troubled by envy towards your brother, for example, then go search out in the writings of the holy fathers a text concerning envy and read it. Likewise with other passions: you should look up and read suitable passages. In this way a person becomes accustomed to defend himself and to withstand the passions. A person who possesses obedience and humility progresses imperceptibly in the spiritual life. If it happens that a young monk speaks about the fear of God, or

about some other aspect of the path of salvation, one should listen and apply it according to one's strength.

But if someone teaches what is contrary or doesn't agree with the Holy Fathers, even if he should have a white beard or even if he should be an elder, as I am, do not listen to him!

The elder advised to have a constant remembrance of death with tears. This is the way of repentance; there is no other.

Father Leonty had a strong constitution, and a firm trust in God and His Providence. He used to bring a full sack of rusks or other essential supplies from Roussico [St Panteleimon's Monastery] or some other distant place, carrying it on his back, and would distribute most of it, and whatever was better, to the poor, the sick, and the elderly. For himself he kept only rusks and whatever else could be eaten without cooking. His disciple, Father Athanassy, rarely left the skete; Father Leonty himself took care of obtaining whatever was necessary for their sustenance. The disciple, like a little child, sat at home and ate what was already prepared, whatever the elder set before him.

Father Leonty peacefully departed to the Lord on 25 May, 1876, mourned by all his spiritual children and by all who had profited from his spiritual counsels and comfort.

The Novice James the Bulgarian and the Mysterious Elder

A certain youth, James, a Bulgarian, without asking for the counsel of any experienced spiritual father, attached himself to an elder, a Greek, who lived in the skete of Kav-sokalyvia, in a cell below the main church. This particular elder was fond of the broad path of life. At the same time he was severe, obstinate, and altogether unskilled in the spiritual life, as one who did not seek it. James, however, aspired to the life of an ascetic; he wanted to pray and to fast, but the elder would not allow it.

James asked a spiritual father what he should do under such circumstances. The spiritual father said that he should be obedient even to such an elder, and he revealed to him what benefit he would receive if at the same time he guarded his mind and heeded the voice of his conscience. The disciple obeyed, but not without extreme inner constraint. He told his spiritual father about this and asked his blessing to go to another elder, but the spiritual father did not give his blessing and instructed him to obey him in all things. At the same time, he gave him a rule for prayer and fasting which he was to fulfill secretly, in a way that the elder would not notice. James obeyed. At night he prayed, during the day he labored, while practicing self-restraint and vigilance. It was difficult to keep this from the elder, who began to keep an eye on him, compelling him to eat and sleep more.

James made a habit of going every night to the main church, where he would pray before an icon of the Holy Trinity, located above the entrance. He had been doing this for a long

time when, one night, as he was praying and sorrowing over the elder's oppressive demands, he heard footsteps. Concealing himself, he observed an elder noiselessly enter the porch; he had a grey beard and long hair, and he was completely naked. On entering he stood before the doors to the church and, saying a prayer, made the sign of the cross over the doors, which proceeded to open of their own accord. The elder entered the church and, standing in the center, prayed for a long time, uttering the prayers aloud. When he had finished praying, the elder venerated the icons and came out. Again making the sign of the cross over the doors, which closed in the same way they had opened, he left the church.

James wanted to know just who this elder was and to ask him to accept him as a disciple. He left the church and began following the elder at a distance. From Kav-sokalyvia they walked up the mountain until Kerasia, where the elder turned aside in the direction of the summit. When dawn cast its first rays they were already nearing the church of Panagia, and James finally decided to catch up with the elder. But just then the elder, who had been walking as though unaware of being followed, turned to James and said, "Where are you going?" James drew nearer and began asking if the elder would accept him. The elder replied, "You cannot live here. Go back to your elder and perform your obedience; this will serve for your salvation. He who has not received Divine Grace cannot live in this place. Your salvation lies with your elder. But know this; that shortly the Lord will call for you." Continuing his way, the elder added, "There are two of us here." And he began descending down from the "Panagia." James related all this to his spiritual father. The latter confirmed what he had been told and instructed James how to prepare for his departure to the next world. Three weeks later James reposed.

After three years his remains were exhumed. They emitted a wondrous fragrance, and his head was full of myrrh. Many who did not know of his life were amazed, as was his elder.



Let us never think that holiness means infallibility, the perfect man is nonexistent. Holiness is in the area of struggle, not perfection. No one is perfect. Perfection does not exist. What exists is the struggling man, the one who keeps striving. We must understand this. I say this because at times we may think that holiness, which is our calling by the way, is so far out of our grasp that it is unattainable. This is not so. It is a delusion and the work of the devil to tell us that holiness is unrealistic and we cannot reach it. The devil wants to destroy us. No, my friends do not listen to this. Holiness is in the struggle!

+Archimandrite Athanasios Mitilinaios (+2006)

HOW FAR THINGS HAVE GONE

By Fr. Elias Warnke, St. George Orthodox Church, Michigan City, IN (August 30, 1999).

I thought I would relay this story, partly for humor value and partly to display how little respect for clergy exists.

Last weekend I was invited to bring the Myrrh-streaming Icon of St. Nicholas to our parish in London Canada for the fortieth anniversary of their temple building. Since I was already in Detroit for the Feast of the Dormition at our cathedral there it was just a short two-hour drive into Canada. I should state that I have traveled with the Icon to Canada before, but only by air, and have never had any problem at all.

I drove through the tunnel from Detroit to Windsor; at the guard booth, I was asked my citizenship (USA) and my reason for travel, which I stated as: "Visiting our parish in London for its anniversary and would only be there for two days." The guard asked why I would want to do that and I informed him I was a priest. After a few minutes he told me to pull into the immigration area. Once there I was instructed by another guard to unlock my doors and trunk and to step to the side while they searched my car. Five guards tore my car and luggage apart asking questions about everything.

What intrigued them the most was the packets of cotton with myrrh that I was bringing to the parish. I informed them that the cotton was soaked with holy oil and was a gift to the people I was to visit. Then I was asked why I had so many pictures of "this man." I informed them that they were pictures St. Nicholas. I noticed no recognition of that name or the fact that these were religious items. Then they opened my suitcase with the vestments in them and they all gathered around poking and picking at them. The person who seemed to be in charge asked, "What's this stuff for?" I told her that they were my vestments and were used for serving Divine Liturgy, or mass, if they understood that better. With a look of disbelief on her face she said, "But what are they for?" I told her again they are part of the religious practice of which I am a priest.

This continued for about forty five minutes until one of them began to take the case from the Icon. At that I protested that they should not touch it, I would be happy to show it to them, but it would be a violation of my faith for them to touch it. The woman in charge saw that I was not going to budge on this and she said for me to remove the case. Upon removing the case she and two others witnessed the Icon, which was streaming. They said nothing for a few seconds and finally the woman said; "Thank you."

I put the Icon back into the case. The woman asked me to accompany her to a nearby bench, there she asked if I had ever been to Canada before. I said yes, many times. She asked if I had ever been searched before. I said no. She then said I would have to go to the administration office. I asked if I could lock my car to protect the Icon and she agreed.

In the office a woman began to interrogate me for about half an hour. She started by saying that they had found many strange things in my car and were concerned about what I really was going to do in Canada. I told her I was just a priest and asked why that was so strange. She replied: "Well it's because you are dressed so weird!" At this I must admit I lost a little of my composure and said that I was a priest and dressed as one, and certainly did not appreciate her calling my attire weird. Her comment was that she had seen priests before and none of them ever looked like me!

At that point I asked what exactly they wanted of me and if I am not welcome in her country, then since I have violated no law, I should either be admitted or allowed to leave, but I would no longer subject myself and my faith to her observations or opinions. She said that in her opinion I was entering Canada for the purpose of making money. I told her that I was not. She said: "You are going to preach in Canada and that is work." I told her that I was not going to preach and if I did not receive compensation for serving in a religious service it could not be seen as work. Once again in a somewhat louder voice I told her either to allow me to pass or return to the US, but I was done talking to her and wanted to see a supervisor.

Just then a man walked in, from the look on the girl's face he was a supervisor. He looked at me and smiled saying; "Hello Father." He turned to the girl and said; "Is there a problem?" She remarked: "This man is trying to enter Canada for the purpose of working without a permit." He looked at me and said: "Is this true Father?" I said, "As I told the man at the gate, I am going to celebrate the anniversary of our temple in London and would be returning to the US tomorrow." He smiled again and took the piece of paper from the girl's hand and stamped it, much to her dismay, handed it to me and said: "Enjoy your stay in Canada Father." I returned to my car amid the stares and smirks of the guards and went on my way.

I am sure this was an incident inspired by the evil one's minions to detour the Icon from coming to the faithful in London, but the reaction of the guards made me feel as if being a Christian and a priest made me a stranger in a strange land. I guess I have to keep in mind this is the country that forced an Orthodox Church to allow a dog inside the temple, fining the priest.

In Christ,

Priest Elias Warnke

Pastor of St. George Orthodox Church

Michigan City, IN



From the Editor: This event transpired in 1999; we cannot help but wonder what is likely to take place in today's governmental offices and custom centers as our priests and theologians travel with relics and icons, struggling to attend to His flock's spiritual needs.

Όταν Οί Πολιτικοί Φεύγουν...

Τοῦ Γεωργίου Καρρά, συντάκτη τῆς «Orthodox Heritage».

Δέν εἶναι τυχαῖο πὼς οἱ πολιτικοί μας (στὴν πλειοψηφία τους) ἀνέκαθεν ἀκολουθοῦσαν τὸ δρόμο τῆς φυγῆς ὅταν ἡ μοίρα τοὺς τοποθετοῦσε ἀντιμέτωπους μὲ τὸ καθῆκον. Φυγὴ ἢ «ἀφομοίωση» ἀπὸ τὰ ἀντίπαλα ἰδεώδη! Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη πλευρὰ ἔχουμε Ἱεράρχες καὶ πραγματικούς Ποιμένες. Ὁ Ἱερομάρτυς Χρυσόστομος εἶναι ἓνας ἀπὸ αὐτούς. Οἱ συγκρίσεις εἶναι δυστυχῶς ἀναπόφευκτες. Ὁμοιότητες μὲ τὸ σήμερα; Ὁ καθένας μπορεῖ νὰ βγάλει τὰ συμπεράσματά του...

Ἄς ἀκούσουμε τὰ προφητικά λόγια τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου, κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τῆς χειροτονίας του σὲ Μητροπολίτη Δράμας, τὸ 1902:

«Ζητῶ μέγαν Σταυρόν, ἐπὶ τοῦ ὁποίου θὰ δοκιμάσω τὴν εὐχαρίστησιν, καθηλούμενος καὶ μὴ ἔχων ἕτερον τί νὰ δώσω πρὸς σωτηρίαν τῆς ἡμετέρας λατρευτῆς πατρίδος, νὰ δώσω τὸ αἷμα μου. Οὕτως ἐννοῶ τὸ ἐπ' ἐμοὶ τὴν ζωὴν καὶ τὴν ἀρχιεροσύνην ... καὶ ἡμίτρα τὴν ὁποίαν αἱ ἅγιοι χεῖρες σου ἐναπέθεσαν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς μου, ἐὰν πέρωται, νὰ ἀπολέση ποτὲ τὴν λαμπηδόνα τῶν λίθων τῆς θὰ μεταβληθεῖ εἰς ἀκάνθινον στέφανον μάρτυρος ἱεράρχου».

Ἡ αὐτόπτης μαρτυρία τοῦ ἱερωμένου βουλευτῆ τῶν Παρισίων ἀββᾶ Ἐδουάρδου Σουλιῆ γιὰ τὸ γεγονότα σχετικὰ μὲ τὸ μαρτυρικὸ τέλος τοῦ Ἱεράρχη εἶναι ὡς ἑξῆς:

«Τὸ ἀπόγευμα τῆς 9^{ης} Σεπτεμβρίου, τὸ Γαλλικὸ προξενεῖο εἰδοποιήθηκε ὅτι ὁ Ἑλληνορθόδοξος μητροπολίτης Χρυσόστομος διέτρεχε ἔσχατο κίνδυνο καὶ ὅτι θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ σταλεῖ ἄγημα ἀπὸ Γάλλους ναῦτες γιὰ νὰ προστατεύσουν τὴν ἀπειλούμενη ζωὴ του. Ὁ ἐπικεφαλῆς τοῦ ἀγήματος πρότεινε στὸν ἱεράρχη νὰ τὸν ὀδηγήσει στὴν ἐκκλησία τῆς «Sacre Coeur», ἢ στὸ Γαλλικὸ Προξενεῖο.

Ὁ Χρυσόστομος δὲν ἀνήκει στὴν Ἐκκλησία τῆς Γαλλίας, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ δὲν μ' ἐμποδίζει νὰ ἐκφράσω τὸν βαθύτατο σεβασμὸ πρὸς τὴν μνήμην του. Μὲ ὠραιότητα ψυχῆς ἀρνήθηκε νὰ δεχθεῖ τὸ προσφερόμενο καταφύγιο λέγων ὅτι τὸ καθῆκον του εἶναι νὰ μείνει γιὰ νὰ συγκακοπαθῆσει μὲ τὸ ποίμνιόν του. Ὅταν τὸ Γαλλικὸ ἄγημα ἀπεχώρησε, κατέφθασε μὲ στρατιωτικὴ ἄμαξα Τοῦρκος ἀξιοματικός, συνοδευόμενος ἀπὸ δυὸ στρατιῶτες, καὶ ζήτησε ἀπὸ τὸν Χρυσόστομο νὰ τὸν ἀκολουθήσει.

Ὁδήγησαν τότε τὸν ἱεράρχη εἰς τὰ ἄκρα τῶν εὐρωπαϊκῶν συνοικιῶν ἐμπρὸς σ' ἓνα κουρεῖο. Ἐκεῖ τοῦ φόρεσαν ἄσπρη μπλούζα, ἴσως γιὰ νὰ διακρίνεται καλύτερα, καὶ ἐκεῖ διαδραματίστηκε τὸ φρικτὸ ἐγκλημα.

Τοῦ ξερρίζωσαν τὰ γένεια, τὸν κτύπησαν μὲ μαχαίρι πισώπλατα καὶ στὴ συνέχεια λυσσασμένες ἀνθρώπινες ὕαινες τοῦ ἔκοψαν μύτη κι αὐτιά. Στὸ πλευρὸ τῶν ἀνδρῶν συναγωνίζονταν μαινόμενες Τουρκάλες ποὺ ἐνθάρρυναν μὲ ἄρες καὶ κατάρες τοὺς λυσσασμένους ἀνδρες τους.

Ἀφοῦ ἔριξαν χάμω τὸν ἱεράρχη καὶ τὸν καταπάτησαν, ὁ ἐπικεφαλῆς ἀξιοματικός διέταξε χαμάληδες νὰ σύρουν τὸ πτώμα καὶ ἀφοῦ τὸ πρόσδεσαν σὲ μία σακαράκα τὸ βάλαν μπροστὰ κι ἄρχισε νὰ τρέχει σβαρνίζοντας τὸ ἅγιο λείψανο τοῦ μάρτυρα ἱεράρχη ποὺ σήκωσε στοὺς ὤμους του τὶς ἀμαρτίες τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ διχασμοῦ καὶ τὴν ὑπεροψία τῶν λεγόμενων Χριστιανικῶν δυνάμεων ποὺ ἀπεδείχθησαν καὶ τοῦ Πόντιου Πιλάτου χειρότεροι».

Μιὰ ἄλλη μαρτυρία εἶναι ἐνὸς φοιτητῆ:

«Κατὰ τὶς τελευταῖες ἡμέρες τοῦ Σεπτεμβρίου 1922, μιὰ ὁμάδα φοιτητῶν τοῦ International College τῆς Σμύρνης καὶ ἐγὼ βρεθήκαμε φυλακισμένοι σὲ ἀπαίσιο ὑπόγειο, σ' ἓνα ἀπὸ τὰ μπουντρούμια τοῦ Διοικητηρίου τῆς Σμύρνης. Σ' αὐτὸ ἦταν ἀσφυκτικὰ στριμωγμένοι Ἕλληνες Χριστιανοὶ αἰχμάλωτοι, μᾶλλον ἀνθρώποι προωρισμένοι γιὰ θάνατο. Τὶς βραδυνὲς ὥρες φύλακες μ' ἐπικεφαλῆς Τουρκοκρήτα παρελάμβανον θύματα ποὺ ἐτυφεκίζοντο.

Στὶς 5 τὸ ἀπόγευμα τῆς τελευταίας ἡμέρας τοῦ θλιβεροῦ Σεπτεμβρίου, ὁ Τουρκοκρῆς ἐκεῖνος μὲ διέταξε νὰ τὸν ἀκολουθήσω στὴν αὐλή.

—Εἶσαι δάσκαλος; μὲ ρωτᾷ.

—Αὐτὴν τὴν τιμὴ εἶχα, τοῦ ἀπαντῶ.

—Καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι ποῦ ἦσαν μαζί σου εἶναι φοιτητές;

—Ναί, τοῦ λέγω.

—Γρήγορα μάζεψέ τους καὶ φέρε τους ἐδῶ.

—Ἐλάτε μαζί μου ἔξω, λέγω στοὺς συντρόφους μου. Φαίνεται ὅτι ἤρθε ἡ ὥρα μας. Ἐμπρὸς μὲ θᾶρρος.

Ποῖα ἦταν ἡ ἐκπληξή μας ὅταν ἀκούσαμε τὸν Τοῦρκο-Κρητικὸ νὰ λέει:

—Δεν θὰ σᾶς σκοτώσω, θὰ σᾶς σώσω. Ἀπόψε θὰ θανατωθοῦν ὅλοι ὅσοι εἶναι στὸ μπουντροῦμι, γιατί ἔφεραν καὶ ἄλλους ποὺ δὲν ἔχουμε χῶρο νὰ τοὺς στοιβάξουμε. Θὰ σᾶς σώσω σήμερα, γιατί ἐλπίζω αὐτὸ νὰ μὲ βοηθήσει νὰ λησμονήσω μιὰ τρομερὴ σκηνὴ ποὺ ἀντίκρισαν τὰ μάτια μου, σκηνὴ στὴν ὁποία ἔλαβα μέρος.

Καὶ συνέχισε:

—Παρακολούθησα τὸ χάλασμα τοῦ Δεσπότη σας. Ἦμουν μ' ἐκείνους ποὺ τὸν τύφλωσαν, ποὺ τοῦ βγάλαν τὰ μάτια καὶ αἰμόφυρτο τὸν ἔσυραν ἀπὸ τὰ γένεια καὶ τὰ μαλλιά στὰ σοκάκια τοῦ Τουρκομαχαλά, τὸν ξυλοκοποῦσαν, τὸν ἔβριζαν καὶ τὸν πετσόκοβαν. Βαθειὰ ἐντύπωση μοῦ ἔκανε καὶ ἀξέχαστος παραμένει ἡ στάση του. Στὰ μαρτύρια ποὺ τὸν ὑπέβαλαν δὲν ἀπῆντα μὲ φωνές, μὲ παρακλήσεις, μὲ κατάρες. Τὸ πρόσωπό του τὸ κατάχλωμο, τὸ σκεπασμένο μὲ τὸ αἷμα τῶν ματιῶν του, τὸ πρόσωπό του εἶχε ἐστραμμένο πρὸς τὸν Οὐρανὸ καὶ διαρκῶς κάτι ψιθύριζε ποὺ δὲν ἠκούετο πέρα ἀπὸ τὴν περιοχὴ του. Ξέρεις ἐσύ, δάσκαλε, τί ἔλεγε;

—Ναί ξέρω, τοῦ ἀπήντησα. Ἐλεγε: «Πάτερ Ἄγιε, ἄφες αὐτοῖς, οὐ γὰρ οἶδασι τί ποιοῦσι».

—Δεν σὲ καταλαβαίνω, δάσκαλε, μὰ δὲν πειράζει. Ἀπὸ καιροῦ σὲ καιρό, ὅταν μποροῦσε, ὕψωνε κάπως τὸ δεξί του

χέρι και εύλογούσε τούς διώκτες του. Κάποιος πατριώτης μου αναγνωρίζει την χειρονομία της εύλογίας, μαριάζει, μαριάζει και με τὸ τρομερὸ μαχαίρι τοῦ κόβει και τὰ δυὸ χέρια τοῦ Δεσπότη. Ἐκεῖνος σωριάστηκε στη ματωμένη γῆ με στεναγμὸ πὸ φαινόταν ὅτι ἦταν μᾶλλον στεναγμὸς ἀνακουφίσεως παρὰ πόνου. Τόσο τὸν λυπήθηκα τότε πὸ με δυὸ σφαῖρες στὸ κεφάλι τὸν ἀποτελείωσα. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ ἱστορία μου. Τώρα πὸ σᾶς τὴν εἶπα ἐλπίζω πὸς θὰ ἡσυχάσω. Γι' αὐτὸ σᾶς χάρισα τὴ ζωὴ.

—Και πὸ τὸν ἔθαψαν; ρωτήσαμε με ἀγωνία.

—Κανείς δὲν ξέρει πὸς ἔριξαν τὸ κομματιασμένο του κορμί, μᾶς ἀπάντησε».

Και μόνο ἡ περιγραφή αὐτὴ ἀρκεῖ γιὰ τὴν κατάρριψη κάποιων ἐνδοιασμῶν ἢ δισταγμῶν ὡς πρὸς τὴν ἀγιότητα τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου. Ὁ Χρυσόστομος πέθανε εύλογώντας τούς βασιμιστὲς και δημίους του. Χιλιάδες και μυριάδες, κληρικοί, λαϊκοί, γυναῖκες, ἄνδρες, παιδιά. Ἄς τούς προσκαλέσουμε στη μνήμη μας:

-Χρυσόστομος Μητροπολίτης Σμύρνης, τὸν κατακρεούργησαν οἱ Τούρκοι και μαζί του 342 κληρικούς τῆς Μητροπόλεως Σμύρνης και τῶν περιχώρων πὸς ἄγρια βασανίστηκαν και μαρτύρησαν γιὰ τὴν Ἑλλάδα και τὸ Χριστό! Τὰ ὀνόματά τους δὲν διεσώθησαν. Θυμίζω μόνο τούς:

-Ἱερεὺς Μελέτιος, τὸν σταύρωσαν στὸν κορμὸ ἐνὸς πεύκου!

-Ἱερεὺς Ἰάκωβος Ἀρχαντζάκης, ἄγρια τὸν παλούκωσαν!

-Ἱεροδιάκονος Γρηγόριος, τὸν ἔκαψαν ζωντανό!

-Γρηγόριος Μητροπολίτης Κυδωνιῶν, τὸν ἔθαψαν ζωντανό και μαζί του ἓνα πλῆθος κληρικῶν και λαϊκῶν τῆς περιοχῆς του.

-Ἀμβρόσιος Μητροπολίτης Μοσχονησιῶν, τοῦ πετάλωσαν τὰ πόδια και τὸν κατατεμάχισαν. Μαζί του 11 ἱερεῖς και 2 ἀγνώστων στοιχείων μοναχοὺς τούς ἔσφαξαν ἄγρια.

-Εὐθύμιος ἐπίσκοπος Ζήλων, ἀπὸ τὰ Παράκοιλα τῆς Καλλονῆς, πέθανε στη φυλακὴ μετὰ ἀπὸ βασανιστήρια.

-Προκόπιος Μητροπολίτης Ἰκονίου, κακοποιήθηκε λίγο πρὶν τὸ 1922.

Μαζί μ' αὐτούς τούς περήφανους ρασοφόρους πὸς θυσιάσαν τὴ ζωὴ τους ὑπὲρ τῶν προβάτων, χιλιάδες Ἕλληνες και Ἑλληνίδες ἄγρια θανατώθηκαν σὲ διάφορα σημεῖα τῆς γῆς τῆς Μικρασίας.

-Μνημονεύουμε τὸν Ἰσαὰκ Γιαβρόγλου πὸς τὸν κρέμασαν ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ Δημαρχεῖο μίας πόλης τῆς Καισαρείας.

-Τὸ Νικόλαο Μπουτζαλή πὸς μαζί με ἄλλους 6 Σμυρναίους τούς ἔσφαξαν στὸ κατώφλι τοῦ σπιτιοῦ του.

-Και τούς 50.000 οἱ θανατωθέντες Σμυρναίους! Τούς: Ἀλέξανδρο, Παναγιώτη, Κυριάκο, Δημητρὸ, Ἐμμανουήλ, Ἐλευθέριο, Ἰωάννη, Παναγιώτη, Νικόλαο...

Και λίγα ὀνόματα ἀπὸ τούς 4.000 Ἀἰβαλιῶτες πὸς θανατώθηκαν ἐκεῖνες τὶς μέρες. Τούς: Κωνσταντῖνο, Παναγῆ, Ἀμερσοῦδα, Εἰρήνη, Εὐάγγελο, Θηρεσία ἀπὸ τὶς Παλαιὲς Φώκιες πὸς οἰκτρὰ θανατώθηκαν μαζί με 3.500 Φωκαεῖς. Νὰ ἀναφέρουμε τὸν τρόπο με τὸν ὁποῖο θανατώθηκε ἡ προαναφερθεῖσα Εἰρήνη: Ἦταν ἔγκυος 9 μηνῶν ὅταν τὴ συνέλαβαν οἱ Τούρκοι. Ἄγρια ὄρμησαν ἐπάνω τῆς και με τὴ ξιφολόγη τῆς ἄνοιξαν τὴν κοιλιά γιὰ νὰ δοῦν... τί παιδί θὰ γεννοῦσε!

Και μερικοί ἄλλοι: Νικόλαος, Φώτιος, Σταμάτης, Ἰωάννης, Ραλλοῦ, Βιργινία, Χαρίκλεια, Νικόλαος, Φώτιος ἀπὸ τὴν Προῦσα. Λίγα ὀνόματα μέσα στὰ ἑκατοντάδες χιλιάδες πὸς «χάλασαν», ὅπως ἔλεγε Μοσχονησιώτισσα γιαιά, οἱ Τούρκοι! Οἱ ἀριθμοὶ μεγάλοι: 3.361 Περγαμηνιώτες, 6.000 Μοσχονησιῶτες... Κι ἀνάμεσα σ' ὅλους αὐτούς και μικρὰ παιδιά σὰν τούς προσκόπους τοῦ Ἀϊδινίου...

Αἰῶνια τους ἡ μνήμη!

Ἑλληνα Ὀρθόδοξε, ἄραγε ἡ σημερινὴ μας γενεὰ ἀξίζει νὰ ἀποκαλεῖ αὐτούς τούς μάρτυρες προγόνους; Και οἱ ἀκριβοπληρωμένοι πολιτικοὶ τῆς ἐποχῆς μας, ὑπάρχει ἔστω και ἓνας τους πὸς θὰ ἀπέφευγε τὸ δρόμο τῆς φυγῆς ὅταν ἡ μοίρα τούς τοποθετοῦσε και αὐτούς ἀντιμέτωπος με τὸ καθῆκον;



Ὅταν βλέπουμε κάτι ἄσχημο, νὰ τὸ σκεπάζουμε και ὄχι νὰ τὸ διαπομπεύουμε. Δὲν εἶναι σωστὸ νὰ γίνονται γνωστὰ τὰ ἠθικὰ παραπτώματα. Ἄς ὑποθέσουμε ὅτι στὸν δρόμο ὑπάρχει μία ἀκαθαρσία. Ἐνας συνετὸς ἄνθρωπος, ἂν περάσει ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ, θὰ πάρῃ μία πλάκα και θὰ τὴν σκεπάσει, γιὰ νὰ μὴν προξενῇ ἀηδία. Ἐνας ἀσύνητος ὁμως, ἀντὶ νὰ τὴν σκεπάσει, μπορεῖ νὰ ἀρχίσει νὰ τὴν ἀνακατεύῃ και νὰ σκορπίσει περισσότερο τὴν δυσωδία τῆς. Ἔτσι, και ὅταν ἀδιάκριτα δημοσιοποιοῦμε τὶς ἁμαρτίες τῶν ἄλλων, προξενοῦμε μεγαλύτερο κακό.

Τὸ «εἰπὲ τῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ» δὲν ἔχει τὴν ἔννοια ὅτι πρέπει ὅλα νὰ γίνονται γνωστὰ, γιὰτὶ σήμερα δὲν εἶναι ὅλοι Ἐκκλησία. Ἐκκλησία εἶναι οἱ πιστοὶ πὸς ζοῦν ὅπως θέλει ὁ Χριστὸς και ὄχι οἱ ἄλλοι πὸς πολεμοῦν τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Στὰ πρῶτα χρόνια τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ πὸς ἡ ἐξομολόγησι γινόταν μπροστὰ σὲ ὅλα τὰ μέλη τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τότε εἶχε αὐτὸ τὸ νόημα τὸ «εἰπὲ τῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ». Ἐνῶ στὴν ἐποχὴ μας πὸς σπάνια βρίσκεται οἰκογένεια νὰ ἔχη τὸν ἴδιο Πνευματικὸ, ἂς μὴ μᾶς ξεγελάῃ ὁ «ἔξω ἀπὸ ἐδῶ» με τὸ «εἰπὲ τῇ Ἐκκλησίᾳ», γιὰτὶ, ὅταν δημοσιοποιοῦμε ἓνα ἠθικὸ λ.χ. παράπτωμα, τὸ κοινοποιοῦμε στοὺς πολεμίους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας και τούς δίνουμε ἀφορμὴ νὰ ἀρχίσουν τὸν πόλεμο ἐναντίον τῆς, ὁπότε κλονίζεται ἡ πίστη τῶν ἀδυνάτων ψυχῶν.

Ο Πειρασμός τῆς Συμβατικότητος

Τοῦ Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου Διονυσίου Τάτση.

Πολλοὶ Χριστιανοὶ εἶναι ἐνοχλητικὰ τυπικοὶ στὶς σχέσεις τους με τοὺς ἄλλους. Ὅλα κατὰ συνθήκην. Ὁ χαιρετισμὸς, ἡ ὀμιλία, τὸ ἐνδιαφέρον του, ὁ ἀποχαιρετισμὸς. Οἱ ἐρωτήσεις χωρὶς πραγματικὴ ἐγνοια γιὰ τοὺς ἀδελφούς. Δὲν περιμένουν τίς ἀπαντήσεις τους. Ρωτοῦν γιὰ νὰ ρωτοῦν καὶ ὄχι γιὰ νὰ μάθουν καὶ νὰ ἐνδιαφερθοῦν. Δὲν γίνονται μέτοχοι τῶν προβλημάτων τῶν ἀδελφῶν τους. Μάλιστα ἀποφεύγουν τὴν πληροφόρηση, γιὰ νὰ ἔχουν τὴ συνείδησή τους ἀναπαυμένη.

Τὸ ἴδιο παρατηροῦμε καὶ σὲ πολλοὺς κληρικούς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐπισκόπους. Θέλουν νὰ εἶναι σὲ ἀπόσταση ἀπὸ τὸν πιστὸ λαό. Δὲν θέλουν νὰ συμφύρονται με τοὺς πονεμένους, τοὺς φτωχοὺς καὶ τοὺς δυστυχεῖς. Ἔχουν ἄλλα σοβαρότερα θέματα, ἰσχυρίζονται.

Ὡστόσο, οἱ Γέροντες τῶν ἡμερῶν μας μᾶς ὑπέδειξαν τὸν ἀληθινὸ τρόπο ἐπικοινωνίας καὶ συμπεριφορᾶς. Ἦταν πάντα ἀνοιχτοὶ στὸν κόσμον καὶ με προθυμία ἄκουγαν τὰ προβλήματα τῶν ἀνθρώπων, χωρὶς κενὲς καὶ ἄχαρες συμβατικότητες. Συμμετεῖχαν στὸν πόνο τους, ἔλεγαν τὸν ψυχωφέλιμο λόγο τους, ἀποκαλύπτοντας τὸ μεγαλεῖο τῆς ψυχῆς τους.

Συχνὰ οἱ Χριστιανοὶ τῆς συμβατικότητος βρίσκονται σὲ δευτέρη θέση. Στὴν πρώτη βρίσκονται οἱ ντόμπροι ἄνθρωποι, οἱ εὐθεῖς καὶ αὐθόρμητοι, αὐτοὶ ποὺ ἐνῶ ἀνήκουν στὸν ἀκαλλιέργητο ἀπὸ πνευματικῆς πλευρᾶς λαό, ἔχουν περισσότερη ἀγάπη πρὸς τοὺς συνανθρώπους τους. Μποροῦν νὰ πάρουν πολλὰ μαθήματα ἀπ' αὐτοὺς οἱ Χριστιανοὶ τῶν τύπων καὶ τῆς ρηχῆς εὐσέβειας.

Τὸ φαινόμενο τῆς κενῆς συμβατικότητος δυστυχῶς ὑπάρχει καὶ στὴν Ἱεραρχία, δηλαδὴ στοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς οἱ ὁποῖοι ἀποτελοῦν τὴ Σύνοδο. Ἐπικρατεῖ ἡ ἀνεικρίνεια καὶ ἡ ἀδιαφάνεια. Ἐμφανίζονται διαφορετικοὶ ἀπ' ὅ,τι εἶναι καὶ κανεὶς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ πιστέψει στὶς ὑποσχέσεις τους καὶ τίς δηλώσεις. Τὰ λόγια τους δὲν ἐκφράζουν τὴν ψυχὴ τους, κάτι ποὺ δὲν ταιριάζει στοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ φυσικὰ δὲν εἶναι θεάρεστο. Εἶναι ὁμως παλιὰ ἢ τακτικὴ αὐτή.

Θεωρῶ ἐνδιαφέρουσα τὴν περιγραφή, ποὺ κάνει ὁ Μητροπολίτης Ἀττικῆς καὶ Μεγαρίδος κ. Νικόδημος τῆς συμπεριφορᾶς τῶν ἀρχιερέων κατὰ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Ἱερωνύμου Κοτσῶνη, γιὰ τὴν καὶ σήμερα τὰ ἴδια συμβαίνουν. Γράφει λοιπὸν ὁ Μητροπολίτης Νικόδημος:

«Ἐκεῖνο ποὺ φανερωνόταν, δὲν ἦταν ἐκεῖ, ποὺ λειτουργοῦσε στὸ ψυχικὸ βάθος. Ἡ ἀρχιερατικὴ εὐπρέπεια, ποὺ προβαλλόταν στὶς δημόσιες ἐμφανίσεις, δὲν ἀντανακλοῦσε καὶ τίς ἐσώτερες διαθέσεις. Ἡ τυπικὴ ἀκρίβεια στὰ συμβατικὰ καθήκοντα δὲ συνοδοιποροῦσε

καὶ με τὴ συνειδησιακὴ ἀκρίβεια στὴν ἐφαρμογὴ τοῦ θεϊκοῦ θελήματος. Ὁ πειρασμὸς τῆς συμβατικότητος φαίνεται πὼς γυροφέρνει τοὺς ἐπισκόπους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Τὸν εἶδα νὰ εὐτελίζει τὴν ἀρχιερατικὴ ἐντιμότητα. Τὸν ἐνοιῶσα καὶ νὰ ἀλαφροπερπατᾷ γύρω μου. Νὰ με κυκλώνει. Νὰ με πλαναίνει. Νὰ προσπαθεῖ νὰ με ρίξει σὲ κείνο τὸ ψεύτικο θέατρο, ποὺ παίζεται ἢ γοητευτικὴ πράξη τῆς ἐξουσίας καὶ ποὺ προδίδεται ἢ γνήσια γραφὴ τῆς ἱστορίας καὶ ἢ γεύση τῆς ἀνυπόκριτης ἀλήθειας»



Ὁ Μυροβλύτης τοῦ Ὀκτώβρη



Νὰ καὶ κάποιο περιστατικὸ ποὺ σχετίζεται μ' ἓναν ἀσκητὴ τοῦ ὄρους Χολομώντος, στὸν ὁποῖο ἔδειξε ὁ Θεὸς τὴν μυροβλυτικὴ χάρη τοῦ Ἁγίου, διαλύοντάς του ἔτσι κάποιες ἀμφιβολίες.

Μία νύχτα ποὺ κοιμόταν ὁ ἐρημίτης αὐτὸς στὸ κελλί του, τοῦ φάνηκε πὼς βρέθηκε στὸν ναὸ τοῦ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου στὴν Θεσσαλονίκη. Ἀντίκρισε ἐκεῖ

τὸν φύλακα. Ζήτησε νὰ τοῦ ξεκλειδώσει τὸν τάφο τοῦ Ἁγίου. Μόλις προσκύνησε, εἶδε τὸν τάφο βρεγμένο ἀπὸ μύρο. Μοσχοβολοῦσε ὁ τόπος. Κατόπιν λέει στὸν ἄνθρωπον νὰ σκάσουν νὰ δοῦν ἀπὸ ποῦ ἀκριβῶς βγαίνει τὸ ἅγιο αὐτὸ ἄρωμα.

Ἄρχισαν νὰ σκάβουν μέχρι ποὺ ἔπεσαν ἐπάνω σὲ μία μαρμάρηνη πλάκα. Τὴν ἀνασήκωσαν με δυσκολία καὶ τί νὰ δοῦν; Τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἁγίου ἦταν λαμπρὸ καὶ ὠραῖο καὶ ἀπὸ τίς τρύπες ποὺ εἶχε ἐπάνω του, διότι θανατώθηκε με τίς λόγχες τῶν ἀκοντίων, ἔρεε τὸ εὐωδιαστὸ ὑγρὸ. Τόσο πολὺ μύρο ἔβγαине, ὥστε νὰ ραντισθεῖ ὁλόκληρο τὸ σῶμα τοῦ φύλακα. Ἀπὸ τὴν ὑπερβολὴ τοῦ μύρου καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἔνταση τῆς εὐωδιάς ὁ ἀσκητὴς ἄρχισε νὰ δυσκολεύεται στὴν ἀναπνοὴ καὶ κινδύνευε νὰ πνίγη.

