

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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NIGHT COMETH, WHEN NO ONE IS ABLE TO BE WORKING [JN 9:4B]

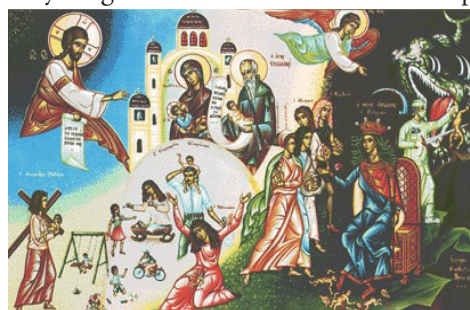
By Fr. Demetrios Carellas, January 22, 2010.

On the eve of the 38th Anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized the brutal murder of pre-born children in the wombs of their mothers, I entreated our Lord Jesus to allow the Holy Spirit to guide my sinful hands to a word from His Word—a specific message for me to take into my heart, regarding this ungodly infanticide; and that is exactly where my hand opened. It is found in St. John's description of our Lord giving—in essence—new eyes to the young man born blind.

Just before uttering those words, our Saviour said the following: *It is needful for Me to be working the works of the One Who sent Me, while it is day.* Like never before, these words convicted my soul. In spite of my total unworthiness, I am an ordained Orthodox Priest of the living God; and, therefore, I must be doing the work of my Jesus, Who sent me, *while it is day.* Because the night—the end of this temporal life—is near, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ! And I feel that we need more time to bring people to Christ and His Truth, His Way, His Life!

Therefore, while I will continue, with God's grace, to offer—to whomever God sends to me—the preaching, teaching and healing of Jesus Christ (bestowed upon me through Holy Ordination), I realize that I must become far more aggressive and bold in defending our

innocent little brothers' and sisters' sacred right to be born. Because too many of our fellow citizens are blind to the fact that, if Christ returned tomorrow, tens of millions of souls would face eternal damnation on the issue of legalized abortion alone! Why? With the murder—and that is what it is, my dear “living ikons” of Christ—of each child via abortion, a great number of people are murdering their very souls: doctors, nurses, parents, social workers, friends, relatives and pro-death (that is what “pro-choice” truly means) politicians, lawyers and judges. It should be easy to understand why a holy priest-monk, many years ago, called abortion the **atomic bomb** of sin—because of the **satanic fall-out** it produces.



The Abortion Icon

Several months ago, President Obama announced to the world that we are not a Christian Nation; and, from one point of view, he is correct, because we certainly are not exhibiting the actions of a Christian Nation. However, our Country was founded upon Christian principles and teachings; and, therefore, we all share a sacred commitment: to our Lord Jesus Christ; our children and grandchildren; each other; and the entire population of this Planet, to return to His Gospel—*while it is day.*

We have chosen as a Nation—especially during the last 50 years—to abandon Christ. And that abandonment is clearly personified in the fact that one of the largest profit-making businesses in the United States is the **legal** killing of God's most innocent children!

How much longer will God endure this shedding of innocent blood? When will He send us earthquakes, like the

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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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ones that have just brought hundreds of thousands of deaths and catastrophic destruction to the tiny country of Haiti? And look at the hypocrisy, my dear brothers and sisters: Both government and private groups—as they should—are pouring much needed aid and personnel to this poor ravaged land; and yet, we remain deaf to the silent screams of 4,000 babies that we legally kill every day! What madness is this? Furthermore, we spend hundreds of billions of dollars every year on trying to clean up our environment from various types of pollutants; however, because of our spiritual blindness, we fail to see the blood of 50 million pre-born babies that has saturated our nation's soul, and the souls of multi-millions of her citizens.

Do we really believe, on that fearful Day (and it will come), that He—Who took upon our flesh in the womb of the Virgin—will ignore this satanic slaughter of His children, and, because we have clean air and water, He will tell us, *Well done, good and faithful servants?* Do we have the audacity to assume that He, Who shed His precious Blood for us on the Cross, will overlook the oceans of blood of His precious little ones that have been offered to Satan on the ungodly altars of pride, privacy, and profit?

Thanks be to God for the hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children, who have been doing God's work

over the past 40 years to defend the pre-born baby's inalienable right to be born. Through their unselfish and Christ-like efforts, several hundred thousand babies have been saved from death over the past 4 decades; and ten times that many souls were given the opportunity to avoid spiritual death by repenting, and seeking God's unlimited forgiveness and healing! Is it not past the time for the rest of us, *while it is day*, to join with them in some manner? Maybe we are not being called to stand in front of the abortion chambers (although that may indeed be the case for some of us), but perhaps we can help prepare and/or help distribute pro-life information, by becoming actively involved in a pro-life group near us.

At the very least, every one of us can pray to our Lord Jesus to

speedily deliver us from this terrible crime against Him. Can we even begin to imagine the glorious impact, if untold thousands (what about millions) of Christians were daily crying out to God to heal our Nation—and all of us—from this abortion holocaust? Could we at least make a commitment to do that every day, until the Lord returns? How much physical strain would that entail? **None!** How much time would that take out of each day? **Very little!** I have even programmed my cell phone to remind me to stop what I am doing, and offer such a prayer at/near noon every day: the time when our



There are two ways to live your life.
One is as though nothing is a miracle.
The other is as though everything is a miracle.
Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

Most-sweet Lord Jesus was nailed on the Cross for us. If you need a prayer to offer, I have placed one at the very end of this paper for you to consider using. Think of how all those prayers would permeate the very air we breathe—helping to cast off the polluted, carnal atmosphere, which has stolen our nation's Christian identity!

My dear brothers and sisters in the risen Lord Jesus, the term, pro-choice Christian, is the consummate oxymoron. You cannot be a Christian, and believe that it is okay to kill a child in the womb of his/her mother. As a priest, I cannot be “politically correct” in my comments; for then I would be betraying the One Who died that I might live. Arise, my brothers and sisters! Arise! Let us stand up for every pre-born child—through our words and our actions. Let us love those who still believe it is okay to commit these murders; but let us not be intimidated by them, as we pray for their deliverance from the evil one's oppression of them. If it is blessed by God, let us—each day—ask our Lord Jesus to accept our prayer on behalf of one baby and his/her mother in our town—that she will have a change of heart and allow her child to be born!

As was the case with each individual (the so-called pro-choice Christian), so also a Nation cannot be called a Christian one, as long as it continues to murder its pre-born children. I beg you, my brothers and sisters: please do your part to restore our Nation to its Christian roots. **Now** is the time for **all**, who call themselves Christians, to come to the defense of the child in the womb! **Now**, while it is day, is the time to be **working the works of the One Who sent us**. Let us begin at this very moment, my beloved co-strugglers on sea of life; because *night cometh, when no one is able to be working!*

A Prayer to Jesus to Deliver Us from the Sin of Abortion

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who—at the 6th hour of the day—didst 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 didst 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 servant; 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.



IS THE BABY IN A WOMB A CHILD OF GOD? YOU DECIDE...

*And Isaac entreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. And **the children struggled together within her**; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of the LORD. And the LORD said unto her, **Two nations are in thy womb**, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels. (Gen 25:21-23)*

*Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, **Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.** (Jer 1:4-5)*

*For thou hast possessed my reins: **thou hast covered me in my mother's womb**. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. (Pss 138:13-14)*

*For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be **filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb**. (Lk 1:15)*

*And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, **the babe leaped in her womb**; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and **blessed is the fruit of thy womb**. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, **the babe leaped in my womb** for joy. (Lk 1:41-44)*

HOW JESUS CHRIST LIVED AND SUFFERED FOR US

By St. Innocent of Alaska.



The basis of life is love: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.* (Mk. 12:30-31). Because of our sinfulness, none of us is capable of loving God and our neighbors in such a complete and perfect manner. Only Jesus Christ truly loved everyone, even His enemies.

His infinite love was evidenced in His every word and deed. Being the only-begotten Son of God and God Himself, Jesus Christ in His pity for us came down from Heaven and was incarnate, becoming in everything the same as us, except in sin. Being the Sovereign Heavenly King, before Whom all Angels and creatures tremble, He deigned to take on the image of an ordinary person, to restore our corrupted nature. While possessing all the treasures of the world, He agreed to be born in poverty, lying in a manger in a dark cave.

Being the supreme Lawgiver, Jesus Christ during His earthly life humbly submitted to all the decrees and commandments of the Jewish religious law. Thus, on the eighth day after His birth, He submitted to circumcision, and on the fortieth day His Mother brought Him into the temple and there paid the redemption fee for Him, the Ruler of the Universe. As was fitting for a boy and then later a youth, He always obeyed His earthly Mother and helped His foster father, the elderly Joseph. Once mature, He treated the Jewish elders and leaders with respect, as well as the Roman governors, and paid the required taxes. He willingly lived in poverty and often, while travelling to preach, had no place to rest His head. Christ, to Whom all nature submits, Himself served people and even washed the feet of His disciples, who were uneducated fishermen.

Jesus Christ constantly prayed to His Heavenly Father, even at night when the others were asleep. On Sabbath days at a synagogue, He took part in the communal prayers and the reading of the Scriptures, and on the major feast days He made pilgrimages to the temple at Jerusalem.

With all His love and diligence Jesus fulfilled that commission for which His Heavenly Father sent Him, directing everything toward His Father's glory. He felt pity for all people, especially for the poor and underprivileged, wished

well to everyone, and was willing to bear anything in order to ease their suffering. He bore all conceivable affronts and insults from the ungrateful crowd with the greatest meekness, and did not vent His anger on those who slandered Him and plotted intrigues against Him. Some who bore Christ ill-will called Him a sinner and lawbreaker; others called Him a carpenter's son and a shallow person; still others said He was a friend of drunkards and sinners.

On several occasions Christ's enemies attempted to stone Him or toss Him from a mountaintop. Jewish scribes called His divine teachings deceitful; and when He healed the sick, raised the dead, or exorcised demons, they explained away these miracles as the deeds of an evil spirit. Some even openly called Him possessed. The Lord Jesus, being Almighty God, could have destroyed them all with one word. Instead, He pitied them as spiritually blind and prayed for their welfare and for their salvation.

In brief, from His early youth till His very death, Jesus Christ constantly did good to all people, even when, instead of being grateful to Him, they caused Him anguish and pain. He was especially hated by the Jewish elders, high priests, and scribes—whose mission it was to teach the people goodness and to lead them toward faith. They worked with all their might to keep the people from believing in Jesus as the God-sent Messiah, distorting the meaning of the prophecies that predicted His coming. They contradicted all that He said or did. Jesus did not grieve so much that the Jewish leaders fought against Him as He did from the fact that they were rushing blindly toward doom, taking the simple people along with them.

Not long before His death, Jesus worked His greatest miracle: He resurrected Lazarus, who had already been in the grave for four days and whose body had started to decompose. This miracle took place in the presence of a great crowd and made an overwhelming impression on them all. After this miracle, many of the unbelieving Jews started to believe in Jesus as the Messiah. But the high priests and the scribes, being envious of His fame, hastily gathered and decided to put Christ to death without delay, together with Lazarus whom He had resurrected.

Knowing that the days of His earthly life were drawing to an end, Christ gathered his disciples in a room near Mount Zion for the mystical last supper. Here He instituted the Mystery of Holy Communion and gave His last commandments to the disciples. After that He went to the garden of Gethsemane, where He experienced His most agonizing inner sufferings. The anguish was so great that during prayer the sweat on His face became a **sweat of blood**. At that moment the soul of the Savior was immersed into a terrible darkness and horror at the unbearable sins which He was taking upon Himself. Jesus knew that he had to wash away with His most Holy blood all the countless transgressions of

billions of people, beginning with Adam and including all future generations. Overwhelmed by the oppression of the world's evil, Jesus Christ exclaimed: *My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.* (Mt 26:38).

No one can truly comprehend what the pure soul of the God-man experienced in the garden of Gethsemane. You can imagine, however, that all the loathsome sins of mankind were revealed to Him in all their ugliness and that the pure soul of the God-man was shocked and depressed by this terrible sight. Christ knew that His great sufferings and boundless love would be appreciated by only a few, that the majority of the people would turn away from Him with indifference, and that some would reject His teachings and would cruelly persecute those who believed in Him.

He foresaw that among His followers there would be many hypocrites who would turn faith into a means for profit and that there would be false teachers and false prophets who would distort His teachings and who, because of pride and greed, would entice the faithful into harmful sects. He foresaw that false pastors would appear, who, because of ambition, would create schisms in the Church. Christ knew not only that many Christians would fail to love God and live righteously but also that they would give themselves to heinous crimes and vices, so that by their sins they would even surpass pagans, and as a result the Christian faith would be scandalized.

In these most trying sufferings, while justice and loyalty to His Father demanded from Christ that He destroy mankind as ungrateful and criminal, the feelings of pity and sorrow ultimately stirred Him to accept all sufferings and death itself to save us sinners from the power of the devil and from eternal damnation.

While Jesus was still praying, a mob with torches and clubs, along with some soldiers who were sent by the Jewish elders, came into the garden. They bound Him and dragged Him, as they would an evildoer, to the high priest for trial. The Apostles, whom He loved so much and brought so close to Himself, faintheartedly left Him and fled. Then the leaders and all the Sanhedrin quickly assembled at the home of the high priest, where they brought a multitude of the most ridiculous accusations against Christ. None of these, however, was enough to warrant a sentence of death. The high priest demanded that Jesus, while He was under oath, state whether or not He was the promised Messiah, the Son of God. After He affirmed that He was, the Sanhedrin ac-

cused Him of blasphemy and sentenced Him to death. After this, the members of the council, unable to hold back their hatred of Jesus any longer, surrounded Him and subjected Him to beatings and all kinds of insults.