Στὸν φόβο ποὺ δοκίμασε, ἔβγαλε μία ἰσχυρὴ κραυγὴ: «Ἁγιε Δημήτριε, βοήθει μοί». Με τὴν δυνατὴ αὐτὴ φωνὴ συνήλθε ἀπὸ τὴν ἔκσταση καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν κατάσταση ποὺ βρισκόταν. Δὲν ἄργησε νὰ συνειδητοποιήσῃ, ὅτι τόσο ὁ ἴδιος ὅσο καὶ τὰ ρούχα τοῦ ἦταν μουσκεμένα ἀπὸ τὸ μύρο.

Μόλις ξεπρόβαλε ἡ καινούργια μέρα, ὁ ἐρημίτης, με πλήρη βεβαιότητα γιὰ τὴν μεγάλη ἀγιοσύνη τοῦ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου, ξεκίνησε γιὰ τὴν Θεσσαλονίκη. Παρέμεινε γιὰ ἀρκετὲς ἡμέρες μέσα στὸ ναὸ κηρύττοντας καὶ ἀνακηρύττοντας τὰ πνευματικὰ ὕψη τῆς ἀγιότητος στὰ ὁποῖα ἀνήλθε ὁ Δημήτριος.

Θεία Κοινωνία και Νέα Γρίπη

Τοῦ Ἀρχιμανδρίτου Παύλου Ντανᾶ.

Αὐτὲς τὶς ἡμέρες πολὺς θόρυβος γίνεται γιὰ τὴ νέα γρίπη. Καὶ ὁ λόγος εἶναι ὅτι ὑπάρχει τὸ ἐνδεχόμενο, ὅπως ἰσχυρίζονται, νὰ μεταδοθοῦν ἀσθένειες στοὺς ἀνθρώπους, πού προσέρχονται στὴ Θεία Κοινωνία. Εἶναι δυνατὸν ὅμως νὰ μεταταδοθεῖ ἡ ἀσθένεια μὲ τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία;

Γιὰ νὰ δώσουμε ἀπάντηση σ' αὐτὸ τὸ ἐρώτημα, πρέπει νὰ θέσουμε τὸ ἐξῆς βασικὸ ἐρώτημα. Τί εἶναι ἡ Θεία Κοινωνία;

Ἡ Θεία Εὐχαριστία εἶναι τὸ Θεοσύστατο μυστήριο, τὸ ὁποῖο συνεχίζει τὴν Σταυρικὴ Θυσία τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ παρέχει στοὺς πιστοὺς τὰ ἀγαθὰ, τὰ ὁποῖα μᾶς προσφέρθηκαν ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τὴν θυσία. Ὀνομάζεται δὲ τὸ Μυστήριο, Θεία Εὐχαριστία, διότι ὁ Κύριος πρὶν ἀκόμη τελέσει αὐτὸ καὶ παραδώσει στοὺς μαθητὲς Του τὸ Σῶμα Του καὶ τὸ Αἷμα Του, εὐχαρίστησε τὸν Οὐράνιο Πατέρα Του. Εἶναι θυσία, δηλαδὴ ἐπανάληψη καὶ συνέχιση τῆς σταυρικῆς θυσίας τοῦ Κυρίου. Εἶναι φάρμακο ἀθανασίας, γιὰτὴν ἐκεῖνος πού κοινωνεῖ, θὰ ζήσει αἰώνιος κοντὰ στὸ Θεὸ καὶ θὰ ἀποκτήσει τὴν ἀθανασία. Εἶναι τὸ Πάσχα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, δηλαδὴ τὸ πέρασμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μαζί μὲ τὸν Χριστὸ ἀπὸ τὸν θάνατό Του στὴν Ἀνάστασή Του.

Ἔτσι, ὀλόκληρη ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ πιστοῦ, πού ἀκατακρίτως κοινωνεῖ, εἶναι καὶ γίνεται μία ἑορτὴ καὶ ἓνα συνεχῆς Πάσχα. Εἶναι Θεία Κοινωνία. Οἱ πιστοὶ δηλαδὴ μετὰ ἀπὸ κατάλληλη ψυχικὴ προετοιμασία, κοινωνοῦν ἀπὸ τὸ Σῶμα καὶ τὸ Αἷμα τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ ἐνώνονται μαζί Του καὶ ἐφαρμόζεται ἔτσι ὁ λόγος Του. *Ὁ τρώγων μου τὴν Σάρκα καὶ πίνων μου τὸ Αἷμα ἐν ἐμοὶ μένει, κἀγὼ ἐν αὐτῷ.* (Ἰωάν. 6:56).

Ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος τονίζει: «Εἶναι ἀναγκαῖα γιὰ τὴν κληρονομία τῆς αἰώνιας ζωῆς ἡ μετάληψη τοῦ Σώματος καὶ τοῦ Αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ».

Ὁ Δάσκαλος τοῦ γένους μας Ἅγιος Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλὸς ἐπισημαίνει: «Θέλοντας ὁ Κύριος νὰ μᾶς δώση ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον, τὴν οὐράνιον τροφήν, ἐπῆρε ψωμί καὶ κρασί καὶ τὸ εὐλόγησε καὶ ἔκαμε τὰ ἄχραντα μυστήρια, τὸ πανάγιο Σῶμα καὶ Αἷμα Του, καὶ ἐμετάλαβε τοὺς δώδεκα Ἀποστόλους. Οἱ ἑνδεκα Ἀπόστολοι, εὐθὺς ὅπου ἐμετάλαβαν τὰ ἄχραντα μυστήρια μὲ καλὴ γνώμη, μὲ καλὴ προαίρεσιν, ἐφωτίστηκαν, ἐλαμπρύνθηκαν, ἔγιναν ὡς σοφοὶ διδάσκαλοι τοῦ κόσμου καὶ μὲ ἐκείνη τὴν χαρὰ ἐλάλουσάνε ὅλες τὶς γλῶσσες τοῦ κόσμου καὶ πέρασαν ἐδῶ καλὰ καὶ ἐπῆγαν εἰς τὸν παράδεισον νὰ χαίρωνται πάντοτε».

Ὁ Ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος λέει: «Ὁ Χριστὸς ἦλθε στὸν κόσμον καὶ ἐνῶ εἶμασταν δούλοι, μᾶς ἀγόρασε καὶ μᾶς ἐλευθέρωσε. Καὶ ὅπως κάποιος πού ἀγοράζει δούλους,

τοὺς ἀγοράζει δίνοντας χρυσάφι, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅταν θέλει νὰ τοὺς καλλωπίσει καὶ νὰ τοὺς στολίσαι τὸ κάνει πάλι μὲ χρυσάφι, ἔτσι ἀκριβῶς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἔκανε. Μᾶς ἀγόρασε μὲ τὸ Αἷμα Του.» Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ Χριστὸς εἶπε κατὰ τὴν σύσταση τοῦ Μυστηρίου *εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.* (Ματθ. 26:28)».

Μέσα στὰ κείμενα τῶν Ἁγίων Πατέρων συναντοῦμε ὅλες τὶς ὠφέλειες, πού ἀποκομίζει ὁ κάθε Χριστιανὸς μὲ τὴν προσέλευσή του στὴν Θεία Κοινωνία. Πολλὲς φορές τονίζεται ἡ θεραπευτικὴ δύναμη τῆς Θείας Κοινωνίας καὶ στὴν ψυχὴ καὶ στὸ σῶμα. Σ' ὀλόκληρη τὴν ψυχοσωματικὴ ὑπαρξὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Σὲ πολλὰ σημεία τῶν Εὐαγγελίων ὁ Χριστὸς διακηρύττει μία μεγάλη Ἀλήθεια, πῶς ἡ ἁμαρτία εἶναι ἄμεσα ἡ αἰτία πολλῶν ἀσθενειῶν τοῦ σώματος. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀποτελεῖ μία ψυχοσωματικὴ ὄντοτητα καὶ ὑπάρχει ἀλληλεπίδραση τῶν δύο αὐτῶν στοιχείων του. Ἔτσι λοιπὸν ἡ Θεία Κοινωνία ἀγιάζει, καθαρίζει καὶ δίνει τὴν υἰγια τῆς καὶ στὸ σῶμα. Ἡ Θεία Κοινωνία ἀποτελεῖ «πηγὴ ἀγαθῶν». Κοινωνοῦμε «εἰς ἴασιν (θεραπεία) ψυχῆς τε καὶ σώματος».

Ἡ Θεία Μετάληψη γίνεται εἰς «ρῶμην (δύναμη) καὶ υἰγιαίν ψυχῆς τε καὶ σώματος». Ἀφοῦ λοιπὸν ὁ Χριστὸς μὲ τὸ Σῶμα Του καὶ τὸ Αἷμα Του εἶναι ὁ Ἀληθινὸς καὶ παντοδύναμος Ἰατρός, πῶς εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ μεταδοθεῖ κάποια ἀσθένεια μὲ τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία;

Ἀλήθεια γνωρίζουν οἱ πολέμοι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὅτι πολλοὶ ἱερεῖς, πού ὑπηρετοῦν στὰ Νοσοκομεῖα, ἂν καὶ κοινωνοῦν ἀσθενεῖς μὲ κάθε εἶδους μεταδοτικὴ ἀσθένεια, δὲν ἀντιμετώπισαν κανένα πρόβλημα; Ἐχουν ἀντιληφθεῖ οἱ ὀρθολογιστὲς ὅτι ἡ μεταβολὴ τῶν φυσικῶν στοιχείων τοῦ ἄρτου καὶ τοῦ οἴνου σὲ Σῶμα καὶ Αἷμα Χριστοῦ γίνεται διὰ τῆς ἐπιφοιτήσεως τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος κατὰ τὴν στιγμὴ τῆς εὐχῆς τοῦ καθαγιασμοῦ.

Τὶ σημαίνει αὐτό: Ὅτι ἡ Θεία Κοινωνία δὲν εἶναι συνηθισμένη τροφή, ἀλλὰ θεϊκὴ τροφή. Στὴν Θεία Εὐχαριστία τρεφόμεστε μὲ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Θεὸ. Μήπως λησμονοῦν ὅτι ἡ Θεία Κοινωνία εἶναι Μυστήριο; Δηλαδὴ, ὅτι δὲν ἔχει σχέση μὲ τὴν φυσικὴ ἐμπειρία, τὴν ἐπιστημονικὴ ἔρευνα καὶ τὴν κριτικὴ διάνοια τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

Οἱ ἀλήθειες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἔχουν μοναδικὴ πηγὴ τὸν Θεὸ. Ἀποτελοῦν φανέρωση, ἀποκάλυψη τοῦ Θεοῦ. Τὶς θεῖες ἀλήθειες τὶς ἀποδέχεται μονάχα ἐκεῖνος, πού τὶς πιστεύει μὲ ταπεινώση καὶ στὸ μέτρο, πού φωτίζεται ἀπὸ τὴν χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Εἶναι ἀξιοπρόσεκτη ἡ διαπίστωση τοῦ ἀειμνήστου Φώτη Κόντογλου: «Ἐμεῖς οἱ ἔξυπνοὶ καὶ οἱ συγχρονισμένοι» βάλαμε τὴν κουτοεξυπνάδα μας καὶ μέσα στὰ μυστήρια τῆς θρησκείας μας καὶ ἀγαπᾶμε τὰ μεγάλα λόγια καὶ τὰ ἐπιστημονικά... γιὰτὴν αὐτὰ δίνουν τροφή στὸν ἐγωισμό μας χωρὶς νὰ νοιώσουμε τὰ λόγια τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου ὅπου φωνάζει: *Οὐχὶ ἐμῶρανεν ὁ Θεὸς τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ κόσμου τούτου,*

Να και δύο περιστατικά συγχρόνων κληρικῶν, πού δείχνουν ὅτι ἡ Θεία Κοινωνία ποτέ δὲν γίνεται ἀφορμή, γιὰ νὰ ἀρρωστήσει κανεὶς ἄνθρωπος.

(1) Ὅταν ὁ Μητροπολίτης τῆς Χίου Παντελεήμων Φωστίνης (1962) ἦταν ἱεροκήρυκας Ἀττικῆς, πῆγε κάποτε νὰ λειτουργήσει στὸ φθισιατρεῖο τῆς Σωτηρίας. Ἐκεῖ τοῦ ἔφεραν οἱ νοσοκόμοι μία μεγάλη πιατέλλα μὲ πολλὰ κουταλάκια. Τί τὰ φέρατε αὐτὰ τοὺς ρώτησε. Μᾶς εἶπαν οἱ γιατροὶ νὰ κοινωνήσετε μ' αὐτὰ τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς, ἀρχίζοντας ἀπὸ τοὺς πιὸ ἐλαφρὰ καὶ προχωρῶντας στοὺς πιὸ βαριά. Δὲν χρειάζονται αὐτά, ἀπάντησε μὲ πίστη ὁ ἱερέας. Ἔχω τὴν Ἁγία Λαβίδα.

Πραγματικά στὴν Θεία Λειτουργία κοινώρησε κανονικά τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς καὶ ὕστερα πλησίασε στὴν Ὠραία Πύλη, γιὰ νὰ καταλύσει. Τὸ ἔκανε αὐτό, γιὰ νὰ τὸν βλέπουν ὅλοι, καὶ νὰ μάθουν οἱ γιατροὶ ὅτι ἡ Θεία Κοινωνία εἶναι φωτιά, πού καίει τὰ πάντα.

(2) Ἕνα σχετικὸ περιστατικὸ συνέβη καὶ τὸ 1942 στὰ Ἰωάννινα. Ὁ ἱεροκήρυκας π. Βενέδικτος Πετράκης (1961) μετὰ τὴν Θεία Λειτουργία στὸ ἐκκλησάκι τοῦ Κάστρου, πῆγε στὸ ἐκεῖ νοσοκομεῖο, ὅπου στεγαζόταν καὶ φθισιατρεῖο, γιὰ νὰ κοινωνήσει τοὺς ἀρρώστους.

Ἕνας βαριὰ φυματικός, μόλις μετέλαβε, ἔκανε αἰμόπτυση πάνω στὸ σεντόνι. Ἀμέσως ὁ πατήρ Βενέδικτος τὴν πῆρε μὲ τὴν Ἁγία Λαβίδα, τὴν ἔφαγε καὶ εἶπε νὰ κάψουν τὸ σεντόνι. Οἱ γιατροὶ τὸ εἶδαν καὶ τρόμαξαν. Τί κάνει αὐτὸς ὁ τρελλός, φώναξαν. Σὲ λίγο θὰ τὸν δεῖτε μὲ καλπάζουσα φυματίωση. Μὰ οὔτε σὲ λίγο, οὔτε σὲ πολὺ τὸν εἶδαν μὲ καλπάζουσα. Ἡ χάρις τοῦ Μυστηρίου δὲν ἐπέτρεψε νὰ πάθει τίποτε.

Συνεπῶς, ἂν θέλουμε νὰ ἔχουμε ἀσφαλῆ ὑγεία στὴν ψυχὴ καὶ στὸ σῶμα, ἄς κοινωνοῦμε συχνά. Ἡ Θεία Κοινωνία εἶναι πηγὴ ζωῆς, εἶναι τὸ θαυματουργικὸ φάρμακο. Οἱ ἑτερόδοξοι (παπικοὶ καὶ προτεστάντες) ἔχουν ἀναστείλει τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία, τὸ κάνουν γιὰ εἶναι αἰρετικοὶ καὶ ἄπιστοι. Ἐμεῖς ὡς Ὁρθόδοξοι ἄς κοινωνοῦμε μὲ ταπεινῶση, καθαρότητα ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος, μὲ πίστη, φόβο Θεοῦ καὶ ἀγάπη, ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ ἐξομολόγηση, γιὰ νὰ γίνεται ἡ Θεία Κοινωνία «πηγὴ ἀγαθῶν».

Ἡ Θεία Κοινωνία δὲν ἔχει καμία ἀπολύτως σχέση μὲ τὴν γρίπη. Ὄντως παρέχει στοὺς πιστοὺς τὰ ἀγαθὰ πού μᾶς προσφέρθηκαν ἀπὸ τὴν θυσία Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Τὸ καλύτερο λοιπὸν ἐμβόλιο γιὰ τὴ νέα γρίπη εἶναι ἡ Θεία Κοινωνία...

Τώρα σὲ Παραδέχομαι, Ἅγιε Νικόλα...

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Βίος καὶ Λόγος», Γέροντος Πορφυρίου Κausοκαλυβίτου, Ἱερά Μονὴ Χρυσοπηγῆς, Χανιά 2003.

Ὁ Γέροντας Πορφύριος ἀφηγεῖται: Ἦταν ἓνα Μοναστήρι, ὅπου ὅλοι οἱ μοναχοὶ εἶχαν γεράσει καὶ πεθάνει, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ ἓναν, πού ζοῦσε ἐκεῖ σὰν ἐρημίτης. Ὁ μοναχὸς αὐτὸς ἦταν τελείως ἀγράμματος, ἀλλὰ εἶχε δυνατὴ καὶ ἀπλή πίστη. Καθὼς ἔκανε τὶς ἀκολουθίες του καὶ τὰ διακονήματά του, πίστευε ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ οἱ ἅγιοι εἶναι ζωντανοὶ καὶ τὸν συντροφεύουν, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ τοὺς μιλοῦσε τακτικά, ὅπως μιλά κανεὶς σὲ ζωντανοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Μία μέρα πού βγήκε ἀπὸ τὸ Μοναστήρι, μπήκαν σ' αὐτὸ ληστὲς, ἔκλεψαν ὅτι βρήκαν, τὰ φόρτωσαν στὰ ζῶα τους κι ἔφυγαν.

Ὅταν ἐπέστρεψε ὁ μοναχὸς καὶ εἶδε τὸ γυμνωμένο Μοναστήρι, ταράχθηκε. Ἀμέσως ἔτρεξε στὸ Ναό, πού ἦταν ἀφιερωμένος στὸν Ἅγιο Νικόλαο, στάθηκε μπροστὰ στὸν Ἅγιο Νικόλαο, στάθηκε μπροστὰ στὸν προστάτη τοῦ Μοναστηριοῦ ἅγιο καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ διαμαρτύρεται: «Ἁγιέ μου Νικόλα, τί ἔγινε ἐδῶ ὅταν ἔλειπα; Ἦρθαν κακοὶ ἄνθρωποι καὶ ἔκλεψαν τὸ Μοναστήρι κι ἐσὺ τοὺς κοίταζες καὶ δὲν μιλοῦσες; Τί ἔκανες γιὰ νὰ ἐμποδίσεις τοὺς ληστὲς; Βλέπω ὅτι δὲν ἔκανες τίποτα. Ἄμ τότε δὲν σοῦ ἀξίζει ἡ θέση αὐτὴ πού ἔχεις, ἀφοῦ δὲν προστάτεψες τὸ Μοναστήρι. Θὰ σὲ βγάλω ἀπ' ἐκεῖ».

Κι ἀμέσως ξεκολλᾷ τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ Ἁγίου ἀπὸ τὸ τέμπλο, τὴν βγάζει ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ Μοναστήρι, τὴν ἀκουμπᾷ σ' ἓνα βράχο, ἐπιστρέφει καὶ κλείνει τὴν πόρτα. Δὲν πέρασε μία ὥρα καὶ ἀκούει δυνατὰ χτυπήματα στὴν ἐξώπορτα. Ἀνοίγει καὶ τί νὰ δεῖ! Οἱ ληστὲς μὲ τὰ ζῶα τοὺς φορτωμένα μὲ ὅλα τὰ κλεμμένα καὶ νὰ τοῦ λένε: «Ἐμεῖς κλέψαμε τὸ Μοναστήρι καί, καθὼς φεύγαμε, τὰ ζῶα μας περπατοῦσαν κανονικά, ἀλλὰ κάποια στιγμή σταμάτησαν καὶ δὲν προχωροῦσαν. Τὰ χτυπήσαμε, τὰ τραβούσαμε, ἔμεναν ἀκίνητα. Μόλις ὁμως γύριζαν πίσω, ἔτρεχαν. Εἶπαμε ὅτι, ὅπως φαίνεται, ὁ Θεὸς θέλει πίσω τὰ κλεμμένα καὶ σ' τὰ φέραμε».

Ὁ μοναχὸς πῆρε τὰ πράγματα καὶ καθὼς ἔφευγαν οἱ ληστὲς, εὐχαρίστησε τὸ Θεό. Τότε θυμήθηκε τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ Ἁγίου, πῆγε στὸ βράχο πού τὴν εἶχε ἀκουμπήσει, τὴν προσκύνησε καὶ εἶπε: «Τώρα σὲ παραδέχομαι, Ἅγιε Νικόλα. Εἶσαι ὁ προστάτης τοῦ Μοναστηριοῦ». Πῆρε θριαμβευτικά τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ Ἁγίου καὶ τὴν τοποθέτησε στὴ θέση της».



Ἐκεῖνοι, πού δὲν ἀρκοῦνται σὲ αὐτὰ πού χρειάζονται γιὰ νὰ ζοῦν ἀλλὰ ἐπιθυμοῦν περισσότερα, ὑποδουλώνουν τὸν ἑαυτὸν τους στὰ πάθη, πού ταράζουν τὴν ψυχὴ καὶ τὴν φέρνουν λογισμοὺς καὶ φαντασίες, ὅτι νὰ θέλουν λίγα ἢ πολλὰ εἶναι τὸ ἴδιο. Καὶ ὅπως τὰ ροῦχα, πού εἶναι μεγαλύτερα ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα ἐμποδίζουν ἐκείνους πού τρέχουν στὸ ἀγώνισμα τοῦ δρόμου, ἔτσι καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου νὰ ἔχει περισσότερα ἀπὸ ὅσα πρέπει, ἐμποδίζει τὶς ψυχὲς καὶ δὲν τὶς ἀφήνει νὰ ἀγωνίζονται ἢ νὰ σωθοῦν.

Ἅγιος Ἀντώνιος ὁ Μέγας

Τὸ Σύνθημα τῆς «Νέας Ἐποχῆς»: Ὅλα Ἐπιτρέπονται!

Τοῦ κ. Μιχαήλ Ε. Μιχαηλίδη, Θεολόγου.

«Τὸν τελευταῖο καιρὸ ὅλο καὶ περισσότερο γίνεται λόγος γιὰ τὴν “παγκοσμιοποίηση,” μὲ ποικίλες σημασιολογικὲς φορτίσεις, κυρίως οἰκονομικὲς, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολιτιστικὲς. Πολλοὶ τὴν ἐκλαμβάνουν ὡς προφανῆ πρόοδο. Ἄλλοι, ὡς ἀναμφισβήτητη ἀπειλή. Ἀνεξάρτητα πάντως ἀπὸ τὴν εὐφορία ἢ τὴν ἀνησυχία μὲ τὴν ὁποία ἀντιμετωπίζεται τὸ φαινόμενο, ἡ παγκοσμιοποίηση εἶναι μιὰ διαδικασία σὲ ἐξέλιξη», γράφει ὁ ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀλβανίας Ἀναστάσιος στὸ βιβλίο του «Παγκοσμιότητα καὶ Ὁρθοδοξία».

Τὸ φαινόμενο τῆς παγκοσμιοποίησης, ὅπως εἶναι γνωστό, δὲν εἶναι ἓνα ἀπλὸ καὶ αὐτόνομο φαινόμενο, ἀλλὰ ἀποτελεῖ μιὰ παγκόσμια πολιτικὴ καὶ πολιτιστικὴ ἰδεολογία, πού δημιούργησε μιὰ «Νέα Ἐποχὴ» μὲ μιὰ πολὺ εὐρύτερη—πανανθρώπινη—ἰδεολογικὴ βάση.

Ἔτσι, ἀναρωτιέται κανεὶς: Ἡ παγκοσμιοποίηση δημιούργησε τὴ «Νέα Ἐποχὴ», ἢ τῆς «Νέας Ἐποχῆς» εἶναι δημιούργημα ἢ παγκοσμιοποίηση;

Ὅπως κι ἂν ἔχει τὸ θέμα, ἐπειδὴ ἡ παγκοσμιοποίηση χρωματίστηκε πιά μὲ τὸν οἰκονομικὸ παράγοντα, θὰ πρέπει νὰ ὁμολογήσουμε ὅτι ὅλα τὰ ὑπαρξιακά, ἰδεολογικά, κοινωνικά καὶ ἠθικά θέματα, ἀνήκουν στὴ «Νέα Ἐποχὴ». (Οἱ δυὸ λέξεις, σὲ εἰσαγωγικά, διότι πρόκειται γιὰ συγκεκριμένη ἐποχὴ). καὶ τούτη ἡ ἐποχὴ εἶναι μὲν συγκεκριμένη—ὄχι χρονικά—ἀλλὰ ἰδεολογικά ἀπὸ τὴ μορφή καὶ τὶς ἐκδηλώσεις τῆς ἀποστασίας. Ἡ «Νέα Ἐποχὴ», κατὰ κάποιον τρόπο, ὀρίζεται καὶ περιορίζεται χρονικά καὶ τροπικά, ἢ δὲ παγκοσμιοποίηση, ἔχει χαρακτῆρα τοπικό. Σκοπὸ ἔχει νὰ αὐτομορφοποιήσει τὸν κόσμον, νὰ γίνῃ ἓνας χῶρος μὲ ἓνα πολιτιστικὸ ἦθος—καὶ ἂν εἶναι δυνατὸ—μὲ ἓνα φρόνημα.

Ἐπειδὴ ὅμως τὰ νήματα τοῦ κακοῦ τὰ κινεῖ ὁ αἰώνιος ἐχθρὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ Διάβολος, αὐτὸς καὶ διαμορφώνει μὲ τὰ ὄργανά του, τὶς ἀντίθεες συνθήκες τῆς ἐπικράτησής του. Σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή, ὁ Ἀντίχριστος—ὁ κατεξοχὴν φορέας τοῦ Σατανᾶ—θὰ ἔρθῃ γιὰ νὰ παραπλανήσει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἀλλὰ θὰ προηγηθεῖ τὸ *μυστήριον τῆς ἀνομίας*, τὸ ὁποῖον *ἤδη ἐνεργεῖται*. (Β' Θεσ. 2:3, 7-8).

Τὰ «σημεῖα» δείχνουν καὶ ἀποδείχνουν μιὰ καταπληκτικὴ ὁμοιότητα τῆς ἐποχῆς τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου μὲ τὴ «Νέα Ἐποχὴ»... καὶ μάλιστα, μὲ τὴ δική μας ἐποχὴ.

Τὸ «μυστήριον τῆς ἀνομίας», ἡ ἐποχὴ τῆς καθαρὸ ἀποστασίας—γιατὶ προὔπηρξαν κι ἄλλες ἐποχὲς ἀποστασίας—θὰ ἐπικρατήσει ἀνομία, παρανομία, ἀθεΐα, «ὑβρις», βλασφημία τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, δηλαδὴ πλήρης ἠθικὴ διαστροφή καὶ ἄρνηση τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ μιὰ καθολικὴ διαφθορὰ καὶ ἠθικὴ ἐξαθλίωση.

Ἄνθρωποι, φορεῖς ὄλων τῶν κακῶν καὶ τῶν ἀνομιῶν, θὰ διαπράττουν τὸ κακὸ μὲ κάθε ἐλευθερία. *Ἔσονται γάρ*

οἱ ἄνθρωποι φίλαντοι, φιλάργυροι, ἀλαζόνες, ὑπερήφανοι, βλάσφημοι, γονεῦσιν ἀπειθεῖς, ἀχάριστοι, ἀνόσιοι, ἄστοργοι, ἄσπονδοι, διάβολοι, ἀκρατεῖς, ἀνήμεροι, ἀφιλάγαθοι, προδόται, προπετεῖς, τετυφωμένοι, φιλήδονοι μᾶλλον ἢ φιλόθεοι...κατεφθαρμένοι τὸν νοῦν, ἀδόκιμοι περὶ τὴν πίστιν. (Β' Τιμ. 3:2-3, 8).

Τὸ σύνθημα τοῦ σύγχρονου ἀνθρώπου τῆς «Νέας Ἐποχῆς», τῆς Ἐποχῆς τοῦ Ὑδροχόου, ὅπως τὴν ἀποκαλοῦν οἱ ἀποκρυφιστές, εἶναι ἡ ἀπόλυτη καὶ χωρὶς ὄρια καὶ περιορισμούς, ἐλευθερία τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Κατὰ τοὺς ἀποκρυφιστές, χάθηκε πιά γιὰ πάντα, ἡ ἐποχὴ τοῦ Ἰχθύος—ἡ ὁποία, κατ' αὐτοὺς ταυτίζεται μὲ τὴ χριστιανικὴ ἐποχὴ—καὶ τώρα ἄλλαξαν τὰ πράγματα. Ὁ π. Ἀντώνιος Ἀλεβιζόπουλος γράφει: «Ἡ εἰκόνα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, πού προβάλλεται στὸν ἀποκρυφισμό καὶ στὶς ὁμάδες τῆς “Νέας Ἐποχῆς,” δὲν στηρίζεται στὴν πίστη σ' ἓνα προσωπικό

Θεό, οὔτε κατοχυρώνει τὴν εὐθύνη τοῦ κάθε ἀνθρώπου γ' αὐτὸ πού συμβαίνει στὸν συνάνθρωπο καὶ γενικότερα στὴν κοινωνία. τὰ πάντα ἐρμηνεύονται μὲ τὸ “νόμο τοῦ κάρμα”, πού κυριολεκτικὰ ἀκυρώνει κάθε προσπάθεια γιὰ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἰσότητα ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ἀνθρώπους, θεμελιώνει θεωρητικὰ τὶς διακρίσεις, τὴν κοινωνικὴ ἀδικία, καὶ δρᾷ καταλυτικὰ σὲ ὅλους τοὺς τομεῖς τῆς κοινωνικῆς μας ζωῆς».

Τώρα, μὲ τὴ «Νέα Ἐποχὴ», λένε, παύουν οἱ περιοριστικοὶ νόμοι, ὅπως πρὶν, οἱ ἐντολές τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ ἔλεγχος τῶν ἱερέων καὶ οἱ καταστροφές. Τώρα χύνεται ἄφθονο φῶς καὶ παύουν οἱ φραγμοὶ καὶ τὰ ὄρια. Τώρα ἡ σωτηρία δὲν εἶναι δῶρο τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἀποτέλεσμα πίστεως, ἀλλὰ ἀποτέλεσμα αὐτοπραγμάτωσης τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

Ἐλληνας ἀποκρυφιστὴς μὲ τὶς ἰδέες του ἀνατρέπει τὴ χριστιανικὴ ἠθικὴ, ὅταν λέγει ὅτι: «Ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἔχει τύψεις γιὰ ὅτιδήποτε, γιατί προσβάλλουν τὴν “Ἀνωτερότητα τοῦ Ὑποσυνειδήτου” καὶ δημιουργοῦν βλάβη. Εἶναι “Ἀϋθυποβολὴ κακῶν ἔξεων,” τὶς ὁποῖες αὐξάνουν. Οἱ τύψεις ἀποτελοῦν “ἀρνητικὲς σκέψεις” καὶ πρέπει νὰ ἐξουδετερωθοῦν“ μὲ σωστὴ χρῆση τῆς Ἀϋθυποβολῆς.”»

Πολλὰ ἀκόμα ἀπαράδεκτα ὑποστηρίζονται, ὅπως ὅτι: «δὲν ὑπάρχει διάκριση ἀνάμεσα στὸ καλὸ καὶ τὸ κακὸ, δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀντίθεση εἶναι, λένε, οἱ δυὸ πλευρές ἐνός καὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ κομματιοῦ... Στὴ σεξουαλικὴ δραστηριότητα, ἐπίσης, δὲ θέτουν ὄρους καὶ περιορισμούς... Οὔτε ὑπάρχει ἡ ἔννοια τοῦ κακοῦ ἢ τῆς ἁμαρτίας. Αὐτές, ὑποστηρίζουν, εἶναι ἀρνητικὲς σκέψεις, «φαντάσματα», πού δημιουργοῦν προβλήματα».

Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ φιλοσοφία τῆς «Νέας Ἐποχῆς»! Ὅλα ἐπιτρέπονται... καὶ τίποτε δὲν ἀπαγορεύεται! Ἐπαναλαμβάνεται, δηλαδὴ, ἡ ἴδια γοητευτικὴ πρόκληση τοῦ Διαβόλου στοὺς πρωτόπλαστους, σ' ἀντίθεση μὲ τὸ νόμο τοῦ Θεοῦ: *Πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν, ἀλλ' οὐ πάντα συμφέρει*. (Α' Κορ. 10:23).

Ζή Κύριος Ὁ Θεός καί Ἀποκαλύπτει τὰς Μεθοδεύσεις Ἐναντίον τῆς Πίστεώς μας

Ἐκθέτων τοὺς Οἰκουμενιστὰς καὶ τοὺς Φιλοπαπικοὺς εἰς τοὺς Κόλπους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας!

ΠΗΓΗ: «*Ορθόδοξος Τύπος*», 16 Ὀκτωβρίου, 2009, Α.Τ. 1802, σελ. 8.

Τὸ Ἀποστολικὸν ἀνάγνωσμα τῆς παρελθούσης Κυριακῆς (*Συντ.*, 11^ης Ὀκτωβρίου, 2009) ἔλεγε μεταξύ ἄλλων ὅτι «αἰρετικὸν ἄνθρωπον μετὰ πρώτην καὶ δευτέραν νουθεσίαν, παραιτοῦ». Αὕτη εἶναι ἡ ἐντολὴ τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου.

Αὕτην τὴν ἐντολὴν δὲν τὴν ἐφαρμόζει ὁ Οἰκουμενικὸς Πατριάρχης καὶ οἱ φιλοπαπικοὶ Ἱεράρχαι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος. Ἀνεθέρμαναν τὸν διάλογον μετὰ τῶν Παπικῶν ἀπὸ τῆς ἐκλογῆς τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριάρχου εἰς τὸν θρόνον τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως.

Ἀντὶ ὅμως διὰ τῶν διαλόγων νὰ ὀδηγήσουν τὸν Παπισμὸν εἰς παραίτησιν ἀπὸ τὰς αἰρετικὰς του θέσεις, ὀδηγοῦν τὴν Ὀρθόδοξον Ἐκκλησίαν εἰς τὰς ἀγκάλας τοῦ Παπισμοῦ. Ἀντὶ νὰ παραιτηθῇ ὁ Παπισμὸς ἀπὸ τὴν αἵρεσιν, ὁ Οἰκουμενικὸς Πατριάρχης ἐπιχειρεῖ νὰ ἀποδείξῃ ὅτι ὁ Παπισμὸς ἐκφράζει τὴν Ἀλήθειαν, τὴν ὁποῖαν διακηρύσσει ἡ Ὀρθοδοξία. Εἰς τὴν προσπάθειάν του αὕτην δὲν ὑπολογίζει τίποτε.

Περιφρονεῖ τὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος. Περιφρονεῖ Καθηγουμένους Ἱερῶν Μονῶν. Περιφρονεῖ Μητροπολίτας. Περιφρονεῖ ρασοφόρους Καθηγητὰς Πανεπιστημίου. Περιφρονεῖ Καθηγητὰς Πανεπιστημίου. Περιφρονεῖ τοὺς Θεολόγους Μέσης Ἐκπαιδευσεως. Περιφρονεῖ τοὺς Ἱερομονάχους καὶ τὸν ἐντιμον κληρὸν. Περιφρονεῖ τὰ λαϊκὰ μέλη

τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Περιφρονεῖ τοὺς Ἱερούς Κανόνας. Συμπεριφέρεται ὡς Πάπας εἰς τὴν Ὀρθόδοξον Ἐκκλησίαν. Δημιουργεῖ διαρκῶς κρίσεις διὰ τὴν ἐξυπηρέτησιν τῶν προσωπικῶν του φιλοδοξῶν καὶ κέντρων ἀποφάσεων, τὰ ὁποῖα προωθοῦν τὴν Ἐνωσιν τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν, διὰ τῆς ποικιλίας τῶν δογμάτων. Ἐὰν ἐπιμείνῃ, θὰ ἀποβάλλῃ τὸν τίτλον τοῦ Πατριάρχου τοῦ Γένους τῶν Ὀρθοδόξων ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκείνου τοῦ Πατριάρχου τοῦ Γένους τῶν Ἑλλήνων. Ἡ προδοσία τῆς Πίστεως θεωρεῖται ὑπὸ τῆς συντριπτικῆς πλειοψηφίας τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ προδοσία τῆς Πατρίδος. Εἶναι καιρὸς νὰ προβληματισθῇ διὰ τὰ ἐπικίνδυνα βήματά του. καὶ νὰ ἴδῃ κάτι ἀκόμη. Ἥμπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι ὁ συντονιστὴς τῆς Ὀρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας. Ἀρχηγὸς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἶναι ὁ Χριστός, ὁ ὁποῖος εἰς πᾶσαν δύσκολον στιγμὴν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας

Του δίδει τὴν παρουσίαν του. Ὡς Ἀρχηγὸς τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τοῦ θανάτου ἀπέστειλε πρὸς τὸν μακαριστὸν Ἀρχιεπίσκοπον Ἀθηνῶν καὶ εἰς τοὺς φιλοπαπικοὺς Μητροπολίτας, οἱ ὁποῖοι τὸν συνώδευσαν εἰς τὸ Βατικανόν, παρὰ τὴν ἀπόφασιν τῆς Ἱεραρχίας τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος, τὰ

μηνύματά του ἐξ ἡμέρας μετὰ τὴν ἐπίσκεψιν των εἰς τὸ Βατικανόν. Ὅλοι ἐδέχθησαν τὴν ἐπίσκεψιν τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἄλλοι ὀλιγώτερον καὶ ἄλλοι περισσότερον.