The Romans, however, had deprived the Sanhedrin of the power to execute anyone. So, the next morning, on Friday, the day before the Passover, the Jewish leaders brought Jesus Christ to a new trial before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, hoping that Pilate would affirm their decision.

Pilate, realizing that they were accusing Christ out of envy, wanted to let Him go. But the high priests and elders threatened that they would complain about him to the Roman emperor. Not wishing to jeopardize his career, Pilate decided to address the people who had gathered there. Reminding the people of the custom to free some prisoner on the eve of the Passover holiday, Pilate asked them which of the two they would want him to set free: Barabbas or Christ (Barabbas was a robber who had been imprisoned for some crime). While the mob of people were talking among themselves, the Jewish leaders convinced them to ask for Barabbas' release and to demand that Christ be crucified on the cross.

The people forgot the innumerable good deeds of Christ: from how many of them He had exorcised demons, how many He had healed of leprosy, blindness, weakness and other incurable diseases, how many He had turned from debauchery to the path of goodness, and to how many of the despairing He had returned hope.

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The Roman soldiers submitted the Lord to scourging and cursing. Finally they placed on Him a purple cloak and on His head a crown of thorns. Pilate then brought out the wounded Christ, hoping the people would feel pity and ask for His release. Instead they began to shout, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" On hearing this, Pilate decided to give up. He halfheartedly washed his hands as a sign of non-participation in the conviction of an innocent man, ordered the release of Barabbas, and handed Christ over to the Jewish leaders for them to dispose of.

The soldiers gave Christ the wooden cross on which He was to be crucified and ordered Him to carry it to the execution site, known as Golgotha (meaning "place of the skull"). There they removed His outer clothing and nailed Him to the cross. Two robbers, one on either side, were crucified with Him. Thus, in the most humiliating circumstances, as if He were a great criminal, they executed the One Who



with the divine light dispelled the darkness of fallacies and Who with His boundless love defeated hate! Dear God! How cruel and blind people can be!

But those who hated Christ could not satisfy their hatred. Even on the dying Sufferer they piled more curses and with sneers demanded a miracle. When He asked for water to quench His thirst, they gave Him vinegar. And thus, deserted by all, wounded, bleeding and suffocating, fatigued by an unbearable thirst, He, the one who once breathed life into the first man, died the cruelest of deaths! Even soulless nature recoiled at this crime: the sun darkened and the earth quaked.

For whom, then, did the Savior of the world suffer? He suffered for all mankind, for enemies and tormentors, for those who, having received many benefits from Him, failed to thank Him. He suffered for each and every one of us, stubborn sinners, who daily sadden Him with our indifference, ingratitude, hatred, lies, and wicked deeds, and who, by these innumerable sins, crucify Him again and again.

In order to appreciate more fully the boundless love of Jesus Christ and the extent of His sacrifice, let us remind ourselves how great He is and how insignificant we are. Indeed, Christ is the true God, equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit. He resides in an unreachable world, this all powerful Creator of the universe, this immortal King before whom bow countless hosts of angels. He is the undying fountain of life, the Lord of all that is visible and invisible, the formidable Judge of the living and the dead.

This same Jesus suffered for us sinful and worthless creatures. **Who can comprehend this mystery of Godly Love?**



We must accept afflictions, for if we are not afflicted here, it awaits us there. Let us choose to be afflicted here that there we may find rest, and obtain the ineffable blessings in Christ Jesus.

St. John Chrysostom, Homily on the Cross



PREPARATION FOR GREAT LENT

From an Orthodox pamphlet, author unknown.

During the three week pre-Lenten season the Holy Orthodox Church prepares Her children for repentance. She urges us to prepare ourselves through gradual diet modification and instructing us with themes of humility, judgment, repentance and forgiveness. The period is bounded by four Sundays, which are as follows for the current year:

January 24th: Publican and the Pharisee (Lk 18:10-14)

This Sunday emphasizes humility as a key attitude for repentance. The Greek word for repentance is *metanoia* (μετάνοια), which means a change of mind. To repent we must not boast of our spiritual feats, but humble ourselves like the Publican who longs for a change of mind. We are called to learn this **secret of the inward poverty of the Publican rather than the self-righteousness of the Pharisee** who is convinced of his perfectness and not open to change because of his pride. There is no prescribed fasting for this week.

January 31st: Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32)

This Sunday teaches us about our need to return from exile. This parable shows us the mercy of the Father who with open arms receives his son, whose behavior he does not return, but is joyous of his return home. We are encouraged to examine ourselves in the period of Lent to purge ourselves of sin and “come home.”

The week that follows is called Meat Week (*Kreatini*) as it is the last week we are to eat meat. In the villages of Greece this was the traditional week to slaughter the family pig and the leftovers were smoked to be eaten after Pascha.

Saturday of this week is the first Saturday of Souls where those who have fallen asleep in the hope of resurrection and eternal life are remembered at a special service “Saturday of the Souls.” Parishioners bring small dishes of kollyva to the church and submit a list of first names of deceased ones to the priest. We commend to God all those who have departed before us, who are now awaiting the Last Judgment. This is an expression of the Church’s love. We remember them because we love them.

February 7th: Judgment (Meat-fare) Sunday

(Mt 25:31-46)

This Sunday emphasizes the eschatological dimension of Lent. We are reminded of His Second Coming and the Judgment of all. We are encouraged not to eat meat this week, but we can eat eggs, cheese and other dairy products.

February 14th: Forgiveness (Cheese-Fare) Sunday

(Mt 6:14-21)

This Sunday emphasizes forgiveness and how we must forgive others if God is to forgive us so we can break the chains of sinful tendency which we inherit from the Adam and Eve. This is the last day of preparation as the traditional Lenten fast begins on the following day where no meat, dairy or eggs are to be eaten according to the church tradition.

February 15th: Great Lent Begins

Great Lent is the period that the Church has in her wisdom set aside for us to intensify our own spiritual growth through fasting, prayer and worship. If you follow the Church guidelines on fasting, make time to attend the services and intensify your own prayer life, you will be rewarded with a greater closeness to God.

ON SPIRITUAL STUDY

By Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994), taken from the Orthodox Christian Information Center Web site (<http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/>) -- from "Spiritual Awakening, Vol. II in the Spiritual Counsels" series by Elder Paisios of Mount Athos (Souroti, Thessaloniki, Greece: Holy Monastery "Evangelist John the Theologian", 2008), pp. 109-114 (printed with permission).

Geronda, what books should be read by those who are beginning their spiritual search?

- First, they should read the New Testament to learn the meaning of Christ, to be shaken up a little; later they can read the Old Testament. Do you know how hard it is when they have read nothing and yet they come to ask for help? It is like an elementary school child going to a university professor and saying, "Help me." What can the professor tell him? "One plus one equals two"? Others, again, are not spiritually restless; they come and say, "Father, I have no problems and I am just fine; I only dropped by to see you." Man can never say that he has no problems, no concerns; he will have something. The struggle for the spiritual life never ends. Or some people come and tell me, "Tell us spiritual things." It is as if they went to the grocery store and said, "Give us some groceries." The grocer is at a loss and needs to know what they need. They need to say, "I want so much sugar, so much rice, and so on, but they only say, 'Give us groceries.' "It is like going to the pharmacy and saying, "Give us medicines," without first saying what their illness is, or whether or not they went to the doctor, and what he advised them to do. Go figure! You see, whoever is seriously concerned over his spiritual condition knows, more or less, what he is lacking, and once he seeks it, he benefits.

As a novice, when I read something I liked, I wrote it down so as not to forget it, and I would try to apply it to my life. I didn't read just to pass my time pleasantly. I had a spiritual restlessness and, when I could not understand something, I would ask for an explanation. I read relatively little, but I checked myself a great deal on what I read. "What point am I at? What must I do?" I would sit myself down and go through such a self-examination. I did not allow what I read to pass me by untaxed.

Today with so much reading, people end up like tape recorders, filling up their cassettes with superfluous matters. According to Abba Isaac, however, Wisdom not based on righteous activity is a deposit of disgrace. [1] You see, many who are interested in sports read sports magazines and newspapers while they are sitting. They may be like the fatted calf, but they still marvel at the athletes. "Oh he is marvelous! He is great! Bravo!" But they don't work up any sweat, and they don't lose any pounds. They read and read about athletic events, and then they go and lie down; they gain nothing. They are satisfied with the pleasure of reading. Some

worldly people read newspapers, others romantic literature or an adventure novel, still others watch a football game at the stadium and pass their time. The same thing is done by some people who read spiritual books. They may spend the whole night reading spiritual books with great intensity and be content. They take a spiritual book, sit comfortably, and begin reading. "Oh, I profited from that," they say. It would be better to say, "I enjoyed myself, I spent my time pleasantly." But this is not profit.

We profit when we understand what we read, when we censure ourselves and discipline ourselves by applying it: "What does this mean? Where do I stand in relation to this spiritual truth? What must I do now?" After all, the more we learn, the more responsibility we have to live up to what we have learned. I am not saying that we should not read so that we can plead ignorance and therefore be free of responsibility, for this is a cunning deception; I am saying that we should not read merely to pass our time pleasantly. The bad thing is that if someone reads a lot and has a strong memory, he may remember many things and may even talk a lot about what he has read, and thus deceive himself into thinking that he also personally observes the many things he reads. So he has created an illusion toward himself and others. So don't be comforted by the thought that you read a lot. Instead, turn your attention to applying what you have read. Much reading alone will only educate you encyclopaedically. Isn't that what they call it?

- Yes, Geronda.

- The goal, however, is to be transformed in a God-centred manner. I am not aiming to be a university professor where I would need to know many things. But if I ever need something from this worldly knowledge, I can easily learn it once I have acquired the God-centred knowledge. Do you see what I mean?

- When one has a distraction, is it beneficial to concentrate through study?

- Yes, one should read a little, something very demanding, in order to warm the soul. This keeps distractions and concerns under the lid, and the mind is transposed into a divine realm. Otherwise, the mind is diverted by whatever task is preoccupying it.

- Geronda, when someone is tired or upset, he usually wants to read something light and easy, a short story or a novel, perhaps, or something like that.

- Is there no spiritual book that is appropriate for such times? The purpose is not to forget one's worry, but to be redeemed. Such light reading does not redeem. Novels, newspapers and television have no value in developing a spiritual life. Quite often even some religious periodicals are damaging to Christians, because they stir a foolish zealotry that leads to confusion. Take care. Do not read unnecessary things during your free time. Some reading matter is completely hollow,

like a water-pumpkin; it is like looking in a haystack to find a kernel of wheat. Some people say, "Yes, but they relax me." But how can they be relaxing, my good man, if they make you dizzy and cause your eyes to ache? It is better to rest by sleeping. You can learn much about a person's spiritual state from what he reads. One who is very worldly will probably be reading indecent magazines. One who is less worldly will read less indecent magazines and newspapers. One who is religious will read religious periodicals, or contemporary religious books or patristic texts, and so on.

- Geronda, which spiritual books are the most helpful?

- The various patristic texts, which thank God are available by the thousands today, are very helpful. One can find whatever one needs and desires in these books. They are authentic spiritual nourishment and a sure guide on the spiritual path. However, in order to be of benefit to us, they have to be read with humility and prayer. Patristic texts reveal the inner spiritual condition of the soul, much as axial tomography reveals the inner structures of the body. Each sentence of the patristic texts contains a multitude of meanings, and each person can interpret them according to their own spiritual state of being. It is better to read the ancient text rather than a translation, because the translator interprets the original verse according to his own spirituality. In any case, in order to understand the writings of the Fathers one must constrain oneself, focus and live spiritually, for the spirit of the Fathers is perceived through and by the spirit only. Especially helpful are the Ascetical Homilies by Saint Isaac the Syrian, but they must be studied slowly so that they can be assimilated little by little as spiritual food. The Evergetinos [2] is truly of great benefit, because it gives us insight into the Whole spirit of the Holy Fathers, it is helpful because it describes the struggles of the Fathers against each and every one of the passions, and, by learning how they worked on the spiritual life, the soul is greatly assisted. Also, the Synaxaria, the Lives of the Saints, are sacred history and very helpful, especially for young people, but they should not be read as stories.

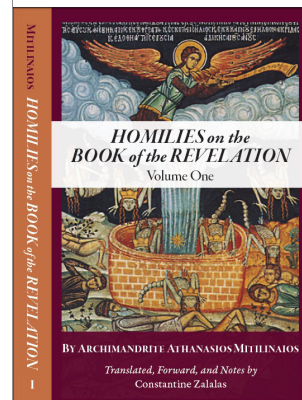
We do not need great knowledge to be devout. If we concentrate and meditate on the few things we know, our heart will be spiritually embroidered. One may be profoundly affected by a single hymn, while another may feel nothing, even though he may know all the hymns by heart, as he has not entered into the spiritual reality. So, read the Fathers, even one or two lines a day. They are very strengthening vitamins for the soul.

Endnotes

1. See Saint Isaac the Syrian, The Ascetical Homilies, Homily 1, p. 8.

2. A familiar anthology of ascetic and patristic sayings and incidents, which were compiled by the Monk Paul the Evergetinos, the founder of the famous Holy Monastery of the Theotokos Evergetithos (Benefactress) in Constantinople.

HOMILIES ON THE "BOOK OF THE REVELATION" VOL. ONE



The long-awaited English publication on the homilies of Geronda Athanasios Mitilinaios of blessed memory (+2006), the Chrysostom of our days, is now available in print. It is a must for every Orthodox Christian! A few words by the late Archimandrite Athanasios of blessed memory best exemplify the importance of this publication:

"One should not think that these lessons (*Ed.* homilies) have as a goal to delight and please the ears. The goal is to teach, to reveal the truth, the Lord's will, to wake up our consciences, to censure, to console, to strengthen, to revise mistaken positions and to point out the way of salvation and repentance. This is the goal of the topics and the lessons before us. Second, what we will accept as a lesson must not simply move us or remain at the level of a dry knowledge. What we will hear should be altered into an experience, into a change, into a rebirth. Our experiential, eschatological worry must be developed. In other words, we must place concern within ourselves about the end of our life and the end of history. This reality must be established in our soul without choking the positive attitude about life, without extinguishing the joy, the joy that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. It does not mean that we will begin to cry but that the experiential, eschatological reality must begin to be established within our souls. The end of times is awaited. Let us not say that the Lord will delay very long. Let us be reminded what the Scripture says about the evil worker and the foolish enemies who say that the Lord will delay. Let us not say, 'Who cares?'"

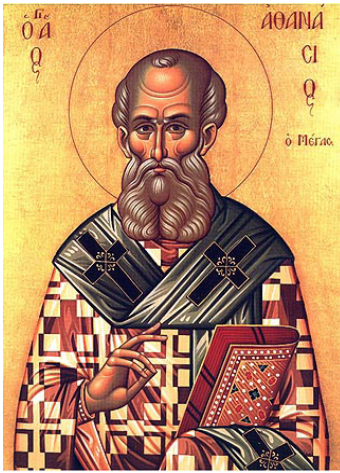
The currently published volume covers the first 22 of the elder's 103 homilies on the Book of the Revelation. We anxiously await future volumes and applaud the work of the translator, Mr. Constantine Zalalas, as well as the editors and many Orthodox faithful that played a part in bringing forth this publication to the faithful in America and worldwide.

The cost of the 318 page book is **only \$13.95 per copy with free shipping in the US**. The publisher offers a 50% discount (with a 10 book minimum) to churches, organizations, and bookstores. Orders may be made by sending a check or money order to:

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THE ATHANASIAN CREED

Being the Confession of Faith of our Holy Father, Athanasius the Great, Patriarch of Alexandria.



Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic* Faith. Which Faith every one must keep whole and undefiled, or without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the Catholic Faith is this, That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance.

For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, is all one, the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit.

The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal.

As also there are not three incomprehensibles, nor three uncreated, but one uncreated, and one incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Spirit Almighty. And yet they are not three Almighties, but one Almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord.

And yet not three Lords, but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity, to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord; so are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion, to say, There be three Gods, or three Lords.

The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. Likewise also the Holy Spirit is of the Father, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons, one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits. And in this Trinity none is afore, or after the other, none is greater, or less than another; But the whole three Persons are co-eternal together, and co-equal.. So that in all things, as is

aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity, and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity.

Concerning Christ

FURTHERMORE, it is necessary to everlasting salvation, that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds, and Man, of the substance of His mother, born in the world; perfect God, and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting; equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead, and inferior to the Father, as touching his Manhood.

Who although He be God and Man, yet He is not two, but one Christ; one; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the Manhood into God; one altogether; not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose on the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven; He sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies, and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.

This is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.



[*] The term *catholic* is an extremely misunderstood word in our days; it means “universal” and it neither means nor is it related to “Roman Catholic” whatsoever.



We have lost our peace of mind. The hothouses, the use of hormones in produce and in animals have made people impatient. In the old days, we knew that we could reach a certain place—on foot—in a certain amount of time. Those with stronger legs would get there a bit sooner. Later, we invented carriages, then cars, airplanes and so on. We try constantly to discover faster and faster means of transportation... Hurry, hurry... Gradually, man will enter a projectile and—with the squeeze of a trigger—this projectile will be launched, only to burst open at some point and allow a madman to emerge! Where is all this taking us? We are heading straight to the madhouse!

Elder Paisios the Athonite

NARROW IS THE WAY

By New Martyr Bishop Basil of Kineshma (+1945) -- edited for length.

And the multitude cometh together again, so that they could not so much as eat bread. And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself. And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils. And he called them unto him, and said unto them ... Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith so ever they shall blaspheme: But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation: Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit. (Mk 3:20-30)

This passage from the Gospel begins with a brief but characteristic episode that sheds a ray of light on a very sad side of the Lord's earthly life: on the attitude of His closest relatives towards Him. We know that the path of the Lord Jesus Christ was not strewn with roses. It was a thorny, sorrowful path, where boundless grace and kindness constantly ran up against thorns of human ingratitude and misunderstanding. But the twenty first verse of the third chapter of St. Mark's Gospel, if one examines it closely, is especially grievous, for it reveals a hidden corner of the Saviour's life, where sorrow is imperceptible to the outsider and not easily discerned even by His disciples. It is a sorrow deeply hidden in the secret recesses of the heart, where it is often most painful.

His friends ... went out to lay hold on Him: for they said, He is beside Himself. Think about it. What does this mean?

The people, as always, were streaming to the Lord in crowds; they celebrated the Great Prophet who had appeared in their midst and took delight in listening to His teachings. Meanwhile, His close ones, His relatives, were uneasy and went to lay hold on Him, for they said, *He is beside Himself*, which is as much as to say, "He's gone crazy."

Crazy! What a simple and easy way of explaining all that was extraordinary; all that did not fit into the ordinary scheme of things; all that was great, miraculous, and bewildering in the life of the Lord. His suffering life of a wanderer, having no place to lay His head; His estrangement from His family, from the spiritual leaders of the people, from the rulers, from the usual way of understanding that existed in the Jewish society; His teaching: lofty, inspired, not readily accessible to mediocrity—all this could be explained by the simple word, "crazy."

And notice: from an average person's point of view, this conjecture, that is so full of suspicion and fear, sounds very plausible. After all, is it not crazy to lead such a life as that of the Galilean Prophet: to leave one's home, abandon one's relatives, refuse the comforts and consolations of a home life, and, instead, to gather around oneself a group of strange, unfamiliar people, to roam through the Palestinian coun-

tryside with them, not lingering anywhere for long, existing on whatever comes to hand, and preaching something quite incomprehensible and irrational. He could live very peacefully, without bothering anyone, but instead He upbraids the powerful Pharisees and Sadducees, vexing them and subjecting Himself to the terrible danger of their revenge. He could enjoy great glory and use it to advantage, but He seems to avoid this glory, and forbids people to tell about the miracles He performs. He could acquire great power, He could become a king or popular leader—the people almost compel Him to take this step—but He prefers to lead the life of a wandering pauper.

What is this? Is it not madness? And the wild, unusual teaching He preaches! We are all accustomed, if not to thinking about wealth and luxury, at least to take care that we have food, clothing, and a half decent place to live. But He... listen to what He demands: *Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? ... Take no thought for the morrow!* (Mt 6:31, 34)

We all think that we can and even must defend our rights from shameless infringement; otherwise people will step all over us, we'll be under someone's thumb. But He says, *Resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.* (Mt 5:39-41).

We all try to live our lives as effortlessly as possible, in maximum comfort and with a minimum of work, and it is beyond us to understand why we should have to deny ourselves, to limit our needs, to take upon ourselves deprivations and sufferings, but He teaches: *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: Bemuse strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life and few there be that find it.* (Mt 7:13-14).

This, approximately, is what many of our Lord's contemporaries must have thought, accustomed as they were to life's familiar routine as it was laid out for them by the Pharisees and lawyers. Doubtless this is the way His closest relatives thought; they could not fathom the depth of His teaching, and did not want to submit to His authority or to accept His words on faith. Finding themselves in His presence more often than others in the preparatory period of His ministry, they, of course, began before anyone else to observe in Him signs of seeming abnormality: love for solitude, pensiveness, incomprehensible utterances, strange actions. For this reason, they had long since harbored in their hearts the terrible suspicion, which now had become a certainty: **He's beside Himself! He's out of his mind!**

Being misunderstood by one's close ones is especially painful. You walk into a room where the family is gathered, and

the conversation is abruptly cut short; there's an awkward silence; you sense that they have been talking about you—perhaps judging, perhaps feeling sorry. And there's no way you can convince these people that you are not crazy, that you are a completely normal person, that they simply do not understand what you think and what you say, or that they do not make the effort seriously to consider them.

This must have been very hard, and the Lord had to endure all this. It is this upsetting and bitter tragedy, unnoticeable from the outside and deeply hidden, that lies at the heart of the twenty-first verse. However, the Lord Jesus Christ had to listen to still more crude, more caustic remarks from the scribes and Pharisees. *And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said, He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth He out devils.* (v. 22).

The Jerusalem scribes were known for their erudition, and their word held weight among the people. Taking advantage of this influence in order to destroy the people's fascination with the person and miracles of the singular Galilean Prophet, they brought against Him an even more serious and fantastic accusation than His relatives: They declared Him to be possessed by an evil spirit.

This lofty, inspired teaching; these wondrous parables, full of inexplicable inner appeal; these moving lessons of moral conduct; this implacable scourging of falsehood and seeking after truth—all this is nothing but demonic delusion. This beauty and nobility of character, kindness, meekness, co-suffering towards the weak, burning love for truth, boundless self-denial—all this is the work of an unclean spirit. Finally, these marvelous works, in which there is so much love for suffering man and so much divine power—this is the gift of a demonic king, Beelzebub.

Such a charge is much more painful and difficult to bear than a reproach of madness. In influencing the people and arousing their suspicions, it hindered and delayed the development of Christ's mission. The accusation of madness was too obviously absurd for those who listened to the wise—although sometimes perplexing—talks of the Lord. The accusation of demon-possession seemed more plausible and therefore could more easily be accepted, repelling many of His followers.

This charge not only retarded the work of mankind's salvation, so dear to the Lord; what was even more painful, it reflected upon His relation to and love for God. A suspicion of madness could be offensive to Him personally as a man. The charge raised by the scribes was an offense to God, acting in Him. *The Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works* (Jn 14:10), testified the Lord Jesus Christ concerning Himself. He knew the mystery of His might, He knew that the works He performed were worked by the power of God, and He saw in this, proof of His divine mission, which should convince people to believe in Him

(Jn 10:37-38). And suddenly, the power working in Him was being called the power of Beelzebub; that is, they want to compel people to regard His supernatural nature to be not of God but of Satan.

This must have grievously offended the Lord's boundless love for God, the love of the Son for the Father. And it was because of this that He replied so harshly to His slanderers: *Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith so ever they shall blaspheme. But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation... Because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.* (Mk 3: 28-30).

Matthew and Luke's rendering of these words convey still another shade of meaning: *Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.* (Mt 12:32; cf. Lk 12:10).

From these words, it is evident how hard it was for the Lord to hear the slander that the Pharisees had advanced against the Holy Spirit operating within Him, trying thereby to draw upon Him the suspicion of demon possession.

The Lord, however, had already foretold to His disciples and followers that He would be the victim of slander, misunderstanding and all manner of offense: *The disciple is not above his master, He said, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?* (Mt 10:24-25)

Therefore, whosoever decides to follow after the Lord Jesus Christ and to be faithful to Him, must be prepared: persecution, offenses, mockeries—these are unavoidable.

Is there not a profound, sorrowful truth in this warning? How the world rises up in arms against anyone who thinks to forsake it in favor of the path of evangelical love and truth! *If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.* (Jn 15:19).

Today you still belong to the world, you live with its interests and tastes, you bow before its idols—luxury, wealth, glory, recognition; you wallow in a maelstrom of vainglory, sensuality, self love, and other passions; like everyone else, you wear a mask of hypocritical propriety; you have so called clever and interesting conversation, full of concealed cynicism and poisonous judgment; you dare not mention God, eternal truth, strict laws of virtuous life; to speak of them is considered laughable and tiresome in polite society, and everyone finds you agreeable. You can be the life of the party, everywhere you are warmly received, people are glad to listen to you, they flatter you, they speak well of you, they readily forgive your poorly concealed sins or they laugh at them good naturedly. Everyone likes you: you are your own person.

But then you experience a radical change: you begin to think more seriously about life and its meaning; something stirs in your conscience: you feel restless, dissatisfied. Long forgotten words of holy writ and sermons come floating into your consciousness; there appear thoughts of God and His righteousness; all the noisy vanity and insignificance of worldly life come sharply into focus before the mind's eye. You feel that there is no satisfaction there and that it cannot be found there, and you decide to make a break with the world, with its customs, with your friends and acquaintances, and, turning your back on your old life, to follow after Christ.

There is a revolution in your life... And just look how quickly and radically society's opinion towards you changes. From all sides one hears howling, hissing; boos, hoots. Your former friends avoid you; when they do meet you, they feign unfamiliarity. You become the subject of badgering, gossip, slanders, talk...

"Have you heard what happened with (N)? He's withdrawn from society, he's abandoned everything... They say he's planning to become a monk."

"Poor fool! What, has he gone mad? You know, I always noticed something strange about him. Pity. He was such fun! What's behind it? Was he jilted?"