Ὡς Ἀρχηγὸς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἰς τὴν δύσκολον αὕτην περίοδον, κατὰ τὴν ὁποῖαν ἡ κεφαλὴ τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας μεθοδεύει εἰς τὴν Κύπρον τὴν προδοσίαν τῆς Πίστεως, ἐφώτισε τὸν Καθηγητὴν Πανεπιστημίου κ. Τσελεγγίδη νὰ «βγῇ πολὺ μπροστά» καὶ νὰ ζητήσῃ τὴν παρέμβασιν τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους, ἀφυπνίζοντας ταυτοχρόνως τὸν πιστὸν λαὸν καὶ τὸν ἐντιμον κληρὸν δι' ὅσα μεθοδεύονται εἰς τὴν Κύπρον.

Καὶ συγκλονίζονται καὶ κλονίζονται οἱ πεπτοφαλαγγίται τοῦ Παπισμοῦ εἰς τοὺς κόλπους τοῦ Γένους τῶν Ὀρθοδόξων. Ὁ Κύριός μας ὡς Ἀρχηγὸς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἐφώτισε τὸν Μητροπολίτην Κηρυκείας κ. Παῦλον νὰ ἀποκρυπτογραφῆσῃ τὰς ἀποφάσεις, αἱ ὁποῖαι ἐλήφθησαν πρὸ ἔτους καὶ πλέον εἰς τὴν Κρήτην μετὰ τῶν Ὀρθοδόξων καὶ Παπικῶν. Συμφώνως μὲ αὐτάς, περιφρονοῦνται αἱ δογματικαὶ διαφοραὶ καὶ διακηρύσσεται ὅτι ἡ Ἐνωσις δύναται νὰ ἐπιτευχθῇ διατηρῶν ὁ Πάπας τὸ ἀλάθητον καὶ τὸ Πρωτεῖον του. καὶ δι' αὐτὸ εἰς τὴν Κύπρον συζητοῦν διὰ τὸ Πρωτεῖον, ὡσὰν ὁ Πάπας νὰ εἶναι ἐνεργὸν μέλος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας.

Ὁ Κύριός μας εἰς τὴν δύσκολον αὕτην περίοδον ἐφώτισε τοὺς συντάκτας τῆς «Ὁμολογίας Πίστεως κατὰ τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ», νὰ παρέμβουν καὶ νὰ ἀποκαλύψουν, ὅσα σημειώνονται ἐναντίον τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας μας εἰς τοὺς θεολογικοὺς Διαλόγους, ὑπὸ ἐκείνων, οἱ ὁποῖοι ὄφειλον νὰ τὴν ὑπερασπίζονται καὶ νὰ φυλάττουν Θερμοπύλας.

Ὁ Κύριός μας εἰς τὴν δύσκολον αὕτην περίοδον ἀποκαλύπτει τὸ θέλημά του, φωτίζων Μητροπολίτας, Καθηγουμένους Ἱερῶν Μονῶν, Ἱερομονάχους, Καθηγητὰς Πανεπιστημίου, θεολόγους, λαϊκὰ μέλη τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος νὰ σπᾶσουν τὴν σιωπὴν των καὶ νὰ κάνουν αἰσθητὴν τὴν παρουσίαν των, διακηρύσσοντες ὅτι ἡ Ἐνωσις, ἄνευ παραιτήσεως τοῦ Παπισμοῦ ἀπὸ τὰς αἵρέσεις του, δὲν θὰ γίνῃ.

Ὁ Κύριός μας, ὅμως, ἀποκαλύπτει καὶ τὴν ἀσέβειαν τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριάρχου ἔναντι τῆς νήσου τῶν Ἁγίων μας, τὴν Κύπρον, ἡ ὁποία εὐρίσκεται μισή, διότι κατέχεται ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἀττίλα. Εἰς αὕτην τὴν ἁγίαν, μαρτυρικὴν καὶ κατεχομένην Κύπρον ἀπεφάσισεν ὁ Οἰκουμενικὸς Πατριάρχης μετὰ τοῦ «Παναγιωτάτου καὶ Ἀγιωτάτου καὶ Θειοτάτου Ἀδελφοῦ» Πάπα νὰ διεξαχθῇ ὁ διάλογος διὰ τὰς ὀριστικὰς ἀποφάσεις διὰ τὴν προδοσίαν τῆς Πίστεως. Προφανῶς, διότι πιστεύει ὅτι ὁ Τουρκικὸς Στρατὸς κατέχει τὴν Κύπρον ἐξ αἰτίας θρησκευτικῶν διαφορῶν.

Εἶναι ἀσυγχώρητος καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικῶς καὶ ἐθνικῶς. Εἰς πρώτην φάσιν τὸν ἀντιμετωπίζομεν ὡς «Ἀττίλαν» τῆς Πίστεώς μας.

Ἡ Παναγία μας στὸν Πόλεμο τοῦ '40



Στὸ μέτωπο καὶ σ' ὄλη στὴ γραμμὴ, ἀπὸ τὴ γαλανὴ θάλασσα τοῦ Ἰονίου μέχρι ψηλὰ τὶς παγωμένες Πρέσπες, ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς στρατὸς ἄρχιζε νὰ βλέπει παντοῦ τὸ ἴδιο ὄραμα: Ἐβλεπε τὶς νύχτες μία γυναικεία μορφή νὰ Βαδίζει ψηλόλιγνη, ἄλαφροπερπατητή, μὲ τὴν καλύπτρα τῆς ἀναριγμένη ἀπὸ τὸ κεφάλι στοὺς ὤμους. Τὴν ἀναγνώριζε, τὴν ἤξερε ἀπὸ παλιά, τοῦ τὴν εἶχαν

τραγουδήσει ὅταν ἦταν μωρὸ κι ὄνειρευόταν στὴν κούνια. Ἦταν ἡ μάνα ἡ μεγαλόψυχη στὸν πόνο καὶ στὴν δόξα, ἡ λαβωμένη τῆς Τήνου, ἡ ὑπέρμαχος Στρατηγός.

Ὁ Τάσος Ρηγοπούλας, στρατευμένος στὴν Ἀλβανία τὸ 1940, ἔστειλε ἀπὸ τὸ μέτωπο τὸ παρακάτω γράμμα στὸν ἀδελφὸ του.

«Ἀδελφέ μου Νίκο:

Σοῦ γράφω ἀπὸ μία ἀετοφωλιά, τετρακόσια μέτρα ψηλότερη ἀπὸ τὴν κορυφὴ τῆς Πάρνηθας. Ἡ φύση τριγύρω εἶναι πάλλευκη. Σκοπὸς μου ὅμως δὲν εἶναι νὰ σοῦ περιγράψω τὰ θέλητρα μίας χιονισμένης Μόροβας μὲ ὄλο τὸ ἄγριο μεγαλεῖο της. Σκοπὸς μου εἶναι νὰ σοῦ μεταδώσω αὐτὸ πού ἔζησα, πού τὸ εἶδα μὲ τὰ μάτια μου καὶ πού φοβᾶμαι μήπως, ἀκούγοντας τὸ ἀπὸ ἄλλους, δὲν τὸ πιστέψεις.

Λίγες στιγμὲς πρὶν ὀρμήσουμε γιὰ τὰ ὄχυρά τῆς Μόροβας, εἶδαμε σὲ ἀπόσταση καμιά δεκαριά μέτρων μία ψηλὴ μαυροφόρα νὰ στέκει ἀκίνητη.

- Τὶς εἶ; Μιλιά...

Ὁ σκοπὸς θυμωμένος ξαναφώναξε:

- Τὶς εἶ;

Τότε, σὰν νὰ μᾶς πέρασε ὄλους ἠλεκτρικὸ ρεῦμα, ψιθυρίσαμε: Ἡ ΠΑΝΑΓΙΑ!

Ἐκείνη ὄρμησε ἐμπρὸς σὰν νὰ εἶχε φτερά ἀετοῦ. Ἐμεῖς ἀπὸ πίσω της. Συνεχῶς τὴν αἰσθανόμασταν νὰ μᾶς μεταγγίζει ἀντρευσύνη. Ὀλόκληρη ἐβδομάδα παλέψαμε σκληρά, γιὰ νὰ καταλάβουμε τὰ ὄχυρά Ἰβάν-Μόροβας.

Ἐπογραμμίζω πὼς ἡ ἐπίθεσή μας πέτυχε τοὺς Ἰταλοὺς στὴν ἀλλαγὴ τῶν μονάδων τους. Τὰ παλιά τμήματα εἶχαν τραβηχτεῖ πίσω καὶ τὰ καινούργια... κοιμοῦνταν! Τὸ τι ἔπαθαν δὲν περιγράφεται.

Ἐκείνη ὄρμουσε πάντα μπροστά. Κι ὅταν πιά νικητὲς ροβολούσαμε πρὸς τὴν ἀνυπεράσπιστη Κορυτσά, τότε ἡ Ὑπέρμαχος ἔγινε ἀτμός, νέφος ἀπαλὸ καὶ χάθηκε».

Ἐπίκαιρα Νέα

Οἱ «Γενναῖοι» Στρατιῶται Τῆς Τουρκίας...

Ἡ εἰδήσις ἐπὶ λέξει ἀναφέρει: Τουρκοκύπριος, ὁ ὁποῖος ἔδῃλωσεν ὅτι ἦταν ἓνας ἀπὸ τοὺς συνοδοὺς τῶν 320 αἰχμαλώτων ἀγνοουμένων τοῦ 1974, εἶπεν ὅτι σφαγιάστηκαν ἀπὸ Τούρκους στρατιῶτες μὲ λόγχες καὶ ξιφολόγχες, δυτικὰ τῆς Κερύνειας. Εἶπε μάλιστα ὅτι ἡ θάλασσα βάφτηκε κόκκινη ἀπὸ τὸ αἷμα τῶν αἰχμαλώτων.

Οἱ αἰχμάλωτοι εἶχαν ὀδηγηθῆ στὸ ἐν λόγω σημεῖο, προκειμένου νὰ μεταφερθοῦν μὲ πλοῖα σὲ φυλακὲς τῆς Τουρκίας. Οἱ Τούρκοι στρατιῶτες εἶχαν μόλις ἀποβίβασθῆ μὲ πλοῖο καὶ ἐπιτέθηκαν στοὺς αἰχμαλώτους μὲ ἄγριο τρόπο. Ἐδήλωσε ὅτι καὶ ὁ ἴδιος φοβήθηκε γιὰ τὴν ζωὴ του, διότι τὸ μένος τῶν Τούρκων στρατιωτῶν ἦταν τόσο μεγάλο, ὥστε ὑπῆρξε κίνδυνος νὰ σφάζουν καὶ τοὺς Τουρκοκυπρίους πού συνοδεύαν τοὺς αἰχμαλώτους...

Εἶπε ἐπίσης πὼς οἱ 320 Ἑλληνοκύπριοι ἴσως νὰ ἐτάφησαν σὲ κάποιον χῶρο κοντὰ στὸ ξενοδοχεῖο «Mare Monte» τῆς Κερύνειας, ἐνῶ ἡ σφαγὴ σημειώθηκε στὰ τέλη Αὐγούστου τοῦ 1974, δηλαδή, λίγες ἡμέρες μετὰ τὴν ὀλοκλήρωση τῆς δευτέρας φάσεως τῆς Τουρκικῆς εἰσβολῆς».

Ἐνας ἀκόμη κρίκος τῆς αἰμοσταγοῦς ἱστορίας τοῦ Τουρκοκυπιοῦ Ἔθνους! Ἀκόμη μία φρικιαστικὴ ἀποκάλυψις διὰ τοὺς ἀγνοουμένους Ἑλληνορθοδόξους ἀδελφούς μας τῶν ὁποίων τὸν φρικτὸν θάνατον πληροφοροῦμεθα μετὰ παρέλευσιν 35 ἐτῶν. Αὐτοὶ εἶναι οἱ «γενναῖοι» στρατιῶται τῆς Τουρκίας. Ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ χώρα των, ἡ ὁποία ἀναμένει τὴν εἰσδοχὴν της εἰς τὴν Εὐρωπαϊκὴν Ἐνωσιν!

Ἡ Βλάσφημος Εὐρώπη...

Βουλευτὴς ἑλληνικοῦ πολιτικοῦ κόμματος εἰσηγήθη τὴν ἀποποινικοποίησιν τῆς βλασφημίας τῶν θεῶν. Τώρα πληροφοροῦμεθα διὰ τοῦ ἀνωτέρω ἐντύπου, ὅτι: «μὲ ἀπόφασιν τοῦ Συμβουλίου τῆς Εὐρώπης ἡ ἐξύβρισι τῶν θεῶν ἀποποινικοποιεῖται καὶ γίνεται ἐλεύθερη ὡς ἔκφρασις τῆς ἐλευθέρου βουλήσεως τοῦ ἀνθρώπου!

Πρᾶξις ἀδιανόητος εἰς παλαιότερας ἐποχάς. «Ἡ βλασφημία τῶν θεῶν, σημειώνει ὁ σχολιογράφος, ἐθεωρεῖτο πάντοτε ἄμαρτία καὶ ἀσεβεία πρώτου μεγέθους. Καὶ τώρα, ἔκφρασις τῆς ἐλευθέρου βουλήσεως!» Καὶ συμπληρώνει: «Ἡ γηραιὰ Εὐρώπη ἐγήρασεν ἐν ἁμαρτίαις καὶ ἀσεβείαις μεγάλας Ἡ Εὐρώπη ἀρνήθηκε τὸν Χριστόν».

Ἡ Εὐρώπη ἀποχριστιανίζεται καὶ ἀποβαπτίζεται. Διακηρύσσει γυμνὴ τὴ κεφαλὴ, τὴν ἀθεΐα της, ὅπως ἐσχάτως συνέβη εἰς τὴν Βρετανίαν μὲ τὰ ἀθεϊστικὰ συνθήματα τῶν λεωφορείων.

Ἄλλ' ας τολμήσουν οἱ Εὐρωπαῖοι νὰ βλασφημήσουν τὸν Μωάμεθ! Μόνον τὸν Ἰησοῦν τολμοῦν οἱ «θρασύδειλοι» νὰ βλασφημοῦν ἐκ τοῦ ἀσφαλοῦς. Ἄς γνωρίζουν ὅμως, ὅτι *φοβερόν τὸ ἐμπεσεῖν εἰς χεῖρας Θεοῦ ζῶντος*. Μακρόθυμος, ἀλλὰ καὶ *Δίκαιος Ὁ Κύριος*.

THE HELLENIC RESISTANCE OF WW II

In memory of the heroic stand of the Hellenic people during World War II, our Brotherhood considered it proper to bring forth some historical facts. The Hellenic nation in the 1940s was a God-fearing faithful people who prized their freedom and conducted their affairs (including defending their lands) in God's name and with His Most Holy Mother as their protector. They serve as an example to the generations of our day. They gave honor to their heritage and validity to the words of the ancient father of tragedies, Aeschylus, when he said: "Because only we, contrary to the barbarians, never count the enemy in battle."

Greece, during WW II, was the only country that was forced to confront the armies of four countries simultaneously: Albania, Italy, Germany, and Bulgaria.

Duration of resistance (in days):

Greece: 219
Norway: 61
France: 43 (The superpower at the time)
Poland: 30
Belgium: 18
Holland: 4
Yugoslavia: 3
Czechoslovakia: 0
Luxembourg: 0
Denmark: 0

The Danes surrendered to one of Hitler's motorcyclist who was conveying Hitler's request to the Danish king for the crossing of the Nazi armies. The king, indicating submission, surrendered his Crown to the motorcyclist to take to Berlin and Hitler...

Total loses in population percentages:

Greece 10%
Soviet Union 2.8%
Holland 2.2%
France 2%
Poland 1.8%
Yugoslavia 1.7%
Belgium 1.5%

On 10 April 1941, after the Greek capitulation to Germany, the northern forts of Greece surrendered. The Germans expressed their admiration to Greek soldiers, declared that they were honored and proud to have as their adversary such an Army and requested that the Greek commandant inspect the German army in a demonstration of honor and recognition! The German flag was raised only after the complete withdrawal of the Greek Army.

A German officer of the air force declared to the commander of the Eastern Macedonia division group, Lieutenant General Dedes, that the Greek Army was the first army on which the Stuka fighter planes did not cause panic. "Your soldiers," he said, "instead of fleeing frantically, as they did in France and Poland, were shooting at us from their positions."

Some relevant quotes on/about the Greeks and the results of their fighting spirit in WW II:

- On the 28th of October 1940 Greece was given a deadline of three hours to decide on war or peace but even if a three day or three week or three year deadline were given, the response would have been the same. The Greeks taught dignity throughout the centuries. When the entire world had lost all hope, the Greek people dared to question the invincibility of the German monster raising against it the proud spirit of freedom. The heroic struggle of the Greek people... Against Germany's attack, after she so thunderously defeated the Italians in their attempt to invade the Greek soil, filled the hearts of the American people with enthusiasm and moved them to compassion. [Franklin D Roosevelt, US President 1933 - 1945]

- You fought unarmed and won, small against big. We owe you gratitude, because you gave us time to defend ourselves. As Russians and as people we thank you. [Moscow, Radio Station when Hitler attacked the U.S.S.R.]

- I am unable to give the proper breadth of gratitude I feel for the heroic resistance of the people and the leaders of Greece. [Charles de Gaulle, from a speech of his to the French Parliament after the end of WW II]

- Greece is the symbol of the tortured, bloodied but live Europe. Never a defeat was so honorable for those who suffered it. [Maurice Schumann, Minister of the exterior of France 1969-1973, member of the French Academy; from a message addressed from the BBC of London to the enslaved peoples of Europe on 28 April 1941, the day Hitler occupied Athens after a 6-month war against Mussolini and six weeks against Hitler]

- It would not be an exaggeration to say that Greece upset the plans of Germany in their entirety forcing her to postpone the attack on Russia for six weeks. We wonder what would have been Soviet Union's position without Greece. [Sir Harold Leofric George Alexander (British Field Marshal during WW II; paraphrased from a speech of his to the British parliament on 28 October 1941)]

- Regardless of what the future historians shall say, what we can say now, is that Greece gave Mussolini an unforgettable lesson, that she was the motive for the revolution in Yugoslavia, that she held the Germans in the mainland and in Crete for six weeks, that she upset the chronological order of all German High Command's plans and thus brought a general reversal of the entire course of the war and we won." [Sir Robert Antony Eden, Minister of War and the Exterior of Britain 1940-1945, Prime Minister of Britain 1955-1957, from a speech of his to the British Parliament on 24/09/1942]

- If the Russian people managed to raise resistance at the doors of Moscow to halt and reverse the German torrent, they owe it to the Greek People, who delayed the German divisions during the time they could bring us to our knees. [Georgy Constantinovich Zhoukov. Field Marshal of the Soviet Army, a quote from his memoirs on WW II]

• I am sorry because I am getting old and I shall not live long to thank the Greek people, whose resistance decided WW II. [*Joseph Stalin; from a speech of his broadcast by the Moscow radio station on 31 January 1943 after the victory of Stalingrad and the capitulation of German Sixth Army Field Marshal Von Paulus*]

• Until now we used to say that the Greeks fight like heroes. Now we shall say: The heroes fight like Greeks. [*Winston Churchill; from a speech he delivered from the BBC in the first days of the Greco-Italian war*]

• The word heroism I am afraid does not render the least of those acts of self-sacrifice of the Greeks, which were the defining factor in the victorious outcome of the common struggle of the nations, during WW II, for the human freedom and dignity. If it were not for the bravery of the Greeks and their courage, the outcome of WW II would be undetermined. [*Winston Churchill; from one of his speeches to the British Parliament on 24, April 1941*]

• The war with Greece proved that nothing is firm in the military and that surprises always await us. [*Benito Mussolini; from a speech he delivered on 10/5/1941*]

• For the sake of historical truth I must verify that only the Greeks, of all the adversaries who confronted us, fought with bold courage and highest disregard of death. [*Adolph Hitler; from a speech he delivered to Reichstag on 4 May 1941*].



A DOCTOR'S WISDOM

A worried woman went to her gynecologist and said: Doctor, I have a serious problem and desperately need your help! My baby is not even 1 yr. old and I'm pregnant again. I don't want kids so close together. So the doctor said: 'Ok and what do you want me to do?' She said: 'I want you to end my pregnancy, and I'm counting on your help with this.'

The doctor thought for a little, and after some silence he said to the lady: 'I think I have a better solution for your problem. It's less dangerous for you too.' She smiled, thinking that the doctor was going to accept her request. Then he continued: 'You see, in order for you not to have to take care of 2 babies at the same time, let's kill the one in your arms. This way, you could rest some before the other one is born. If we're going to kill one of them, it doesn't matter which one it is. There would be no risk for your body if you chose the one in your arms.'

The lady was horrified and said: 'No doctor! How terrible! It's a crime to kill a child!' 'I agree', the doctor replied. 'But you seemed to be ok with it, so I thought maybe that was the best solution. The doctor smiled, realizing that he had made his point. He convinced the mom that there is no difference in killing a child that's already been born and one that's still in the womb. **The crime is the same!**

TELEVISION: THE CYCLOPS THAT EATS BOOKS

By Larry Woiwode, from the February 1992 issue of "Imprimis," the monthly journal of Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, MI 49242.

From the Editor: Radio was once called "the treadmill to oblivion." The subject article reminds us that television has even greater potential for harm. For us Orthodox Christians, television's detrimental effect on spiritual life is all too apparent. Through this article, "Orthodox Heritage" offers its readers some moral and intellectual fortification in the battle to "turn it OFF." It comes this time from one of America's leading novelists, Larry Woiwode, who presented this lecture in 1991, at Hillsdale College's Center for Constructive Alternatives seminar, "Freedom, Responsibility, and the American Literary Tradition." Mr. Woiwode vividly described the profound changes wrought by this modern "Cyclops."



What is destroying America today is not the liberal breed of one-world politicians, or the IMF bankers, or the misguided educational elite, or the World Council of Churches; these are largely symptoms of a greater disorder. If there is any single institution to blame, it is, to use the cozy diminutive, "TV."

TV is more than a medium; it has become a full-fledged institution, backed by billions of dollars each season. Its producers want us to sit in front of its glazed-over electronic screen, press our clutch of discernment through the floorboards, and sit in a spangled, zoned-out state ("couch potatoes," in current parlance) while we are instructed in the proper liberal tone and attitude by our present-day Plato and Aristotle, Dan Rather and Tom Brokaw. These television celebrities have more temporal power than the teachings of Aristotle and Plato have built up over the centuries. Television, in fact, has greater power over the lives of most Americans than any educational system or government or church.

Children are particularly susceptible. They are mesmerized, hypnotized and tranquilized by TV. It is often the center of their world; even when the set is turned off, they continue to tell stories about what they've seen on it. No wonder, then, that as adults they are not prepared for the frontline of life; they simply have no mental defenses to confront the reality of the world.

The Truth About TV

One of the most disturbing truths about TV is that it eats books. Once out of school, nearly 60 percent of all adult Americans have never read a single book, and most of the rest read only one book a year. Alvin Kernan, author of "The Death of Literature," says that reading books "is ceasing to be the primary way of knowing something in our society." He also points out that bachelor's degrees in English literature have declined by 33 percent in the last twenty years and that in many universities the courses are largely reduced to reme-

dial reading. American libraries, he adds, are in crisis, with few patrons to support them. Thousands of teachers at the elementary, secondary and college levels can testify that their students' writing exhibits a tendency towards superficiality that wasn't seen, say, ten or fifteen years ago. It shows up not only in the students' lack of analytical skills but in their poor command of grammar and rhetoric.

I've been asked by a graduate student what a semicolon is. The mechanics of the English language have been tortured to pieces by TV. Visual, moving images—which are the venue of television—can't be held in the net of careful language. They want to break out. They really have nothing to do with language. So language, grammar and rhetoric have become fractured.

Recent surveys by dozens of organizations also suggest that up to forty percent of the American public is functionally illiterate; that is, our citizens' reading and writing abilities, if they have any, are so seriously impaired as to render them, in that handy jargon of our times, "dysfunctional." The problem isn't just in our schools or in the way reading is taught: TV teaches people not to read. It renders them incapable of engaging in an art that is now perceived as strenuous, because it is an active art, not a passive hypnotized state.

Passive as it is, television has invaded our culture so completely that you see its effects in every quarter, even in the literary world. It shows up in supermarket paperbacks, from Stephen King (who has a certain clever skill) to pulp fiction. These are really forms of verbal TV-literature that is so superficial that those who read it can revel in the same sensations they experience when they are watching TV. Even more importantly, the growing influence of television has, Kernan says, changed people's habits and values and affected their assumptions about the world. The sort of reflective, critical and value-laden thinking encouraged by books has been rendered obsolete. In this context, we would do well to recall the Cyclops, the race of giants that, according to Greek myth, predated man.

Here is a passage from the well known classicist Edith Hamilton's summary of the encounter between the mythic adventurer Odysseus and the Cyclops named Polyphemus, as Odysseus is on his way home from the Trojan Wars. Odysseus and his crew have found Polyphemus' cave:

At last he came, hideous and huge, tall as a great mountain crag. Driving his flock before him he entered and closed the cave's mouth with a ponderous slab of stone. Then looking around he caught sight of the strangers, and cried out in a dreadful booming voice, "Who are you who enter unbidden the house of Polyphemus? Traders or thieving pirates?" They were terror-stricken at the sight and sound of him, but Odysseus made shift to answer, and firmly too: "Shipwrecked warriors from Troy are we, and your supplicants, under the protection of Zeus, the supplicants' god." But Polyphemus roared out that he cared not for Zeus. He was bigger than any

god and feared none of them. With that, he stretched out his mighty arms and in each great hand seized one of the men and dashed his brains out on the ground. Slowly he feasted off them to the last shred, and then, satisfied, stretched himself out across the cavern and slept. He was safe from attack. None but he could roll back the huge stone before the door, and if the horrified men had been able to summon courage and strength enough to kill him they would have been imprisoned there forever."

To discover their fate, read the book... What I find particularly appropriate about this myth as it applies today is that first, the Cyclops imprisons these men in darkness, and that, second, he beats their brains out before he devours them. It doesn't take much imagination to apply this to the effects of TV on us and our children.

TV's Effect on Learning

Quite literally, TV affects the way people think. In "Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television" (1978), Jerry Mander quotes from the Emery Report, prepared by the Center for Continuing Education at the Australian National University, Canberra, that when we watch television "our usual processes of thinking and discernment are semi-functional at best." The study also argues "...that while television appears to have the potential to provide useful information to viewers—and is celebrated for its educational function—the technology of television and the inherent nature of the viewing experience actually inhibit learning as we usually think of it." And its final judgment is: "The evidence is that television not only destroys the capacity of the viewer to attend, it also, by taking over a complex of direct and indirect neural pathways, decreases vigilance—the general state of arousal which prepares the organism for action should its attention be drawn to a specific stimulus."

We have all experienced this last reaction:

"Dad, it's time to..."

"Go on, get out of here!"

"But Dad, Mom just fell down the..."

"Leave me alone; can't you see I'm watching the Super Bowl?"

How are our neural pathways taken over? We think we are looking at a picture, or an image of something, but what we are actually seeing is thousands of dots of light blinking on and off in a strobe effect that is calculated to happen rapidly enough to keep us from recognizing the phenomenon. More than a decade ago, Mander and others pointed to instances of "TV epilepsy," in which those watching this strobe effect overextended their capacities, and the New England Journal of Medicine recently honored this affliction with a medical classification: Video Game Epilepsy.

Shadows on the Screen

Television also teaches that people aren't quite real; they are images—grey-and-white shadows or technicolor little beings

who move in a medium no thicker than a sliver of glass, created by this bombardment of electrons.

Unfortunately, the tendency is to start thinking of them in the way children think when they see too many cartoons: that people are merely objects that can be zapped, or that can fall over a cliff and be smashed to smithereens and pick themselves up again.

This contentless violence of cartoons has no basis in reality. Actual people aren't images but substantial, physical, corporeal beings with souls. And, of course, the violence on television engenders violence; there have been too many studies substantiating this to suggest otherwise. One that has been going on for thirty years, begun by the psychologist Leonard Eron, began research on 875 eight-year-olds in New York State. Analyzing parental childrearing practices and aggressiveness in school, Eron discovered that the determining factor is the amount of TV parents permit their children to watch.

Eron's present partner in this extensive on-going study, University of Illinois professor of psychology Rowell Heusmann, has written: "When the research was started in 1960, television viewing was not a major focus. But in 1970, in the ten-year follow-up, one of the best predictions we could find of aggressive behavior in a teenage boy was how much violence he watched as a child. In 1981, we found that the adults who had been convicted of the most serious crimes were those same ones who had been the more aggressive teenagers, and who had watched the most television violence as children."

Where is this report? Buried in an alumni publication of the University of Illinois. In 1982, the National Institute of Mental Health published its own study: "Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the '80s." This report stated that there is "overwhelming evidence" that violence on TV leads to aggressive behavior in children and teenagers. Those findings were duly reported by most of the major media in the early 80s and then were forgotten.

Why do such reports sink into oblivion? Because the American audience does not want to face the reality of TV. They are too consumed by their love for it.

TV: Eating Out Our Substance

TV eats books. It eats academic skills. It eats positive character traits. It even eats family relationships. How many families do you know that spend the dinner hour in front of the TV, seldom communicating with one another? How many have a television on while they have breakfast or prepare for work or school?

And what about school? I've heard college professors say of their students, "Well, you have to entertain them." One I know recommends using TV and film clips instead of lecturing, "throwing in a commercial every ten minutes or so to keep them awake." This is not only a patronizing attitude, it is an abdication of responsibility: A teacher should teach. But TV eats the principles of people who are supposed to be

responsible, transforming them into passive servants of the Cyclops.

TV eats our substance. Mander calls this the mediation of experience: "[With TV] what we see, hear, touch, smell, feel and understand about the world has been processed for us." And when we "cannot distinguish with certainty the natural from the interpreted, or the artificial from the organic, then all theories of the ideal organization of life become equal. In other words, TV teaches that all life-styles and all values are equal, and that there is no clearly defined right and wrong..."

In the 1960s and 1970s, many of the traditional standards and morals of society came under heavy assault; indeed, they were blown apart, largely with the help of television which was just coming into its own. There was an air of unreality about many details of daily life. Even the "big" moral questions suffered distortion when they were reduced to TV images.

During the Vietnam conflict, there was graphic violence—soldiers and civilians actually dying—on screen. One scene that shocked the nation was an execution in which the victim was shot in the head with a pistol on prime-time TV. People "tuned in" to the war every night, and their opinions were largely formed by what they viewed, as if the highly complex and controversial issues about the causes, conduct and resolution of the war could be summed up in these superficial broadcasts.

You saw the same phenomenon again in the recent war in the Gulf. With stirring background music and sophisticated computer graphics, each network's banner script read across the screen "War in the Gulf," as if it were just another TV program. War isn't a program. It is a dirty, bloody mess. People are killed daily. Yet, television all but teaches that this carnage is merely another diversion, a form of blockbuster entertainment; the big show with all the international stars present.

In the last years of his life, Malcolm Muggeridge, a pragmatic and caustic TV personality and print journalist who embraced religion in later life, warned: "From the first moment I was in the studio, I felt that it was far from being a good thing. I felt that television [would] ultimately be inimical to what I most appreciate, which is the expression of truth, expressing your reactions to life in words. I think you'll live to see the time when literature will be quite a rarity because, more and more, the presentation of images is preoccupying."

Muggeridge concluded: "I don't think people are going to be preoccupied with ideas. I think they are going to live in a fantasy world where you don't need any ideas. The one thing that television can't do is express ideas.... There is a danger in translating life into an image, and that is what television is doing. In doing it, it is falsifying life. Far from the camera's being an accurate recorder of what is going on, it is the exact opposite. It cannot convey reality, nor does it even want to."

CORRECTING THE HEART

By St. Theophan the Recluse, translated from *"Pisma o Khristianskoi Zhizni,"* Moscow, 1908.



“I want everything to be IMINE” determines the greedy man. This is the second outgrowth from the root of evil. It reveals most noticeably the spirit of self-love which acts here as a kind of independent entity; the greedy man does not say a word, he does not take a step or make a move unless it is to bring him some advantage. Everything about him is calculated, every-

thing is so ordered, everything is motivated in such a way that time and place and objects and persons—in short, everything his hand or mind touches upon—bears their own related tributes into his coffers.

Personal gain or interest—this is the principal incentive which everywhere and always brings his entire being into a flurry of activity, and under its influence he is prepared to transform everything into a means to achieve his own ends: He will seek the highest ranks of dignity and honor if this is advantageous; he will accept the most difficult employment if it is more profitable than others; he will set his mind to endure any and every difficulty—he won’t eat or drink—if only his gain is realized. He is either mercenary or acquisitive or stingy, and only under the strong influence of vainglory is he able to love splendor and luxury. His possessions are dearer to him than life itself, dearer than people, dearer than the Divine commandments. His spirit is stifled by things; and he even lives through them and not of itself. Here, then, is the power and the sphere of influence belonging to this second outgrowth from the seed of evil—self-love! And who doesn’t have certain things which it would be as painful to part with as it would be to part with happiness?

“I want to live for my own pleasure,” says the carnal man. His soul is mired in the flesh and in feelings. He doesn’t think about heaven, about spiritual needs or the requirements of the conscience or about responsibility. He doesn’t want to, he cannot think of this. His experience is limited to various forms of enjoyment; he cannot do without them; they occupy his thoughts and conversations.

If the carnal man begins to please his palate, he becomes an epicurean; the play of colors cultivates his taste for elegant dress; a variety of sounds inspires pointless or annoying talkativeness; the need for food leads him to gluttony; the need for self-preservation—to laziness; other needs—to dissipa-

tion. Linked to nature through the flesh, the man whose soul is enslaved by his flesh drinks up pleasures from nature, in as many ways as there are functions in his body. And together, with these pleasures, he absorbs the essential spirit of nature—the spirit of involuntary, mechanical operation. Consequently, the more a person indulges in self-gratification, the more limited his circle of freedom. And whoever gives free reign to such indulgence may be regarded as an outright prisoner of his flesh.

Here, then, is how evil grows within us from a tiny, almost imperceptible seed. In the depths of the heart, as we have seen, lies the seed of evil—self-love. From it springs forth three branches, three variations, each filled with the seed’s power; self-importance, self-interest and carnality. And these three generate an innumerable multitude of passions and sinful inclinations. Just as the main trunks of a tree grow out into many branches, so, too, there arises within us a whole tree of evil which, taking root in the heart, later, spreads throughout our entire body, penetrates to the outside, and occupies our surroundings. One can say that a similar tree exists within everyone whose heart is in some way inclined towards sin. The only distinction is that in one person one branch is more fully developed, and in another person a different branch.

Why is it that for the most part we don’t notice this in ourselves and often think or even unashamedly say aloud: “What have I done?” or “What’s bad about me?” We don’t notice because we cannot. Sin won’t allow it. It is very sly and foreseeing. If the naked tree of evil presented itself before the mind’s eye, there is no one who would not be immediately repulsed. For this reason, sin hastens to clothe the tree with leaves, to cover its hideousness, and it covers it in such a way that the soul in which the tree grows can distinguish neither its roots nor its trunk nor even its branches. These leafy coverings are distraction and an excess of worldly cares.

The distracted person doesn’t like to dwell within himself; the person preoccupied with worldly concerns hasn’t a spare minute. One cannot, the other hasn’t time to take note of what goes on in his soul. With the first stirrings from sleep, their soul hurries out of itself: In the case of the first, it departs into a world of daydreams; in the latter it sinks into a sea of ostensibly necessary affairs. The present does not exist for them, and this essentially characterizes their activity. One prefers to live in a self-made world and touches upon reality only in part, unintentionally, superficially. The other, in his mind and heart, lives in the future. Everything he does he tries to finish as soon as possible in order to go onto the next; he begins this—and rushes towards a third. In general only his hands, feet, tongue, etc. are occupied with the present, while his thoughts are all directed towards the future. In such a state, how can they possibly discern what lies concealed in the heart?

Sin, however, is not content with this leafy covering alone, for it is not impervious to penetration; its leaves can be blown aside by the winds of misfortune and by inner shakings of the conscience, thereby exposing the tree's grotesque form. Therefore, sin creates of itself a kind of impenetrable covering, resembling stagnant murky water in which it submerges its tree together with its foliage. This covering is composed of ignorance, insensibility and negligence. We don't know the danger that threatens us and therefore we are unaware of it, and because we are unaware of it we give in to negligence.

Here in general terms is all that which we stand to change in ourselves; here is that broad field of activity in the holy podvig (spiritual struggle) of self-amendment! We must strip sin of its covering, chase from our souls negligence, insensibility, self-delusion, distraction and excessive busy-ness; we must chop off its branches: all carnal passions and inclinations; finally, we must extirpate its very root by chasing out self-love. How? By means of self-denial. This task is neither small nor simple.

The sinful uncleanness described above covers the soul not like dust which can be blown off with a breather air. No, it has penetrated our very being, it has grafted itself onto our being and become a part of us, as it were. For this reason, to liberate oneself from it is the same as to separate oneself from oneself, to pluck out an eye or cut off a hand. Such difficulty, however, should not overwhelm us; rather, it should rouse us from our negligence. He who earnestly desires salvation does not look at the obstacles to his goal; they only cause him to be more stalwart, to set to work with greater determination and to begin even more zealously the saving task of self-amendment.



The Christian struggle is glorious, for the prize is not something ephemeral, but it is eternal glory up in heaven! Blessed is he who is wise in God, for no account will be demanded of him, and he will not find himself in a difficult position when God calls him to give an account for his time on earth.

We waste time with no regret. When we leave this world, we shall realize the damage we have suffered by letting time escape from us. The days are passing with no reckoning. Realizing this saves us, even if it is only during the final days of our life.