"No, he's just a pharisee, a holier than thou! He puts on such airs... Hypocrite!... He's no different from the rest of us. We know him through and through."

And so on. But have no fear! Do not let all this noise cause you to step back. There is no real danger here, not yet. This is only the first, relatively small test of your will and of the seriousness of your decision. You must overcome it, toughen up.

Have no fear! All this howling and hooting is coming from a chorus of demonic powers who are sore at losing their hold on one of their former slaves. They are scaring you in order to make you abandon your intent. Ignore them. Remember, as a rule, demons always make a lot of noise and scare their victims, but they seldom do any real harm. Without God's allowance, they can do nothing.

Have no fear! You are not alone. The Lord is coming to meet you, stretching out His arms towards you. Trust in Him. For in that He Himself suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them (*Ed.*, come to their rescue) that are tempted. You can count on this. You heard what a wondrous promise He gave to His faithful followers: *Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and my mother.* (Mk 3:35).

How much joy and spiritual encouragement are in these words! To have such a brother—is this not a guarantee of victory? Could such a brother possibly abandon you without help and support in a difficult moment? What does it matter that your former acquaintances turn away from you, that your friends speak ill of you, if you have acquired such a brother?

However, in order to be entitled to this, there is one condition: you must do the will of God. The Lord recognizes as His brother, His sister, His mother only those who do the will of God. From the moment that you took the decisive step, you should have no other aim besides coming to know what is this will and fulfilling it in your life.

We already said that when a person is able to fuse his will with the will of God, submitting to it unconditionally, he acquires enormous strength and secures his victory in the war with evil. And there are other serious reasons for a Christian to cut off his own will and to make his aim in life the fulfillment of the will of God.

After the Fall, man's will became defective, his desires sinful and irrational, because now they were ruled by his passions. There is an old Greek legend about King Midas that represents a typical example of the irrationality of our usual desires. In reward for some service, Midas was granted the right to ask for the fulfillment of one wish. The king was greedy for gold, and he demanded that whatever he touched would turn into gold. He received this magical gift, and fantastic things began to happen: the chair in which he sat down suddenly became gold, the table on which he leaned his elbow turned to gold. He went into the garden, and each step of the stairway leading there turned to gold the moment he set foot on it. In the garden he had only to touch any of the trees and they became covered with gold leaves.

At first he found this all very entertaining. Everything that he could touch he turned to gold, and soon everything near and around him dazzled and glittered. When, however, the king's young son ran out of the palace and, throwing himself into his father's embrace, suddenly turned into a golden statue, Midas reflected that perhaps this was not such a wonderful gift after all. And when he sat down to eat and saw, to his horror, that the bread, vegetables, fruit, all the food with which he tried to satisfy his hunger turned to gold and that he could not swallow so much as a bite before the accursed gift took effect, he fell into despair. Alas! It was too late to repent of his wish.

True, this is only a legend, an edifying tale. But while we may have enough sense not to demand such an obviously dangerous gift, our desires, in essence, are rarely any better. From a moral standpoint, they very seldom surpass the desire of that anecdotal gypsy, who wished to be king so that every day he could eat ginseng with honey.

Is it not true? Are not the vast majority of our desires characterized by a narrow egoism and sensuality? They are all generated by our passions and, in trying to satisfy them, we invariably undermine our physical health and poison our soul, for each passion is ruinous and pernicious.

Ultimately, if each of us were offered the privilege of King Midas, it is more than probable that we would choose a gift

[Continued on page 21]

Περὶ Νηστείας

Ἐκ τοῦ Συναξαριστοῦ.

Ἀπὸ δύο πράγματα εἶναι καὶ λέγεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος σύνθετος. Ἀπὸ ψυχὴν καὶ ἀπὸ σῶμα. Καὶ ἡ μὲν ψυχὴ εἶναι ἄυλος καὶ ἀόρατος, τὸ δὲ σῶμα εἶναι ὑλικὸν καὶ ὁρατόν· καί, ἂν καὶ εἶναι καὶ τὰ δύο ταῦτα διαφορετικά, ὅμως, ἐν πράγματι δύναται νὰ συνδέσῃ τὰ δύο ταῦτα. Ποῖον; Ἡ νηστεία καὶ ἄκουσον πῶς.

Ἡ νηστεία καθαρίζει τὸ σῶμα, κόπτει τὰ πάθη, καθαίρει τὶς αἰσθήσεις, ἐλαφρύνει τὸ σῶμα. Ταῦτα δὲ πάντα εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν δίδουνσιν ὄφελος, διότι ὅταν ἀποκτήσῃ τὸ σῶμα αὐτὰ τὰ ὁποῖα εἶπον, τότε φωτίζεται ὁ νοῦς, ὅστις εἶναι ὁφθαλμὸς τῆς ψυχῆς· τότε ὁρέγεται ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀθανάτου κάλλους, τότε συνομιλεῖ τῷ Θεῷ, τότε ἐλευθεροῦται τῶν κοσμικῶν φροντίδων καί, γενικῶς εἰπεῖν, τότε τὸ μὲν σῶμα γίνεται ὡς αὔλον, λεπτυνόμενον διὰ τῆς ἀποχῆς ἀπὸ τῶν τροφῶν, ἡ δὲ ψυχὴ περισσότερον ἀπολαμβάνει τῆς αὔλου μορφῆς τῆς.

Ἐπειδὴ λοιπὸν ταῦτα οὕτω γίνονται, ἅς τιμήσωμεν, ἀδελφοί, τὴν πρόξενον τῆς αὐλότητος, τὴν συνεργὸν τῆς σωφροσύνης, τὴν βοηθὸν τῆς ἀρετῆς, τὴν χαλιναγωγὸν τῶν παθῶν, τὴν μητέρα καὶ τροφὸν τῶν Ἁγίων. Ἄς ἀγαπήσωμεν τὴν ἐγκράτειαν, εὐλογημένοι Χριστιανοί, ἵνα καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀγαπηθῶμεν παρὰ τῶν Ἀγγέλων, ἐπειδὴ καὶ αὐτοὶ εἶναι ἀμέτοχοι καὶ τροφῆς καὶ ποτοῦ. Ἄς μισήσωμεν τὴν τρυφήν, ἵνα μισήσωσι καὶ ἡμᾶς οἱ ἀκάθαρτοι δαίμονες. Διότι ὅπου ἡ νηστεία, ἐκεῖ καὶ Ἄγγελοι· ὅπου ἡ ἐγκράτεια, ἐκεῖ καὶ αἱ οὐράνια Δυνάμεις· ὅπου δὲ τρυφή καὶ ἡ πολυφαγία, ἐκεῖ οἱ δαίμονες.

Ἴδε καὶ τὰ ἄλογα πετεινά, ὅτι τὰ μὲν καθάρᾳ, καρποὺς μόνον τρώγουσι, τὰ δὲ ἀκάθαρτα εἶναι σαρκοφάγα· ὅπως, ἡ μὲν περιστέρα καὶ ἡ τρυγὼν καὶ ἄλλα τοιαῦτα μόνον ἀπὸ τοῦς καρποὺς τρέφονται καὶ ἀπέχουσι τῆς κρεωφαγίας, ὁ δὲ κόραξ καὶ ὁ ἀετὸς καὶ τὰ ἄλλα μεγάλα ὄρνεα περισσότερον χαίρονται εἰς κρέατα καὶ θνησιμαῖα, παρὰ εἰς καρπούς. Μίσησον λοιπὸν καὶ σὺ ὦ ἄνθρωπε τὴν κρεωφαγίαν, ἵνα γίνῃς ἀκέραιος ὡς ἡ περιστέρα καὶ σῶφρων ὡς ἡ τρυγὼν.

Διότι οὐδεὶς πολυφάγος ἐγένεν ἀσκητής, οὐδεὶς μέθυσος ἐγινε φιλόσοφος, οὐδεὶς φιλήδονος ἐγινε Ἅγιος, οὐδεὶς σαρκικὸς ἐγινε μέτοχος τῆς Βασιλείας τῶν Οὐρανῶν. Ἐνθυμήσου τὸν πρωτόπλαστον Ἀδάμ, ὁ ὁποῖος, ἕως ὅτου ἐφύλαττε τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἐνήστευε τοῦ

ξύλου τῆς γνώσεως, ἦτο ἐντὸς τοῦ Παραδείσου, ἀφ' οὗτου δὲ ἔφαγεν ἐξ ἐκείνου, ἐγένετο καὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Παραδείσου ἐξόριστος. Ἐφαγεν ἐκεῖνος καὶ ἐξωρίσθη τοῦ Παραδείσου· ἅς νηστεύσωμεν ἡμεῖς, ἵνα εἰσέλθωμεν ἐντὸς αὐτοῦ. Διότι διὰ τοῦτο ἦλθε ὁ Χριστὸς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ ἐσαρκώθη καὶ ἐνήστευσε τεσσαράκοντα ἡμέρας καὶ μᾶς ἔδωκε παράδειγμα νηστείας, ἵνα, νηστεύοντες, ἔλθωμεν εἰς τὴν πρώτην ἀποκατάστασιν.

Ἐνθυμήσου τὸν δίκαιον Νῶε πῶς ἡ πολυποσία τὸν ἔκαμε γυμνὸν καὶ ἐντροπιασμένον καὶ ἄπεχε τῆς μέθης. Ἐνθυμήσου τὸν Ἡσαΐ, πῶς ἡ γαστριμαργία τὸν ἔκαμε δοῦλον τοῦ μικροτέρου ἀδελφοῦ καὶ νήστευσον σὺ, ἵνα ἐλευθερωθῇς τῆς δουλείας τοῦ πονηροῦ καὶ γίνῃς δοῦλος Χριστοῦ. Ἐνθυμήσου τὸν παλαιὸν Ἰσραηλίτην, πῶς ἡ πολυποσία τὸν ἔκαμε εἰδωλολάτρην καὶ νήστευσον σὺ, ἵνα γίνῃς θεοσεβής.

Μὲ τὴν νηστείαν ὁ Μωϋσῆς εἶδε τὸν Θεὸν καὶ ἐδέχθη τὰς Θεογράφους πλάκας· νηστεύσας ὁ Ἡλίας, ἀνέστησεν τὸν υἱὸν τῆς Σαραφθείας· νηστεύσας ὁ Ἐλισσαῖος, ἀνέστησεν τὸν υἱὸν τῆς Σωμανίτιδος. Νηστεύσαντες οἱ τρεῖς Παῖδες, ἔσβεσαν τὴν φλόγα τῆς καμίνου. Νηστεύσας ὁ Δανιὴλ, εἶδε τὸν Θεόν, ὡς Κριτὴ καθεζόμενον. Διὰ τοῦτο πᾶς Χριστιανός, προθύμως ἅς τρέχῃ εἰς τὸν δρόμον τῆς νηστείας. Μᾶς φθάνει ὁ καιρὸς καθ' ὃν ἐθεραπεύσαμεν τὴν σάρκα· ἅς θεραπεύσωμεν καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν μας.

Ἀρκεῖ ὁ χρόνος ὅλος, τὸν ὁποῖον διήλθομεν τρώγοντες καὶ πίνοντες καὶ ποιοῦντες τὰ θελήματα τῆς σαρκός· ἅς δουλεύσωμεν καὶ τῷ Κυρίῳ, κατὰ ταύτας τὰς ὀλίγας ἡμέρας τῆς Ἁγίας Τεσσαρακοστῆς. Μὴ προφασίζόμεθα καὶ λέγομεν ὅτι εἴμαι ἀσθενὴς καὶ δὲν δύναμαι νὰ νηστεύσω· ἐὰν δὲν πῶ οἶνον, βλάπτομαι· ἐὰν δὲν φάγω ἔλαιον, ἀσθενῶ. Διότι τοιαῦτα ἀκούω πολλοὺς νὰ λέγουσι καὶ τὰ ὁποῖα εἶναι προφάσεις ἐν ἀμαρτίαις.

Εἰπέ μοι, πῶς μερικὰ ἔθνη, ὅπου δὲν γνωρίζουν διόλου τὴν φύσιν τοῦ οἴνου καὶ μόνον ὕδωρ πίνοντα ζῶσι; Πῶς ἄλλοι χωρὶς ἔλαιον ζῶσι τὴν ζωὴν των; Ὁ Σαμψὼν δὲν ἦτο Ναζωραῖος, τουτέστιν ἀφιερωμένος στὸν Θεὸν καὶ ποτέ του οἶνον δὲν ἔπιεν. Ἀλλὰ τίς ἦτο δυνατώτερος ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνον; Οἱ Ῥῶσοι καὶ οἱ Σκύθαι καὶ ἄλλα βάρβαρα ἔθνη, δὲν ἔχουσι παρὰ μόνον ἀκούσει περὶ οἴνου καὶ ἐλαίου, ἀλλὰ ποιὸς τοὺς νικᾷ σὲ καιρὸ πολέμου;

Ἐὰν δὲ εἴπῃς ὅτι ἡ συνήθεια κυριεύει, σοῦ λέγω κι ἐγώ, τοῦτο συνήθισε καὶ σὺ. Δὲν σὲ κωλύει τίποτε· ἀνάγκη δὲν



εἶναι νὰ πίνεις οἶνον, ἀνάγκη δὲν εἶναι νὰ φάγῃς ἔλαιον, ἀνάγκη δὲν εἶναι τὸ νὰ κακοφάγῃς· καὶ δίχως αὐτὰ δύνασαι νὰ ζήσεις τρώγων μόνον ἄρτον καὶ ὕδωρ. Πόσοι διήλθον μὲ τοιαύτη τροφήν, τριάκοντα καὶ τεσσαράκοντα χρόνους! Σὺ τεσσαράκοντα ἡμέρας δὲν δύνασαι νὰ ὑπομείνῃς; Ἀδύνατον εἶναι νὰ εἶσαι φιλήδονος καὶ φιλόχριστος, διότι ἐὰν ἀγαπᾷς τὰς ἡδονὰς καὶ τὰ θελήματα τοῦ σώματος, μισεῖς τὸν Χριστόν· ἐὰν δὲ ἀγαπᾷς τὸν Χριστόν, μίσῃσον τὰς ἡδονὰς, μίσῃσον τὴν τρυφήν, μίσῃσον τὴν πολυφαγίαν.

Θέλω νὰ εἶπω καὶ ἄλλο παράδειγμα, τὸ ὁποῖον ἂν καὶ εἶναι ἔξω τῶν Γραφῶν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἡμῶν, εἶναι ὅμως πρὸς ἐντροπήν μας. Οἱ εἰδωολάτραι οἱ πεπλανημένοι καὶ ἄθεοι, οἵτινες ἐλπίδα Ἀναστάσεως δὲν εἶχον, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἐπροσκυνοῦσαν ὡς θεοὺς καὶ τὰ σαρκικὰ πάθη, τὰ ὁποῖα ἐλάτρευον, οἱ μὲν μοιχὸν θεὸν τὸν Δία, οἱ δὲ φονέα θεὸν τὸν Ἄρην, ἄλλοι πόρνη γυναῖκα τὴν Ἀφροδίτην, ἄλλοι πολυφάγον θεὸν τὸν Κρόνον καὶ Ἡρακλέα, ἄλλοι μέθυσον θεὸν τὸν Διόνυσον, ὅμως καὶ ἀπ' αὐτοὺς πολλοὶ φιλόσοφοι ἐτίμησαν τὴν νηστείαν, τῶν ὁποίων τὰ ὀνόματα δὲν εἶναι τοῦ παρόντος καιροῦ νὰ τὰ εἴπωμεν.

Ἐὰν λοιπὸν ἐκεῖνοι, μόνον διὰ τὴν κατανόησιν τῆς καταργουμένης σοφίας ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον ἐπέτυχον νὰ ἐφαρμόσουν τὴν νηστείαν, ἡμεῖς, εἰπέ μοι, οἱ εὐσεβεῖς, οἱ κληρονόμοι τῆς Βασιλείας τῶν Οὐρανῶν, οἱ λατρευταὶ τῆς υπερθέου Τριάδος, νὰ μὴ ἀγωνισθῶμεν νὰ υπερβάλωμεν ἐκεῖνους; Καὶ ποίαν ἀπολογία νὰ ἔχωμεν νὰ εἴπωμεν ἐπὶ τοῦ φοβεροῦ βήματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ; Φοβοῦμαι μὴν πληρωθῇ εἰς ἡμᾶς ὁ λόγος τοῦ Κυρίου τὸν ὁποῖον ὥρισεν εἰς τὸ ἱβ' κεφάλαιον τοῦ κατὰ Ματθαῖον Ἀγίου Εὐαγγελίου: *Ἄνδρες Νινευῖται ἀναστήσονται ἐν τῇ κρίσει μετὰ τῆς γενεᾶς ταύτης καὶ κατακρινοῦσιν αὐτήν, ὅτι μετενόησαν μὲ τὸ κήρυγμα Ἰωάνᾳ.*

Οἱ Νινευῖται, ἄπιστοι ὄντες, μὲ μίαν φωνὴν τοῦ Ἰωάνᾳ μετενόησαν καὶ ἐνήστευσαν καὶ αὐτοὶ καὶ τὰ ζῶα τῶν. Ἡμεῖς, ἀκούοντες τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀκούοντες τῶν Προφητῶν, τῶν Ἀποστόλων, τῶν Ὁσίων Πατέρων ἡμῶν, κηρυττόντων τὴν ὠφέλεια τῆς νηστείας, δυσανασχετοῦμεν καὶ γογγύζομεν. Δικαίως λοιπὸν ἐκεῖνοι θέλουσι μᾶς κρίνῃ ἐν τῇ Ἀναστάσει. Ὅταν δὲ καὶ γυναῖκες, τὸ ἀσθενέστερον γένος εὐρεθῶσιν ὅτι ἐνήστευσαν, ὅτι ἠγωνίσθησαν εἰς τοὺς παλαιοὺς καιροὺς, ὅτι ἐνίκησαν τὸν σατανᾶν, ποῖαν ἀπολογία θέλομεν δώσῃ ἡμεῖς οἱ ἄνδρες, οἱ δυνατοί, οἱ ἔχοντες τὴν δεσποτείαν ἐπὶ τῶν γυναικῶν;

Ταῦτα δὲ λέγων, πολὺ περισσότερον συμβουλεύω τοὺς Ἱερεῖς νὰ γίνωνται τύποι καὶ κανόνες τῶν κοσμικῶν καὶ νὰ παρακινοῦν τούτους εἰς τὴν νηστείαν. Διότι, ἐὰν ἐσὺ ὁ Ἱερεὺς ὁ ἐπίγειος ἄγγελος, ὁ μεσίτης Θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων, ἀτιμάζῃς τὴν νηστείαν, πῶς νὰ τὴν τιμῶσιν οἱ κοσμικοί, οἱ ὁποῖοι σὲ ἔχουσι ὁδηγόν, ὡς τὰ πρόβατα τὸν ποιμένα; Ἔστω· οἱ ἄνδρες εἶναι φρόνιμοι καὶ δὲν σὲ μιμοῦνται εἰς τὸ κακόν. Αἱ γυναῖκες ὅμως, πῶς θέλουσι σωφρονισθῇ; Πῶς θέλουσι νηστεύσῃ; Πῶς θέλουσι φυλαχθῇ ἀπὸ πᾶν κακόν,

ὅταν σὺ μεθᾷς καὶ καταλύεις τὴν νηστείαν; Οἱ δὲ παῖδες πότε νὰ μάθωσι νὰ νηστεύουν; Πόθεν θὰ συνηθίσουν τὴν τιμὴν τῆς Ἁγίας Τεσσαρακοστῆς;

Μὴ νομίσης δὲ ὅτι εἶναι μικρὰ ἁμαρτία, τὸ νὰ γίνεσαι πρόσκομμα καὶ σκάνδαλον τῶν ἄλλων. Θέλεις νὰ μάθῃς ποῖα εἶναι ἡ καταδίκη τοῦ τοιούτου πταίσματος; Ἀκουσον τοῦ Κυρίου λέγοντος εἰς τὸ ἱγ' κεφάλαιον τοῦ κατὰ Ματθαῖον Ἀγίου Εὐαγγελίου: *Οὐαὶ τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ἐκείνῳ, δι' οὗ τὸ σκάνδαλο ἔρχεται.*

Ὅστε, ἀδελφοί μου Χριστιανοί, ἅς τιμήσωμεν πάντες τὴν Ἁγίαν Τεσσαρακοστήν, ἅς σπουδάσωμεν πάντες καὶ Ἱερεῖς καὶ κοσμικοὶ καὶ γυναῖκες καὶ παιδιά, νὰ διέλθωμεν ἀξίως τὸν πρόσκαιρον βίον. Ἄς ἀρχίσωμεν ὅλοι τὴν πρώτην ἐβδομάδα μετὰ προθυμίας καὶ ἕως τέλους ἅς αὐξάνωμεν τὴν ἀρετὴν. Μή, ὅσον προχωρεῖ ἡ Ἁγία Τεσσαρακοστή, τόσον ἡμεῖς ἀμελοῦμεν.

Διότι ὅπως ἐκεῖνοι οἱ ὁποῖοι τρέχουν, ὅσον πλησιάζουν εἰς τὸ τέρμα, τοσοῦτον φιλοτιμοῦνται νὰ διαβῶσι τοὺς ἄλλους οὕτω καὶ ἡμεῖς, ὅσον ἐγγίζομεν τὸ ἅγιον καὶ σεβάσιμον πάθος τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τὴν Αὐτοῦ λαμπροφόρον Ἀνάστασιν, κατ' αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπον ἅς φροντίζωμεν νὰ διέλθωμεν καὶ νὰ υπερνικήσωμεν εἰς νηστείαν τὰς παρελθούσας ἡμέρας, ἵνα, ἐδῶ μὲν, ἀξίως καὶ θεαρέστως διάγοντες, ἀξιοθῶμεν νὰ ἴδωμεν τὴν ἁγίαν ἡμέραν τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ Πάσχα, τῆς ζωηφόρου τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγέρσεως, ἐκεῖ δὲ νὰ ἀπολαύσωμεν τοῦ νοητοῦ Πάσχα, τὸ ὁποῖον εἶναι Αὐτὸς ὁ ἀληθὴς Θεὸς ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, ὃς πρέπει πάσα δόξα τιμὴ καὶ προσκύνησις, σὺν τῷ ἀνάρχῳ Αὐτοῦ Πατρὶ καὶ τῷ παναγίῳ καὶ ἀγαθῷ καὶ ζωοποιῷ αὐτοῦ Πνεύματι, νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. Ἀμήν.



Ὡς ἡ βάση εἶναι ἡ ποιότητα τῆς προσευχῆς. Ἡ προσευχή πρέπει νὰ εἶναι καρδιακή, νὰ γίνεται ἀπὸ πόνο. Γιὰ τὸν Θεὸ δὲν μετράει τόσο ἡ ποσότητα τῆς προσευχῆς ὅσο ἡ ποιότητα.

Γέροντας Παῖσιος

Τὸ ἀδιαλείπτως προσεύχεσθε ἐκπληρώνεται ὅταν μελετοῦμε καὶ διαβάζουμε ἱερὰ βιβλία. Ὅταν βλέποντας τὰ δημιουργήματα τοῦ Θεοῦ δοξολογοῦμε τὴν ἁπειρή Του δύναμη καὶ σοφία. Ὅταν ἀναπνέοντας τὸν ἀέρα ἢ πίνοντας νερὸ ἢ τρώγοντας ψωμὶ ἢ ἄλλες τροφές ἢ ἀπολαμβάνοντας ὅτιδήποτε πνευματικὸ ἢ ὑλικὸ ἀγαθὸ, εὐγνωμονοῦμε καὶ εὐχαριστοῦμε τὸν Θεό. Ἐπίσης ὅταν ἐπικαλούμεθα τὸν Θεό, ἐργαζόμενοι κάποιο ἔργο πνευματικὸ ἢ τὰ ἔργα γιὰ τὴ συντήρησιν τῆς παρούσης ζωῆς.

π. Εὐσέβιος Μαθόπουλος

Περὶ Ἑξομολογήσεως

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον «Οἱ Περιπέτειες Ἐνὸς Προσκυνητοῦ».



Εἰς τὸ τέλος τῆς ἐβδομάδος, ἀφοῦ παρασκευάσθηκα καλὰ γιὰ τὴν ἁγία Κοινωνία, πρὶν ἐξομολογηθῶ, ἐσκέφθηκα ὅτι ἦταν μιὰ εὐκαιρία νὰ κάνω ἐκεῖ μιὰν ἐξομολόγησιν ὅσον τὸ δυνατόν πρὸ λεπτομερῆ.

Ἀρχισα, λοιπόν, τὴν προσπάθεια γιὰ νὰ θυμηθῶ ὅλα τὰ ἁμαρτήματα ἀπ' τὴν νεότητά μου καὶ γιὰ νὰ μὴ τυχὸν λησμονήσω ἔστω καὶ τὸ παραμικρό, τὰ ἔγραψα μὲ ὅση τὸ δυνατόν περισσότερη λεπτομέρεια. Ἐγέμισα ἔτσι μιὰ μεγάλη κόλλα χαρτί μὲ ὅλα αὐτὰ πού ἔγραψα. Ἐπειτα, ὅμως, ἄκουσα ὅτι εἰς τὴν Κιταβάγια Παστίνα, πού ἀπέχει περίπου τρία χιλιόμετρα ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ, ἐζοῦσεν ἓνας ἀσκητὴς ἱερεὺς, ὁ ὁποῖος ἦτο σοφὸς ἄνθρωπος καὶ γεμᾶτος ἀπὸ κατανόηση. Ὅποιοσδήποτε ἐπῆγαιεν εἰς αὐτὸν γιὰ νὰ ἐξομολογηθεῖ, εὐρίσκονταν σὲ μιὰν ἀτμόσφαιρα γεμάτη ἀπὸ μελιχρότητα καὶ συμπάθεια, ἀποχωροῦσε δὲ χορτάτος ἀπὸ διδασκαλία γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία του καὶ ἤρεμος ψυχικά. Μὲ μεγάλην εὐχαρίστηση ἐπληροφορήθηκα γιὰ ὅλα αὐτὰ καὶ ἀνεχώρησα ἀμέσως νὰ συναντήσω τὸν ἅγιον αὐτὸν γέροντα.