From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain—from the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim"

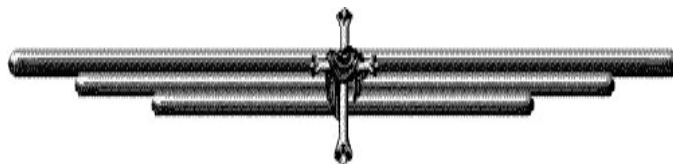
SANCTIFYING ONE'S WORK

Source: "Family Life" by Elder Paisios the Athonite, published by the Sacred Hesychastirion of St. John the Evangelist, Souroti, Greece (2002); translated from Greek by Fr. Luke Hartung – The Dalles, Oregon, U.S.A.

Everyone should, by his life and prayers, sanctify his work and become holy. Additionally, if he is an employer and has responsibilities, he should help his employees spiritually. If he has a good inner state, he sanctifies his work. For example, when young people go to study under a craftsman to learn his trade, he should also teach them to live spiritually. This will benefit himself, his employees and his customers, for God will bless his work.

Every profession can be sanctified. A doctor, for example, shouldn't forget that that which helps most in medicine is the Grace of God. Therefore, he should strive to become a receptacle of Divine Grace. A doctor who is a good Christian also helps the sick with his goodness and faith, because he encourages them to face their sickness with faith. To a patient with a very serious illness he can say: "Medicine has helped to this point—but remember from now on that there is God Who works miracles."

Or a teacher should try to instruct with joy, and to help the children in their spiritual rebirth, something which not all parents are able to do, even if they have good intentions. While teaching them to read he can also teach them to be good people. Otherwise, how will learning to read benefit them? Society needs good people who will do well in whatever profession they choose. A teacher shouldn't only pay attention to whether the students know how to read well, but they should also consider whether they have other good qualities, such as piety, goodness, and conscientiousness. God's grades don't always correspond to those of the teacher's. The four that one child receives might be a ten in God's eyes, while a ten for another might count as a four to God.



Once, when I was a young novice, I was in church listening to a reading from the prophet Isaiah, and at the words *Wash you, make you clean* (Is 1:16), I reflected, "maybe the Mother of God sinned at one time or another, if only in thought." And, marvelous to relate, in unison with my prayer a voice sounded in my heart, saying clearly, *The Mother of God never sinned even in thought*. Thus did the Holy Spirit bear witness in my heart to her purity. My soul trembles and is afraid when I consider the glory of the Mother of God.

St. Silouan of Mount Athos

THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS OF YOUTH

A talk delivered by Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky (+1936) on Sept. 5, 1899, to students entering the Kazan Theological Academy (translated from the Life and Writings of Blessed Anthony, Metropolitan of Kiev and Galicia, compiled by Archbishop Nikon Rklitsky, New York, 1968).

A certain householder planted a vineyard and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country...

(Mt 21:33)

Your first thought upon beginning the advanced course of theological study should concern not your own well-being but the welfare of that vineyard which is entrusted by the husbandman to the servants of the Word. We have been hired to do His work. When the time of the fruit draws near, He will ask us for it; if we are found to be careless workers we shall be miserably destroyed and He will let out His vineyard unto other husbandmen. This must be our first consideration, brethren, upon entering the walls of this academy; your life no longer belongs to you; from henceforth you must labor and live for the mighty work of God.

Now is this the kind of exhortation anticipated by young people who have at last attained the coveted title of “student” after ten years of obedience and a supervised life of younger years spent under the watchful eye of parents and teachers? Your picture of student life, of the academy, of the city of Kazan, is colored perhaps with visions of freedom, of having fun, of pursuing a bold and critical examination of ancient traditions. And very likely some of you young people are now thinking to yourselves: “You greet us with words about ascetic struggle, about our spiritual calling. What are we to understand by these words if not restraints, solitude, sitting over boring old books, even fasting and prostrations? We’ve seen enough of all that in seminary and at school. Let us have at least these next four years to give ourselves over to the prerogatives of youth. Perhaps in our own good time we shall come to the altar with drawn and somber faces and dedicate the remainder of our lives to ascetic labors. But for now, do not deprive us of our youth; let us be young, let us have our worldly ways and enjoy this period between our strict seminary years and the difficult life which lies ahead of us. Don’t cloud our entrance into the academy with reminders of our responsibilities, of our fealty to the Church and to the spiritual needs of the people. Of course, these reminders are just and the demands are lawful. But are those very different inclinations of a young heart—which so quickly fill it when it breaks away from its long confinement and enters the relative freedom of student life—so unnatural and unlawful?”

And so, my dear young friend, are you afraid of ascetic struggle, afraid of deprivations and restraints? But I have not yet spoken to you of such things; and if I should begin to speak of them, I would not refer to them as the goal of life,

but only as a means of attaining that which is holy, exalted and eternally satisfying. Look at those called by God and by nature to give physical birth, and you will be ashamed of your faintheartedness by comparison. Think of a young woman, liberated from the obediences of maidenhood and the scrutiny of her parents, who becomes the wife of a wealthy baron. There opens before her the prospect of a brilliant social life and freedom, but she prepares herself to be a mother. And if she is a worthy member of the family of man, her thoughts and feelings are fixed upon her children. She is indifferent to worldly enticements and does not grieve that in place of banquets, balls, and crowds of admirers she has to become a nursemaid, to wash diapers and to constantly be anxious for the welfare of her child—who may be sickly or abnormal. All these deprivations are compensated by a joyful awareness that she is giving her life to a beloved being, that she is living not for herself but for another.

And to you, beloved students of the highest knowledge of the divine and saving Truth, to you is now entrusted not the life of a single child, but the spiritual nourishment, the spiritual preservation, the spiritual life of a society, of a people, and of nations. In the face of such a lofty and absorbing task, is there any place for self-love, self-pity, laziness, sensual indulgence? Of course, it is not these base feelings which filled you with misgivings upon hearing my words. Your sense of regret concerned much higher, more refined gifts of youth: an enthusiasm for ideas, the happiness of friendships, a ready acquaintance with the life of society...

I do not argue that these are wonderful gifts. And you should know that the way of Christ does not exclude anything which is genuinely beautiful and exalted, and does not prohibit it to His followers. *All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me* (Jn 6:37), said the Lord, and only that which is foul and base is foreign to His disciples. Therefore, do not imagine that we want to deprive you of the best gifts of your youth; on the contrary, we are offering you the possibility of using these gifts to far greater advantage than happens otherwise, so that you can bring a more abundant harvest to the Owner of the vineyard.

What is youth in its relation to spiritual life? Through observation we have come to recognize three periods in a man’s life when the Lord shows particular attention to the soul, showering it with gifts and effecting its renewal.

This happens first of all in the childhood years which our Saviour glorified in saying *Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven*. At this age a human being first comes to an awareness of those lofty qualities in his nature which distinguish him from the world of dumb animals; feelings of love, compassion and truthfulness are aroused within that God created purity and beauty of soul with which a man comes into the world.

A second and more refined renewal of spiritual life occurs in the years of youth, when a person’s soul, freed from the

guidance first of parents and then of teachers, steps into life as a more or less independent being: it steps into life a second time as it were. In this period of youth the exalted soul is keenly aware of the God-created beauty of nature; it envisions the possibility of a holy, ideal life on earth; it is drawn irresistibly to acts of love and self-sacrifice...

There is a third renewal of the spirit and mind which comes to those who for a time abandoned their high calling but who never entirely lost the image of God. This renewal occurs when sickness or misfortune rouses the awareness of their approaching death and forces them to shake from their soul the deceit of sensuality and pride, those delusions which they exchanged for the holy add pure poetry of youth. This is that rebirth of wisdom and repentance experienced by some of the best representatives of our secular society who went astray in their youth but who regained this path of truth in their latter years.

May the Lord not deprive you, my dear listeners, of experiencing at least this penitential rebirth, although it lacks the strength and integrity which enrich those followers of Christ who submitted themselves to His yoke while still in their youth, One of the ancient prophets has well said:

It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. (Lam 3:27) Yes, these are blessed, for they enriched their spirit and their activity with those irreplaceable and never to be recaptured gifts with which God adorns the period of youth and through which every youth can—if he so desires—conquer those temptations of sensuality and self-love so commonly encountered at this stage of life. Therefore, let us now define more precisely the nature of these gifts and how they must be utilized in serving God and in refining one's own spirit.

The Youthful Ideal

A young person's soul possesses an abundance of empathy, a need to love. Left to the natural course of a spoiled life, this love usually turns either into sexual passion or into an aimless, romantic fantasy which later resolves into bitter disillusionment. But if a soul filled with an abundance of empathy is seized by zeal for God's truth, God's righteousness, then it will turn with love toward others similarly chosen by God's Providence; and here, within this warm fellowship, in the lively exchange of ideas and inner reflection, he will gain an immeasurably richer source of joy and fullness of life than that soul which is given over to carnal love. These comradely discussions concerning the common aims of life, these mutually invigorating conversations on matters of philosophy and ethics, bring one to forget about food and rest; they expand the heart and fill the soul to such an extent that in the student's own awareness they give his perfectly ordinary (an outside observer would say even boring) surroundings an aura of rare beauty and poetry Of course, seekers of sensual and material pleasures cannot understand this, but life itself offers this lesson.

Ask older people: what memories make them feel young at heart, inspire them to undertake some podvig or help them to oppose temptation? The answer lies in memories of friendships forged in student life, of inspired plans for working to improve society, of heartfelt discussions—naive perhaps but truly holy—in twilight hours or at night in the corridors of the academy or along the pathways of the academy grounds. And if such people also have memories of romantic conquests and love affairs which make such prey of reckless youth, as a person grows older such memories become burdensome and shameful, a fact well expressed by our national poet:

The fading diversions of youthful folly
Like a dim and drunken stupor rest heavily upon me;
The regret in my heart over days gone by,
Like wine, grows stronger with time.

The same thinker would consider himself happy indeed if in place of these burdensome memories, he had endowed his soul with memories of pure and wholesome friendships of youth. What a great advantage it would be to the work of God and the building of Christ's Church if from their youth its builders had delighted themselves in true friends, united in mind and heart in the study and mutual elucidation of God's truth, in a sharing dedication of their lives to the service of Christ.

And here youth has all the more to gain. If in the earthly realm it is able to take such pleasure in groundless and unrealizable fantasies, then in the realm of spiritual life—where sincere desire has a corresponding reality—where, as Christ said, there is not that grievous distinction between the poetic ideal and prosaic reality, *where among two or three gathered together in the name of the Lord, Christ Himself is present*—this youth is truly one continuous celebration, a stranger to vanity and free from those tormenting pangs of conscience and from that hopeless despondency and premature aging which is the fate of all seekers of sensual pleasures.

A Love of Knowledge

Enough has been said for now about this first characteristic of youth. Another gift, no less seductive for that youth who chooses the wrong path in life but likewise no less beneficial for the lover of truth—is defined by a vibrant love of knowledge and a pressing search for an integral and coherent world view, a search which is so much a part of the adolescent years. May God preserve us from leaving you in this state of curiosity. True, for many it resolves itself in a temporary cooling of faith, and in those educated in secular schools—even in a loss of faith.

But this is not because our divine truth fears the light, fears examination and the test of reason. No, it happens in those sad, though unfortunately not rare cases when, through the corrupting influence of self-love and self-will, a soul has been predisposed towards seeking out means of easing the conscience and freeing itself from all moral obligations. But if

this same youthful curiosity and thirst for knowledge is pure and sincere, if it does not close its ears to the inner voice of conscience and the prompting of his moral awareness, then that youthful boldness and independence of thought become not a hindrance for our young philosopher-theologian but, on the contrary, a decided advantage often lacking in an older scholar who has not taken care to preserve his mind pure and free of prejudice.

One often finds among older people a tendency to be one-sided, to be conditioned by former errors which they don't wish to admit, or by personal animosity or friendship with advocates of some particular point of view, or simply by mental laziness... A young person's thinking which is in the process of unfolding is free from this. If it remains cautious and preserved from high-mindedness it can always discover new, unnoticed aspects of a subject, and discover those mistakes which have become so conventional as to be accepted.

But perhaps some of you might think: what you are saying justifiably applies to every other branch of learning, but not to theology. What sort of work is there for independent thinking in this area where everything is already laid out, where one is left simply to memorize that which is handed down in generally accepted forms?

Unfortunately, this kind of talk is often heard in our academies. But I assure you that, quite the contrary, no branch of knowledge is in greater need of independent, creative minds than theology... Knowledgeable people are conscious of the persistent demand on the part of unbelievers and sectarians for theology to define the ethical value of our dogmatic beliefs and our canonical and ritual ordinances, for theology to give evidence of the link between the Creed and Christ's Sermon on the Mount, for it to demonstrate not only the lawfulness and truthfulness but the holiness of all we believe and of the order governing our spiritual lives,

This is a lofty and inspiring task; it is also extremely difficult and has scarcely been broached by academic inquiry. So, do not imagine that your intellectual energy, your desire for independent study, your hope to articulate something new—will not find worthy application in the field of theology...

And do you know what significance theological truth has for life today? It is immeasurably greater than in former times, at least with respect to church life in this country. Thirty years ago or more the theologian worked for a small circle of colleagues; for the majority of people, even among the educated ranks of society, his works were a luxury—not without benefit, of course, but something which was not deemed crucial to spiritual life.

This is because the moral consciousness of society and obedience to the Church at that time were guarded primarily by the active asceticism of its spiritual leaders—those Christian

heroes whose lives were an incarnation and expression Of the beauty and truth of God's revelation, who could say together with the divine Paul: *Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.* (I Cor 11:1).

Our times suffer from a deficiency of such spiritual luminaries, and today the attracting power of Christianity—at least in Russian and European society—is concentrated in Christian teaching: its truth, wisdom, holiness and beauty. For this reason the work of a Christian pastor in relation to those of little faith or a weakly believing or unbelieving society is the work of a theologian educator. And that theologian who is able to explain the moral dimensions of Christian beliefs and precepts, and to demonstrate the vanity and deception of the moral foundations of opposing systems of thought, is more highly esteemed and more beloved in the eyes of society than anyone who has attained success in the secular sphere.

We have been speaking until now about the natural, the human side of your calling, and about those gifts which your youth can bring to its advantage. But “unless the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it,” and no gift of nature is sufficient to execute successfully the work of God if it is not joined by a cooperating grace. Natural talents can only generate positive impulses and shine forth with some good ideas; but to create with patience and love some work of wholeness, to bring a youthful dream into a living reality, or to elevate a tender friendship of one's youth to the level of Christian brotherly love, to the level of a lone-suffering love of a teacher toward his student or of a pastor to his flock—these spiritual struggles are possible only for those who labor not alone, not on their own strength, but with the help of Divine grace. Only such a worker can say with the Apostle: *I labored more abundantly than them all; yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.* (I Cor 15:10).

Grace is given according to prayer. I would commend to you the words I heard more than once from our late hierarch, Archbishop Vladimir, who loved to ask young people for their prayers. “It is easier,” he said, “for a young person to ascend to God in genuine prayer than it is for an older person, for the soul of a youth is less oppressed by the world than that of someone well on in years if in his youth he was not diligent in prayer.”

This is perhaps the most valuable advantage of an unspoiled youth. Treasure it. If you wish to experience this period of youth at its best, you must defend yourself through prayer from all those negative characteristics which commonly mark this stage of your life: dissoluteness, cynicism, and stubborn self-will which so rapidly destroy what is genuinely youthful in a young person's heart and cause him soon to become a worn-out slave of the mundane world, a stranger to the tender feelings of a young heart and to that eager love of knowledge.

Unfortunately, these negative aspects mark a large number, if not a majority, of students in secular institutions. Forty or fifty years ago, when society was governed by a Christian worldview, every student was an idealist, an inspired worker in the enlightenment of society, someone with a broad education. Today, our youth are more apt to give in to the slightest prompting of their sensual desires; and if they are inspired by some endeavor in the field of scholarship or social work, this usually lasts no more than a year or two, if that long. They grow to disdain their religious heritage and, as if in the name of science, even deny the dogmas of the Faith.

Conversely, what an exemplary type of youth is produced by our theological academies, at least from among those of its students who utilize the gifts bestowed upon youth to work on their own moral perfection and to serve God and the Church. To give an example, Archbishop Vladimir followed the above described path from his student years and thereby brought great profit to the service of God and to the younger brethren. Furthermore, he was able to preserve a youthful disposition until deep old age. I'm sure that those of you who knew him will agree with this observation.

And so, my friends, when you hear the holy Word of God or our sinful human tongue remind you again and again that from henceforth you belong not to yourselves but to God and the Church, do not let your hearts be seized by feelings of despondency and sinful self-pity, do not gaze enviously upon those youths who are free from such obligations and who spend their days in vain amusements; **that is not youth but spiritual death and premature old age.**

The Lord has called us *to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.* (I Pet 1:4); He has entrusted us with tilling His vineyard and awaits from us fruit in its season. Amen.



O if we could only understand the great forbearance of God! ... In two minutes, God can shake up the world and change all people into believers—super-believers. How? All He has to do is turn the earthquake button... At eight on the Richter scale, the high rise apartment buildings will be falling upon each other like drunkards on the street. At ten, everyone will be screaming, “We have sinned; please save us.” They may even say, “We will all become monks!” But as soon as the earthquake is over—while still shaking, but standing—they will again run to the bouzouki clubs. Their return to God would not be from true repentance, but they would just say it temporarily to be saved from disaster.

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

(Prov 1:7)

If someone was to know the number of stars in the heavens and the names of the fish in the sea and the amount of the grass in the field and the habits of the beasts in the forest and would not have the fear of God, his knowledge is as water in a sieve. And before death, his knowledge makes him a greater coward than the completely ignorant.

If someone were able to conjecture all the thoughts of mankind and to foretell the fate of mankind and to manifest every mystery that the earth conceals in its depths and not have the fear of God, his knowledge is as milk poured into an unclean container from which all the milk is spoiled.

And in his hour of death, his wisdom will not shine even as much as a piece of charcoal without a flame, but his night of death will make his death even darker.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

How can he who has not begun correctly, finish correctly? Whoever started out on a wrong path from the beginning must turn back and must take-up the correct beginning, i.e., he must tread with his feet on the correct path. He who does not have the fear of God cannot have the love for God.

What are we talking about? He who has no fear of God has no faith in God. The greatest ascetics, those who mortified themselves and who for a period of forty or fifty years daily and nightly lived a life of mortification until death, were filled with the fear of God and these, the most sinless among mortals, cried out in their hour of death: “O God, have mercy on me a sinner!”

The fear of God is the salt of total piety. If there is not that salt then all of our piety is inane, devoid of qualities and lax. The fear of God girds the loins, girdles the stomach and makes the heart sober, restrains the mind and flogs self-will.

Where is repentance without the fear of God? Where is humility? Where is restraint? Where is total chastity? Where is patience? Where is service and obedience?

O my brethren, let us embrace this word as the holy truth: *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.* O Lord Almighty, implant Thy fear in our hearts.

To Thee be glory and thanks always. Amen.



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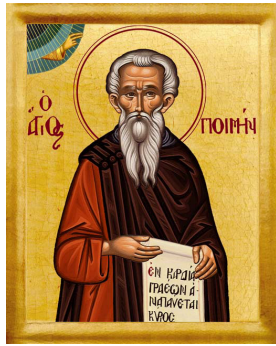
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GUIDELINES FOR ALL ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS

By Metropolitan Philaret Voznesensky, the New Confessor (+1985)



Metropolitan Philaret's sermons and advice to his spiritual children were always characterized by the simplicity in all his words which paralleled his action; there was never anything artificial about him. "Be, and not merely appear to be"—this testament of his famous namesake was incarnated in His Eminence throughout his earthly presence.

† † †

1. Remember, you are a son (daughter) of the Orthodox Church. These are not empty words. Remember the commitment this entails.

2. Earthly life is fleeting; one is hardly aware of the swiftness of its passing. Nevertheless, this transient life determines the eternal destiny of your soul. Do not forget this for a moment.

3. Try to live piously. Pray to God in church, pray to God at home—ferently, with faith, trusting yourself to God's will. Fulfill the holy and saving precepts of the Church, her rules and commandments. Outside the Church, outside obedience to her, there is no salvation.

4. The gift of words is one of God's greatest gifts. It ennobles man, lifting him above all other creatures. But how this gift is now misused by a corrupt humanity! Safeguard this gift and learn to use it as befits a Christian. Do not judge, do not speak idly. Avoid, like fire, bad language and seductive conversation; do not forget the words of our Lord and Saviour: *By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.* (Mt 12:37). Do not indulge in lying. Holy Scripture sternly forewarns: *The Lord shall destroy all them which speak a lie.* (Pss 5:4).

5. Love your neighbor as yourself, according to the Lord's commandment. Without love there is no Christianity. Remember, Christian love is SELF-SACRIFICING, and not egocentric. Do not miss an opportunity to show love and mercy.

6. Be meek, pure and modest in your thoughts, words and deeds. Do not imitate the profligate. Do not take their example, and avoid close acquaintance with them. Have no unnecessary dealings with unbelievers—unbelief is infectious. Observe meekness and propriety always and everywhere; avoid becoming contaminated by the shameless habits of today's world.

7. Fear vanity and pride; run from them. Pride caused the highest and most powerful angel to be cast down from heaven. Remember, 'thou art earth and to the earth shalt thou return...' Deeply humble yourself.

8. The fundamental task in life is to save one's soul for eternity. Keep this as the most essential task, the main concern of your life. Woe to those whose indifference and neglect bring their souls to eternal ruin.

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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]

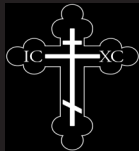
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PERFECT GOD AND PERFECT MAN

CHRIST IS BORN! GLORIFY HIM!

A Nativity Epistle by St. Justin Popovich.

God is born on earth, and moreover He is born as a man: perfect God and perfect man—the unique God-man. And He has forever remained as the God-man both on earth and in heaven. Indeed, the God-man is the first perfect man on earth. Perfect man? Yes, because only in the God-man is man without sin, without evil, without death, totally filled with God, and thereby with all divine perfections.

The God-man has demonstrated and proved this most convincingly: man is only a true man when he is completely united with God, and in everything and every way completely lives in God, thinks in God, feels in God, acts in God, is virtuous in God, is immortal in God, is eternal in God. Only and solely in God is man a man, a true man, a perfect man, a man in whom all the fullness of the Godhead lives.

We can analyze this fundamental, evangelic, Divine-human truth about man.

The soul of man? Only and solely as the Divine Soul in the God-man does it become and forever remain sinless, immortal, God-like, holy, perfect eternal.

The mind of man? Only and solely as the Divine Mind in the God-man does it become and forever remain sinless, immortal, God-like, holy, perfect, eternal.

The heart of man? Only and solely as the Divine Heart in the God-man does

it become and remain sinless, immortal, God-like, holy, perfect, eternal.

The conscience of man? Only and solely as the Divine Conscience in the God-man does it become and remain sinless, immortal, God-like, holy, perfect, eternal.

The will of man? Only and solely as the Divine Will in the God-man does our will become and forever remain sinless, immortal, God-like, holy, perfect, eternal.

The body of man? Only and solely as the Divine Body in the God-man does the body become and forever remain

sinless, immortal, God-like, holy, perfect, eternal.

The life of man? Only and solely as the Divine Life in the God-man does our life become and forever remain sinless, immortal, God-like, holy, perfect, eternal.

Everything that man is, and everything that is of man perfectly lives, works, thinks, feels, is hu-

man, immortal, divine, and eternal only and solely in the God-man and through the God-man. Only through the God-man Christ is man divine majesty and the highest value next to God in all worlds. For this reason God became man, and has remained the God-man for all eternity. With the God-man Christ, all that is God's has become man's, human, ours, so that each of us individually and all of us assembled together in the Divine-human body of Christ, the Church, might become god-men, having attained "to the perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:12-13).

Therefore Christmas, the day of the birth of the God-man, the Lord Jesus



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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.

If you wish to receive this periodical, please write or e-mail us with your address. We suggest to all that share our views and wish to assist us to donate \$24 per annum. This amount will greatly assist us in the costs it takes to bring these articles to you, as well as to aid in our other educational and philanthropic activities.

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Christ, is the greatest and most important day in the history of all the worlds in which man moves and lives. Truly this is *great joy*, truly the only true joy, the only eternal joy of a human being in all worlds.

The God-man? This is the most important Event of all the worlds of man: the Ultimate Event.

The God-man? This is the most important Justice of all the worlds of man: the Ultimate Justice.

The God-man? This is the most important Love of all the worlds of man: the Ultimate Love.

The God-man? This is the most important Good of all the worlds of man: the Ultimate Good.

The God-man? This is the most important Man of all the worlds of man: the Ultimate Man.

The God-man? This is the most important God of all the gods of man: the Ultimate God.

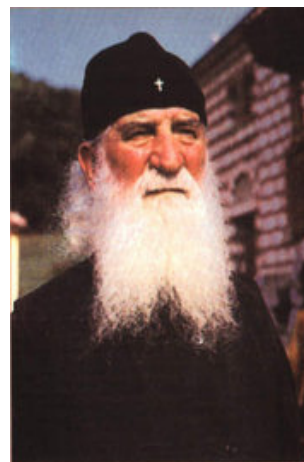


A man may seem to be silent, but if his heart is condemning others, he is babbling ceaselessly. But there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent, that is, he says nothing that is not profitable.

Abba Poimen the Great

THE MYSTERY OF KNOWLEDGE

By St. Justin Popovich (+1979), an excerpt from the chapter, ‘The Theory of Knowledge of Saint Isaac the Syrian.’



Man has always been fascinated by ultimate things—life, death, the origin of the world—and his discoveries in other fields of knowledge have given him confidence to assume that some day these mysteries will also yield to the power of his intellect. Such pride of mind, however, can only lead away from the truth, which, according to Orthodox teaching, is the aim and foundation of all true knowledge. How is such knowledge acquired? This a small

section of a longer essay by St. Justin Popovich (+1979), in which he distills the writings of Saint Isaac the Syrian on the Orthodox theology of knowledge.

† † †

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

There are also two sorts of faith: the first comes through hearing and is confirmed and proven by the second, “the faith of contemplation,” the faith that is based on what has been seen. In order to acquire spiritual knowledge, a man

must first be freed from natural knowledge. This is the work of faith. It is by the ascesis of faith that there comes to man that “unknown power” that makes him capable of spiritual knowledge. If a man allows himself to be caught in the web of natural knowledge, it is more difficult for him to free himself from it than to cast off iron bonds, and his life is lived *against the edge of a sword*.

When a man begins to follow the path of faith, he must lay aside once and for all his old methods of knowing, for faith has its own methods. Then natural knowledge ceases and spiritual knowledge takes its place. Natural knowledge is contrary to faith, for faith, and all that comes from faith, is the destruction of the laws of natural knowledge.

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

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

Faith can often *bring forth all things out of nothing*, while knowledge can do nothing *without the help of matter*. Knowledge has no power over nature, but faith has such power. Armed with faith, men have entered into the fire and quenched the flames, being untouched by them. Others have walked on the waters as on dry land. All these things are “beyond nature;” they go against the modes of natural knowledge and reveal the vanity of such modes. Faith “moves about above nature.”

The ways of natural knowledge ruled the world for more than 5,000 years, and man was unable to *lift his gaze from the earth and understand the might of his Creator until our faith arose and delivered us from the shadows of the works of this world* and from a fragmented mind. He who has faith *will lack nothing*, and, when he has nothing, *he possesses all things by faith*, as it is written: *All things whatsoever ye shall*

ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive. (Mt 21:22); and also; *The Lord is near; be anxious for nothing*. (Phil 4:6).

Natural laws do not exist for faith. St. Isaac emphasizes this very strongly: *All things are possible to him that believeth* (Mk 9:23), for with God nothing is impossible. To step beyond the limits of nature and to enter into the realm of the supernatural is considered to be against nature, as something irrational and impossible. Nevertheless, this natural knowledge, according to St. Isaac, is not at fault. It is not to be rejected. It is just that faith is higher than it is. This knowledge is only to be condemned in so far as, by the different means it uses, it turns against faith. But when this knowledge *is joined with faith, becoming one with her, clothing itself in her burning thoughts*, when it *acquires wings of passionlessness*, then, using other means than natural ones, it rises up from the earth *into the realm of its Creator*, into the supernatural. This knowledge is then fulfilled by faith and receives the power to *rise to the heights*, to perceive him who is beyond all perception and to *see the brightness that is incomprehensible to the mind and knowledge of created beings*.

Knowledge is the level from which a man rises up to the heights of faith. When he reaches these heights, he has no more need of it, for it is written: *We know in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away*. (I Cor 13:9-10). Faith reveals to us now the truth of perfection, as if it were before our eyes. It is by faith that we learn that which is beyond our grasp, by faith and not by enquiry and the power of knowledge.

There are three spiritual modes in which knowledge rises and falls, and by which it moves and changes. These are the body, the soul, and the spirit.

At its lowest level, knowledge *follows the desires of the flesh*, concerning itself with riches, vainglory, dress, repose of body, and the search for rational wisdom. This knowledge invents the arts and sciences and all that adorns the body in this visible world. But in all this, such knowledge is contrary to faith. It is known as *mere knowledge, for it is deprived of all thought of the divine and, by its fleshly character, brings to the mind an irrational weakness, because in it the mind is overcome by the body and its entire concern is for the things of this world*. It is puffed up and filled with pride, for it refers every good work to itself and not to God. That which the Apostle said, *knowledge puffeth up* (I Cor 8:1), was obviously said of this knowledge, which is not linked with faith and hope in God, and not of true knowledge.

True, spiritual knowledge, linked with humility, brings to perfection the soul of those who have acquired it, as is seen in Moses, David, Isaiah, Peter, Paul, and all those who, within the limits of human nature, were counted worthy of this perfect knowledge. *With them, knowledge is always immersed in pondering things strange to this world, in divine*

revelations and lofty contemplation of spiritual things and ineffable mysteries. In their eyes, their own souls are but dust and ashes. Knowledge that comes of the flesh is criticized by Christians, who see it as opposed not only to faith but to every act of virtue.

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

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

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

It is very difficult, and often impossible, to express in words the mystery and nature of knowledge. In the realm of human thought, there is no ready definition that can explain it completely. St. Isaac therefore gives many different definitions of knowledge. He is continually exercised in this matter, and the problem stands like a burning question mark before the eyes of this holy ascetic. The saint presents answers from his rich and blessed experience, achieved through long and hard ascesis. But the most profound, and to my mind the most exhaustive answer that man can give to this question is that given by St. Isaac in the form of a dialogue:

Question: What is knowledge? Answer: The perception of eternal life.

Question: And what is eternal life? Answer: To perceive all things in God. For love comes through understanding, and the knowledge of God is ruler over all desires. To the heart that receives this knowledge every delight that exists on earth is superfluous, for there is nothing that can compare with the delight of the knowledge of God.

Knowledge is therefore victory over death, the linking of this life with immortal life and the uniting of man with God. The very act of knowledge touches on the immortal, for it is by knowledge that man passes beyond the limits of the subjective and enters the realm of the trans-subjective. And when the trans-subjective object is God, then the

mystery of knowledge becomes the mystery of mysteries and the enigma of enigmas. Such knowledge is a mystical fabric woven on the loom of the soul by the man who is united with God.

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

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

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

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

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

STELLA THE *FOOL FOR CHRIST* AND GOD'S LITTLE SPARROW

The story of a modern-day fool for Christ, from the Greek Orthodox publication "Παρέμβασις," June 6, 2006, translated from Greek by K. N. (and the "Orthodox Outlet for Dogmatic Enquiries" website, <http://www.oodegr.com/>).

From the Editor: *It is rarely that we occupy such great percentage of our publication for a single article or story. However, with the great feast day of our Lord's Nativity upon us in just a few weeks, we could find no other story from our days that can move the human heart as much as this one. We pray that you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed bringing it to you.*

† † †

This is the story of Stella, a little old lady, unknown by most people around her, who lived her life as free as a sparrow, but entirely devoted to God.

On the 3rd of June 2005 our beloved Stella was killed in a car accident.

She bore all the signs of a "fool for Christ," with an inner life of spirituality.

It was her will to remain homeless; she lived on the streets; at nights—in summer and in winter—she slept on park benches, in hovels and in the waiting rooms of Hospitals, but she was always filled with a love for God, for the Saints and for unfortunate people. Her clothes were always clean. Whatever earnings she had, she would dedicate to the requirements of charity. She did not like to be praised, and when they did praise her, she would act "silly"...

She came from Constantinople; she had acquired a good education; she handled the Greek language extremely well, and she was also familiar with the French language, and lately was also trying to learn Italian.

Her departure from this life was exactly as she had desired it: with a violent death, and as a stranger among strangers. Nobody had gone to identify her. They interred her without a funeral service, because they didn't know who she was. But all this missing information became known in a miraculous manner a year later; that was also when her funeral service was performed. I was honoured to perform her memorial service also. After her memorial service, in the guest hall of the Holy Monastery of Pelaghia, Mrs. Militsa Pisimisi-Loukidou, a lawyer, and Mrs. Chrysoula Mandas, a dentist, narrated all they knew about Stella, who was truly a person of God.

In this issue, we are publishing the text by Mrs. Militsa Pisimisi-Loukidou, which was written in collaboration with Mrs. Chrysoula Mandas also, outlining only a portion of her blessed life, while in the next issue we shall be publishing the remembrances of Stella—"God's little sparrow"—by the Monastic community of the Sacred Monastery of Pelaghia, who was unknown to the world but certainly well known by

God—who had lived "alone, with only God." It is my belief that this narration will be beneficial to those people who live their lives seeking unbridled bliss, laden with a neurotic mentality and constantly complaining about the things they would have liked to possess.

The following words of Christ were applicable in her case: "Observe the fowl of the sky, how they neither sow nor reap nor collect in barns, and how your heavenly Father sustains them; are you not far different than them?" (Matthew 6:26).

Finally, Man "is" not what he "has"; he "has" what he "is."

The ever-memorable Stella, whom I was exceptionally blessed to meet, is a positive protest for all those who are "insured."

+ Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos

† † †

GOD'S LITTLE SPARROW

By Militsa Pisimisi-Loukidou, Lawyer, Employee of the Labour Ministry.

I became acquainted with Stella in the summer of 1979 at a chocolate factory. She was an ordinary worker; she worked very hard—more than 9 hours a day. Everyone exploited her, everyone gave her orders and she would obey immediately, and always with a smile. Stella, here! Stella, there! The owner-employer was very fond of her because of her obedience and her diligence.

To most of the other workers, she was "stupid Stella." Her face always shone, her lips were always murmuring something. When you listened carefully, you would hear her saying *Glory to You, O Lord*.

Quite often our supervisor would assign a chore that we were supposed to undertake together, so I was given the opportunity to savour her kindness, her love... I remember that she would constantly say the prayer, then suddenly burst into laughter and turn her dear head upwards, towards the sky. That's when her face glowed.

Glory to You, O Lord was what you would frequently hear proceeding from her mouth.

That chocolate factory produced various kinds of chocolates. Its more inferior range of chocolates would be exported to countries in Africa. That upset Stella very much. Once, when we were working together in the packaging sector, I remember Stella concentrating her attention over those boxes and praying "for the little black children who would be eating those chocolates."

Whenever we were wronged in our workplace—they used to "whittle away" our wages—she would never respond, never criticize, never react. Stella was for me a little harbor of comfort; I, however, used to react against every injustice. To my comments, she would simply reply with "Ah, Militsa!" I don't remember her ever putting a single chocolate in her mouth (I would remind you that she worked in a chocolate factory!) Even though most of the employees regarded her as "crazy,"

still, they respected her and would always wonder how she managed to work so efficiently.

Stella never participated in our discussions; she was with us, but at the same time, she abstained from comments, from unnecessary talk. Very often, when she was asked to give her opinion, she played the fool. I had noticed that she did that on purpose. For all worldly things, she was crazy—a lunatic; but when you asked for her assistance at work, her tiny hands would move tenderly in assistance; if it were possible, she would even offer to do all the work for you.

This is the environment in which we became acquainted. I had so much respect for her that I never asked her about her private life. She told me herself that she came from Constantinople. It was surprising how all those who knew her had (somewhat thoughtlessly) characterized her as “crazy,” when I had sensed that they were wrong to do so. The truth is, I had perceived very early along that Stella wanted them to regard her as “crazy.” There were times when the two of us happened to be alone, talking quite normally, and when someone else approached, she would start to talk entirely incoherently. She always gave me a feeling of serenity, so the others’ judgments were entirely indifferent to me...

I worked at that chocolate factory only for a short period of time. I would often encounter Stella on the street, and she would always be saying that prayer—in her heart and with her lips. She used to say the prayer audibly, but in a very soft voice. Every now and then she would come to my house. During that time, she used to live in the laundry room of that two-story home.

The years passed, I lost track of her, but I always brought her to mind with a sweet remembrance and nostalgia.

Later, as a married woman, I saw her again at the Holy Monastery of the Nativity of the Theotokos (Hossia Pelaghia) at Akrefnion. We had gone there with my husband and were to stay at the Monastery overnight, to be there for the Divine Liturgy early next morning. The nuns there very politely apologized to us, explaining that they did not have any available room to put us up for the night on account of the construction work that was going on, and that we would have to share the cell where “a very eccentric lady” was staying. I accepted. They led me to that cell, where to my surprise I realized that the “very eccentric lady” was my very dear Stella, whom I hadn’t seen for years. My joy could not be described. We had remained embraced for quite a long time, when I suddenly heard the nuns shouting out: “Eldress, come and see Stella and Militsa embracing each other!” We were all overjoyed. That evening, Stella acted like a little child out of

sheer joy. She kept clapping her hands, she laughed, she kept crossing herself...