Ὅταν ἔφθασα, εἰς τὴν ἀρχή, ἐζήτησα ὀλίγες συμβουλές, ὕστερα δὲ ἀπὸ κάμποσιν ὥρα συνομιλίας τοῦ ἐδιάβασα τὸ χαρτί μὲ τὶς ἁμαρτίες μου, πού εἶχα γράψει. Ὅταν ἐτελείωσα τὸ διάβασμα, ἐκεῖνος μοῦ εἶπε:

«Παῖδί μου, πολλὰ ἀπ' αὐτὰ πού μοῦ ἐδιάβασες εἶναι χωρὶς καμμιὰ ἀξία, οἱ συμβουλές μου δὲ γιὰ τὴν ἐξομολόγησιν εἶναι γενικά οἱ ἐξῆς:

Πρῶτον: Δὲν εἶναι ἀνάγκη νὰ ἐξομολογήσαι ἁμαρτήματα γιὰ τὰ ὁποῖα ἄλλοτε μετενόησες, τὰ ἐξαγορεύθηκες καὶ ἐπῆρες τὴν συγχώρηση. Ὅταν τὰ ξαναεξομολογήσαι εἶναι σὰν νὰ θέτεις σὲ ἀμφιβολία τὴ δύναμη τοῦ Μυστηρίου τῆς θείας Ἑξομολογήσεως.

Δεύτερον: Δὲν πρέπει νὰ θυμᾷσαι εἰς τὴν ἐξομολόγησιν οὔτε καὶ νὰ ἀναφέρεις εἰς αὐτὴν ἄλλα τυχὸν πρόσωπα πού συνέβη νὰ εἶναι συνδεδεμένα μὲ τὶς ἁμαρτίες σου. Δηλαδή, πρέπει νὰ ἐξομολογηθεῖς τὰ ἰδικά σου μόνον ἁμαρτήματα καὶ νὰ κρίνεις τὸν ἑαυτό σου μόνον καὶ κανέναν ἄλλον.

Τρίτον: Δὲν πρέπει νὰ ξεχνᾷς ὅτι οἱ ἅγιοι Πατέρες μᾶς ἀπαγορεύουν νὰ ἀναφέρουμε μὲ ὅλες τὶς λεπτομέρειες τὰ διάφορα ἁμαρτήματά μας, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι καλύτερο νὰ τὰ ὁμολογοῦμε καὶ νὰ τὰ ἀναγνωρίζουμε εἰς τὶς γενικές τους γραμμές γιὰ νὰ ἀποφεύγεται ὁ πειρασμὸς ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπανάληψιν τῶν λεπτομερειῶν καὶ γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτό μας καὶ γιὰ τὸν πνευματικό.

Τέταρτον: Ὅταν μετανοεῖς πρέπει νὰ μετανοεῖς εἰλικρινὰ καὶ πραγματικὰ γιὰτὶ εἶναι γεγονὸς ὅτι ἡ μετάνοιά σου αὕτη σήμερα εἶναι ἀφρόντιστη χλιαρὴ καὶ πρόχειρη.

Πέμπτον: Ἀσχολήθηκες σήμερα μὲ ἓνα σωρὸ λεπτομέρειες, ἐνῶ παρέλειψες τὸ κυριότερο πρᾶγμα, δηλαδή δὲν ἀνέφερες τὶς πιὸ βαρεῖες ἀπ' ὅλες τὶς ἁμαρτίες, γιὰτὶ δὲν παραδέχθηκες, οὔτε ἔγραψες εἰς τὸ χαρτί, ὅτι δὲν ἀγαπᾷς τὸν Θεό, ὅτι μισεῖς τὸν πλησίον σου, ὅτι δὲν πιστεύεις εἰς τὸν Λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ ὅτι εἶσαι γεμᾶτος ἀπὸ ὑπερηφάνεια καὶ φιλοδοξία, γεγονότα πού ἀποτελοῦν τὴν τετραπλὴ μάζα τοῦ κακοῦ καὶ τὰ ὁποῖα εἶναι ἡ αἰτία ὅλων τῶν ἄλλων ἁμαρτημάτων μας. Αὐτὰ εἶναι οἱ τέσσερις κυριώτερες ρίζες, ἀπὸ τὶς ὁποῖες φυτρώνουν ὅλα τὰ ἄλλα ἁμαρτήματα εἰς τὰ ὁποῖα πέφτουμε ὅλου.

Ἡ ἐκπληξίς μου πραγματικὰ ἦταν μεγάλη ἀπὸ ὅσα ἄκουσα, γι' αὐτὸ ἀπευθυνόμενος πρὸς τὸν φημισμένο αὐτὸν πνευματικό, τοῦ εἶπα:

«Νὰ μὲ συγχωρήσεις, σεβαστὲ πάτερ, ἀλλὰ πῶς εἶναι δυνατόν νὰ μὴ ἀγαπῶ τὸν Θεό, τὸν Πατέρα ὅλων μας καὶ Συντηρητὴ; Σὲ τί ἄλλο θὰ μπορούσα νὰ πιστεῦσω, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸν Λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἡ εὐλογία τοῦ ὁποῖου ἀγιάζει τὰ πάντα; Ἐγὼ θέλω πάντα τὸ καλὸ τοῦ πλησίον μου, ποῖον δὲ λόγο θὰ εἶχα γιὰ νὰ τοὺς μισῶ; Ὡς πρὸς τὴν ὑπερηφάνεια, δὲν ἔχω τίποτα γιὰ νὰ ὑπερηφανευθῶ, ἐκτὸς ἀπ' τὰ ἀναριθμητὰ μου ἁμαρτήματα. Ἀλλ' ἀκόμη τί καλὸ ἔχω ἐπάνω μου γιὰ νὰ ὑπερηφανευθῶ; Μήπως τὰ πλούτη μου ἢ τὴν ὑγεία μου; Μόνον ἂν ἦμουν μορφωμένος ἢ πλούσιος, θὰ μπορούσα νὰ ἔχω πέσει σὲ σφάλματα σὰν αὐτὰ πού μοῦ ἀνέφερες».

«Ἀγαπητέ μου, εἶναι κρῖμα πού τόσο λίγο κατάλαβες τί ἐννοῶ μὲ αὐτὰ πού εἶπα. Κοίταξε! Θὰ διαχθεῖς πολὺ καὶ γρήγορα, ἀπάνω σὲ ὅσα σοῦ εἶπα, ἐὰν διαβάσεις αὐτές τὶς σημειώσεις πού σοῦ δίνω, τὶς ὁποῖες καὶ ἐγὼ χρησιμοποιοῦ εἰς τὴν ἐξομολόγησίν μου. Διάβασέ τες προσεκτικὰ καὶ θὰ καταλάβεις ἐντελῶς καθαρὰ τὴν ἀκριβὴ ἀπόδειξιν ὅλων αὐτῶν πού σοῦ εἶπα καὶ τὰ ὁποῖα σὲ ἐξέπληξαν».

Μοῦ ἔδωσε τὶς σημειώσεις καὶ ἐγὼ ἄρχισα νὰ τὶς διαβάζω. Οἱ σημειώσεις αὐτές ἔχουν ἀκριβῶς ὡς ἐξῆς:

Ἑξομολόγησις πού Ὁδηγεῖ τὸν Ἑσὼ Ἄνθρωπον σὲ Ταπείνωσιν

«Στρέφοντας τὰ μάτια μου προσεκτικὰ εἰς τὸν ἑαυτό μου καὶ παρακολουθώντας τὴν πορείαν τῆς ἐσωτερικῆς μου καταστάσεως, πιστοποιῶ ἀπὸ τὴν πείρα μου, ὅτι δὲν ἀγαπῶ τὸν Θεόν, ὅτι δὲν ἔχω θρησκευτικὴ πίστη καὶ ὅτι εἶμαι γεμᾶτος ἀπὸ ὑπερηφάνεια καὶ ὑλοφροσύνη. Ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ βρίσκω εἰς τὸν ἑαυτό μου μετὰ ἀπὸ λεπτομερὴ ἐξέταση τῶν αἰσθημάτων καὶ τῆς συμπεριφορᾶς μου.

Δὲν ἀγαπῶ τὸν Θεό. Ἄν ἀγαποῦσα πραγματικὰ τὸν Θεὸ θὰ εἶχα συνεχῶς τὴν σκέψην μου στραμμένη πρὸς Αὐτόν καὶ θὰ ἦμουν εὐτυχισμένος. Κάθε σκέψην γιὰ τὸ Θεὸ θὰ μοῦ ἔδινε χαρὰ καὶ ἀγαλλίασιν. Ἀντιθέτως, ὅμως, πολὺ συχνότερα καὶ πολὺ εὐκολώτερα σκέπτομαι διάφορα

γήινα πράγματα, ἐνῶ ἡ ἀπασχόληση τῆς σκέψεώς μου μετὸν Θεὸν καταντᾷ ἐργασία ἐπίπονη καὶ ξερή. Ἐὰν ἀγαποῦσα τὸν Θεόν, ἡ συνομιλία μου μετὰ Αὐτόν, διὰ τῆς προσευχῆς θὰ ἦτο ἡ τροφή καὶ ἡ τρυφή μου καὶ θὰ με ὠδηγοῦσε σὲ ἀδιάσπαστη ἐπικοινωνία μετὰ Αὐτόν. Ὅμως, ὅπως ἀντίθετα, ὅχι μόνο δὲν εὐρίσκω εὐχαρίστηση εἰς τὴν προσευχή μου ἀλλὰ χρειάζεται κάθε φορὰ νὰ καταβάλλω προσπάθεια γιὰ νὰ προσευχηθῶ.

Ἀγωνίζομαι κατὰ τῆς ἀπροθυμίας, νικῶμαι ἀπὸ τὴν ἀμαρτωλότητά μου καὶ εἶμαι πάντα πρόθυμος νὰ καταπατῶ με κάθε ἀνόητη σκέψη καὶ πρᾶγμα, ἀκόμη καὶ κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τῆς προσευχῆς, γεγονότα, πού, ὅπως εἶναι φυσικόν, μικραίνουν τὴν προσευχή καὶ ἀπομακρύνουν τὴν σκέψιν ἀπὸ αὐτήν. Ὁ καιρὸς μου περνᾷ ἀχρησιμοποίητος ἢ μᾶλλον χρησιμοποιεῖται σὲ μάταιες ἀπασχολήσεις, ὅταν δὲ ἀπασχολοῦμαι μετὸν Θεόν, ὅταν θέτω τὸν ἑαυτὸν μου κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν παρουσία Του, τότε κάθε ὥρα μοῦ φαίνεται πὼς εἶναι ἓνας ὁλόκληρος χρόνος. Ὅταν ἓνας ἄνθρωπος ἀγαπᾷ κάποιο πρόσωπο, τὸ σκέπτεται ὅλη τὴν ἡμέρα χωρὶς διακοπή, διατηρεῖ συνεχῶς τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ μέσα εἰς τὴν καρδιά του, φροντίζει γι' αὐτὸ καὶ σὲ καμμιὰ περίπτωση τὸ ἀγαπημένο του πρόσωπο δὲν φεύγει ἀπὸ τὴν σκέψη του. Ἐγώ, ὅμως ὁλόκληρη τὴν ἡμέρα, εἶναι ζήτημα ἂν ξεχωρίζω ἔστω καὶ μιὰν ὥρα γιὰ νὰ βυθισθῶ σὲ ἐντρυφήση καὶ θεία μελέτη, γιὰ νὰ ζωογονήσω τὴν καρδιά μου μετὰ τὴν ἀγάπη μου πρὸς Αὐτόν, ἐνῶ με εὐκολία καὶ εὐχαρίστηση ἐξοδεύω τὶς εἴκοσι τρεῖς ὥρες τοῦ ἡμερονυκτίου σὰν μιὰ θερμὴ προσφορὰ καὶ θυσία εἰς τὰ εἶδωλα τῶν διαφορῶν παθῶν.

Ὅλονένα συζητῶ γιὰ τιποτένια πράγματα καὶ γεγονότα, τὰ ὁποῖα μολύνουν τὸ πνεῦμα, κι αὐτὸ μοῦ δίνει εὐχαρίστηση. Εἰς τὶς σκέψεις μου γιὰ τὸν Θεόν, εἶμαι ξηρὸς, ἀπρόθυμος καὶ ἀμελής. Κι ὅταν ἀκόμη χωρὶς νὰ τὸ θέλω, συμβαίνει ὥστε ἄλλοι νὰ με παρακινήσουν σὲ πνευματικὴ συζήτηση, κοιτάζω νὰ μετατρέψω τὸ θέμα σὲ κάτι ἄλλο, πὺδ' εὐχάριστο εἰς τὶς ἐπιθυμίες μου. Εἶμαι τρομερὰ περίεργος γιὰ κάθε μοντέρνο, γιὰ τὰ πολιτικά καὶ γιὰ χίλια δυὸ ἄλλα ζητήματα. Πολύ συχνὰ ζητῶ τὴν ἱκανοποίησιν εἰς τὴν ἀγάπην πρὸς τὶς κοσμικὲς γνώσεις, εἰς τὴν ἐπιστήμην, εἰς τὴν τέχνην, καὶ θέλω ὅλο καὶ περισσότερα ἀγαθὰ νὰ ἀποκτήσω. Ἡ μελέτη τοῦ Νόμου τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἡ γνῶσις Αὐτοῦ καὶ τῆς Θρησκείας, δὲν μοῦ κάνουν πολλὴν ἐντύπωσιν, οὔτε ἱκανοποιοῦν τὴν πνευματικὴν πείναν τῆς ψυχῆς μου. Ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ παραδέχομαι ὅτι εἶναι ὅχι μόνον ἀνούσια ἀπασχόληση γιὰ ἓνα χριστιανό, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ πλέον καὶ ἀνωφελής.

Ἐὰν ἡ ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν εἶναι ἡ τήρησις τῶν ἐντολῶν Του, ὅπως ὁ Χριστὸς εἶπε *εἰ ἀγαπᾶτε με τὰς ἐντολάς τὰς ἐμὰς τηρήσατε* ἐγὼ ὅχι μόνο δὲν τηρῶ τὰς ἐντολάς Του, ἀλλ' οὔτε καμμιὰ προσπάθεια καταβάλλω νὰ κατορθώσω τὴν τήρησίν τούς. Ἐτσι εἶναι ἀπόλυτη ἀλήθεια, τὴν ὁποῖα εὐκολὰ συμπεραίνει κανεὶς, ὅτι δὲν ἀγαπῶ τὸν Θεόν. Ἐπάνω σ' αὐτὸ ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος λέει: *Ἡ ἀπόδειξις ὅτι*

ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲν ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Θεὸν καὶ τὸν Χριστόν, ἔγκειται εἰς τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι δὲν τηρεῖ τὰς ἐντολάς του.

Δὲν ἀγαπῶ οὔτε τὸν πλησίον μου. Ἐὰν ἀγαποῦσα τὸν πλησίον μου, θὰ ἦτο δυνατόν νὰ σκεφθῶ καὶ νὰ ἀπόφασίσω νὰ δώσω καὶ τὴν ζωὴν μου γι' αὐτόν, ἐὰν θὰ ὑπῆρχε ἀνάγκη. Ὅχι, ὅμως, αὐτὸ μόνον δὲν κάνω, ἀλλ' οὔτε καὶ τὴν παραμικρὴ θυσία εἶμαι διατεθειμένος νὰ ὑποστῶ γι' αὐτόν. Ἐὰν ἀγαποῦσα τὸν πλησίον μου, σύμφωνα μετὰ τὴν ἐντολὴν τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, οἱ λύπες τοῦ θά ἦσαν καὶ δικές μου λύπες καὶ οἱ χαρές τοῦ θά ἄντανακλοῦσαν εἰς τὸ πρόσωπό μου, ὅπως εἰς τὸ δικό του. Ἀντιθέτως, ὅμως, εὐχαριστοῦμαι νὰ ἀκούω διάφορα ἄσχημα πράγματα γι' αὐτόν, ἀντὶ νὰ λυποῦμαι καὶ νὰ πονῶ. Τὸ κάθε κακὸ τυχὸν ποὺ ἀκούω γιὰ τὸν πλησίον μου, ὅχι μόνον δὲν τὸ σκεπάζω με ἀγάπην, ἀλλὰ τὸ διατυμπανίζω ὅπου μπορῶ με ἐσωτερικὴν ἱκανοποίησιν. Ἡ εὐτυχία τοῦ πλησίον μου, ἡ τιμὴ του, τὰ ἀγαθὰ του δὲν με εὐφραίνουν, μοῦ δίνουν δὲ ἀντιθέτως τὸ συναίσθημα τῆς ἀδιαφορίας. Τέλος, ὅχι λίγες φορές, καταλαμβάνουν τὴν ψυχὴ μου περιφρόνηση καὶ φθόνος γιὰ τὸν πλησίον μου.

Δὲν ἔχω θρησκευτικὴ πίστιν. Οὔτε εἰς τὴν ἀθανασίαν, οὔτε εἰς τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον, διότι ἐὰν ἦμουν τέλεια πεπεισμένος καὶ ἐπίστευα χωρὶς ἀμφιβολία ὅτι μετὰ ἀπὸ τὸν τάφο ξανοίγεται ἡ αἰώνιος ζωὴ καὶ ἡ ἀνταπόδοσις τῶν πεπραγμένων αὐτοῦ τοῦ κόσμου, θὰ ἐσκεπτόμουν συνεχῶς αὐτό, χωρὶς ἀνάπαυλα. Ἡ ἰδέα τῆς ἀθανασίας θὰ με συνέτριβε κυριολεκτικὰ καὶ θὰ ἐξοῦσα αὐτὴν τὴν πρόσκαιρην ζωὴν σὰν ἓνας ξένος καὶ παρεπίδημος, ποὺ ἔχει πάντα εἰς τὸν νοῦ του τὴν φροντίδα νὰ ἀξιωθεῖ κάποτε νὰ φθάσει εἰς τὴν γλυκεῖά του πατρίδα. Ἀντίθετα, ὅμως, ἐγὼ οὔτε κἀν σκέπτομαι γιὰ τὴν αἰωνιότητα καὶ συμπεριφέρομαι εἰς τὴν ζωὴν μου σὰν νὰ πιστεύω ὅτι τὸ τέλος τοῦ παρόντος βίου εἶναι καὶ τὸ τέρμα τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ὑπάρξεώς μου. Μέσα μου φωλιάζει ὑποσυνείδητα ἡ σκέψις ποὺ συνοψίζεται εἰς τὸ “ποιοὺς ξέρει καὶ ποιοὺς εἶδε τὰ μετὰ θάνατον;”

Ὅταν μιλῶ γιὰ τὴν ἀθανασία, τὸ μυαλό μου συμφωνεῖ μ' ἐκείνην, ἐνῶ ἡ καρδιά μου πολὺ ἀπέχει ἀπὸ τοῦ νὰ εἶναι πεπεισμένη γι' αὐτήν. Ὅλη αὐτὴ ἡ ἀπιστία μου ἀποδεικνύεται ἀπὸ τὶς πράξεις μου καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν συνεχεῖ φροντίδα νὰ ἱκανοποιῶ τὴν ζωὴν τῶν αἰσθήσεων. Ἐὰν ἡ διδασκαλία τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου εἶχε κυριαρχήσει εἰς τὴν καρδιά μου μετὰ τὴν ἀνάλογον πίστιν, θὰ εἶχα καταλυφθεῖ ἀπ' τὸ Λόγον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ θὰ τὸν ἐμελετοῦσα, θάβρισκε δὲ ἡ ἀφοσίωσις καὶ ἡ προσοχὴ τὴν κατοικίαν τῆς εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν μου. Ἡ προσοχή, ἡ εὐσπλαγχνία, ἡ ἀγάπη ποὺ κρύπτονται μέσα εἰς Αὐτόν θὰ με ὠδηγοῦσαν εἰς τὴν χαρὰ καὶ τὴν εὐτυχία τῆς μελέτης τοῦ Νόμου τοῦ Θεοῦ νύκτα καὶ ἡμέρα. Εἰς τὴν μελέτην αὐτὴν θὰ εὕρισκα τροφὴν πνευματικὴν, τὸν ἐπιούσιον ἄρτον τῆς ψυχῆς μου, καὶ ἡ καρδιά μου θὰ παρεκινεῖτο εἰς τὴν τήρησίν του.

Τίποτα εἰς τὸν κόσμον αὐτόν δὲν θάταν δυνατό νὰ με ἀποτρέψει ἀπ' τὴν ἐφαρμογὴν τῆς εἰς τὴν ζωὴν μου.

Ἀντιθέτως, ὁμως, ὅταν κάθε τόσο διαβάζω ἢ ἀκούω τὸν Λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἂν ἡ ἀνάγκη ἢ ἡ ἀγάπη πρὸς τὴ γνώση μὲ ὠθοῦν πρὸς τοῦτο, τὸν παρακολουθῶ χωρὶς τὴν δέουσα προσοχή καὶ τὸν εὐρίσκω τὶς περισσότερες φορές καταθλιπτικό ἢ χωρὶς σπουδαῖο ἐνδιαφέρον. Συνήθως φθάνω εἰς τὸ τέλος τῆς μελέτης του χωρὶς σπουδαία ὠφέλεια καὶ πάντα πρόθυμος νὰ τὸν ἀλλάξω μὲ ἐλαφρὰ ἀναγνώσματα πού μοῦ εἶναι πολὺ ἐνδιαφέροντα καὶ μὲ εὐχαριστοῦν.

Εἶμαι πλήρης ἀπὸ ὑπερηφάνεια καὶ φιλαντία. Ὅλες μου οἱ ἐνέργειες τὸ βεβαιώνουν. Βλέποντας κάτι καλὸ εἰς τὸν ἑαυτὸν μου, ἐπιθυμῶ νὰ τὸ κάνω ἐμφανές ἢ νὰ ὑπερηφανευθῶ γι' αὐτὸ μπροστὰ σὲ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους ἢ νὰ τὸ θαυμάσω μόνος μου ἐσωτερικῶς. Ἄν καὶ ἐπιδεικνύω μίαν ἐξωτερικὴ ταπεινοφροσύνη, τὴν ἀποδίδω σὲ ἀποτελεσματικότητά τῆς ἰδικῆς μου δυνάμεως, θεωρῶ δὲ τὸν ἑαυτὸν μου ἢ ἀνώτερον ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους, ἢ τουλάχιστον ὄχι χειρότερό τους. Ὄταν ἀνακαλύπτω ἓνα σφάλμα μου προσπαθῶ νὰ τὸ δικαιολογήσω καὶ νὰ τὸ σκεπάσω, λέγοντας: “Τὶ νὰ κάνω;” Ἐτσι εἶμαι φτιαγμένος,” ἢ “δὲν πειράζει, κανεὶς δὲν θὰ μὲ παρεξηγήσει.”

Θυμῶνω μὲ ὅσους δὲν δείχνουν ἐκτίμηση πρὸς τὸ πρόσωπό μου καὶ τοὺς πιστεύω ὅτι εἶναι ἄνθρωποι πού δὲν ἔμπορουν νὰ ἐκτιμήσουν τὴν ἀξία τοῦ ἄλλου. Ἀγάλλομαι γιὰ τὰ χαρίσματά μου, καὶ ὅλες μου τὶς πτώσεις τὶς θεωρῶ ἐντελῶς προσωπικό μου ζήτημα. Ἐνῶ εἶμαι μεμψίμοιρος, εὐρίσκω εὐχαρίστησιν εἰς τὶς ἀτυχίες τῶν ἐχθρῶν μου. Ὄταν ἀγωνίζομαι γιὰ κάτι καλὸ τὸ κάνω μὲ τὸν σκοπὸ ἢ νὰ κερδίσω ἐπαίνους, ἢ νὰ δώσω κάποια ἐλαστικότητα εἰς τὸν πνευματικό μου ἑαυτό, ἢ νὰ πάρω μιά πρόσκαιρη παρηγορία.

Μὲ μιά λέξη, συνεχῶς κατασκευάζω ἓνα εἶδωλο τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ μου πρὸς τὸ ὅποιο ἀποδίδω ἀδιάκοπες τὶς ὑπηρεσίες μου, φροντίζοντας μὲ κάθε τρόπο γιὰ τὴν εὐχαρίστησή μου καὶ τὴν καλλιέργεια τῶν παθῶν καὶ τῶν ἐπιθυμιῶν μου. Πράττοντας ὅλα αὐτὰ ἀναγνωρίζω τὸν ἑαυτὸν μου νὰ εἶναι γεμᾶτος ἀπὸ ὑπερηφάνεια, ἀπὸ διάφορες σαρκικὲς ἐπιθυμίες, ἀπὸ ἀπιστίαν, ἀπὸ ἑλλειψιν ἀγάπης πρὸς τὸν Θεὸ καὶ ἀπὸ κακία πρὸς τὸν πλησίον μου.

Ποιὰ κατάστασις θὰ μπορούσε νὰ ὑπάρξει πιὸ ἁμαρτωλὴ ἀπὸ αὐτήν; Ἡ κατάστασις τῶν πνευμάτων τοῦ σκότους πρέπει νὰ εἶναι καλύτερη ἀπὸ τὴν ἰδικήν μου. Ἐκεῖνα, ἂν καὶ δὲν ἀγαποῦν τὸν Θεό, ἂν καὶ μισοῦν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ τροφὴ τους εἶναι ἡ ὑπερηφάνεια, μ' ὅλα ταῦτα πιστεύουν εἰς τὸν Θεὸ καὶ φρίττουν. Ἐγὼ ὁμως; Μπορῶ νὰ βρεθῶ σὲ χειρότερη κόλασιν ἀπ' αὐτήν πού ἀντιμετωπίζω; Πῶς δὲ δὲν θὰ λάβω τὴν πιὸ αὐστηρὴ τιμωρία γιὰ τὴν ἀνόητη καὶ ἀπρόσεκτη ζωὴ μου, τὴν ὁποίαν ἀναγνωρίζω ὅτι ζῶ;»

Διαβάζοντας ὅλον αὐτὸν τὸν τύπον τῆς ἐξομολογήσεως πού μοῦ ἔδωσεν ὁ ἱερεύς, τρομοκρατημένος ἐσκέφθηκα καὶ εἶπα μέσα μου: «Θεὲ καὶ Κύριε! Τὶ φοβερά ἁμαρτήματα

ὑπάρχουν κρυμμένα μέσα μου καὶ μέχρι τώρα δὲν τὰ εἶχα ἀνακαλύψει!». Ἡ ἐπιθυμία νὰ καθαρισθῶ ἀπὸ αὐτὰ μὲ ἔκαναν νὰ ἱκετεύσω αὐτὸν τὸν μεγάλον ἐξομολόγο νὰ μὲ διδάξει πῶς νὰ γνωρίσω τὴν αἰτίαν ὅλου αὐτοῦ τοῦ κακοῦ καὶ πῶς νὰ θεραπεύσω ἀπ' αὐτὸ τὸν ἑαυτὸν μου.