—My Militsa, I am overjoyed that you are married. You know, I prayed a lot, that you would get married. I am so glad, so glad. I am only sad that you are suffering from your legs. I know you have a problem. Patience... Prayer... (you must bear in mind that Stella did not know that I had suffered a chronic and painful problem with my legs). Your husband’s position will change, but don’t worry—it will be for the better. (And indeed, entirely unexpectedly, my husband was obliged to move his veterinarian practice to another place).

That night, we spoke of many things. The next day, while Stella was some distance away, I told the nuns that I had perceived she was a holy soul... The next day, Stella left the Monastery. She had perceived what had been said. She did not want

you to praise her. When we met again at a later date, she reprimanded me very austere-ly for having praised her. I was taken aback, because I had not said anything in front of her. And yet, she knew I had praised her...

Another time, she had said to me: “I can’t stand the honour that the Eldress is bestowing on me. Look what she did—she recently made me dine together with them—with all those holy souls! Who am I?... Oh no, no, no Militsa! .”

We lost track of her for a long time after that. The Eldress would call us on the phone and ask us if we had seen Stella. At the time, I had realized that if I ever wanted to see her again, I had to stop talking about her.

Stella had become homeless. She had retired from her job and had been allocated the minimum pension by our Social Services (about 411 Euros per month), which she would distribute to the poor, to prisoners in jail, to the Overseas Missions etc. She was now living on park benches, in hovels, in deserted country chapels, on stairs, in unfinished buildings. She had personally entrusted this information to me.

Pressured by the Eldress and myself, she had come to us—during heavy winter weather—and stayed with us. She always asked to be lodged in the lowliest part of the house.

I remember very nostalgically that whenever we did offer her the hospitality of our home, serenity and light prevailed, and everything was peaceful. When my husband would come to join us, Stella would depart; and whenever he addressed her, she never replied. She delighted in eating plain tomato soups that contained no oil. She incessantly glorified the Lord and her soul overflowed with gratitude, with a continuous “thank You, thank You.”



Many times at night, on the pretext that I was tired, I would ask her to recite the Evening Prayers. It is impossible for me to describe what occurred when she began to pray. Her expression gradually changed, her petite face would light up and she would entirely forget herself in her glorification of God. I would leave her and go off to sleep.

One time, while thinking of her with compassion “wandering about like a little sparrow in the streets” she looked at me suddenly and said: “Don’t worry about me. It is the will of God that I sleep on park benches. I am just fine; I am very happy. You know, I even sew my own clothes on those park benches (Stella was also an excellent seamstress). For example, I had a very nice time at Easter. On Easter Saturday I went and bought some lamb, I put it in a little confectionery pan, I gave it to the bakery and they baked it for me. I hid it under the bench and the next day I celebrated Easter on my park bench, happy and pleased, because my Priest had also given me a red-dyed Easter egg. So don’t worry about me. No, no, because I am under the shelter of our Most Holy Mother.”

Another time, she narrated to me that she had gone and washed her hair in the bathroom of the Municipal Health Center. The employees there saw her and reprimanded her severely. Stella did not accept their reprimand, arguing that she was not stealing anything—not the water, nor the soap—because as a worker she had been consistently paying her dues to the Social Security authorities. She spoke in a very bad manner to them and they called the Police, so Stella was taken to the Police station. This was how she narrated the dialogue between her and the Police Chief:

“Mister Police Chief, forgive me for tiring you, but please listen to me. I am homeless, I have nothing of my own. See, all I have is this Social Security Medical Coverage Booklet which verifies that I have paid my dues to them. The Health Center where I washed my hair belongs to the Social Security organization, therefore I have a right to it. When I am inside a Social Security building, I feel as though I am in my own home. Please forgive me.”

Police chief: “You can leave, but next time you wash your hair, make sure that nobody sees you. Now go on your way.” She left, glorifying God and with gratitude towards the Police chief.

She had slept in hospital lounges many a night. Or rather, we should say that she pretended to sleep, because as soon as things calmed down in the hospital, she would hurry to the lonelier patients who were in need of help and would tend to them, but, as soon as she sensed that a third person had noticed her, she would begin to display her “craziness.”

On numerous mornings while on my way to work (around 6:30 - 7 am) I would run into her as she was leaving the Accident Center Hospital, and when I pressured her into telling me why she wouldn’t come to my house to stay, she confessed that she loved the Saints very much; that she regarded them as

her friends, her relatives, and would rush to their feast-days, to the festivals, and was so happy when they also distributed food there. She would go on various pilgrimages during the entire year. On the Myrrh-Bearers’ Sunday she would be in Mantamados (on Lesbos island) for the feast-day of the Archangel Michael, then in Aegina island for Saint Nektarios, at Nafpaktos for Saint Paraskeve, etc.. Indicatively, I would like to mention the following: Once, she had gone to Saint Paraskeve at Nafpaktos and had acted like a little child, as she herself described it. She was very fond of the Reverend Hierotheos (Vlachos), whom she regarded as someone very close to her; she was so happy to watch him officiating in his splendid priestly attire and to listen to him speaking so beautifully. She had a great deal of respect for him. She was so proud that he had spoken to her and had given her his blessing at the Monastery at Akrefnio. She rejoiced over him, as she used to say.

All of Stella’s narrations were enjoyment and relaxation for me. I had been observing an elderly woman feeling and expressing herself like a little child.

One time, we hosted a celebration at our house, with quite a few guests. Suddenly, Stella showed up. She seated herself, and I went and seated myself right next to her. Among the guests was a couple who were facing very many problems, which I was aware of. Stella was “in her own world,” whispering the prayer and simultaneously telling me in a low voice what was going on with that couple—what was wrong with them—but to the other guests she would say irrelevant things or just smile at them. But she was always focused on the prayer. Most of the people present thought she was “nuts,” but that was exactly what Stella wanted, so that they wouldn’t understand her.

It was August 12th, 2004. I was in my office, and I was to travel to Lesbos island on that day for my summer vacation. All morning, I was tormented by a trivial detail—my mind was “stuck” as we commonly say. I didn’t have a key chain to hook on my spare keys. I was going to give my neighbours these keys so they could come and water my garden while I was away on holiday. Suddenly, around lunch time, my door opened and Stella appeared, soaked in perspiration, dead tired and panting. She said: “Here, take it. I was at Omonia Square, and she told me to bring you this key chain.” I was stunned. When I asked her who told her to bring it to me, she mumbled “the Holy Mother” at first, but then she began her incoherent rambling, her “crazy” act. She had purchased that key chain at the Monastery, and on it was a depiction of our Holy Mother. To my insistence that she remain a little longer with us to rest herself, to have some refreshment, she sat down on the couch and began to tell me things about herself. That was when she told me: “My Militsa, I will die on the streets, alone. No-one will hear about it—no-one, no-one...” Those words hurt me deeply, so I told her somewhat

forcefully: “My Stella, please, I want you to tell me about it. I want to learn about your departure,” as I hugged her. After that, she stopped talking for several minutes. Then, suddenly, she turned and looked at me with a tender gaze full of love and said to me: “My Militsa, you will hear about it, you will hear about it.”

She stayed at my place for the last time, in October of 2004. She had pains in her leg at the time and was forced to limit her walks. I happened to have offered hospitality at my place during that period to a person who was finding it difficult to tolerate her presence, especially during her evening prayer, because she went to bed early and would get up late at night and begin to chant in a loud voice. We would often hear her repeat the words: *Liveth, the Lord God*.

So, in view of this problem, a friend of ours—Chrysoula—offered to let her live in a small apartment which remained vacant after the death of her parents. Stella was happy to be living in a house near people with love and understanding—especially now that she was having trouble with the pain in her legs. She stayed there, until May of 2005. On the 1st of June 2005, Chrysoula saw her leave the house. We lost all traces of Stella after that day.

We began to worry eventually, but because she regularly used to disappear, we believed that she would show up again. Every now and then, we used to communicate with the Eldress—Chrysoula and myself—in the hope of learning news of Stella. The Eldress would always say: “Go and look for her and find her.” But we were convinced that she had left on a trip somewhere and would be returning.

After Easter of 2006 one evening, very late at night and with my family sound asleep, I lay down and fell asleep immediately—unusual for me—and was awakened just as quickly (I verified this, by looking at the clock) by a powerful dream: I saw Stella underneath a beautiful tree, standing upright and leaning lightly against its trunk, looking very youthful and exceptionally beautiful and sweet, and she was looking at me with an infinitely warm gaze. I felt my soul releasing a cry that reached the heavens and tore through my chest: “My Stella... my Stella... my Stella...” And I ran to embrace her, with my arms outstretched, but when I came near the tree, she vanished and in her place stood a lit, pure white Easter candle, which radiated a wonderful light all around and I could see its flame rising straight up into the sky. Then I noticed on the ground—right next to the candle—a newspaper clipping that showed a horribly mangled body, as though from a ghastly automobile accident...

An unbearable message pierced my being: “Stella is dead!” I awoke, overcome by mixed feelings: immense joy at Stella’s appearance and the light of that candle, and terrified by the photo that I saw in the newspaper clipping. I wanted to wake up my husband Dimitri, to tell him about Stella—the “little sparrow” as we used to call her, not only because she lived “as

a bird living alone on a rooftop,” but also because her walk resembled a sparrow’s. But something powerful kept me from waking him. The next day, I rang the Eldress and Chrysoula and I told them about the dream. They both recommended that we try to locate Stella. From that moment on, we commenced our agonized search. Traffic police, hospitals, military police, morgues...

Chrysoula discovered that on the 3rd of June 2005 and at 6:10 pm an unidentified woman (sparrows don’t have names!) was killed in an automobile accident, near her house. Her death was instantaneous. All the research proved that the unidentified woman was indeed Stella. She was run over while crossing the road, by a car with an Army officer who was driving at a dangerous speed. She was crushed. Only her face was discernible (as shown in the Traffic Police photos).

Stella’s body remained in the “Aesclepion” Hospital until the 18th of June 2005 and was then transferred to the Central Morgue of the Popular Hospital of Athens, where it remained among the unclaimed bodies until the 20th of July 2005, after which, it was released for interment. The funeral office that handled the interment informed us that the Funeral Service was not performed; only a Trisagion prayer over the grave.

It should be noted that all of us who were involved in locating her would speak to her in our prayers, saying: “If you can hear us, if you are in God’s favour, lead us, help us...” And help us she did; we were led to her “nonexistent” grave which was overgrown with weeds, at the easternmost end of the Zographos district cemetery, marked with the number 8915...

Forty days after the feast of Easter, a year after her repose, Stella’s funeral service was performed in the Holy Temple of the Life-Giving Fount, where she used to celebrate during the Paschal period. The priest had said about Stella: “She had her crazy behavior, but she said correct things and she always came here laden with food for the poor, with sacramental bread, oil, and wine for Holy Communion... she had even commissioned the icon of Saint Marina to be painted in our Church...”

On the 3rd of June 2006 her annual memorial service took place—with her very “favorite bishop,” Metropolitan Hierotheos as celebrant—at the Monastery of the Nativity of the Theotokos (Hossia Pelaghia), at Akrefnio.

In one of our last encounters, she had said: “This life has made me feel complete. The Lord has given me everything. Only one wish has not been fulfilled: I wanted to baptize two children, to which I would have given the names of Saint Nektarios and our Holy Mother, but nobody wanted me as a godmother.” When I told her that I would try to baptize two children in her place—and in fact, that when they grew up I would speak to them about “their true godmother”—she was overjoyed and exclaimed: “Now I am at peace. I am ready to leave.”

STELLA'S HANDWRITTEN NOTES

Handwritten notes in Greek: Τίποτα κατέβα ναρό δέν... εὐραγαταί... ἀνθρώπων... ἀγαθὰ... ἀποφασίζω...

Nothing, I have done nothing good and proper in my life. If I know or read or study or write the Greek language of my Homeland or whatever else, small or big, is it beneficial to my fellow-man?"

Others have done many good things, and they do them entirely noiselessly, with patience. With God's help, truly great things. Liveth, the Lord God. With His help, I shall not despair. He will not abandon me in despair. I have not done anything right. I have thought of nothing correct. I am guilty, deserving many punishments.

Handwritten notes in Greek: Μακάρι... καὶ τὸν... εὐχάριστον... εὐχαριστῶ... εὐχαριστῶ... εὐχαριστῶ... εὐχαριστῶ...

Handwritten notes in Greek: Ἡ ἐλπίς μου εἰς Θεόν... καὶ ἐν τῷ... καὶ ἐν τῷ... καὶ ἐν τῷ... καὶ ἐν τῷ...

God is my hope for everything. He will Never be victorious, and in no way, that enemy of my soul. Stylianitsa.

In the care of GOD. Yes, of CHRIST. "I am a foreigner and a sojourner on Earth." My Hope in You makes me conquer opponents.

Handwritten notes in Greek: ἘΣΤὴν ΜΕΡΙΜΝΑ ΤΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ... ΝΑΙ ΤΟΥ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ... Ἐταπεινωμένος καὶ παρεπίδημος εἶμαι ὅτι γὰρ 77... Ἡ ἐλπίδα μου εἰς Σένα... μὲ ἡμᾶν... ἀντιπάλους...

Handwritten notes in Greek: ΘΕΕ ΜΟΥ ΣΕ... ΕΥΧΑΡΙΣΤΩ... ΧΡΙΣΤΕ ΜΟΥ... Ἁγία Αἰματερίνη... Πρεσβυτέρα... Ἁγία Στυλιανὲ... ἀντιπάλους...

My GOD, I THANK YOU. My CHRIST. Saint Catherine, intercede for me, 25 November. Saint Stylianos, 26 November.

THE FREEDOM OF A FOOL FOR CHRIST

Fools for Christ belong to a category of people who decide to pursue a difficult path. Albeit city dwellers, they feign madness. They do things that a madman would do, but those acts of theirs have an intrinsic content. "Fools for Christ" have noetic energy to a sublime degree; albeit in full control of their mental faculties, they purposely choose a grueling path and way of life...

The lifestyle of fools for Christ is a perfect one, perhaps even an extreme: implementation of in-Christ folly, which is the quintessence of the whole spirit of the Gospel. Not everyone can, of course, pass himself off as a fool for Christ because it happens to be a special charisma and a special blessing given by God. However, it is possible for everyone to experience in-Christ folly, in a more moderate form and adjusted proportionately; this can be perceived, by the fact that the lifestyle of the Church—a life of love, of faith, of self-restraint—aspires to and is inspired by another polity: one that is clearly contrary to human polities. This way of life that the Church has cannot be easily comprehended by those who have logic and the physical senses as the hub of their life. Christian life does not abolish logic and the senses, it just moves beyond them.



A servant of the Lord is he who in body stands before men, but in mind knocks at Heaven with prayer.

Do not say that you are collecting money for the poor; with two mites the Kingdom was purchased.

An angel fell from Heaven without any other passion except pride, and so we may ask whether it is possible to ascend to Heaven by humility alone, without any other of the virtues.

The Christian is one who imitates Christ in thought, word and deed, as far as is possible for human beings, believing rightly and blamelessly in the Holy Trinity.

In all your undertakings and in every way of life, whether you are living in obedience, or are not submitting your work to anyone, whether in outward or in spiritual matters, let it be your rule and practice to ask yourself: Am I really doing this in accordance with God's will?

St. John Climacus

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THE WAR ON EASTERN ORTHODOXY

By Theodoros Georgiou Karakostas (Byzantine Cultural Project).

At the present time, the Serbian Orthodox faithful of Kosovo are still being murdered. Ancient churches and monasteries that survived the centuries of Ottoman occupation stand no more. The religious heritage of Kosovo is being destroyed by extremists and fanatics.

The sacrifices made by Serbia to the west in both World Wars has been forgotten, as has the genocide of the Serbs that occurred during the Second World War. During the Second World War, the Serbs heroically resisted the Germans. Simultaneously, pro-Nazi Croats, Muslims, and Albanians engaged in genocide that resulted in the extermination of 800,000 Serbian Orthodox faithful. The Germans and the Vatican who destroyed the first Yugoslavia in 1941, likewise destroyed the second Yugoslavia in 1991.

Forgotten are the sacrifices made by the Serbs who rescued over 500 American pilots who were shot down over Yugoslavia during the Second World War. During the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, the largest ethnic cleansing campaign occurred when pro-Nazi Croatia launched an offensive that resulted in the massacres that forced expulsions of over 200,000 Serb civilians from lands that they had been residing in for many centuries. During the 1990s, as Osama Bin Laden began building the most dangerous terrorist network in the world, Washington either backed, or launched its own war against the Serbian nation; this is a nation that had been a historic ally of the United States in two World Wars!

Terrorism expert Youssef Bodansky, in his 1999 biography of Osama Bin Laden noted that Al Quada supported the wars against the Serbs. Muslim extremists from Al Quada, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Turkey, and Afghanistan all gathered in Bosnia and Kosovo to wage "jihad" against the Orthodox nation of Serbia. The Kosovo Liberation Army, backed by the Clinton administration in 1999 has since been exposed as a

network of drug dealers and terrorists with links to Muslim extremists and Al Quada!

Since 1999, over 300,000 Serbian Orthodox have been ethnically cleansed. Victims include monks like Father Chariton Lukic who was beheaded in 2000. There has been no notice in the west of the destruction of the Serbian Orthodox population and culture over the past nine years. For the record, it should be noted that the Serbs of Kosovo had been persecuted and ethnically cleansed during the communist period as well. This is a fact that the US media with its anti-Serb propaganda failed to take notice of.



KOSOVO



CYPRUS

Orthodoxy now mourns the loss of lives and the destruction of shrines and churches in Kosovo. The American "war on terror" apparently does not intend to target those terrorists who murder and ethnically cleanse Orthodox Christians. While the faithful of the Serbian Orthodox Church are suffering and dying in Kosovo, Washington is planning to help Ankara to finish off Cyprus.

The Greeks and the Serbs have much in common. They were both victims of Genocide during the twentieth century, they were both allies against the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria during the Balkan Wars, both supported the United States at crucial times, and both have been sacrificed to Islam. Present day events in Cyprus and Kosovo indicate that Washington is surrendering in the war on terror.

The defeat of the Serbs during the 1990s has paved the way for the establishment of Al Quada bases in Bosnia and Kosovo. The historic appeasement of Turkey by the United States has led to

the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. The sacrifice of Serbs and Greeks will come at a great cost for the West.

After the horrors of the 9/11 attacks, I had hopes that the western world would come to recognize and acknowledge the enormous suffering and martyrdom of the Eastern Churches over the centuries. Rather, it appears that Washington is going to help the perpetrators of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and occupied Cyprus finish the job.

The American government today resembles the British government of 1938 which handed Czechoslovakia to Hitler. Such is the fate of the Kosovo Serbs and the Greek Cypriots.

THEOPHANY

By Metropolitan Philaret (Voznesensky).

On the day of the feast of Theophany—the Baptism of the Lord—it is not out of place to remember another baptism: that baptism which was performed over each of us Orthodox Christians, that baptism at which each of us, by the mouth of our godparents, gave a promise to God that he would always renounce Satan and his works and would always unite himself, *join himself* with Christ.

This, I repeat, is especially fitting for this present day. The solemn rite of the Great Sanctification of Water will be performed shortly. Its center, its main part, one could say, is the majestic prayer wherein the Lord is glorified and the grace of the Holy Spirit is called down upon the water being sanctified. This prayer begins with the beautiful words:

Great art Thou, O Lord, and marvelous are Thy works, and no word sufficeth to hymn Thy wonders.

Whoever has been at a performance of the mystery of Baptism and was present attentively, knows that the prayer at the sanctification of the water in which a man will be baptized begins with these same words, and the first part of this prayer is completely the same, both at the Great Sanctification of Water and at the performance of the mystery of Baptism. And only later, in the last part, does the prayer at the performance of the mystery of Baptism change, as applicable to this mystery, when a new human soul will be baptized.

And so, it would not do us any harm to remember those vows given at Baptism on behalf of each of us. When a man is baptized as an adult, as even now sometimes happens, and happened especially often in antiquity, he himself makes the vows on his own behalf; but if he is baptized in infancy, his godfather or godmother—his “sponsors”—pronounce these vows for him. And so these vows, in which a Christian has promised God to renounce Satan and all his works and to join himself, to unite himself with Christ, these vows are not only forgotten by people, but many in general know nothing about them or about the fact that these vows were pronounced for them and that they ought to think a little about how they must fulfill these vows.

And what if at the last day of the history of the human race on earth—on the day of the Dreaded Judgment—it turns out that a man (or his “sponsors” for him) made vows, and he does not even know what the vows were and what was promised? What will happen to such a man?

Think, brethren, about what it means to renounce Satan and all his works and to join oneself to Christ.

The times are such now that a God-opposing bustle, in which the enemy of the human race reigns, has taken possession of humanity and, as was said in olden times, forces almost all people “to dance to its tune.” All this bustle, of which our present life is composed, is a God-opposing bustle, in which there is no God, in which God’s enemy holds sway and rules. If we made a vow to renounce Satan and all his works, then, in fulfilling it, we ought to strive not to stifle our soul with this bustle, but to reject it and to remember how the Church says, *One thing is needful*—only one thing is necessary—and to remember that we must join ourselves with Christ, that is, not only fulfill His commandments, but also endeavor to unite ourselves with Him.

Think, then, about this, O Christian soul, on this day of the radiant and great feast; think and pray that the Lord send thee firm faith and the resolve to fulfill these vows, and not to be swallowed up by the bustle of the world and lose the tie with the Lord, with Whom thou didst promise to join thyself for ever.

Today’s feast is called the feast of the Lord’s Baptism or the feast of Theophany; but those who know well the church Typicon, know also that sometimes in this Typicon it is also called *the feast of the holy Theophanies*—in the plural number.

Why? Here is why: Of course, that which the singers sang about today—*God the Word appeared in the flesh to the human race*—is the center of the com-

memorations of the present feast day. The incarnate Son of God, of Whose birth, when He was born, only a very few knew, *appeared to the human race*; for His baptism is, as it were, His solemn inauguration of His ministry, which He then performed after that until His death and resurrection.

But at the very same time, the fact that precisely on this feast *the worship of the Trinity was made manifest*, as is sung in its troparion, is characteristic of today’s feast. All three Persons of the Holy Trinity appeared for the first time in their separateness, which is also why this feast, I repeat, is called *the feast of the holy Theophanies*. Men heard the voice of God the Father: *This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased* (on Whom My favor rests); the Son of God accepted baptism from John (moreover, we know from the Gospel that John the Baptist was, as it were, at a loss when the Savior of the world came to him, and he attempted to restrain Him); and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descended



from the Father on the Son. In this way, *the worship of the Trinity was made manifest* for the first time, which is why the Church sings thus in the troparion, and why she also calls this feast *the feast of the holy Theophanies*. Christ the Savior appeared in order to begin His saving ministry.

Here, not so long ago, when there was another great feast—the Nativity of Christ—we said that the Lord, by his nativity in a poor cave, when He deigned to be laid in a cattle manger, thereby emphatically rejected, as it were, all earthly glory, all earthly splendor and magnificence, for He did not deign to appear in royal chambers or rich palaces, but precisely in those poor and modest conditions. And thereby He immediately showed that He had brought to the earth a new principle, the principle of humility.

Look, then, how He Himself, so to say, is true to Himself, how even now on today's great feast He institutes the very same principle of humility manifestly and undoubtedly for us. For whither did He come? To the Jordan. Why? To be baptized by John. But sinners came to John; they confessed their sins to him and were baptized. But He was without sin, *could not be touched by sin*, was absolutely free of it and pure; yet nonetheless, He humbly stands in line with other sinners, as if He were in need of this cleansing washing with water. But we know that the water did not cleanse Him, the most holy and sinless One; but it was He who sanctified the water by deigning to be washed by it, as was sung today during the sanctification of the water: *Today the nature of the waters is sanctified*.

And so, Jesus Christ brought the principle of humility to the earth and was true to it throughout the course of His whole life. But that is not all. He has also left us this testament: *Come and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls*.

Remember one more radiant, joyful, spring feast—the feast of the Annunciation. Here the most blessed Virgin Mary hears the good tidings from the Archangel how the incarnation of God will be accomplished through her. What does her most holy, most pure and blameless soul say when she came to her relative, Elizabeth, in order to share her joy with her? She only says: *My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior, for He hath regarded the low estate [humility] of his handmaiden*.

This humility was also the beauty of her spirit. From the very account of the Annunciation, we know that the Archangel appeared to her at that moment when she, having read the prophecy of Isaiah concerning the incarnation of God from a virgin, was not even thinking to apply this to herself, but only thought in the depth of her humility: *How joyful I would be if I were the least handmaid of that blessed virgin*. And here stands the Archangel Gabriel before her with his good tidings. The Lord, meek and humble Himself, regarded her humility.

He also enjoined humility on us, contrary to the principles of pride and self-love by which humanity today breathes.

Look, why are there so many disagreements among us, both within the enclosure of the Church and in parishes? Because everywhere men made red-hot by self-love are clashing; but if that humility to which the Lord calls us would be found in us, none of this would happen.

Let us, then, brethren, learn from our Savior, who as the least sinner came to John in order to be baptized by him; let us learn from Him this God-beloved and fragrant virtue, without which, as the holy fathers, no other virtue whatever can be perfect.



God is full of love and compassion. Let us not sadden Him in anything! He endured the Cross for us; His head was pricked by the crown of thorns; His side was pierced by the spear; His feet were nailed; His back was scourged; His all-holy mouth was given gall and vinegar; His heart ached from the insolence and ingratitude; He was naked up on the Cross in front of such a demonic mob. This, my children, is Whom we should not sadden with our carelessness, which intensifies His suffering. The Jews were His enemies, whereas we have been baptized in His holy Name—we are His disciples who are devoted to serving Him!

His disciples abandoned Him out of fear of the Jews, and how much He was grieved is beyond description! And now, how will all who deny Him, all who abandon Him, all who promise Him one thing and do another, find themselves before Him at the hour of judgment? What shall they say when our Christ begins to enumerate His sufferings one by one, while they will have only their denial and a multitude of evils to present?

Let us attend to our life, my children. Let us have love and patience in everything. Let us not criticize, let us drive away every evil thought, let us humble ourselves, let us bear in mind the difficult hour of death and judgment.

When you do all these things, know that you will live with Christ eternally! Like angels beside His throne, you will chant everlasting hymns full of joy! What bliss we shall have then! All things here will be forgotten! Only joy and Pascha with no end! Glory to God, who gives us the victory.

Elder Ephraim of Philotheou
From *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*

«Χριστός Γεννᾶται...»

Αγίου Ιωάννου Χρυσοστόμου.

Βλέπω παράξενο και παράδοξο μυστήριο· ποιμένες, πού αντί να παίζουν με τις φλογέρες τους κάποιο μελωδικό σκοπό, ψάλλουν ούρανιο ύμνο και γεμίζουν με τούς ήχους τους τὰ αὐτιά μου. Ψάλλουν ἄγγελοι και ἀνυμνοῦν ἀρχάγγελοι, ὑμνοῦν τὰ Χερουβὶμ και δοξολογοῦν τὰ Σεραφίμ. Ὅλοι πανηγυρίζουν γιατί βλέπουν τὸ Θεὸ στὴ γῆ και τὸν ἄνθρωπο στοὺς οὐρανοὺς. Βλέπουν Ἐκεῖνον πὸ εἶναι πάνω στὸν οὐρανό, νὰ βρίσκεται κάτω στὴ γῆ λόγω τῆς οικονομίας του γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο, και τὸν ἄνθρωπο πὸ εἶναι στὴ γῆ, νὰ βρίσκεται ψηλά στὸν οὐρανὸ ἐξαιτίας τῆς φιλανθρωπίας τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Σήμερα ἡ Βηθλεὲμ ἔγινε ὁμοία με τὸν οὐρανό, ἀφοῦ ἐφανίστηκαν σ' αὐτὴν ἀντὶ γιὰ ἀστέρια ἄγγελοι πὸ ἀνυμνοῦν τὸ Θεό, και δέχτηκε με τρόπο θαυμαστὸ στὸ χῶρο τῆς ὄχι τὸν φυσικὸ ἥλιο, ἀλλὰ τὸν ἥλιο τῆς δικαιοσύνης. Καὶ μὴ ζητᾶς νὰ μάθεις πὸς ἔγινε αὐτό. Γιατί ἐκεῖ ὅπου ἐκδηλώνεται ἡ θέληση τοῦ Θεοῦ, νικῶνται οἱ φυσικοὶ νόμοι. Θέλησε λοιπὸν ὁ Θεός, μπόρεσε, κατέβηκε ἀπὸ τοὺς οὐρανοὺς και ἔσωσε τὸν ἄνθρωπο, γιατί τὰ πάντα ὑπακούουν στὸ Θεό. Σήμερα γεννιέται ὁ αἰώνιος και γίνεται ἐκεῖνο πὸ δὲν ἦταν. Ἐνῶ δηλαδή ἦταν Θεός, γίνεται ἄνθρωπος, χωρὶς νὰ παύσει νὰ εἶναι Θεός. Δὲν ἔχασε δηλαδή τὶς θεϊκὲς του ιδιότητες γιὰ νὰ γίνει ἄνθρωπος, οὔτε πάλι ἄλλαξε κι ἀπὸ ἄνθρωπος ἔγινε Θεός. Ἀλλὰ ἐνῶ ἦταν Θεός Λόγος, χωρὶς νὰ πάθει τίποτε, προσέλαβε τὴν ἀνθρώπινη σάρκα, και ἡ θεία φύση παρέμεινε ἀμετάβλητη.

Και ὅταν γεννήθηκε, οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι δὲν παραδεχόντουσαν τὴν παράδοξη γέννησή του και οἱ μὲν Φαρισαῖοι παρερμήνευαν τὶς θεῖες Γραφές, οἱ δὲ Γραμματεῖς δίδασκαν τὰ ἀντίθετα τοῦ μωσαϊκοῦ νόμου. Ὁ Ἡρώδης γύρευε τὸ νεογέννητο, ὄχι γιὰ νὰ τοῦ προσφέρει τιμές, μὰ γιὰ νὰ τὸ σκοτώσει. Γιατί ἔβλεπαν ὅτι σήμερα τὰ πράγματα ἦρθαν ἀντίθετα πρὸς τὶς προσδοκίες τους. Γιατί ὅπως λέγει ὁ Ψαλμωδός: «Δὲν ἔγιναν αὐτὰ κρυφὰ ἀπὸ τὰ παιδιά τους και θὰ γίνουν γνωστὰ και στὶς ἐπερχόμενες γενεές».

Προσηλθάν λοιπὸν βασιλεῖς νὰ δοῦν με θαυμασμό τὸ Βασιλιά τῶν οὐρανῶν και ἀποροῦσαν πὸς ἦρθε στὴ γῆ χωρὶς ἀγγέλους και ἀρχαγγέλους και θρόνους και κυριότητες και δυνάμεις και ἐξουσίες, και πέρασε ἀπὸ δρόμο παράξενο και ἀπάτητο, δηλαδή ἀπὸ σπλάχνα παρθενικά, χωρὶς νὰ παύσει νὰ ἐπιστατεῖ τοὺς ἀγγέλους Του, και χωρὶς νὰ

χάσει τὶς θεϊκὲς του ιδιότητες, ἔγινε ἄνθρωπος και ἦρθε κοντὰ μας. Βασιλεῖς λοιπὸν ἦρθαν νὰ προσκυνήσουν τὸν ἔνδοξο Βασιλιά τῶν οὐρανῶν, στρατιῶτες νὰ ὑπηρετήσουν τὸν ἀρχιστράτηγο τῶν οὐρανίων δυνάμεων, γυναῖκες νὰ προσκυνήσουν Ἐκεῖνον πὸ γεννήθηκε ἀπὸ γυναίκα, γιὰ νὰ μετατρέψει σὲ χαρὰ τὶς λύπες τῆς γυναίκα.

Ἦρθαν παρθένοι στὸν Υἱὸ τῆς Παρθένου κι ἀποροῦσαν πὸς ὁ Δημιουργὸς τῶν μητρικῶν μαστῶν και τοῦ γάλακτος, Ἐκεῖνος πὸ κάνει τοὺς μαστοὺς νὰ βγάζουν μόνοι τους ἄφθονο γάλα, πὸς ἔφαγε παιδικὴ τροφή ἀπὸ μητέρα Παρθένο. Ἦρθαν τὰ νήπια σ' Ἐκεῖνον πὸ ἔγινε νήπιο γιὰ νὰ συντεθεῖ ὕμνος στὸν Κύριο ἀπὸ νήπια πὸ ἀκόμα θηλάζουν. Ἦρθαν παιδιά πρὸς τὸ Παιδί πὸ τὰ ἔκανε μάρτυρές Του ἐξαιτίας τῆς θηριωδίας τοῦ Ἡρώδη. Ἦρθαν οἱ ἄνδρες σ' Ἐκεῖνον πὸ ἔγινε ἄνθρωπος και θεράπευσε τὶς ταλαιπωρίες τῶν δούλων Του. Ἦρθαν ποιμένες στὸν καλὸ Ποιμένα πὸ θυσιάζεται γιὰ νὰ σώσει τὰ πρόβατά Του. Ἦρθαν ἱερεῖς σ' Ἐκεῖνον πὸ ἔγινε Ἀρχιερέας κατὰ σειρά διαδοχῆς ἀπὸ τὸν



Ναὸς (καὶ τὸ Ἀκριβὲς Μέρος) Γεννήσεως τοῦ Κυρίου, ἐν Βηθλεὲμ

Μελχισηδέκ. Ἦρθαμε οἱ δούλοι σ' Ἐκεῖνον πὸ ἔλαβε δούλου μορφή, γιὰ νὰ μετατρέψει σὲ ἐλευθερία τὴ δουλεία μας. Ἦρθαν οἱ ψαράδες σ' Ἐκεῖνον πὸ τοὺς μετέτρεψε ἀπὸ ἄπλους ψαράδες σὲ ψαράδες ἀνθρώπων. Ἦρθαν τελῶνες σ' Ἐκεῖνον πὸ ἀνέδειξε ἕναν ἀπὸ τοὺς τελῶνες σὲ εὐαγγελιστὴ. Ἦρθαν οἱ πόρνες σ' Ἐκεῖνον πὸ ἄφησε τὰ πόδια Του νὰ τὰ βρέξει με τὰ δάκρυά τῆς ἡ πόρνη. Καὶ γιὰ νὰ μιλήσω με συντομία, ὅλοι οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ ἦρθαν νὰ δοῦν τὸν Ἄμνὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ πὸ σήκωσε πάνω Του

τὴν ἁμαρτία ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου, οἱ ταπεινοὶ μάγοι, οἱ ποιμένες πὸ τὸν τίμησαν, οἱ τελῶνες πὸ κήρυξαν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, οἱ πόρνες πὸ τοῦ πρόσφεραν μύρα, ἡ Σαμαρείτιδα πὸ ἐπιθυμοῦσε νὰ γευθεῖ νερὸ ἀπὸ τὴν πηγὴ τῆς ζωῆς, ἡ Χαναναία πὸ εἶχε ἀκλόνητη πίστη.

Ἀφοῦ λοιπὸν ὅλοι πανηγυρίζουν χαρούμενοι, κι ἐγὼ ἐπιθυμῶ νὰ σκιρτήσω, και νὰ χορέψω και νὰ πανηγυρίσω. Χορεύω χωρὶς νὰ παίζω κιθάρα, χωρὶς νὰ κινῶ κλάδους κισσοῦ, χωρὶς νὰ κρατῶ αὐλό, χωρὶς νὰ κρατῶ ἀναμμένες λαμπάδες, ἀλλὰ κρατώντας στὰ χέρια μου ἀντὶ γιὰ μουσικὰ ὄργανα, τὰ σπάργανα τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Γιατί αὐτὰ εἶναι ἡ ἐλπίδα μου, αὐτὰ εἶναι ἡ ζωὴ, αὐτὰ εἶναι ἡ σωτηρία μου, αὐτὰ εἶναι γιὰ μένα αὐλὸς και κιθάρα. Γι' αὐτὸ τὰ ἔχω μαζί μου, γιὰ νὰ μοῦ δώσουν με τὴ δική τους δύναμη τὴν ἰκανότητα νὰ πῶ μαζί με τοὺς ἀγγέλους: «Δόξα στὸν ὕψιστο Θεό», και μαζί με τοὺς ποιμένες: «και ἂς ἐπικρατήσῃ στὴ γῆ ἡ εἰρήνη και στοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἡ ἀγάπη»...

Άπαγορεύεται Νά Φέρωμεν Σταυρόν;

ΠΗΓΗ: «*Ορθόδοξος Τύπος*», Α. Τ. 1806, 13 Νοεμβρίου, 2009.

Ὁ Ἁγιορείτης Μοναχὸς Μωϋσῆς εἰς τὸ τακτικόν του ἄρθρον εἰς τὴν ἐφημερίδα «Μακεδονία» σχολιάζει θέσεις, τὰς ὁποίας διετύπωσεν εἰσαγγελικὸς λειτουργὸς ἀπὸ ἔδρας ἐναντίον τοῦ σταυροῦ. Πλέον συγκεκριμένως ὁ Ἁγιορείτης Μοναχὸς Μωϋσῆς περιγράφει καὶ σχολιάζει τὰ ἀκόλουθα:

«Κατὰ τὴ “δική” τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μονῆς Βατοπαιδίου στὸ Πενταμελὲς Ἐφετεῖο Θράκης στὴν Κομοτηνὴ συνέβη κάτι πρωτακουστό. Ὁ εἰσαγγελέας τῆς ἔδρας Β. Φλωρίδης, ἀδελφὸς τοῦ βουλευτῆ τοῦ ΠΑΣΟΚ Γ. Φλωρίδη, ὅπως ἀναφέρεται καὶ σχολιάζεται σὲ ἀρκετὰς σελίδες τοῦ διαδικτύου, εἶπε στὴ δικαστὴ, ποὺ δικαζόταν γιὰ τὴν ὑπόθεση, Μ. Ψάλτη: “Ὅταν εἴστε στὴν ἔδρα, εἶναι ἀπαράδεκτο νὰ φορᾶτε σταυρό, γιατί εἶναι θρησκευτικὸ σύμβολο καὶ ἐπηρεάζετε”!

Ναί, τὸ εἶπε ἀκριβῶς, ὅπως τὸ διαβάσατε. Ὅπως εὐστοχα σχολιάστηκε στὶς ἰστοσελίδες, ἡ δικαιοσύνη δὲν ἀποφασίζει βάσει στοιχείων, ἀλλὰ βάσει τὸ τί φορᾶει ὁ κάθε δικαστής...

Αὐτὸ ποὺ φέρεται νὰ εἶπε εἶναι ἀπαράδεκτο καὶ φοβερό. Ἐνας εἰσαγγελέας νὰ κρίνει μὴ συνάδελφο κατηγορουμένη ἀπὸ τὸ ἂν φορᾶει ἢ ὄχι σταυρό. Τὸ ὅτι φοροῦσε ἢ δικαστὴς σταυρὸ σὲ δικαστικὴ αἴθουσα τὸ χαρακτήρισε ἀπαράδεκτο θρησκευτικὸ σύμβολο. Τότε νὰ ἀφαιρέσουμε καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τὸ εὐαγγέλιο ἀπὸ τὸ δικαστήριον. Νὰ μὴ ὀρκιζόμεστε στὸ εὐαγγέλιο. Νὰ μὴ κάνουμε καθόλου τὸ σταυρό μας. τί εἶδους σκεπτικὸ εἶναι αὐτό;

Εἶναι γνωστὸ πλέον σὲ ὄλους ὅτι οἱ κατηγοροὶ τῆς Ἱ. Μονῆς Βατοπαιδίου ἀπολαμβάνουν μεγάλες τιμὲς ἀπὸ τὴ νέα κυβέρνησι. Μάλιστα ὁ εἰσαγγελέας Β. Φλωρίδης, γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ στὰ δικαστικὰ χρονικά, ἔδωσε συνέντευξη, γιὰ νὰ πεί πόσο περήφανος εἶναι ποὺ καταδικάστηκαν οἱ βατοπαιδινοὶ μοναχοί.

Κατὰ τ’ ἄλλα παρουσιάζεται ὡς φιλόθρησκος καὶ φιλοαθωνίτης, ποὺ ἐπισκέπτεται ὀρισμένους μονὰς τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους. Τέλος πάντων, αὐτὸ εἶναι δικαίωμά του. Ἄς ἐπανέλθουμε στὸ θέμα μας.

Ἡ κ. Ψάλτη εὐθαρσῶς εἶπε πὼς ἐπὶ τρεῖς σχεδὸν δεκαετίες δικάζει μὲ ἡσυχία τὴ συνειδησὴ της καὶ ἀνέφερε: “Μπορεῖ ὁ σταυρὸς νὰ εἶναι τὸ καύχημά μου, οὐδέποτε ὁμως ἀποτέλεσε στοιχεῖο γιὰ τὴν κρίση μου,” σὲ ὅσα τῆς καταμαρτύρησε ὁ εἰσαγγελέας. Γιὰ τὸν σταυρὸ εἶπε ὅτι τὸν φορᾶ γιατί εἶναι οἰκογενειακὸ κειμήλιο καὶ ἀποτελεῖ ἔκφραση τῆς θρησκευτικῆς της πεποιθήσεως. Μεγάλῃ ἀπορίᾳ δημιούργησε στὴν ἴδια καὶ σὲ ὄλους τὸ πᾶς χρησιμοποίηθηκε ἀκόμη καὶ ὁ σταυρὸς ποὺ φοροῦσε. Γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ ἀκούσθηκε ὅτι ὁ σταυρὸς εἶναι σημεῖο προκλήσεως κι ἐντάσεως.

Ὁ συνήγορος ὑπερασπίσεως Τ. Μιχαλόλιας σχολίασε ὅτι ὁ εἰσαγγελέας μοιάζει μὲ καρδινάλιο σὲ ἱερὰ ἐξέτασι, γιὰ τὸ σχόλιο ποὺ ἔκανε γιὰ τὸ σταυρὸ, ποὺ φοροῦσε ἡ κ. Ψάλτη,

καὶ τόνισε: “Ἐμεῖς τὴν ξέρουμε τόσα χρόνια καὶ πάντα μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν σταυρὸ δικάζε.”

Τὸ συγκεκριμένον θέμα εἶναι σοβαρὸ. Δὲν μπορεῖ δηλαδὴ ἕνας δικαστὴς νὰ φορᾶ σταυρό; Δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κάνει γνωστὴ τὴ Χριστιανικὴ του ιδιότητα; Δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἐκκλησιάζεται, γιὰ νὰ μὴ τὸν δοῦν καὶ θεωρηθεῖ ὅτι εἶναι ἐπηρεασμένος καὶ σὲ μὴ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ δίκη θὰ εἶναι μονομερῶς τοποθετημένος; Μήπως ἐπιστρέφουμε σὲ Μεσαιῶνα; Μήπως θὰ ἀρχίσουμε νὰ διωκόμεθα γιὰ τὴν Ὀρθόδοξον πίστη μας;

Εἶναι πολὺ λυπηρὰ ὅλα αὐτά. Χρειαζέται ἀντικειμενικότητα, νηφαλιότητα καὶ διάκρισις. Ἐμεῖς ἐπὶ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ συγκεκριμένου θέματος ἀναφερθήκαμε καὶ ὄχι ἐπὶ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ ὅλου θέματος. Τὶς πληροφορίες μας λάβαμε ἀπὸ τὸ διαδικτυο, ὅπου εἶναι ἐνυπόγραφα καταχωρημένες. Ἀναφέρονται σὲ λεπτομέρειες, ποὺ ξενίζουν καὶ προβληματίζουν καὶ δημιουργοῦν ἰσχυρὰ ἐρωτήματα γιὰ προκατάληψη καὶ προαποφάσεις.

Εὐχόμεθα νὰ λάμπει ἡ ἀλήθεια, τὸ πραγματικὸ δίκαιο καὶ ἡ εὐθυκρισία δίχως ἐπηρεασμοὺς καὶ σκοπιμότητες παντοῦ καὶ πάντοτε. Ὁ σταυρὸς εἶναι σύμβολο ὕψιστης ταπεινώσεως, ἀφάτου κενώσεως καὶ μεγάλης θυσιαστικῆς ἀγάπης. Γι’ αὐτὸ τὸν φορᾶμε καὶ γι’ αὐτὸ τὸν προσκυνᾶμε. Γι’ αὐτὸ κυριαρχεῖ σὲ ὅλη τὴν ἐκκλησίαν. Εἶναι μεγάλη ἢ σημασία του καὶ βαθύτατος ὁ συμβολισμὸς του. Κάθε ἀντισταυρικὸς λόγος εἶναι μᾶλλον ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ.



Ρώτησε κάποιος ἕνα Γέροντα:

- Πὼς μπορεῖ κανεὶς νὰ προσεύχεται πάντοτε; Γιατί τὸ σῶμα δὲν ἀντέχει νὰ στέκεται συνεχῶς στὶς ἀκολουθίες.

Καὶ ὁ Γέροντας ἀποκρίθηκε:

- Προσευχὴ δὲν λέγεται μόνο τὸ νὰ προσεύχεσαι στὶς τακτὰς ὥρες προσευχῶν, ἀλλὰ τὸ νὰ προσεύχεσαι ἀκατάπαυστα.

- Πὼς δηλαδὴ ἀκατάπαυστα; ἀπόρησε ὁ ἀδελφός.

Καὶ εἶπε ὁ Γέροντας:

- Εἶτε τρῶς εἶτε πίνεις εἶτε περπατᾶς στὸ δρόμο εἶτε δουλεύεις, νὰ μὴν ἀφήνεις τὴν προσευχὴν.

- Ἄν ὁμως συζητᾶει κανεὶς μὲ κάποιον, ξαναρώτησε ὁ ἀδελφός, πὼς μπορεῖ νὰ ἐκπληρώσει τὴν ἀκατάπαυστην προσευχὴν;

- Μὰ γι’ αὐτὸ εἶπε ὁ ἀπόστολος, «διὰ πάσης δεήσεως» (Εφ. 6:18), ἀπάντησε ὁ Γέροντας. Ὅταν δηλαδὴ μιλᾶς μὲ ἄλλον καὶ δὲν μπορεῖς νὰ προσευχηθεῖς, τότε ἄς ἀρκεῖσαι στὴν ἀπλή δέηση.

- Καὶ ποιά προσευχὴ νὰ προτιμᾶει κανεὶς;

- Τὸ «Πάτερ ἡμῶν». Ἐκεῖνος ὁμως ποὺ θέλει νὰ φτάσει σ’ αὐτὸ τὸ κατόρθωμα, ὀφείλει νὰ βλέπει ὄλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τὸ ἴδιο καὶ νὰ μὴν κατακρίνει.

Ἄπὸ τὸ «Γεροντικὸν»

«Ἡ Δύση Δὲν Παράγει Ἁγίους»

Τοῦ κ. Μιχαήλ Ε. Μιχαηλίδη, Θεολόγου.

Ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου μὲ τὸν ὠραῖο ἐκφραστικό του λόγο, γράφει γιὰ τοὺς ἀρνητές τῆς Δύσης: «Σὲ μιὰ στιγμή, πού εἶναι οἱ ἴδιοι πεθαμένοι, φωνάζουν μὲ μιὰ δαιμονική χαρὰ πὼς πέθανε ὁ Θεός!... Ἄς δοῦνε πού μᾶς φέρανε οἱ βαθυστόχαστες φιλοσοφίες κι οἱ “μεγάλοι” ἄνδρες, οἱ δαιμονόψυχοι Νίτσιδες καὶ οἱ Σάρτρηδες, πού διαλύσανε τὸν στερεὸ ἀνδριάντα τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ψυχῆς... Μὲ τέτοιους καθηγητάδες, τέτοια προκοπή κάναμε!»!

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς Δύσης μὲ τὸν ὀρθολογισμό καὶ τὴν ἀθεΐα του, ἔφερε τὴ σύγχυση καὶ τὴν ταραχὴ στὴ δυτικὴ σκέψη καὶ τὴ διανόηση· μὲ τὴν ἀλαζονεία του ἔχτισε πύργους «βαβέλ» ἀνθρώπινης ματαιοδοξίας. Νόμισε πὼς δὲν τοῦ χρειάζεται ὁ Θεός καὶ τὸν πέταξε μακριὰ ἀπ’ τὴ ζωὴ καὶ τὰ ἐνδιαφέροντά του. Ἀπορροφήθηκε ἀπ’ τὸν τεχνικὸ πολιτισμὸ καὶ στηρίχτηκε στὴν ἐπιστήμη καὶ τὴν εὐημερία τῆς ζωῆς, λησμονώντας κάθε μεταφυσικὸ καὶ πνευματικὸ ἐνδιαφέρον. Θεώρησε τὸν ἑαυτό του αὐτάρκη, ἔγινε πλούσιος στὰ ὑλικά, ἀλλὰ φτώχηνε πνευματικά. Προσκολλήθηκε στὴ γῆ, ἀλλὰ ἔχασε τὸν οὐρανό. Ἐχάσε πὼς «ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ εἶναι ὁ πολιτισμὸς τῆς ψυχῆς».

Δίχως μεταφυσικὴ ἐνατένιση καὶ σύνδεσμο μὲ τὸ Θεό, δίχως ἐσωτερικὴ τῆς ψυχῆς καλλιέργεια, ὁ ἄνθρωπος γίνεται τὸ μεγάλο καὶ τραγικὸ θῦμα τῆς δικῆς του δημιουργίας. Ὁ τεράστιος τοῖχος πού οἰκοδομοῦσε, πέφτει καὶ τὸν πλακώνει καὶ θάβεται κάτω ἀπὸ τὰ ἔργα τῶν χεριῶν του.

«Ἐκεῖ πού δὲν ὑπάρχει Θεός, δὲν ὑπάρχει ἄνθρωπος πιά», γράφει ὁ Μπερντιάεβ. Δικαιολογημένα ὁ Romano Guardini ρωτάει: «Σὲ τί μπορεῖ νὰ μᾶς βοηθήσει ἢ κάθε τεχνικὴ, ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος στὸ βάθος τῆς οὐσίας του γίνεται ὀλοένα φτωχότερος καὶ συνεχῶς πιὸ ἀδύνατος στὴν κατάκτηση τῆς ἐλευθερίας του»;

Πολιτισμὸς χωρισμένος ἀπ’ τὸ Θεό, μετέωρος καὶ ἄθρησκος, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἐμπνεῖ, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ φωτίζει, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ καθοδηγεῖ. Ἄν παραμερίσουμε τὶς αἰώνιες Χριστιανικὲς ἀξίες, τότε, μὲ τί θ’ ἀντικατασταθοῦν; Ὑπάρχει τίποτε ἀνώτερο ἀπ’ τὸν Χριστιανισμό καὶ ἄριστος θεμελιωτὴς ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστό;

Κάποιες πολὺ ὠραῖες καὶ βαθυστόχαστες σκέψεις διάβαζα τελευταῖα, τοῦ σύγχρονου ἁγίου Νικολάου Βελιμίροβιτς, οἱ ὁποῖες ἀναφέρονται στὴν ἀποστασία τῆς Δύσης. Ἀνάμεσα στ’ ἄλλα, γράφει καὶ αὐτὰ ὁ σοφὸς αὐτὸς ἱεράρχης τῆς Σερβίας: «Ὁ Χριστὸς βρίσκεται ὑπεράνω τῆς ἀνατολικῆς φιλοσοφίας καὶ τῆς δυτικῆς ἐπιστήμης. Βρίσκεται ὑπεράνω τῆς βαπτισμένης μὰ καὶ τῆς ἀβάπτιστης ἀνθρωπότητας. Ὁ Ἰησοῦς ζυγίζει μὰ δὲ ζυγίζεται... Ναι, Κύριε, ἀποδέχομαι αὐτὸ πού μοῦ προσφέρεις καὶ ἀπορρίπτω ἐκεῖνο πού μοῦ προσφέρουν οἱ ἐχθροί Σου ἀπὸ τὴ Δύση καὶ τὴν Ἀνατολή... Ἡ αἰτία τῆς ταραχῆς στὴ Δύση, εἶναι ἡ ἴδια ἐκείνη τῆς ταραχῆς τοῦ Ἀδάμ καὶ τῆς Εὕας, τότε πού γύρισαν τὴν πλάτη τους στὸ

Θεὸ - Δημιουργὸ καὶ ἔστρεψαν τὸ πρόσωπό τους πρὸς τὸν Σατανᾶ... Γι’ αὐτὸ στὴ Δύση ὅλα τέθηκαν σὲ ἀμφισβήτηση, ὁ Θεός, ἡ ψυχὴ, ἡ ἠθικὴ, ὁ γάμος, ἡ οἰκογένεια, ἡ κοινωνία, τὸ κράτος... Ἡ Δυτικὴ ἐπιστήμη δὲν ἔλυσε μίτε ἓνα ἐρώτημα. Γιατὴ ἡ δυτικὴ ἐπιστήμη εἶναι τὸ ἀτσάλινο χτένι στὰ χέρια τοῦ ἀντίχριστου, ἓνα χτένι πού ζύνει παλιές πληγές καὶ ἀνοίγει καινούριες».

Καὶ προσθέτει: «Ἡ Δύση σταμάτησε νὰ παράγει ἁγίους καὶ σοφούς. Αὐτὸ χρονολογεῖται ἀπὸ τότε, πού οἱ πάπες σταμάτησαν νὰ εἶναι ἅγιοι καὶ σοφοὶ καὶ ἔγιναν πολιτικοὶ καὶ διπλωμάτες. Ἡ καταξίωση καὶ τὸ μέλλον τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ ἐξαρτᾶται ἀπὸ τὶς σχέσεις του μὲ τὶς Χριστιανικὲς ἀξίες. Προπάντων ἐξαρτᾶται ἀπ’ τὶς σχέσεις του μὲ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστό, τὸν ἀνακαινιστὴ τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου. Μόνον μὲ τὸν Ἰησοῦ ἀνθίζει ὁ πολιτισμὸς. Κατὰ κοινὴ ὁμολογία, ex ecclesia lux.

Ἀπ’ τὴν Ἐκκλησία τὸ φῶς. Δυστυχῶς ἡ σύγχρονη δυτικὴ κοινωνία βουλιάζει στὸν ἀμοραλισμὸ, τὴ διαφθορὰ καὶ τὴν ἀποστασία. Ἡ παρακμὴ στὸ ἀποκορύφωμά της. Ἡ διανόηση, ἀλαζονικὴ καὶ φίλαυτη, ἀργοσβήνει στὸ μηδενισμό της. Κατὰ τὸν Παῦλο, *φάσκοντες εἶναι σοφοί, ἐμωράνθησαν* (Ρωμ 1:22).

«Ὁ κεφαλαιοκρατικὸς πολιτισμὸς τῶν μοντέρνων καιρῶν σκοτᾶναι τὴν ἰδέα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Εἶναι ὁ πιὸ ἀσεβὴς πολιτισμὸς», λέει ὁ Ν.Μπερντιάεβ. Τὸ μεγάλο ἔγκλημα τῆς ἐποχῆς μας εἶναι ἡ ἄρνηση τῆς Χριστιανικῆς πίστεως καὶ ζωῆς καὶ ἡ ἀφοσίωση στὰ νέα εἰδῶλα. Προχώρησε στὴ διαλυτικὴ διαδικασία τῶν ἠθικῶν καὶ πολιτιστικῶν ἀξιῶν.

Τὴν Εὐρώπη συνηθίζουν νὰ τὴ λένε «γηραιὰ ἡπειρο»! Γέρασε ἡ Εὐρώπη, ὄχι μόνον ἱστορικὰ, ἀλλὰ γέρασε πολιτιστικὰ καὶ ἠθικὰ. Γέρασε ὡς πρὸς τὶς ἀξίες πού ἐκπροσωποῦσε. Γέρασε στὴν πίστη καὶ τὴν ἀρετὴ. Ἐπαθε πνευματικὸ μαρασμό. Ἐχάσε τὶς ἠθικὲς τῆς δυνάμεις. Τὴν ἐξασθένησε καὶ τὴ μάρανε ἡ ἀποστασία καὶ ἡ ἄρνηση. τὴν κουρέλιασε ὁ ἀθεϊσμός της.

Ἡ Δύση θέλησε νὰ σκοτώσει τὸ Θεό, ἀλλὰ σκότωσε τὸν ἄνθρωπο. «Ἡ θεοκτονία καταλήγει πάντοτε στὴν αὐτοκτονία». Ἡ Δύση προτίμησε τὸ θάνατο ἀντὶ τῆ ζωῆ. Ἐδίωξε τὸ Χριστό καὶ καλοδέχτηκε τὸ διάβολο. Ἡ ἀπόρριψη τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀποτελεῖ τὸ κορύφωμα τῆς ἀπιστίας τῆς Δυτικῆς κοινωνίας. Λησμόνησε ὁ Δυτικὸς κόσμος ὅτι, *διὰ τούτου (τοῦ Ἰησοῦ) ἠνεφώθησαν ἡμῶν οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ τῆς καρδίας, καὶ διὰ τούτου ἡ ἀσύνητος καὶ ἐσκοτωμένη διάνοια ἡμῶν ἀναθάλλει εἰς τὸ θαυμαστὸν αὐτοῦ φῶς*, λέγει ὁ Ἅγιος Κλήμης Ρώμης.

Ἡ Δύση πρόδωσε τὸ Χριστό. Μονάχα ἡ μετάνοια τὴ σώζει. Θ’ ἀνακτήσει τὴ δύναμη γιὰ τὴν ἐπιστροφή στὸν Πατέρα;



Ὁὐδὲν ὄφελος βίου καθαροῦ δόγμα τῶν διεφθαρμένων.
Ἰ. Χρυσόστομος

Ὁ Ἴος Τῆς Γρίπτης καὶ Ὁ Υἱὸς Τοῦ Θεοῦ

Τοῦ κ. Στεργίου Ν. Σάκκου, Ὁμ. Καθ. Πανεπιστημίου.

Δὲν εἶναι ἡ πρώτη φορά, πού πλήττεται ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἀπὸ ἀνίερες καὶ ἀστήρικτες ἐπιθέσεις τῆς ἀπιστίας. Ἔτσι, δὲν μᾶς ξενίζει ἡ πρόσφατη πολεμικὴ ἐναντίον τῆς πού ἐκδηλώθηκε ἐδῶ καὶ μερικὸς μῆνες με ἀφορμὴ τὴν ἐμφάνιση ἐνὸς νέου ἰοῦ, τοῦ ἰοῦ τῆς γρίπτης τῶν χοίρων.

Τὰ μέσα μαζικῆς ἐνημέρωσης, με τὴν συνηθισμένη δημαγωγικὴ τακτικὴ τους, ἐκτόξευσαν πεπυρωμένα τὰ πολλὰ βέλη τους, προσπαθώντας νὰ ἐμβάλουν ποικίλους λογισμούς ἀμφιβολίας στὸν λαό· νὰ ἐνσπείρουν τὸν φόβο καὶ νὰ καλλιεργήσουν τὴν ἀποχὴ ἀπὸ τὸ μυστήριον τῆς Θείας Μεταλήψεως, με τὴν βλάσφημη ἰδέα ὅτι μπορεῖ διὰ τοῦ μυστηρίου νὰ διαδοθεῖ ὁ ἴος τῆς γρίπτης.

Ποιὰ ἐπίδραση ἔχουν ὅλα αὐτὰ στοὺς Χριστιανούς; Καμία! Τὰ συνειδητὰ μέλη τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μένουν ἀνεπηρέαστα ἀπὸ τέτοιες φλυαρίες, ὅπως ἡ πορεία τῆς ἀμαξοστοιχίας μένει ἀνεπηρέαστη ἀπὸ τὰ γανγίσματα τῶν σκύλων. Ὅσοι διαθέτουν τὴν ἐμπειρία τῆς πίστεως μᾶλλον ἐνισχύονται καὶ ἐδραιώνονται περισσότερο. Ὁ φωτισμὸς τῆς θείας χάριτος, ἡ δροσιὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πνεύματος, ὁ χορτασμὸς τῆς θείας τροφῆς, πού τοὺς παρέχει τὸ Μυστήριον, τοὺς ὠθοῦν σὲ συνεχή δοξολογία καὶ εὐχαριστία πρὸς τὸν δωρεοδότη Κύριον. καὶ φυσικὰ ἐμπιστεύονται στὸ προσωπικὸ τους βίωμα καὶ ὄχι στὶς συκοφαντίες τῶν ἀσχέτων.

Ἀμφιβολίες μπορεῖ νὰ ἔχουν οἱ ὀλιγόπιστοι, πού ἄγευστοι τῶν πνευματικῶν ἐμπειριῶν ἀγνοοῦν τὸν λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἢ οἱ ἄπιστοι, πού ὑπεροπτικὰ τὸν ἀπορρίπτουν καὶ με ἐμπάθεια τὸν πολεμοῦν. Αὐτοὶ δὲν γνωρίζουν ἢ δὲν παραδέχονται ὅτι ὅπως ἡ φυσικὴ ζωὴ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ διατηρηθεῖ χωρὶς τροφή— ἢ ἀσιτία φέρνει τὸν θάνατον— ἔτσι καὶ ἡ πνευματικὴ ζωὴ ἔχει ἀνάγκη τροφοδοσίας.

Στὴν ὑπέροχη διδασκαλία τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὴν ὁποία διασώζει ὁ εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἰωάννης στὸ ἕκτο κεφάλαιον τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου του, ὁ Κύριος ἀποκαλύπτει ὅτι οἱ δικοὶ του ὀφείλουν νὰ τρέφονται με τὸν λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸν ἄσαρκο καὶ τὸν σαρκωμένο.

Ἄσαρκος λόγος εἶναι ἡ ἅγια Γραφή, τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον. Τρῶμε τὸν ἄσαρκο λόγο, ὅταν μελετοῦμε με προσοχὴ τὴν ἅγια Γραφή καὶ ὑπακοῦμε σ' αὐτήν, δηλαδὴ τὴν ἐφαρμόζουμε στὴν ζωὴ μας. Σαρκωμένος Λόγος εἶναι τὸ Σῶμα καὶ τὸ Αἷμα τοῦ Κυρίου, πού μεταλαμβάνουμε με τὸ μυστήριον τῆς Θείας Εὐχαριστίας.

Εἶναι ρητὴ καὶ κατηγορηματικὴ ἡ διαβεβαίωση τοῦ Κυρίου· *Ἀμήν, ἀμήν, λέγω ὑμῖν, ἐὰν μὴ φάγητε τὴν σάρκα τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πῖητε αὐτοῦ τὸ αἷμα, οὐκ ἔχετε ζωὴν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς* (Ἰω 6:53). Νεκρώνεται πνευματικὰ ὁ Χριστιανὸς πού δὲν μελετᾷ τὴν ἅγια Γραφή καὶ ἀπέχει ἀπὸ τὸ ποτήριον τῆς Ζωῆς. Γι' αὐτὸ ἐπάνω στὴν ἅγια τράπεζα, πού ἀποτελεῖ τὴν ταυτότητα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, βρίσκεται τὸ ἱερὸ Εὐαγγέλιον καὶ τὸ ἅγιον δισκοπότηρον. Δὲν ὑπάρχει Ἐκκλησία οὔτε σωτηρία χωρὶς αὐτὰ τὰ δύο.

Ἡ Θεία Εὐχαριστία εἶναι τὸ μυστήριον τῶν μυστηρίων, τὸ κέντρο καὶ ἡ καρδιὰ τῆς λατρείας μας. Μᾶς καθιστᾷ μετόχους στὸ ἴδιον τὸ Σῶμα καὶ τὸ Αἷμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὄχι συμβολικὰ ἢ μεταφορικὰ, ἀλλὰ ὄντολογικὰ. Ἡ Θεία Κοινωνία δὲν εἶναι μία ἀπεικονιστικὴ ἢ συμβολικὴ παράσταση οὔτε μία ψυχολογικὴ ἀνάμνηση τῶν σωτηρίων ἐκείνων γεγονότων, ἀλλὰ αὐτὴ ἡ ἴδια ἡ θυσία τοῦ Γολγοθᾶ, πού καθημερινὰ ἐπαναλαμβάνεται ἀνάιμακτα καὶ μᾶς προσφέρεται πλουσιοπάροχα, γιὰ νὰ γίνουμε σύσσωμοι καὶ σύναιμοι τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Γιὰ νὰ πλησιάσει, βεβαίως, κάποιος στὴν Θεία Κοινωνία χρειάζεται προηγουμένως νὰ ἐξετάσει τὸν ἑαυτό του, ὅπως παραγγέλλει ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος (Α' Κορ 11:28). Τὸ κάλεσμα τοῦ ἱερουργοῦ *Μετὰ φόβου Θεοῦ πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης προσέλθετε* προσφέρει τὰ κριτήρια γι' αὐτὴ τὴν ἐξέταση. Ἄν προσερχόμαστε στὴν Θεία Κοινωνία χωρὶς μετάνοια, ἐξομολόγηση καὶ

προετοιμασία, τότε μόνοι μας προκαλοῦμε ἀσθένεια καὶ θάνατον, τόσο στὶς ψυχές ὅσο καὶ στὰ σώματά μας. Γι' αὐτὸ, ἔγραφε ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος στοὺς Κορινθίους, *μεταξύ σας πολλοὶ εἶναι ἀσθενεῖς καὶ ἄρρωστοι καὶ ἄρκετοὶ ἔχουν πεθάνει* (Α' Κορ. 11:30).

Προφανῶς πολλοὶ κοινωνοῦσαν ἀναξίως χωρὶς τὴν ἀπαραίτητη πνευματικὴ προετοιμασία. Ἄν ὁ ἴος τῆς ἀπιστίας, τῆς ἀπουσίας τοῦ φόβου τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τῆς ἔλλειψης ἀγάπης ἔχει προσβάλλει τὶς καρδιές μας, δὲν θὰ πρέπει νὰ προσερχόμαστε στὸ ἅγιον δισκοπότηρον, εἴτε εἶναι περίοδος πανδημίας εἴτε ὄχι. Ἐφόσον ὅμως πιστεύουμε στὸν Κύριον καὶ τὸν ἀγαποῦμε, ἐφόσον καταθέτουμε τὴν εἰλικρινῆ ἐξομολόγησή μας στὸ πετραχήλι τοῦ πνευματικοῦ, κατὰ τὴν συμβουλὴ καὶ καθοδήγηση ἐκείνου νὰ κοινωνοῦμε τοῦ Σώματος καὶ Αἵματος τοῦ Κυρίου.

Ἐνωμένοι μαζί του δὲν διατρέχουμε κανένα κίνδυνον. Ποιὸς μπορεῖ νὰ βλάψει τὸν Χριστό; Ποιὰ ἀσθένεια νὰ τὸν προσβάλλει; Στὴν αἰωνόβια πορεία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μεταδίδει τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία *εἰς ἴασιν ψυχῆς καὶ σώματος*. Μεταδίδει ὑγεία γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα καὶ ποτὲ καμία ἀσθένεια.



Τὸ Σῶμα καὶ τὸ Αἷμα τοῦ Κυρίου διέρχεται *πρὸς μελῶν τις συνθέσεις, εἰς πάντας ἀρμούς, εἰς νεφρούς, εἰς καρδίαν*, θωρακίζοντας ἔτσι τὸν πιστὸ ἀπὸ κάθε ἴωση καὶ προσβολῇ τοῦ πονηροῦ. καὶ γίνεται ἡ Εὐχαριστία *εἰς χαρὰν, υγείαν καὶ εὐφροσύνην*.

Ἐξάλλου, ἡ ἴδια ἡ ἱστορία μᾶς πληροφορεῖ ὅτι στὸ διάβα τῶν ἐτῶν ἰοὶ ἀμέτρητοι ἐπληξάν τὸν πλανήτη μας προξενώντας πανδημίες σὲ περιόδους πού τὰ μέτρα ἀντιμετώπισής τους ἦταν πενιχρὰ ἕως καὶ ἀνύπαρκτα. Ποτὲ κανεῖς τους ὅμως δὲν στάθηκε ἱκανὸς νὰ προσβάλλει τὸ «φάρμακον τῆς ἀθανασίας», τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία. Οὔτε στὴν συνοδικὴ συνείδηση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μαρτυρεῖται κανόνας πού νὰ ἀναστέλλει τὴν Θεία Μετάληψη σὲ περιοδὸ ἔξαρσης νοσημάτων εὐκόλως μεταδιδομένων.

Ἐπειτα, οἱ ἱερεῖς μας, οἱ ὁποῖοι μετὰ τὴν μετάδοση τῆς Θείας Κοινωνίας καταλύουν μὲ τὴν ἴδια λαβίδα ὅλο τὸ Σῶμα καὶ τὸ Αἷμα τοῦ Κυρίου, ποτὲ δὲν προσβλήθηκαν ἀπὸ καμία μεταδοτικὴ νόσο· πολλοὶ ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς διακονοῦν σὲ νοσοκομεῖα, στὰ ὁποῖα νοσηλεύονται ἀσθενεῖς πάσχοντες ἀπὸ μεταδοτικὲς νόσους (φυματίωση, λέπρα, aids). Φαίνεται μάλιστα ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς ἐκτάκτως τοὺς χαριτώνει καὶ μακροημερεύουν. Ὑπάρχουν αἰωνόβιοι λευῖτες, οἱ ὁποῖοι διακονοῦσαν τοὺς νοσηλευομένους στὸ Σανατόριο Θεσσαλονίκης. καὶ νὰ σημειωθεῖ ὅτι δὲν πλένονται οὔτε ἀπολυμαίνονται ποτὲ τὸ ἅγιο δισκοπότηρο καὶ ἡ ἅγια λαβίδα!

Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ μυστήριον τῆς Θείας Κοινωνίας, τὸ μυστήριον τῆς Ζωῆς. Ἄν τώρα οἱ αἰρετικοὶ παπικοὶ καὶ ἀγγλικανοὶ ἀπαγόρευαν τὴν «Μετάληψη» γιὰ νὰ προφυλάξουν τοὺς πιστοὺς τους ἀπὸ τὴν μετάδοση τοῦ ἰοῦ, αὐτὸ δὲν ἀποτελεῖ παράδειγμα πρὸς μίμηση, ὅπως θέλησαν νὰ τὸ παρουσιάσουν κάποιοι δημοσιογράφοι. Προφανῶς οἱ ἐν λόγῳ αἰρετικοὶ μὲ τὴν κίνηση αὐτὴ συνειδητοποιοῦν καὶ ὁμολογοῦν ὅτι οὔτε Ἐκκλησία εἶναι οὔτε οἱ ἴδιοι οἰκονόμοι τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ παρὰ τις δικές μας οἰκουμενιστικὲς προθέσεις καὶ προσδοκίες.

Αὐτοκαταργούμενοι ἐκδίδουν οἱ ἴδιοι τὸ πιστοποιητικὸ τῶν φρονημάτων τους καὶ δημοσιοποιοῦν τὴν ταυτότητά τους. Ἐπιβεβαιώνουν ὅτι μοναδικὴ ταμειοῦχος τῆς θείας χάριτος εἶναι ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία, ἡ ὁποία ἐδῶ καὶ δύο χιλιετίες πορεύεται συνιστώντας τὴν συχνὴ Θεία Κοινωνία ὡς τὸ ἀποτελεσματικότερο ἐμβόλιο γιὰ τοὺς *τεθανατωμένους τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ*, ὡς τὸ *φάρμακον ἀθανασίας, ἀντίδοτον τοῦ μὴ ἀποθανεῖν*, κατὰ τὴν ἔκφραση τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰγνατίου.

Ἀλλὰ τὴν ἀποστομωτικὴ ἀπάντηση πρὸς τοὺς ἀντιφρονούντες καὶ πολεμίους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τὴν δίνει ὁ φιλόχριστος λαὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ. Μετὰ ἀπὸ τὴν σφοδρὴ πολεμικὴ τῶν τελευταίων μηνῶν, σὲ κάθε Θεία Λειτουργία κατὰ χιλιάδες οἱ Χριστιανοὶ προσέρχονται στὸ ποτήριον τῆς Ζωῆς γιὰ νὰ ἐνωθοῦν μυστηριακὰ μὲ τὸν ἐνανθρωπήσαντα Υἱὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἐπιβεβαιώνουν ἔτσι τὸν θεόπνευστο λόγο *γεύσασθε καὶ ἴδετε ὅτι Χριστὸς ὁ Κύριος!*

Ὁρθόδοξος Ζωὴ

Π. Μ. Σωτήρχος, ἀπὸ τὴν ἑβδομαδιαία ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἐφημερίδα «Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος», 31 Ιουλίου, 2009.

ΟΤΑΝ ΔΗΣ ΤΙΣ ΑΜΑΡΤΙΕΣ ΣΟΥ. Ὁ Ὅσιος Πέτρος ὁ Δαμασκηνὸς γράφει (Δεύτερον Βιβλίον): *Ἐκεῖνος, πού φωτίστηκε, ὥστε νὰ βλέπῃ τις ἁμαρτίες του, δὲν σταματᾷ νὰ θρηνῇ τὸν ἑαυτὸν του καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους, βλέποντας τὴν τόσην ἀνοχὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τις τόσες ἁμαρτίες, πού ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχὴ κάναμε καὶ συνεχίζουμε νὰ κάνουμε διαρκῶς οἱ ἄθλιοι. Ἀπ' αὐτὸ γίνεται εὐγνώμων, μὴ τολμώντας νὰ κατακρίνῃ κανέναν, ἀπὸ ντροπὴ γιὰ τις πολλὰς εὐεργεσίες τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὰ δικά μας ἁμαρτήματα...* Ἄς βλέπουμε λοιπὸν κι ἐμεῖς τις ἁμαρτίες μας καὶ ἄς πράττουμε ἀνάλογα.

ΝΑ ΛΥΠΑΣΑΙ ΤΟΝ ΧΡΟΝΟ. Μιὰ πολὺ μεγάλη ἀλήθεια μᾶς διδάσκει ὁ Ἅγ. Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος, λέγοντας νὰ λυπόμαστε πρὶν ἀπ' ὅλα τὸν χρόνο τῆς ζωῆς μας: *Τίποτε ἄλλο δὲν πρέπει νὰ λυπᾶσαι τόσον, ὅσον τὸν χρόνον σου. Ἄν ξοδεύσης χρήματα, θὰ μπορέσης καὶ πάλι νὰ τὰ ἀποκτήσης. Ἄν ὅμως χάσης τὸν χρόνον σου, εἶναι πολὺ δύσκολον νὰ τὸν ξαναποκτήσης. Γιατὶ εἶναι πολὺ λίγος ὁ χρόνος, πού μᾶς ἔχει χαρισθῆ στὴν παρούσα ζωὴ.* Ἄς φροντίζουμε λοιπὸν γιὰ τὴν αἰωνιότητα.

Η ΠΙΣΤΗ ΞΕΠΕΡΝΑ ΤΗΝ ΝΟΗΣΗ. Πολλοί, δυστυχῶς, συζητοῦν τὰ τῆς πίστεως, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ἴδια τὴν πίστη μὲ τὴν λογικὴ καὶ προσπαθοῦν νὰ τὴν ἐξηγήσουν μὲ τὴν νόησή τους. Οἱ Ἅγιοι Πατέρες ὅμως μᾶς λένε ὅτι αὐτὸ εἶναι λάθος, ὅπως ὁ Ἅγ. Μάξιμος ὁ Ὁμολογητῆς (Δ' Ἐκατοντάδα διαφόρων κεφαλαίων), ὅπου λέγει: «Ἡ πίστις εἶναι γνῶσις, πού δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀποδειχθῆ. καὶ ἀφοῦ εἶναι γνῶσις, πού δὲν δέχεται ἀπόδειξιν, ἄρα εἶναι μιὰ ὑπερφυσικὴ σχέση, μὲ τὴν ὁποῖαν ἐνωθήμασθε μὲ τὸν Θεόν μὲ τρόπον ἄγνωστον καὶ χωρὶς ἀποδείξεις, σὲ μιὰ ἔνωση, πού ξεπερνᾷ τὴν νόηση».

ΠΩΣ ΝΑ ΑΡΧΙΣΗΣ ΤΟΝ ΑΓΩΝΑ. Ἀντιγράφω ἀπὸ τὸν «56^{ον} Λόγον» τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰσαὰκ τοῦ Σύρου: «Ὅταν θέλης νὰ ἀρχίσῃς τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα, κατὰ Θεόν, πρῶτον νὰ κάνῃς τὴν διαθήκη σου, ὅπως ἐκεῖνος, πού ἐτοιμάστηκε γιὰ τὸν θάνατον, καὶ ἄφησε τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς παρουσίας ζωῆς, ὡσάν νὰ ἔφθασε ἡ ὀρισμένη ὥρα τῆς προθεσμίας σου καὶ ὡς νὰ μὴ ἔχεις πιά νὰ ζήσης ἄλλον χρόνον σ' αὐτὴν τὴν ζωὴν. καὶ νὰ τὸ θυμᾶσαι αὐτὸ καλά, γιὰ νὰ μὴ ἐμποδισθῆς μὲ τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς παρουσίας ζωῆς, ἀπὸ τοῦ νὰ ἀγωνισθῆς καὶ νὰ νικήσης. Διότι ἡ ἐλπίδα γι' αὐτὴν τὴν ζωὴν ἀποχαυνώνει τὴν διάνοια. Γι' αὐτὸ μὴ τὰ πολυσκερφέσαι αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα (τὰ γῆινα), ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴν πίστη δυνάμωσε τὴν διάνοιά σου, καὶ νὰ θυμᾶσαι τις μακρὲς ἡμέρες τῆς μελλούσης ζωῆς καὶ τοὺς ἀπερίγραπτους αἰῶνες, αὐτοὺς, πού ἀρχίζουν μετὰ τὸν θάνατον καὶ τὴν κρίσιν, καὶ δὲν θὰ χαυνωθῆς καὶ δὲν θὰ ἀμελήσης ποτέ, κατὰ τὸν σοφόν, πού λέγει ὅτι *χιλία χρόνια τοῦ κόσμου τούτου δὲν ἀντιστοιχοῦν οὔτε σὲ μιὰν ἡμέρα τοῦ ἀτέλειωτου αἰῶνος τῶν δικαίων.* (Ψαλμ 89:4)».

Χριστιανοί Δίχως Χριστόν

Πρεσβ. Διονυσίου Τάτση.

Πόσο Χριστιανική είναι ή κοινωνία μας; Πόσο Χριστιανοί είναι οί Χριστιανοί μας; Μήπως ή όποια πίστη τους έχει νεκρωθεϊ; Μήπως ό Χριστός έπηρεάζει ελάχιστους ανθρώπους;

Τά έρωτήματα άπασχολούν τούς άληθινούς Χριστιανούς και τούς καλοπροαίρετους, πού θέλουν νά στραφοϋν στο Χριστό. Ό Νήφων, προβληματισμένος όπως κι εγώ, άπάντησε: «Μπορώ ν' άπαντήσω με ευκολία. Προφανώς ή κοινωνία μας δέν είναι Χριστιανική, για νά μη πώ ότι είναι αντιχριστιανική. Οί άνθρωποι, παρόλο πού φέρουν τή σφραγίδα του Χριστιανού, είναι αδιάφοροι. Η πίστη τους δέν έπηρεάζει καθόλου τή ζωή τους. Ό Χριστός γι' αυτούς άπουσιάζει. Θα τολμούσα νά πώ ότι ό Χριστός άπουσιάζει και άπ' τή ζωή πολλών κληρικών! Και άπ' τή ζωή πολλών μοναχών! Κάθε φορά πού παρατηρώ ή μαθαίνω τόν τρόπο ζωής τών άνθρώπων, πέφτω σέ κατάθλιψη και άνησυχώ. Πόση δουλειά άλήθεια χρειάζεται για νά βελτιωθεί ή εικόνα. Και δέν φτάνει μόνο ό λόγος. Άποτελεσματικότερος είναι ό άγιος τρόπος ζωής. Όλοι δέχονται ότι τρεις Άγιοι γέροντες σέ μία μεγάλη πόλη μπορούν νά πετύχουν περισσότερα άπ' ότι δεκάδες ιεροκήρυκες».

«Ό λόγος του Θεού αντικαταστάθηκε άπ' τόν λόγο του κόσμου και τής ματαιότητας. Οί σύγχρονοι άνθρωποι έγκατέλειψαν τόν Ίερό Ναό του Θεού και στράφησαν στα θέατρα, στα κέντρα διασκέδασης, στα γήπεδα, στις πολιτικές συγκεντρώσεις και στις κοσμικές εκδηλώσεις. Έκει περνούν πολλές ώρες τήν εβδομάδα, αλλά για τόν εκκλησιασμό τους τήν Κυριακή δέν έχουν ούτε μισή ώρα διαθέσιμη. Δέν έχουν δίψα Θεού, γι' αυτό και δέν νιώθουν ότι τούς λείπει ή Θεία Λατρεία», είπα συμπληρωματικά. «Μένουν άνεπηρέαστοι και άπ' τά πρότυπα τής Έκκλησίας. Οί ιερές εικόνες τών Άγίων δέν τούς συγκινούν. Στη θέση τους μπήκαν τά πορτρέτα τών συγγραφέων, τών ήθοποιών, τών τραγουδιστών, τών ζωγράφων, τών πολιτικών, τών φιλοσόφων κ.λπ. Αυτούς προσέχουν και έκτιμούν. Αυτούς μιμούνται και αυτών γίνονται όπαδοί. Γνωρίζουν και λεπτομέρειες άπ' τήν προσωπική τους ζωή. Άποδέχονται και όλα τά άρνητικά τους και αυτό τούς οδηγεί σέ πολλές πτώσεις και δυστυχίες. Δυστυχώς οί περισσότεροι άνθρωποι έμπιστεύονται τά πρόσωπα τής δημοσιότητας και όχι τούς Άγίους τής Έκκλησίας».

«Πρέπει νά έπισημάνω ότι τά πρόσωπα αυτά, ένώ έχουν κάποιο χάρισμα και παράγουν κάποιο έργο, δέν έχουν ήθος. Είναι φιλόδοξα και φιλήδονα. Πολλές φορές έχουν και άρμοδιότητες στο δημόσιο τομέα και θέλουν νά προβάλλονται και νά ρυθμίζουν τά πράγματα όπως εκείνοι θέλουν. Άπέναντι δέ στους συνειδητούς Χριστιανούς αντιδροϋν με τρόπο άπαξιωτικό, πώς τάχα είναι περιορισμένης αντίληψης και άρνητές κάθε κοσμικής

χαράς. Δέν βρίσκουν σχεδόν τίποτα τó θετικό και τούς θέτουν στο περιθώριο», είπα ένοχλημένος.

«Η αντίδραση αυτή θα έλεγα ότι είναι φυσιολογική, άφού οί Χριστιανοί άρνοϋνται όλα όσα εκείνοι επιλέγουν και κάνουν. Ωστόσο, βλέπω ότι στο βάθος τής ψυχής τους έχουν κάποιο σεβασμό γι' αυτούς, γιατί θαυμάζουν τή συνέπεια στη ζωή τους, αλλά και τήν άθωότητα και άγάπη τους. Δέν έχουν όμως τόν ήρωισμό νά τόν εκδηλώσουν ή νά τούς μιμηθοϋν. Τό κοσμικό φρόνημα τούς έχει αιχμαλωτισμένους».

«Νήφων, θα ήθελα νά μου πεις τά χαρακτηριστικά του Χριστιανού, του ανθρώπου δηλαδή πού είναι κοντά στο Χριστό».

«Τά συνοψίζω σ' ένα. Είναι στραμμένος στο Χριστό με πίστη και άγάπη, γι' αυτό και προσεύχεται όσο γίνεται περισσότερο, αλλά και αγαθοποιός είναι σ' όλες τις εκδηλώσεις του. Βέβαια, τά πράγματα δέν είναι εύκολα στην καθημερινή πράξη. Οί βιοτικές μέριμνες περιορίζουν τó έλεύθερο χρόνο, πού πρέπει ν' άφιερώνει στην προσευχή και τήν έμπρακτη άγάπη προς τούς άδελφούς του. Αυτό όμως δέν είναι ένοχο. Άπ' τή στιγμή, πού ύπάρχει ή άγαθή προαίρεση, ό Θεός αυξάνει τήν πρόνοιά του στον άληθινό Χριστιανό, του άνοίγει δρόμους και του δίνει νέες δυνατότητες».

«Τά πράγματα δέν βελτιώνονται. Η κατρακύλα είναι μεγάλη. Χάνονται και οί εκλεκτοί. Και μακάριοι είναι εκείνοι, πού αντιστέκονται και διατηροϋν τή λυχνία τους άναμμένη», είπα σχεδόν άπογοητευμένος.



Οί άγιοι Άγγελοι φροντίζουν για μās, όπως οί μεγαλύτεροι άδελφοί για τούς μικρότερους.

Η άπομάκρυνση από τά καλά έργα και τήν προσευχή μās οδηγεί στην υπερηφάνεια, όποτε φεύγει ό φύλακας άγγελός μας και μās κυριεύει ό σατανās.

Η άργία τών προσευχών, τής μελέτης τών Θείων Γραφών και ή άποχή από τής Θείας Κοινωνίας, φέρνουν μέσα μας τούς δαίμονες και μās έξουσιάζουν.

Όποιος έμποδίζει τó στόμα του από τήν καταλαλιά και κατάκριση, φυλάει τήν καρδιά του άπαθή και βλέπει Κύριον τόν Θεόν, διώκοντας μακριά τούς δαίμονες τής κακίας.

Η άμοιβή δέν δίνεται στον άνθρωπο για τήν άρετή του αλλά για τήν ταπεινώσή του. Χωρίς τήν ταπεινώση όλα είναι μάταια.

Πολυχρόνια ύπομονή οδηγεί στην ταπεινώση. Η ταπεινώση οδηγεί στην υγεία τής ψυχής. Η υγεία τής ψυχής στη γνώση του Θεού. Η γνώση του Θεού στην άγάπη του Θεού. Και τέλος ή άγάπη του Θεού στη Χαρά του Θεού, πού είναι γλυκύτερη από τήν μελοκήρηθρα.

Άββās Ίσαακ ό Σύρος

Στή Ρωσία Κτίζουν και στην Ελλάδα Γκρεμίζουν...

Μοναχός Μωυσής Αγιορείτης.

Μου έστειλαν από το διαδίκτυο κάποιες ειδήσεις που μου έκαναν ιδιαίτερη εντύπωση και σās τις μεταφέρω με κάποια μικρά σχόλια. Έμεις είμεθα πιο προοδευμένοι και ελεύθεροι από τους Ρώσους;

Γιατί στη σημερινή Ρωσία συνέβησαν τὰ ἐξῆς πρόσφατα: Ὁ πατριάρχης Μόσχας κ. Κύριλλος συναντήθηκε με τὸν πρωθυπουργὸ τῆς Ρωσίας κ. Β. Πούτιν. Ὁ πατριάρχης κατὰ τὴ συνάντησή αὐτὴ δήλωσε ὅτι τὸ ἔργο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἶναι μία συνεχῆς προσφορά, θετικὴ κι εὐεργετικὴ γιὰ τὸν λαὸ καὶ τὴν κοινωνία, πὺ τελικὰ ὠφελεῖ καὶ τὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ τὸ Κράτος.

Ὁ πρωθυπουργὸς ἀνέφερε ὅτι οἱ σχέσεις Ἐκκλησίας καὶ Κράτους τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια εἶναι πολὺ καλές. Ὁ Ρώσος πατριάρχης συνέχισε πὺς οἱ σχέσεις Ἐκκλησίας καὶ Κράτους καὶ τῆς κοινωνίας τῶν πολιτῶν εἶναι βεβαίως πολὺ καλὰ ἀναπτυγμένες, ἀλλὰ θὰ πρέπει νὰ ἐργασθοῦμε ὅλοι γιὰ μεγαλύτερη ἀνάπτυξή τους.

Πολὺ καλὴ ἐργασία γίνεται ἀπὸ τοὺς στρατιωτικὸς ἱερεῖς στὸν ρωσικὸ στρατό. Γίνονται θεῖες λειτουργίες, κηρύγματα καὶ ἐξομολογήσεις. Ἰερουργοῦν 650 ἱερεῖς σὲ 530 ναοὺς τοῦ στρατοῦ. Ὅλοι οἱ στρατιωτικοὶ ἱερεῖς ἀπολαμβάνουν τὴν ὑποστήριξη τῶν στρατιωτικῶν διοικητῶν.

Ὁ ὑπουργὸς Πολιτισμοῦ τῆς Ρωσίας κ. Α. Σοκολόβ δήλωσε στοὺς δημοσιογράφους ὅτι θεωρεῖ πὺς ἦρθε ἡ ὥρα γιὰ τὴν διδασκαλία τῶν «ἀρχῶν τοῦ Ὁρθόδοξου Πολιτισμοῦ» στὰ σχολεῖα μέσης ἐκπαίδευσεως, λέγοντας πὺς σὲ πολλές περιοχὲς τῆς Ρωσίας ὑπάρχει ἤδη συσσωρευμένη ἐμπειρία στὸ θέμα αὐτό.

Πρὸ καιροῦ Ἑλληνας ἐπίσκοπος, πὺ εἶχε ἐπισκεφτεῖ τὴ Μόσχα, ρωτήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν ὑπουργὸ Παιδείας τῆς Ρωσίας με ἀγωνία ἂν εἶναι ἀλήθεια ὅτι ἡ ἑλληνικὴ κυβέρνησή προτίθεται νὰ καταργήσῃ τὸ μάθημα τῶν θρησκευτικῶν στὰ σχολεῖα. Τώρα ἀκοῦμε ἐμεῖς ὅτι στὰ ἑλληνικὰ σχολεῖα θὰ εἰσαχθεῖ ἡ σεξουαλικὴ διαπαιδαγώγησή καὶ ἡ γιόγκα. Τί ἄλλο θ' ἀκούσουμε;

Κατὰ τὴν πρόσφατη ἐπίσκεψη στὴ Μόσχα ἀγιορεῖται ἡγουμένου καὶ τὴ συνάντησή του με τὸν πρόεδρο τῆς Ρωσίας κ. Δ. Μεντβέντεφ διαπίστωσε τὸν βαθὺ σεβασμὸ του πρὸς τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Πρὸς τοὺς σπουδαστὲς τῆς Θεολογικῆς Ἀκαδημίας τῆς Πετρούπολεως, πὺ κατόπιν συνάντησε, τοὺς εἶπε γι' αὐτόν: «Πρέπει νὰ ὁμολογήσω ὅτι ὁ πρόεδρός σας με ἐξέπληξε. Συζητήσαμε μαζί του ἀρκετά. Καὶ εἶδα ἕναν ἄνθρωπο πὺ ἀγαπᾷ τὴν πατρίδα του, πὺ ἀγαπᾷ τὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ τὸν κλῆρο».

Κατὰ τὶς ἐπισκέψεις μου στὴ Ρωσία γιὰ δυὸ συνέδρια, πρὸ διετίας καὶ τριετίας, παρατήρησα μία θρησκευτικὴ ἀναγέννηση, ἀνοικοδόμηση νέων ναῶν, ἀνακαίνιση

παλαιῶν μονῶν κι ἐκκλησιῶν, συνειδητὴ συμμετοχὴ νέων στὰ μυστήρια τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ λοιπά. Δὲν λέω ὅτι ὅλα στὴ Ρωσία σήμερα εἶναι ρόδινα καὶ τέλεια. Δὲν λέω ὅτι δὲν ὑπάρχουν προβλήματα.

Δὲν συμφωνοῦμε με ἀντιερὲς βλέψεις καὶ περὶ ἄστοχων ἰδεῶν τρίτης Ρώμης. Ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη δὲν εἶναι δευτέρη Ρώμη, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ἡ Νέα Ρώμη. Ὅμως στὴ Ρωσία ὑπάρχει σεβασμὸς, ὑπάρχει εἰλικρινὴς ἀναζήτησή τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ φωτὸς τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας.

Στὴ Ρωσία κτίζουν καὶ στὴν Ἑλλάδα γκρεμίζουν. Ἡ Ἑλλάδα εἶναι πὺ προοδευτικὴ καὶ μοντέρνα. Θέλει νὰ καταργήσῃ τὸ μάθημα τῶν θρησκευτικῶν, τὴν προσευχὴ στὰ σχολεῖα, νὰ κάνει χωρισμὸ Ἐκκλησίας καὶ Κράτους.

Ν' ἀποϊεροποιήσῃ τὰ πάντα. Ἡ ἐλευθερία νὰ μὴ σέβεται καὶ νὰ τιμᾷ τίποτε. Νὰ γελοιοποιήσῃ ὅλους τοὺς κληρικοὺς καὶ τοὺς μοναχοὺς.

Νὰ χαμηλώσῃ καὶ τὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος. Νὰ ὑποτιμήσῃ τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Κρίμα γιὰ κάποια λάθη ὀρισμένων, νὰ ἰσοπεδῶνται θεσμοί, ἀρχές, πρόσωπα, σύμβολα καὶ ἀρχαῖες ἀξίες...



Τὸ Τέλος τῆς Ἐλευθερίας;

Σὲ συνέντευξή του, στὴν «Ἐλευθεροτυπία» τῆς 29ης Ὀκτωβρίου ἐ.ἔ., ἕνας ἀπὸ τοὺς πλέον εἰδήμονες στὸ χῶρο τῆς Πληροφορικῆς, Ἀμερικάνος Ἀκαδημαϊκὸς κ. Ἄντριου Τάνεμπαουμ, δήλωσε, μεταξύ ἄλλων: «Σύντομα τὰ RFID (Radio Frequency Identification—Ταυτοποίηση Μέσω Ραδιοσυχνότητων) θὰ ὑπάρχουν παντοῦ... στὸ μέλλον γιὰ παράδειγμα, φανταζόμαστε καὶ σχεδιάζουμε τὰ προϊόντα στὰ καταστήματα νὰ ἔχουν τὰ RFID ἀντὶ γιὰ τὸν ραβδωτὸ κωδικὸ (barcode) ἀπλοποιώντας τὶς διαδικασίες ἀσφάλειας ἐξόδου πελατῶν καὶ προϊόντων...».

Καὶ συνεχίζει ὁ Καθηγητὴς Τάνεμπαουμ: «Τὰ RFID τσίπς θὰ ἔχουν τὴ δυνατότητα νὰ χρησιμοποιηθοῦν γιὰ νὰ ἐξαλείψουν τὴ λιγοστὴ ἰδιωτικότητα, πὺ ἔχει ἀπομείνει. Ὅταν μέσα στὴν ἐπερχόμενη δεκαετία, τὰ αὐτοκίνητα, τὰ εἰσιτήρια στὴ δημόσια συγκοινωνία ἀκόμα καὶ τὰ ροῦχα θὰ φέρουν τὰ RFID τσίπς, οἱ Κυβερνήσεις θὰ ἔχουν τὴ δυνατότητα νὰ παρακολουθοῦν, πὺ βρίσκεται ἀλλὰ καὶ πὺ πηγαίνει ἀνὰ πᾶσα στιγμή ὁ καθένας μας. Εἶμαι σίγουρος ὅτι θὰ σκεφτοῦν ἀρκετοὺς λόγους γιὰ νὰ τὸ κάνουν αὐτό. Ἀκόμη καὶ οἱ πὺ δημοκρατικὲς Κυβερνήσεις θὰ ἔχουν περισσότερη δύναμη ἀπ' ὅση ὄνειρευόταν ὅποιοσδήποτε βασιλιάς στὴν Ἱστορία».

Καὶ καταλήγει ὁ Ἀκαδημαϊκὸς: «Εἶμαι σίγουρος ὅτι ὁ Τόμας Τζέφερσον εἶχε δίκιο ὅταν εἶπε: “Τὸ ἀντίτιμο τῆς ἐλευθερίας εἶναι ἡ διαρκὴς ἐπαγρύπνηση.” Ὁ Τζέφερσον εἶχε γνωρίσει μερικὲς αὐταρχικὲς κυβερνήσεις. Σήμερα δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἀνησυχοῦμε μόνο γιὰ τὶς Κυβερνήσεις, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ τὶς μεγάλες πολυεθνικὲς, τὰ RFID τσίπς καὶ πολλὰ ἄλλα»...

Ἡ Ἱεροπρέπεια τοῦ Κληρικοῦ

Τοῦ Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου Διονυσίου Τάτση.

Ὁ κληρικός, σὲ ὅποιον τόπο καὶ ἂν βρεθεῖ, πρέπει νὰ διατηρεῖ τὸ σχῆμα του καὶ νὰ ἐμφανίζεται μὲ ἱεροπρέπεια. Καὶ ὅταν πηγαίνει διακοπὲς μὲ τὴν οἰκογένειά του καὶ ἐπισκέπτεται μέρη, ὅπου εἶναι παντελῶς ἄγνωστος. Δὲν εἶναι ὠραῖο νὰ βγάζει τὰ ράσα του καὶ νὰ εἶναι ὅμοιος μὲ τοὺς κοσμικοὺς. Ἡ ἀνάγκη τῆς ξεκούρασης δὲν πρέπει νὰ βγάζει τὸν κληρικὸ ἐξω ἀπὸ τὰ ράσα του. Ὅλα πρέπει νὰ εἶναι προσεγμένα γιὰ νὰ μὴ σκανδαλίζει, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ νὰ νιώθει ὁ ἴδιος καλά.

Σημειῶνω ἓνα περιστατικό. Περίμενα στὸν κεντρικὸ δρόμο τῆς κομόπολης ὅπου ζῶ δύο γνωστοὺς γιὰ νὰ ἐπισκεφθοῦμε ἓνα ἐγκαταλειμμένο μοναστήρι καὶ νὰ κάνουμε μιὰ παράκληση. Εἶδα νὰ περνάει δίπλα μου μιὰ ἄγνωστη οἰκογένεια. Ὁ πατέρας εἶχε μακριὰ γενειάδα καὶ μαλλιά οὐρὰ σαράντα ἑκατοστῶν. Ἡ μητέρα σεμνὰ ντυμένη καὶ τὰ δύο τους κορίτσια καλοκαιρινά. Ἀμήχανα κάπως μοῦ εἶπε ὁ γενειοφόρος «εὐλογεῖτε». Ἀμέσως βεβαιώθηκα ὅτι ἦταν ἱερέας. Δὲν ἤμουν πρόθυμος νὰ συνομιλήσω μαζί του.

Τὸ γεγονός ὅτι εἶχε βγάλει καὶ τὸ ἀντερί του μὲ ἐνόηλησε. Δὲν τὸν ρώτησα ἀπὸ ποῦ ἔρχεται. Δὲν θέλησα νὰ μάθω πληροφορίες σχετικές. Ὅμως ἐκεῖνος, διστακτικὰ μὲ ρώτησε, ποῦ εἶναι τὸ πατρικὸ σπίτι τοῦ Γέροντα Παΐσιου. Τοῦ ἀπάντησα τυπικά. Μὲ ξαναρώτησε, ποῦ εἶναι καὶ τὸ μοναστήρι τοῦ Στομίου, ὅπου εἶχε μονάσει γιὰ ἓνα χρονικὸ διάστημα ὁ Γέροντας, τοῦ ἔδειξα τὴ χαράδρα καὶ τοῦ εἶπα ὅτι πρέπει νὰ περπατήσουν ἄρκετὰ γιὰ νὰ φτάσουν. Μοῦ εἶπε κι ἐκεῖνος ἓνα τυπικὸ εὐχαριστῶ κι ἔφυγε. Εἶχε καταλάβει ὅτι ἡ ἱερατικὴ του ιδιότητα μοῦ εἶχε ἀποκαλυφθεῖ. Αὐτὸ ἦταν κουραστικὸ γιὰ ἐκεῖνον. Ἦταν δυσάρεστο καὶ γιὰ μένα.

Μέχρι νὰ ἔρθουν οἱ γνωστοί μου ἔκανα πολλές σκέψεις γιὰ τὸν ἀράστο συλλειτουργό μου. Ἄν φοροῦσε τὰ ράσα του, θὰ εἶχε τὴν ἐμφάνιση ἐνός παραδοσιακοῦ καὶ ἐνάρετου κληρικοῦ καὶ θὰ ἔσπευδαν οἱ ἀπλοὶ ἄνθρωποι τοῦ λαοῦ νὰ τοῦ φιλήσουν τὸ χέρι. Πρόθυμα κι ἐγὼ θὰ τὸν χαιρετοῦσα, θὰ τὸν κερνοῦσα, θὰ μιλοῦσαμε καὶ γιὰ τὸν Γέροντα Παῖσιο. Ὅμως, δίχως τὰ ράσα, τὸν ἔβλεπα σχεδὸν γυμνὸ, χωρὶς ντροπὴ καὶ χωρὶς ἱερατικὸ ἦθος. Ἔτσι τὸν ἐνίωθα. Μπορεῖ νὰ τὸν ἀδικοῦσα. Ὅμως αὐτὴ ἡ ἐντύπωση μοῦ εἶχε σχηματιστεῖ.

Ἴσως κάποιος μοῦ πεῖ, ὅτι αὐτὸ πού εἶδα δὲν ἦταν καὶ τόσο κακό. Ὑπάρχουν ἄλλα πού συμβαίνουν μὲ πρωταγωνιστὲς κληρικοὺς καὶ δὴ ἀγάμους, τὰ ὁποῖα εἶναι ἀπερίγραπτα. Δὲν ἔχω ἀντίρρηση· συμβαίνουν χειρότερα. Ὅμως ἐγὼ σχολιάζω τὸ συγκεκριμένο περιστατικό, τὸ ὁποῖο μὲ ἐνόηλησε. Κι ἐκφράζω τὴν εὐχὴ οἱ κληρικοὶ νὰ διατηροῦν στὴν ψυχὴ τους τὴν ἱερότητα τοῦ σχήματος πού φέρουν καὶ νὰ τὴν ἀποδεικνύουν καὶ μὲ τὰ ράσα τους. Καὶ ἄς μὴ ἰσχυρίζομαστε ἐπιπόλαια ὅτι τὰ ράσα δὲν κάνουν τὸν παπά. Ναί, τὰ ράσα δὲν κάνουν τὸν παπά. Τὸν διατηροῦν ὅμως καὶ τὸν ἀναδεικνύουν. καὶ αὐτὸ εἶναι ἀναγκαῖο στὴ δύσκολη ἐποχὴ μας, ὅπου σχεδὸν ὅλα ἔχουν κατεδαφιστεῖ καὶ καταπατηθεῖ.

Γυναῖκες καὶ Ἱερωσύνη

Πρ. Ἀθανάσιος Μελετός.

Συχνάκις τίθεται τὸ ἐρώτημα, διατί νὰ ἀποκλείονται αἱ γυναῖκες ἐκ τῆς Ἱερωσύνης. Ἐπ' αὐτοῦ ἀπήντησεν ὁ Καθηγητὴς τῆς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν κ. Νίκος Νικολαΐδης εἰς τὸ περιοδικὸν «Λυδία» (ἀριθμὸς τεύχους 426). Σημειῶνει μεταξὺ ἄλλων:

«Ὁ εὐαγγελικὸς λόγος ἀπελευθέρωσε τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἀπὸ τὰ δεσμὰ τοῦ διασυρμοῦ καὶ τῆς καταπίεσης. Πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἐστὲ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. (Γαλ 3:28). Ἄλλωστε τὸ ἔργο τῆς οἰκονομίας τοῦ Θεοῦ πραγματώνεται διὰ τοῦ προσώπου μίας γυναίκας, τῆς Ἀειπαρθένου καὶ Θεοτόκου Μαρίας... Ἄν ὁ Χριστὸς καὶ οἱ Ἀπόστολοι θεωροῦσαν ὅτι καὶ ἡ γυναῖκα μπορεῖ νὰ ἀναλάβει τὸ ἱερατικὸ ἀξίωμα, κατὰ τὸν Ἅγιο Ἐπιφάνιο, πρώτη ἡ Παναγία ἔπρεπε νὰ θεωρηθεῖ ὡς ἡ καταλληλότερη γιὰ τὸ ρόλο αὐτό.

Κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς, ἡ ἐπιδημία τοῦ Παρακλήτου Πνεύματος προχείρισε μόνον στοὺς Ἀποστόλους τὸ βαθμὸ τῆς ἱερωσύνης, ἐνῶ συγκεντρωμένες στὸ χῶρο τοῦτο ἦταν καὶ γυναῖκες μὲ κορυφαῖο πρόσωπο τὴ Μητέρα τοῦ Κυρίου... Οἱ πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀποφαίνονται ὅτι, ὅπως ἡ φύση τῆς γυναίκας, λόγω τῆς κατασκευῆς της, μπορεῖ νὰ ἀναλαμβάνει τὴ σύλληψη, τὴν κύηση, καὶ τὸν τοκετὸ τοῦ νέου ἀνθρώπου, κατ' ἀνάλογο τρόπο, αὐτὸ λειτουργεῖ καὶ στὴ φύση τοῦ ἀνδρα σὲ σχέση μὲ τὴν ἱερωσύνη...

Ἔτσι, τὸ φρονιμότερο εἶναι οἱ ἄνθρωποι νὰ συμμορφωνόμαστε, σὲ ὅσα ἡ σοφία τοῦ Θεοῦ καλύτερα ἀπὸ μας γνωρίζει καὶ ὀρίζει καὶ νὰ ἔχομε τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ὑπακοῆς καὶ τῆς ἐμπιστοσύνης στὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ὄχι νὰ ἐπαναλαμβάνουμε κατ' ἐξακολούθησιν τὴν προπατορικὴ παράβαση καὶ παρακοή, γενόμενοι ὑποχείριοι τῶν αὐθαιρεσιῶν τοῦ πονηροῦ».

Σαφεῖς αἱ ἀπαντήσεις καὶ ὅλη ἡ σκέψις τοῦ κ. Καθηγητοῦ ἐπὶ τοῦ θέματος, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἠθικὸν συμπέρασμα τῆς ὑπακοῆς εἰς τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Δὲν πρέπει νὰ πολυπραγμονῶμεν ἐπὶ τῶν βουλῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ.



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

COWARDS OR ACCOMPLICES IN THE ABORTION HOLOCAUST?

By Patrick Johnston, D.O.

I have boldly gone where few physicians have gone before. Where? You ask. I'll give you a hint. It's a very lonely place. You are liable to be rejected by your peers, slandered by your superiors, and avoided by those following in your footsteps if you dare venture into this arena. It's a place where you defend innocent life against not only the mammon-lusting attackers, but also from those medical colleagues who would turn a blind eye and endorse silence in the face of murder of Holocaust proportions.

I was fearful of exposing the moral corruptness of previous superiors, under whose leadership I received fine training as a physician, but now I am on my own in a flourishing medical practice, and God has proven himself able to shut the lions' mouths. On March 27, 2000, I, a second-year family practice resident at the Southern Ohio Medical Center in Portsmouth, Ohio, gave a lecture to the medical students, interns, and residents, entitled, "Ethical Considerations in Elective Abortions—From a Physician's Perspective." In this graphic photograph-laden powerpoint lecture, I gave a scientific defense for the humanity of the pre-born child and a logical argument that the lives of these innocent human beings should be protected not only by law, but by the physicians who care for them and their mothers.



The lecture went well with the exception of one student who said that it was not well balanced; "I didn't give the other side." I explained to her that she was well acquainted with the "pro-choice" position, and that it was only fair that she also be acquainted with the pro-life arguments. I also explained the pro-choice position was not based upon scientific fact, but the rejection and censorship of plain scientific fact, and so it would be impossible to give an honest, science-based lecture legitimizing the destruction of innocent, living human beings. Such arguments could be based upon atheistic philosophy and case law, polls and popular opinion, but not objective scientific data.

More than one medical student told me that they were shocked at our profession's tolerance of the baby-killing industry. However, one of the forty lecture attendees went to one of my superiors and complained. The Director of the Family Practice residency told me over the phone that I would not be allowed to give this lecture again. I rebutted that the lec-

ture would save innocent lives and was based upon scientific fact, and should not be censored. I was told that the lecture was appropriate for religious groups, but not for physicians. I responded that it was a scientific argument for the humanity of the pre-born child and that of all those who should familiarize themselves with this evidence, for physicians it was most critical. I was told that I could not be unbiased and so I was disqualified to give such a lecture on such an emotionally-charged topic. The physician who informed me of the administration's decision was sympathetic with my arguments, but the decision was not his; he was simply the chosen vehicle to relay it to me. I was informed that if I did not voluntarily comply with their censorship, then the administration of the hospital would "gag me."

Gag me! They hadn't even heard or read the lecture yet. I was tried and found guilty without even a hearing. I went to Kendall Stewart, M.D., psychiatrist and Director of Medical Education, who was responsible for this decision, and I gave him a copy of the lecture and asked him to at least peruse it before censoring it. I told him he was prematurely basing his opinions of my lecture solely on the evaluations of my critics, and he was not familiar with the substance of the lecture at all. Refute my arguments, if they were so erroneous, but "gagging" the messenger was neither scientific nor ethical.

It was then that I was verbally blasted for fifteen minutes on why I would be censored! It came down to an ad hominem abusive argument.

"People perceive you as a religious zealot..."

"And what's wrong with that? I don't apologize for my faith..."

"You're a one issue physician! You have employed science to cloak your passionate religious opposition to abortion..."

"Show me how, please, sir. There's the notes of the lecture I gave. Where did I say anything remotely religious?"

"You have offended many with your comments. We will censor you, you will not be allowed to give this lecture again!"

The psychological abuse was relentless.

"You have an ulterior motive for your lecture."

"What? That's not true."

"You're blushing as I'm speaking!" He retorted. "Your denial of the obvious is evidence of your problem."

"Sir, I have no secondary gain, as if I enjoyed controversy," I said calmly. "I only want to fulfill my Hippocratic oath, to care for human beings, especially the defenseless, those who were being discriminated against and killed by medical professionals."

“That is so...” he swallowed hard and shook his head as he searched for the words. “That is soooo insulting! That is soooo offensive to me! Don’t you realize how very condescending and judgmental you are?”

“My dilemma is similar to that of a physician in Nazi Germany where Jews were being experimented upon and fatally discriminated against. German physicians who protested the Holocaust and protested the medical profession’s involvement in the killing were considered ‘one issue physicians’. But it was only ethical to oppose the slaughter then, and it is only ethical to oppose the slaughter now, in spite of those in our profession who take offense with the presentation of the evidence of the humanity of the unborn child, which is all I gave today in that lecture. The only way a physician can justify abortion and claim he is being true to his oath is if he dehumanizes those being discriminated against, namely, the fetus, the unborn child. Just as slave societies dehumanize those they want to abuse, just like Nazi Germany dehumanized those they sought to destroy, so the medical profession today turns a blind eye to scientific fact and accepts the dehumanization of an entire class of human beings, at the cost of the lives of our most helpless patients. My lecture gave the scientific case for the humanity of the fetus and the legal basis for their protection in natural and constitutional law. It should not be censored,” I told him.

To this he glibly responded, “Did that make you feel better?”

I spoke hardly another word during the remainder of our meeting, as he continued his diatribe against me. “Well,” I said, standing to leave after he concluded his reproof, “at least you have a copy of the lecture you’re censoring. I’d appreciate any scientific critique of it,” I said before shaking his hand and exiting the room.

Is the medical profession that bankrupt that we not only turn a blind eye to the illegitimate destruction of human life in our neighborhood, but we also censor and belittle those who would simply present the scientific facts of the humanity of the unborn child and expose the immorality of killing the most innocent and defenseless of human beings? Dr. Stewart is not only a popular psychiatrist and Director of Medical Education, but a practicing Methodist and professing Christian. My indictment of Dr. Stewart also applies to the medical profession at large, but also the Christian church in America which has been largely anemic in its all-too-tolerant response to the intolerable slaughter and has expressed outrage only at those who have the courage to speak up in defense of the innocent children and resist their slaughterers.

I had been looking forward to giving this lecture annually at S.O.M.C. Apparently, many physicians are afraid to comply with our Hippocratic traditions and expose the abortion industry. Medical students, interns, and residents have not heard the truth about abortion, and they will not, as long as

the leadership of the institutions of higher education “gags” all dissenting professionals who have the audacity to face the gauntlet of intellectual barbarians and defend the humanity of the pre-born and the sacredness of human life. The Holocaust will continue as long as physicians and pastors don’t care, as long as they keep their patients, congregations, and communities in the dark about the killing centers in their town. As long as Christians remain silent, content with their wealth, their safety, their comfort, and give no care for *the least of these* (Mt 25) who are being fatally discriminated against in their communities at a rate of over a million mutilated corpses annually.

I was part of a pro-life team in a pro-life vs. pro-choice debate in my medical school, Southeastern College of Osteopathic Medicine in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. When the facts of the humanity of the unborn child are exalted, the sophistry of the pro-choice-to-kill proponents is exposed and their justifications of the bloodshed crumble like a deck of cards in a hurricane. Students came up to me after that debate and told me that their minds were changed about abortion. It was then that I discovered that these debates were a great way to save lives.

Unfortunately, my experience in trying to organize public debates on the issue of abortion is that it is virtually impossible to get a pro-choice spokesperson or physician to defend abortion in a public debate forum, even when I offered them hefty honorariums out of my own pocket! As my wife and I tried to acquire pro-choice defenders for a public debate on the campus of Florida State University on the twenty-fifth anniversary of Roe versus Wade, an abortion clinic director told us, “We really don’t have anything to gain and everything to lose by engaging public debates. You see, we are winning!”

That’s why directors of medical education like Dr. Stewart would rather “gag” a pro-life resident than refute him. You see, they are winning. The killing continues every day, and as long as the scientific facts for the humanity of the unborn child and the constitutional principles that protect innocent human life from discrimination are kept in the books and away from the minds of the masses, the bloodshed will continue with the blessing of the justice system.

I fear that those who are most familiar with those facts, those who are most obligated to defend these innocent human beings from a “legal” kill, those who have the potential to turn the tide in the struggle for life and liberty in our nation and around the world, are either cowards or accomplices. The blood of the innocent stains their hands and the wrath of the Almighty hovers over their heads.

Is it worth the persecution, my abortion-protesting comrades? Is it worth the abuse, the slander, the belittling, and the thousands of middle fingers? Oh, it is worth that and so much more! Let our reward be the smile of our Creator, and we will find the strength to endure in the fight for life. Let our satisfaction come in knowing that we are doing unto

others as we would have them do unto us. Let our joy come in knowing that one day, murder will be outlawed and all impenitent murders, as well as cowards and accomplices, will be punished, be it through a revival of truth in our houses of worship, legislatures, and courtrooms, or be it via the second coming of Jesus Christ.

In the book of Genesis, God heard the blood of Abel that cried up out of the ground, and he consequently cursed Cain, humanity's first murderer. In the Bible, God's wrath consumed entire civilizations because of the innocent blood shed in their land that went unavenged. God hears the cries of the slaughtered and the fervent prayers of the saints who care about their plight. Justice is inevitable! The fight for life will ultimately succeed.



HOLD THAT FAST WHICH THOU HAST!

By Metropolitan Philaret (+1985). [This message was found in the typewriter of Metropolitan Philaret shortly after his repose. No date was indicated, but one must conclude that it was typed within a few days of his peaceful repose. His words serve as one of many reminders for us to live as true Orthodox Christians.]

These words from the Book of Revelation [Rev 3:11] have a particular significance in our time, our greatly sorrowful and wicked days which are full of temptation. They remind us of that priceless spiritual treasure that we possess, as children of the Orthodox Church. Yes, we are rich. This spiritual wealth is that which the Holy Church possesses. This is the wealth which belongs to all Her faithful children...

The teaching of the Faith! Our wonderful, salvific Orthodox Faith! The countless living examples of the lives of people who have lived according to the Faith and according to the lofty principles and laws which the Church sets before us. Those who have attained that spiritual purity and exalted state that is called sanctity, the beauty and magnificence of our Orthodox divine services, and a living participation in them through faith and prayer. The fullness of the spiritual life of grace which is accessible to each and every one. And, what is the crown of all, the unity of the children of the Church in that love of which the Savior said: *By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another.* [Jn 13-35].

DEATH, CHILDREN & H1N1

By Karen Schuberg, CNS News Network, November 3, 2009.

A CDC report released last Friday placed the death toll from H1N1 at 114 for persons aged 18 or younger. The week of Oct. 18-24 saw 19 laboratory-confirmed pediatric deaths from H1N1. Since August, 65 children have died from the virus and 12 have died from an unknown subtype of Influenza A. Since April 26, only 1 child has died from seasonal flu.

Meanwhile, in a 2008 Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR), the CDC said that in 2005, the most recent year for which abortion data is available, 820,151 legal abortions were reported from 49 reporting areas.

According to Guttmacher data, which are considered more up-to-date and more accurate than federal government statistics, 3,305 babies on average lose their lives to abortion daily. In 2005, the number of abortions totaled 1,206,200 children. Guttmacher spokeswoman Rebecca Wind told CNSNews.com that her organization's data are more "complete" than the CDC's because, rather than relying on state self-reports, Guttmacher contacts abortion providers directly.

"Guttmacher conducts a census of all known abortion providers in the United States," Wind explained. "The CDC compiles data that are submitted by state departments of health and depend on state reporting requirements, which vary from state to state. In 2005, California, Louisiana, and New Hampshire did not provide data to the CDC."

Moreover, the CDC does not factor in how many children die from the legal abortion-inducing drug mifepristone, also known as RU-486.

Based on the Guttmacher statistics, an estimated 694,050 children were killed by abortion over the last seven months—not including deaths from abortion drugs taken privately, outside of clinics. Brian Clowes, director of research at Human Life International, told CNSNews.com that while it is "sad" that 114 children have died from the H1N1 virus since April, the contrast is overwhelming.

"Over that same seven months, over 700,000 pre-born human beings have been killed legally by abortion in the United States," Clowes said. "Yet we tolerate the death toll from abortion because we have come to believe, contrary to science and every mother's experience, that the unborn human being really isn't a human being."

Clowes added: "This staggering inconsistency hardly even shocks us anymore, as the latest 'pandemic' never even begins to reach the death toll that we have grown to tolerate from legalized abortion. **Ignoring the by-far-largest killer of children in favor of the latest fashionable panic goes beyond mere irony; it speaks of a deep societal sickness that we can hardly comprehend because it is so pervasive.**"

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. (Mt 11:15).

THE GREAT FEAST OF RENEWAL

Teaching on the week preceding Nativity, by St. John of Kronstadt.

We are approaching, beloved brethren, the world-saving feast of the birth in the flesh of our Lord God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

For several days before the feast, the holy Church already celebrates this wondrous mystery in the spiritual hymns of her daily services. These hymns remind us of our divine birthright, and the squandering of our sonship through sin; of its restoration through repentance of our common spiritual kinship and of the spirit of love and care for one another. And in order that we celebrate this feast of God's limitless love and His extreme condescension not in a worldly, but in a spiritual manner, let us briefly consider the following: why did God become man while remaining God? And what does God's incarnation require of us?

Having set forth these two questions, I shall answer the first one with the words of the Archangel to Joseph, the betrothed of the Holy Virgin: *God became man to save His people from their sin.* (Mt 1:21). For this reason He is called Jesus, which means "Saviour." And so, it was for our salvation that the Lord came to earth and became man, for the regeneration in us of the image of God which had fallen. The Son of God became the Son of Man in order to make us sons of God who were the children of wrath and eternal damnation. In the words of the Holy Apostle John the Theologian: *That we should be called the sons of God.* (I Jn 3:1); *Now God became man, that He may make Adam a god.* (Stichera for lauds of Annunciation).

O the unutterable love of God! O the unspeakable compassion of the Lord! And He, the Most Holy, did this: He deified mankind in His chosen ones, cleansed them from all evil both of soul and body, sanctified, glorified, led them from corruption to everlasting life, made them worthy to stand in blessedness before the terrible throne of His glory. And He deified us also, brothers and sisters; He gave us a new birth through water and the Holy Spirit, sanctified us, made us His sons, gave us the promise of eternal life and eternal blessings, surpassing all telling and imagining. And in confirmation, as a surety of the future blessings, He gave to us, still here on earth, the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts: *God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, "Abba Father"* (Gal 4:6) writes the Apostle.

And so, my brothers, the feast of the Nativity of Christ reminds us that we are born of God, that we are sons of God, that we have been saved from sin and that we must live for God and not sin; not for flesh and blood, not for the *world which lies in evil* (I Jn 5:19), not for earthly corruption, but for an inheritance incorruptible... reserved in heaven the Lord Himself will give you a sign; *behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.* (Is 7:14).

You who are preparing yourselves to meet the feast of Christ's Nativity, ask yourselves: Have you preserved that spiritual birth from God which we each received in baptism? Are you always heedful of your Divine sonship and the sacred treasure of the Spirit which you acquired in baptism? Have you grown closer to God through faith and love, like His beloved children; have you loved one another as befits children of God; have you despised ugly, evil and all-destructive sin? Have you loved truth and every virtue? Have you loved immortal and eternal life prepared in a land which will not pass away and to which we are called by Him Who now has come to our corrupt earth? These are questions which we must ask ourselves now and decide-not only with our minds, but above all, with our hearts and with our very deeds.

In general, we should not allow ourselves to celebrate any Christian feast without seriously considering the following: What is its meaning and what is its purpose? What is our responsibility towards it? We must know the Christian meaning behind every feast. Then the feast will become profitable for our soul's salvation. Otherwise, the enemy of our salvation will snatch us and turn the feast of God into a feast of the flesh,, of lawlessness, as so often happens.

Having resolved the first question (as to why did God become man) we now arrived to the resolution of the second: What does the Incarnation of the Son of God require of us? It requires of us to remember and hold in sacred honor the fact that we are born of God; and if we have sullied and trampled upon this birthright with our sins, we must restore it by washing it with tears of repentance; we must restore and renew within us the image of God which has fallen and the union with God of blessedness, truth and holiness which has been destroyed.

The incarnation of the Son of God requires from us, above all, mutual love, humility, that we help and serve one another; for how can we not love one another when we see the love that God has towards us? How can we not be humble, seeing such humility, such voluntary condescension for our sake of the Son of God? How can we not help one another in every way possible, when the Son of God Himself came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to *give His life a ransom for many?* (Mt 20:28). Like the wisemen, let us, brothers, also prepare gifts for The new-born King. Instead of gold, frankincense and myrrh, let us bring Him the gifts of faith, hope, and love. Amen.



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A NATIVITY EPISTLE OF 1962

By Saint John, Archbishop of Shanghai (+1966).

Thou, Who art the God of peace and the Father of compassions, didst send unto us the Angel of Thy great Counsel, granting us peace.



The Angel-Messenger of the pre-eternal Counsel of the Holy Trinity comes to the earth. This is not an ordinary messenger; it is *the Only-begotten Son of God Himself*. He brings peace to men.

Peace be unto you, He said more than once to His disciples. *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you*, He says to the apostles at the Mystical Supper, *not as the world giveth, give I unto you*. And appearing

after His Resurrection, again He says: *Peace be unto you*.

For he is our peace, the holy Apostle Paul says concerning Him: *He came to the earth to reconcile man unto God by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby. And having come, He preached peace to those afar off and to those near, because through Him we both have access unto the Father*.

The wall that separated heaven and earth is destroyed; the sword that barred the way to the tree of life disappears. Unto man that had sinned comes his Creator, calling him into His embrace!

By the mouths of the apostles, the Holy Spirit cries out: *In Christ, be ye reconciled to God*. You that had sinned came not to God, but the Son of God, before Whom you sinned, came to you! He calls everyone to Himself; He gives forgiveness to everyone who merely thirsts for this. For without the desire of man himself, without at least his little effort, God's peace cannot settle in him.

The Lord forces no one to come to Him, but calls everyone: *Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*. Come all ye who are heavy laden with sins, who are exhausted from your labors and who do not find rest! You shall find that inner peace, which you will find nothing on earth more desirable than. The soul will feel unearthly peace and joy.

The Magi who worshipped the Babe experienced that joy; the shepherds, finding Him lying in a manger, also felt it. But neither peace nor joy touched the heart of Herod and those who wanted to destroy the Babe. For evil desire and malice are incompatible with inner peace. And whoever does not have inner peace, also sows strife and malice about.

The Church now calls us to meet Christ Who comes from heaven. What can we do in order to meet Him like the Magi, and not like Herod? *Ye that desire life, keep your tongue from*

evil and your lips from speaking guile. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

It tends to be hard to do this; we are weak when it comes to everything good. But the Son of God even came for this: in order to strengthen us. Not for naught was He born in Bethlehem, which signifies "house of bread." He feeds us with heavenly food, His flesh.

God, the Lord and Creator of all, as a babe in the flesh, is worshipped in a poor manger, crying out: eat My body and through faith be made steadfast. These words of the divine Babe are directed to us. Let us hearken to His call! Let us follow the Magi; let us hasten with the shepherds!

Our churches are now that cave of Bethlehem. Not illusory, but in reality does He, Who is now being born in His most pure flesh, rest in them. Let us worship Him; let us offer as a gift our thoughts and desires; let us confess our sins, and let us taste of His immaculate Body and Blood. Whoever did not do this earlier, let him at least accomplish it now, when the star of Bethlehem is already shining! Our minds will be enlightened and the heart will hear:

Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will among men!



OUR HOLY ORTHODOX CHURCH

He who wishes personal salvation and who wishes to be a true son of the Orthodox Church, must seek in her deliverance from the flood as in the ark of Noah. He who fears the terrible thunder of anathema that overwhelms soul and body must take upon himself the most sweet yoke of Christ—the ecclesiastical dogmas. Let him tame the unruliness of his mind with the ecclesiastical laws and submit in all things to his Mother—the Church!

St. John Chrysostom

Christ the Lord called Catholic that Church which maintains the true and saving confession of the faith.

St. Maximus the Confessor

The Church is the gathering of the People, the Body of Christ, His Name, His Bride, which calls the peoples to penitence and prayer; purified by the water of Holy Baptism and washed by His precious Blood, adorned as a Bride and sealed with the anointing of the Holy Spirit... The Church is an earthly heaven wherein the heavenly God dwells and walks; it is an anti-type of the Crucifixion, Burial and Resurrection of Christ... The Church is a divine house where the mystical living Sacrifice is celebrated,... and its precious stones are the divine dogmas taught by the Lord to His disciples.

St. Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople

CONSCIENCE: THE VOICE OF GOD IN MAN

By Archpriest Alexander Mileant (+2005).

THE ACTION OF CONSCIENCE IN MAN

One woman, by reason of poverty, took something from a store and carried it away surreptitiously. No one saw her. But from that moment a certain unpleasant feeling gave her no peace. She had to go back to the store and return what she had taken. Having done this, she came home with a feeling of relief. Such cases, in which people are forced to act contrary to their advantage or their pleasure, are impossible to enumerate.

Each individual is acquainted with his inner voice which at times reproaches and persecutes him as it were, and at other times encourages and gladdens him. This refined, innate moral feeling is called conscience. Conscience—it is a kind of spiritual instinct which differentiates between good and evil more quickly and more clearly than the mind. He who follows his conscience will not regret his actions.

In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus Christ likens the conscience to the *eye*, by means of which a person sees his moral state (Mt 6:22). He also likens it to an adversary with whom a man must make peace before he appears *before the Judge* (Mt 5:25). This last comparison reveals the distinguishing characteristic of the conscience: to oppose our bad actions and intentions.

Our personal experience likewise proves that this inner voice, called the conscience, is located outside our control and expresses itself independently, quite apart from our desire. Just as we cannot convince ourselves that we are full when we are hungry, or that we are rested when we are tired, so, too, we cannot convince ourselves that we have done something good when our conscience tells us that we have done something bad.

Some see in Christ's words concerning the *worm that dieth not*, which will torment sinners in the life to come, a reference to the gnawing of the conscience (Mk 9:44). Similar torments of the conscience were expressively and colorfully described by A. S. Pushkin in his dramatic work, "The Avaricious Knight:" *Conscience: A clawed beast, scraping the heart; conscience is an uninvited guest, a tiresome interlocutor, a churlish creditor; it is—a witch, before whom the moon and the tombs grow dim.*

And further the knight with terror recalls the pleading and the tears of all those whom he pitilessly robbed.

A COMMON NATURAL LAW

The presence of the conscience gives evidence that indeed, just as the Bible relates, in the very process of creating man, God placed within the depths of his soul *His image and likeness* (Gen 1:26). For this reason it is customary to call the conscience the voice of God in man. As a moral law written

directly on man's heart, it acts in all people, independent of age, race, upbringing and level of development.

Anthropologists who study the morals and customs of various underdeveloped and primitive peoples testify that, to this day, they have yet to find, even among the wildest savages, a people lacking some form of an understanding of good and evil. Furthermore, many tribes not only place a high value on good and despise evil, but for the most part their views agree on the essence of the one and the other. Many primitive tribes stand just as high in their understanding of good and evil as many cultured peoples. Even among those tribes which place a positive value on certain deeds which are unacceptable according to prevailing opinion, there is in general a marked consensus in the moral consciousness of all people

In the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans, St. Paul writes in some detail concerning the actions of the inner moral law in man. The Apostle reproaches the Jews who, knowing the written law of God, often transgress it, whereas the pagans, which have not the [written] law, do by nature the things contained in the law... *Which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves. Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another* (Rom 2:14-15). Here, too, St. Paul explains how this law of conscience sometimes rewards and at other times punishes a man. Each person, therefore, no matter who he may be, Jew or Gentile, has a feeling of uneasiness, of distress and oppression, and *knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.* (Rom 1:32). At the coming Day of Judgment, God will judge people not only according to their faith, but also according to the witness of their conscience.

The conscience has a highly refined sense of good and evil. If man were not marred by sin, he would have no need of the written law. His conscience could rightly guide all his actions. The need for a written law arose after the Fall, when man, darkened by passions, ceased to hear clearly the voice of his conscience. But in essence, both the written law and the inner law of the conscience speak about the same thing: *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.* (Mt 7:12).

In our daily relations with people we subconsciously place greater trust in a man's conscience than in written laws and rules. After all, one cannot track down every violation, and even the law "something drew a breath, you turn around, it's gone." Whereas the conscience contains in itself the eternal and immutable law of God. And because of this, normal relations between people are possible only as long as people have not lost within themselves the voice of conscience.

EXAMPLES OF THE ACTION OF THE CONSCIENCE DESCRIBED IN THE BIBLE

No worldly book explains so precisely all the various manifestations of the conscience in man as does the Bible. We shall cite here some cases in which the conscience is most apparent.

In examining negative examples we see how evil deeds evoke in man feelings of shame, fear, grief, guilt and even despair. Adam and Eve, for example, having tasted the forbidden fruit, felt ashamed and hid with the intention of concealing themselves from God (Gen 3:7-10). Cain, having killed his younger brother Abel out of jealousy, afterwards began to be afraid that some passerby would kill him (Gen 4:14). King Saul, persecuting the innocent David, wept from shame on learning that David, instead of taking revenge, had defended his life (I Kings 26). The proud scribes and pharisees, who brought to Christ the woman caught in adultery, began to depart in shame when they saw their own sins written by Christ in the ground (Jn 8). When Christ chased the merchants and moneychangers out of the temple, they left without protesting, knowing that it was wrong to turn the temple into a market-place (Jn 2).

Sometimes the pangs of conscience become so unbearable that a man prefers to cut short his life. The clearest example of this sharp gnawing of the conscience we see in the traitor Judas, who hung himself after he had betrayed Christ to the chief priests of the Jews (Mt 27:5). In general, sinners—both believers and unbelievers—subconsciously feel responsible for their actions. Thus, according to Christ's prophetic words, before the end of the world sinners, seeing the approach of God's righteous judgment, will ask the earth to swallow them up and the hills to cover them (Lk 23:30; Rev 6:16).

It sometimes happens that a man compassed about by anxieties does not hear the voice of his conscience. But later, when he comes to himself, he feels its pangs with double intensity. Thus, the brothers of Joseph, having fallen onto hard times, remembered how they had sold their younger brother into slavery and understood that they had been justly punished for this sin (Gen 42:21). King David, carried away with the beauty of Bathsheba, understood his sin of adultery only after he had been called to account by the prophet Nathan (II Kings 12:13). Out of fear, the fiery Apostle Peter renounced Christ; but upon hearing the rooster crow, he recalled Christ's prophecy and wept bitterly (Mt 26:75). The wise thief, hanging on the cross next to Christ, understood only just before he died that sufferings were sent to him and his comrade for their previous crimes (Lk 23:40). The publican Zaccheus, moved by Christ's love, remembered how he had offended people through his greed and resolved to recompense all those whom he had cheated (Lk 19:8).

On the other hand, when a man knows he is innocent, he finds in the clean witness of his conscience an unshakable support for hope in God. The righteous Job, for example,

knew that the reason for his cruel suffering lay not with him but in the higher designs of God, and he hoped in God's mercy (Job 27:6). Similarly, when the righteous King Hezekiah lay dying from an incurable disease, he began to entreat God to heal him for the sake of those good deeds which he had earlier performed, and he became well (IV Kings 20:3). St. Paul, whose life was dedicated to God and the salvation of others, not only did not fear death, but, on the contrary, he desired to depart from his perishable body in order to be with Christ (Phil 1:23).

There is no greater relief or happiness for the sinner than to receive forgiveness of sins and peace of conscience. The Gospel is filled with such cases as the sinning woman who with gratitude washed Christ's feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair (Lk 7:38). On the other hand, disdain for the voice of the conscience and repeated falls into sin darken the soul to such an extent that a man can expect, as St. Paul warns, the shipwreck of his faith (I Tim 1:19); i.e., he can become irrevocably immersed in evil.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL SIDE OF THE CONSCIENCE

Psychology is concerned with the study of the nature of conscience and its relation to man's other moral capabilities. Psychology tries to ascertain two things:

- (a) Is conscience a natural human trait innate to man, or is it the result of upbringing and conditioned by those circumstances of life which affect man's formation?
- (b) Is conscience a manifestation of the mind, the senses or the will of man, or is it a manifestation of some independent power?

In answer to the first question, a careful observation of the presence of the conscience in man convinces us that the conscience is not the fruit of upbringing or physical instincts, but possesses a higher, inexplicable origin.

For example, children give evidence of having a conscience before receiving any [moral] instruction from adults. If physical instincts dictated the conscience, it would prompt people to do what was pleasant and to their advantage. The conscience, however, very often forces a person to do precisely that which appears unpleasant and to his disadvantage. No matter how much the wicked may revel if they go unpunished, or how much good people may suffer, the conscience tells everyone that there exists a higher justice. Sooner or later, each will receive a reward according to his deeds. For this reason, the most convincing argument for many people in support of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul is the presence of a conscience in man.

Concerning the mutual relationship of the conscience and man's other faculties—his mind, senses and will—we see that not only does the conscience tell a man what in and of itself is morally good or bad, but it obliges him to do without fail what is good and to avoid what is bad, accompanying the good

deeds with a feeling of joy and blessedness, and wrong doings with a feeling of shame and torment. In these actions, which are proper to the conscience, are manifest rational, sensual and volitional aspects.

Of course, on its own the mind cannot discern some actions as morally bad and others as morally good. The mind can only distinguish between which of our or another's actions are intelligent or foolish, expedient or inexpedient, advantageous or disadvantageous, and that is all. Meanwhile, for some reason the mind sometimes urges us to oppose the most seemingly intelligent or advantageous opportunities with morally good actions, to condemn the first and approve the latter. It deters in certain of man's actions not only a calculation or mistake, similar to an error in mathematical calculations, but also something vile, criminal. May we not therefore conclude that the conscience, acting upon the mind, sets before it purely moral reasons, independent from it in essence?

In turning to the manifestations of the conscience in the area of the will, we see that in and of itself, the will is the ability in man to desire something, but that this ability does not command a man what to do. The human will, inasmuch as we know it in ourselves and in others, very often struggles against the moral law and strives to tear itself loose of its binding fetters. If the commanding power of the conscience were merely a manifestation of man's will, this struggle would not exist. Whereas the summons of the moral law certainly weigh upon our will. Inasmuch as it is free, the will can refuse to fulfill these summons, but never is it able to renounce them. However, even in its non-fulfillment of the demands of the moral law, the will does not go unpunished.

Finally, the sensory power of the conscience also must not be regarded solely as the sentient faculty of man's heart. The heart seeks pleasant feelings and turns away from what is opposed to these. Meanwhile, violations of the demands of the moral law are frequently accompanied by the most severe torments which cause the heart to be rent in two, and from which we can in no way escape, no matter how much we want or try. Clearly, the sentient power of the conscience also must not be regarded solely as a manifestation of the normal sensual faculty.

In view of all this, should we not acknowledge that the conscience appears to be a power independent of us, standing higher than man and reigning over his intellect, will and heart, although it is both contained and lives within him?

ON PRESERVING PURITY OF CONSCIENCE

Keep thine heart with utmost care; for out of it are the issues of life (Prov 4:23). With these words the Holy Scriptures summon man to preserve his moral purity.

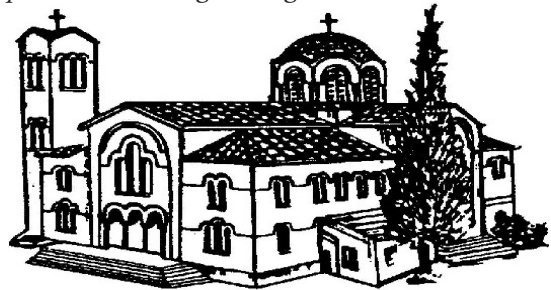
But what is a sinful man to do? Having sullied his conscience, is he forever doomed? Fortunately, no! An enormous advantage that Orthodoxy has over other religions lies in the fact that it opens the way and provides the means to a complete purification of the soul. This way consists in a repentant laying

down of one's sins before the mercy of God, with the sincere intent to change one's life for the better. God forgives us for the sake of His Son, Who on the Cross offered the redeeming sacrifice for our sins. In the Mystery of Baptism, and again in the Mystery of Confession and Holy Communion, God completely cleanses the conscience of a person from dead works (Eph 9:14). This is why the Church attaches such great significance to these Mysteries.

In addition, Christ's Church possesses that grace-giving power which gives the conscience the possibility to perfect itself, to become highly refined and manifest itself with great clarity. *Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.* (Mt 5:8). Through a clean conscience, God's light begins to operate, ruling man's thoughts, words and deeds. In this blessed light a man becomes a vessel of God's Providence. Not only does he perfect himself spiritually and attain salvation, but he also contributes to the salvation of others, those who have contact with him. We recall Sts. Seraphim of Sarov, John of Kronstadt, Elder Ambrose of Optina and many other saints like them.

Finally, a clean conscience is a source of inner joy. People with clean consciences are calm, pleasant, desiring the good of others, thinking well of others. People with clean consciences have a foretaste already in this life of the blessedness of the Kingdom of Heaven!

Neither greatness of authority, nor wealth of riches, nor extensive power, nor physical might, nor a sumptuous table, nor elegant clothes, nor anything else a man may possess can give joy and peace of soul; this comes only from spiritual well-being and a good conscience.



Listen to what the Lord Himself tells us: *Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart and you shall find rest for your souls* (Mt 11:29). There you have it in a nutshell: He has taught us the root and cause of all evils and also the remedy for it, leading to all good. He shows us that pretensions to superiority cast us down and that it is impossible to obtain mercy except by the contrary, that is to say, by humility. Self-elevation begets contempt and disobedience begets perdition whereas humility begets obedience and the saving of souls. And I call that real humility which is not humble in word and outward appearance but is deeply planted in the heart; for this is what He meant when He said that *I am meek and humble of heart.*

St. Dorotheos of Gaza

ON HUMILITY

By St. Silouan the Athonite.

It is a great sign of grace to learn Christian humility; life becomes easier and everything becomes dearer to the heart. Only to the humble does the Lord show Himself through the Holy Spirit. Humility is that light, by means of which we can see the Light of God, just as we sing *In Your light we see the light*.

There is a great difference between the simplest person who has felt the Lord through the Holy Spirit and the person, though he may be prominent, who has not felt the grace of the Holy Spirit. There is a great difference between believing only that God exists, experiencing Him only through nature or the Scriptures, and experiencing Him through the Holy Spirit. If one has experienced God through the Holy Spirit, his soul burns with love for God day and night, and it can no longer be tied to anything earthly. The soul which has not felt the sweetness of the Holy Spirit, feels joy in the vanity of earthly fame or wealth, but the soul that has experienced God through the Holy Spirit, desires only the Lord, and places no value on wealth or earthly glory.

If we were humble, the Lord in His kindness would show us everything, reveal all secrets, but we are not humble, we are proud and vain over all details, and in this we suffer ourselves and torment others.

The Lord does not reveal Himself to proud souls. The proud soul, even if it has read all the books, will never understand the Lord, for in its pride it does not allow any room for the grace of the Holy Spirit, and God is only experienced through the Holy Spirit. Pride does not allow the soul to enter on the path of faith. I give this advice to the unbeliever: Let him say, "Lord, if You exist, then enlighten me, and I will serve You with all my heart and soul." For this humble thought and preparedness to serve God, the Lord will certainly enlighten him.

The Lord, though He is merciful, tests the soul with hunger and does not bestow grace until it learns humility. The proud person fears reproach while the humble does not. Whoever has acquired the meekness of Christ is always prepared to reproach himself and welcomes abuse, and sorrows when he is complimented. But this is only the first step in humility; when the soul experiences the Lord through the Holy Spirit in His humility and meekness, then it sees itself as worse than all.

The Lord has taught me to hold my mind in hell, and not to despair. And this is how my soul becomes humble, but this is not yet real humility, which is indescribable. As the soul moves toward the Lord, it becomes fearful, but when it sees the Lord, then it becomes immensely joyous from the beauty of His glory, and it forgets everything earthly in the face of the love of God and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit.

This is the Lord's Heaven. Love will surround everyone, and from the humility of Christ they will be glad to see others

above them. The humility of Christ exists in the lowly: they are happy in their lowliness. This was given to me to understand by the Lord.

The Lord said, *Learn from Me to be meek and humble of heart*. There are many types of humility. You can be obedient and reproach yourself in everything—this is a form of humility. Another can repent his sins and count himself the lowest before Christ—this is also a form of humility. But when a soul sees the Lord through the Holy Spirit in all His meekness and humility, then it also becomes humbled to its limits. This is an indescribable special sort of humility that can only be experienced through the Holy Spirit. And if people could experience the Lord through the Holy Spirit, they would all change—the wealthy would despise their wealth, the learned their studies, the powerful their glory and authority, and all would be humbled and would live in great peace and love, and the earth would be filled with great joy. He who has experienced God through the Holy Spirit has a different understanding and taste.

The Lord loves people, but sends them sorrows, so that they can understand their weakness and be humbled, and for their humility they can accept the Holy Spirit. With the Holy Spirit all is good, all is joyous, all is wonderful.

One might suffer greatly from poverty and ill-health, yet not be humbled, and so suffer in vain. But whoever is humbled is happy with any fate because the Lord is his wealth and joy, and all people will be amazed at the beauty of his soul.

The soul of the humble person is like the sea; cast a stone into the sea, and for a moment it will disturb its serenity, and then sink to the depths. Sorrows sink in the heart of the humble because the power of the Lord is with them.

I used to think that the Lord performed miracles only in response to the prayers of saints. But now I know that the Lord will perform a miracle even for a sinner as soon as his soul is humbled, for when a person learns humility, then the Lord shall hear his prayers.

In their inexperience, many believe that one or another saint performed a miracle, but I have learned that it is the Holy Spirit residing in a person Who performs the miracle. The Lord hopes that we will all be saved and be with Him eternally, and for that reason He listens to the prayers of a sinner for the good of others and for the one who prays.

Where do you reside, humble soul? And who resides in you? And what can I compare you to? You shine brightly, like the sun, and you do not burn out, but give warmth to all around. You will inherit the earth of the meek, as the Lord said. You are like a flourishing garden, in the midst of which stands a beautiful house, where the Lord likes to live.

The earth and the sky love you. The holy Apostles, prophets, and saints love you. The angels, Seraphim and Cherubim love you. You, in your humility, are loved by the Ever-Virgin Mother of God. The Lord loves you and finds joy in you.

MAY HE SERVE AS AN EXAMPLE FOR ALL ORTHODOX HIERARCHS

By George Karras.

It is with great sorrow that Orthodoxy world-wide mourns the loss of the saintly hierarch, His Holiness Patriarch Pavle of Serbia.

He was born on September 11, 1914, to Stefan and Ana Stojčević, in the village of Kučani, in the county of Donji Miholjac, in Croatia. His baptismal name was Gojko. He graduated with high honors from the Fourth Male Gymnasium (high school) in Belgrade 1929. He also graduated from the seminary in Sarajevo in 1935, and from the Orthodox Theological Faculty in Belgrade in 1940. He did postgraduate studies at the Orthodox Theological Faculty at the University of Athens from 1955 to 1957. During his stay in Greece, he studied the New Testament and developed an expertise in liturgics, which resulted in the Patriarch becoming one of the most prolific liturgical writers in the Serbian Church. For his patient and prominent work in the field of theology, the Theological Faculty of the Serbian Orthodox Church awarded His Holiness an Honorary Doctorate of Divinity.

From 1944 to 1955, he was a monastic of Rača Monastery performing different disciplines. During the 1950/51 academic year, the then-hierodacon Pavle was appointed a lecturer at the Prizen Seminary, a position which he retained until his election to the Patriarchal Throne.

He was tonsured a monastic in 1948 and that same year he was ordained a hierodacon. In 1954, he was ordained a hieromonk and raised to the rank of protisingelos. He was elevated to the rank of archimandrite in 1957 by Bishop Emilian of Slavonija. On May 29, 1957, the Holy Assembly of Bishops elected Archimandrite Pavle as Bishop of Raska-Prizen.

From that day and until his last breath, he had faithfully shared in the plight of his suffering people. Bishop Pavle wrote and warned of the present exodus of Serbs from Kosovo, the attacks of the Albanians on Serbian monasteries, the rape of nuns, and terrorizing of pedestrians, the desecration of Serbian cemeteries and overall suffering of the Orthodox in Kosovo and in Metohija. In 1989, the then Bishop Pavle was personally beaten by several Albanian youths in Kosovo. The extent of his injuries required nearly three months of hospitalization. However, in the spirit of Christian forgiveness, he refused to press charges.

It is not without reason that Patriarch Pavle was frequently referred to as a “saint who walks.” The simplicity of his lifestyle and his personal humility had found favor by all of those who are familiar with this virtuous man. Each of the bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church had an automobile, which they used to travel through their dioceses. The one exception had been Patriarch Pavle. When asked why he never obtained an automobile, he replied: “I will not purchase one until every Albanian and Serbian household in Kosovo and Metohija has an automobile.”

His Holiness published *Devich, The Monastery of St. Joanikije of Devich* (1989), and *Questions and Answers to the Church Reader* (1988). For the past 20 years, he had been responsible for the column in the Glasnik of the Serbian Patriarchate known as *Questions and Answers*, dealing with liturgical and sacramental questions. Through his efforts the Holy Synod published the new version of *Srbljak* in 1968. He also coordinated the reproduction of liturgical studies *Christian Feasts* by M. Skabalanovich, published originally in Kiev in 1915 in six volumes. The most monumental contribution of His Holiness Patriarch Pavle was the translation of the New Testament published in 1984, under his supervision. This was the first official Serbian translation of the New Testament, approved by the Serbian Orthodox Church.

If all Patriarch Pavle’s works were published, there would be thousands of pages and many volumes. Patriarch Pavle exem-

plified simplicity in his lifestyle and was the embodiment of humility and personal holiness, a most worthy helmsman that helped guide the “Ship of the Church” in these troubled times.

In 1991, the Holy Assembly of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church elected Bishop Pavle as the 54th Serbian Orthodox Patriarch. During his tenure as patriarch, Pavle has healed the schism with the Free Serbian Orthodox Church, now known as the New Gračanica Metropolitanate, and he had made great efforts to heal the current schism in FYROM with the so-called Macedonian Orthodox Church, (which is considered uncanonical by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and other Eastern Orthodox churches).

His Holiness Patriarch Pavle reposed to the Lord on Sunday November 15, 2009, shortly after receiving the Holy Sacrament of Communion. A truly saintly end to a true saint of our days. May we be worthy of his intercessions and may he serve as an example for all Orthodox hierarchs of our sinful days.



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MERRY CHRISTMAS

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DEC. 27TH: THE FEAST OF THE HOLY INNOCENTS

TROPARION - TONE 1

We beseech You, O Lord of mankind To accept in supplication The suffering which Your saints endured for Your sake, O Lord, And heal all our infirmities.

KONTAKION - TONE 8

When the King was born in Bethlehem, the Magi came from the East. Having been led by a star from on High, they brought Him gifts. But in exceeding wrath, Herod harvested the infants as sowing wheat; The rule of his kingdom has come to an end.

SYNAXARION

14,000 Holy Infants were killed by King Herod in Bethlehem. When the time came for the Incarnation of the Son of God and His Birth of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, Magi in the East beheld a new star in the heavens, foretelling the Nativity of the King of the Jews. They journeyed immediately to Jerusalem to worship the Child, and the star showed them the way. Having worshipped the divine Infant, they did not return to Jerusalem to Herod, as he had ordered them, but being warned by God in a dream, they went back to their country by another way.

Herod finally realized that his scheme to find the Child would not be successful, and he ordered that all the male children two years old and younger at Bethlehem and its surroundings be killed. He thought that the divine Infant, Whom he considered a rival, would be among the dead children.

The murdered infants thus became the first martyrs for Christ. The rage of Herod fell also on Symeon the God-Receiver (February 3), who declared before everyone in the Temple that the Messiah had been born. When the holy Elder died, Herod would not give permission for him to be properly buried. On the orders of King Herod, the holy prophet and priest Zachariah was also killed. He was murdered in Jerusalem between the Temple and the altar (Mt 23:35) because he would not tell the whereabouts of his son John, the future Baptist of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The wrath of God soon fell upon Herod himself: a horrid condition struck him down and he died, eaten by worms while still alive. Right before his death, the impious king murdered the chief priests and scribes of the Jews, and also his brother, and his sister and her husband, as well as his own wife Mariam and three of his sons, and seventy men of wisdom who were members of the Sanhedrin. He initiated this bloodbath so that the day of his death would not be one of rejoicing, but one of mourning.

† † †

From the Editor: The Holocaust of the Holy Innocents continues today through the very evil and reprehensible act of abortion! Killing is killing, no matter what the motivation (or what the “law” allows), and God has made no amendments to the commandment *Thou shall not Kill*. Let us not forget that over 50 million babies have been brutalized in the womb. It is an invisible holocaust, systematically implemented by a paganistic society, hell-bent on losing its soul.