Ἐτσι ὁ ἅγιος αὐτὸς πνευματικὸς ἄρχισε νὰ μὲ καθοδηγεῖ λέγοντας: «Παῖδί μου καὶ ἀδελφέ μου, ἡ αἰτία τῆς ἑλλειψεως ἀγάπης πρὸς τὸν Θεὸ εἶναι ἑλλειψις πίστεως. Ἡ ἑλλειψις αὐτῆς τῆς πίστεως εἶναι ἡ αἰτία τῆς ἑλλειψεως τῆς πεποιθήσεως καὶ ἡ αἰτία τοῦ τελευταίου αὐτοῦ, εἶναι ἡ ἀποτυχία μας ὡς πρὸς τὴν ἀναζήτησιν τῆς ἀληθινῆς καὶ ἁγίας γνώσεως καὶ ἡ ἀδιαφορία μας ὡς πρὸς τὴν ἀναζήτησιν τοῦ φωτὸς τοῦ πνεύματος. Μὲ μιά λέξη, ἂν δὲν πιστεύεις δὲν μπορείς νὰ ἀγαπᾷς... Μὲ τὴν ἁγιαστικὴ μελέτη τοῦ λόγου τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ μὲ τὴν ἀπόκτησιν πείρας, πρέπει νὰ γεννηθεῖ εἰς τὴν ψυχὴ σου μιά δίψα, μιά ἀκατάσχετη ἐπιθυμία, κάτι σὰν θαῦμα, τὸ ὅποιο θὰ σοῦ φέρει μίαν ἀσίγαστη ἐπιθυμία νὰ μάθεις, ὅσο μπορείς πιὸ πολὺ, πιὸ τέλεια, πιὸ βαθειά, ὅ,τι περιβάλλει ὅλους μας...

Φαντάζομαι τώρα πῶς θὰ κατάλαβες ὅτι ἡ αἰτία τῶν ἁμαρτημάτων, τὰ ὁποῖα ἐδιάβασες προηγουμένως, εἶναι ἡ ἀδράνεια τῆς ψυχῆς μας γιὰ σκέψεις ἐπάνω σὲ πνευματικὰ πράγματα, ἀδράνεια πού ξηραίνει τὰ συναισθήματα καὶ τὴν ἀνάγκη τῆς ψυχῆς γιὰ παρόμοιες πνευματικὲς ἐντροφήσεις. Ἐὰν θέλεις νὰ μάθεις πῶς θὰ νικήσεις αὐτὴν τὴν αἰτία τοῦ κακοῦ, φρόντισε νὰ ἀποκτήσεις μὲ ὅλη σου τὴν δύναμη τὴν φώτισιν τοῦ πνεύματος, τὴν φώτισιν τῆς ψυχῆς, μὲ ἐπιμελὴ καὶ ἁγιαστικὴ μελέτη τοῦ λόγου τοῦ Θεοῦ, μὲ τὴν μελέτη τῶν Πατέρων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, μὲ τὶς συμβουλές πνευματικῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ μὲ συζητήσεις μὲ ἄτομα πού εἶναι σοφοὶ καὶ γεμᾶτοι ἀπὸ Χριστό...

Ἄς κάνουμε τὴν προσπάθεια αὐτὴ καὶ ἄς προσευχώμεθα, ὅσο συχνότερα μπορούμε μὲ τὰ λόγια: Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, κάνε μας νὰ σὲ ἀγαπήσουμε τόσον, ὅσο πρὶν γνωρίσουμε Σένα, ἀγαπούσαμε τὴν ἁμαρτία!»



Ὅσο ἀπομακρύνονται οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀπὸ τὴν φυσικὴ ζωὴ, τὴν ἀπλὴ, καὶ προχωροῦν στὴν πολυτέλεια, αὐξάνουν καὶ τὸ ἀνθρώπινο ἄγχος. Καὶ ὅσο προχωρεῖ ἡ κοσμικὴ εὐγένεια, τόσο χάνεται καὶ ἡ ἀπλότητα, ἡ χαρὰ καὶ τὸ φυσικὸ ἀνθρώπινο χαμόγελο.

Θέλεις ἡ προσευχή σου νὰ γίνῃ καρδιακή, γιὰ νὰ εἶναι εὐπρόσδεκτη στὸ Θεό; Κάνε τὸν πόνο τοῦ συνανθρώπου σου δικό σου πόνο. Καὶ μόνο ἓνας καρδιακὸς ἀναστεναγμὸς γιὰ τὸν πλησίον σου φέρνει θετικὰ ἀποτελέσματα.

Γέροντας Παΐσιος

Ὁ Χρόνος καὶ ἡ Σχετικότητα του

Τοῦ κ. Ἀλεξάνδρου Μ. Σταυροπούλου Ὁμ. Καθηγητοῦ τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν.



Συνήθως, τέλος τοῦ παλαιοῦ καὶ ἀρχεῖς τοῦ καινούριου χρόνου κάνουμε σκέψεις γιὰ τὸ χρόνο. Γι' αὐτὸ πού ἐκπροσωπεῖ γιὰ ἐμᾶς ὡς μονάδα μετρήσεως, ὡς ἄξια, ὡς περίοδος πού μπορούμε νὰ τὴν ἀξιοποιήσουμε γιὰ τὴ ζωὴ μας καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους. Κάθε

στιγμή, ὅμως, σὲ ὁποιοδήποτε ἡμερολογιακὸ καθορισμὸ της, μπορεῖ νὰ γίνῃ ἀφορμὴ γιὰ σκέψεις αὐτοῦ τοῦ εἶδους. Ἡ διάρκεια ἄλλωστε τοῦ χρόνου εἶναι σχετική. Ἐξαρτᾶται ἀπὸ χίλια δυὸ πράγματα. Καὶ ἡ ἀποτίμησή του ἐπίσης.

Λέγεται ὅτι ὁ χρόνος εἶναι χρῆμα. Τί χρῆμα; Πῶς ὑπολογίζεται ὁ χρόνος ἐνὸς ἐργάτη, ἐνὸς ἐπιστήμονα, μίας οἰκιακῆς βοηθοῦ, ἐνὸς λαθρομετανάστη, ἐνὸς πρωθυπουργοῦ, ἐνὸς γιατροῦ, ἐνὸς πιλότου, ἐνὸς διευθυντοῦ τραπέζης; Αὐτὸς ὁ χρόνος βλέπουμε ὅτι ἐκτιμᾶται μὲ διαφορετικὲς ἀμοιβές. Καὶ εἶναι φορὲς πού οἱ κλιμακώσεις δὲν ἀνταποκρίνονται πάντοτε στὸ μέγεθος τῆς προσφορᾶς. Μπορεῖ νὰ πληρώνεται κάποιος γιὰ τὸ χρόνο τῆς «ἀγαρείας» του, ποσοτικά, ὄχι ὅμως καὶ γιὰ τὴν ποιότητα πού καταβάλλει. Καὶ πράγματι, πῶς νὰ ἐκτιμηθεῖ ἡ διάθεση, τὸ κέφι, τὸ φιλότιμο;

Στὴ σχετικότητα τοῦ χρόνου πρέπει νὰ ληφθεῖ ὑπόψη τὸ ὑποκειμενικὸ στοιχεῖο. Διαφορετικὴ εἶναι ἡ ἀντίληψη πού ἔχεις ὅταν ἐργάζεσαι μὲ ρυθμὸ πολὺ ἔντονο καὶ ἄλλη ὅταν βαριέσαι γι' αὐτὸ πού κάνεις. Εἴτε ὅταν εἶσαι ἄρρωστος, φυλακισμένος, ὅταν πηγαίνεις γιὰ τὴ δουλειά σου ἢ ὅταν ἐπιστρέφεις ἀπὸ αὐτήν, ὅταν ταξιδεύεις, ὅταν βρίσκεσαι σὲ διακοπές.

Στὴ συγκεκριμένη περίπτωση πολλοὶ ὀνομάζουν αὐτὸ τὸ χρόνο «ἐλεύθερο χρόνο». Τί σημαίνει αὐτό; Ὅτι ἐνῶ στὸν ἄλλο χρόνο δεσμεύεσαι ἀπὸ τίς συνθῆκες νὰ κάνεις αὐτό, καὶ ἐκεῖνο, καὶ τὸ ἄλλο, στὸν ἐλεύθερο χρόνο σου ἔχεις τὴ δυνατότητα νὰ τὸν διαθέσεις πῶς ἐσὺ θέλεις. Ἡ ἀληθινὴ αὐτοδιάθεση ὑποστηρίζουν μερικοί, ἀρχίζει ἀπὸ τὸ χρόνο. Εἶσαι ἀνεξάρτητος ἀπὸ τὴ στιγμή πού μπορείς ἐσὺ νὰ χειρίζεσαι καὶ νὰ χρησιμοποιεῖς ὅπως ἐσὺ θέλεις τὸ χρόνο σου. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ θεωρεῖται πολὺτιμο ἀγαθὸ πού τὸ ὑπερασπιζόμαστε μὲ κάθε θυσιά.

Ἐνοχλούμεθα ὅταν μας ἀναζητοῦν γιὰ ὑπηρεσιακὰ θέματα ἔκτος ὑπηρεσίας. Ὅταν δὲν διεκπεραιώνουν μία ὑπόθεσή μας στὸ χρόνο πού προβλέπεται ἢ μᾶς ἔχουν ὑποσχεθεῖ. Εἶναι, βέβαια, ἀλήθεια, ὅτι τὸ λιγότερο σήμερα σεβόμενο ἀγαθὸ εἶναι ὁ χρόνος τοῦ ἄλλου. Ἐὰν ἡ ἐποχὴ μας μεταξὺ ἄλλων μπορεῖ νὰ χαρακτηριθεῖ ὡς ἀσεβῆς

τοῦτο ὀφείλεται καὶ στὴν ἀσέβεια πού ἐπιδεικνύουμε στὸν χρόνο τοῦ ἄλλου. Γινόμαστε μάλιστα ἀπαιτητικοὶ ἀπ' αὐτὸν ἐνῶ γιὰ τὸν δικό μας ἀμυνόμαστε μέχρις ἐσχάτων, ἄσχετο ἂν δὲν σεβόμαστε οὔτε καὶ τὸν δικό μας, σπαταλώντας τὸν ἀσύδοτα γιὰτί θεωροῦμε τί τὸν κατέχουμε ὡς ἀγαθὸν ἐν ἐπάρκειᾳ.

Ἐπειδὴ ὅμως καὶ ὁ δικός μας δὲν εἶναι ἀπεριόριστος, ὀφείλουμε νὰ τὸν ἐξαγοράζουμε, νὰ ἐπωφελοῦμεθα δηλαδὴ ἀπὸ αὐτόν, νὰ τὸν χρησιμοποιοῦμε σωστά (Ἐφ. 5:16). Ἐδῶ μπορούμε, παραλλάσσοντας τὸ γνωστὸ λόγιό του Κυρίου μας γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη, νὰ προτείνουμε ὡς κριτήριον σεβασμοῦ γιὰ τὸ χρόνο τὸ δικό μας καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τὸ *σεβάσον τὸν χρόνο τῶν ἄλλων ὅπως σέβεσαι καὶ τὸν δικό σου χρόνο*. Αὐτὸ θὰ ἄλλαζε κυριολεκτικὰ τὴν ἀντιμετώπιση πού ἔχουμε γιὰ πολλὰ ζητήματα.

Κάτι ἄλλο πού προσφέρεται σ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς στοχασμούς μας γιὰ τὸ χρόνο εἶναι ὅτι ὁ χρόνος πού διαθέτουμε μᾶς διατίθεται. Βέβαια, ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀρέσκεται στὴν ἰδέα νὰ πιστεύει ὅτι ὅ,τι κατέχει τὸ κατέχει δικαιωματικά, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ στὸ θέμα τοῦ χρόνου ὡς λυδία λίθος κρίνεται ἡ αὐτονομία του. Ὁ χρόνος μας, ὅμως, εἶναι κάτι δεδομένο, μᾶς ἔχει δοθεῖ. Θὰ τολμοῦσα νὰ πῶ ὅτι γιὰ τὸ χρόνο δίνουμε λόγο σὲ κάποιον τελικά, καὶ πρέπει νὰ μὴ βρεθοῦμε ἀναπολόγητοι.

Ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι ὁ Μέγας Χρονομέτρης, ὄχι μὲ τὴν ἔννοια ἐνὸς ἀδυσώπητου κριτῆ, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴ φροντίδα πού ἔχει ἔτσι ὥστε στὸν χρόνο πού μας διαθέτει νὰ κάνουμε τὸ καλύτερο, κι ἐμεῖς αὐτὸ τὸ ξεχνᾶμε συχνά. Ζοῦμε τὸ χρόνο μόνοι μας. Δὲν συγχρονίζομαστε μὲ τὸ χρόνο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀσχετο ἂν Αὐτὸς εἶναι Ἄχρονος, ἐμεῖς ἔχουμε τὴ δυνατότητα πού μᾶς τὴν παραχωρεῖ ὁ ἴδιος νὰ ζοῦμε τὸ χρόνο μας μαζί Του, νὰ δουλεύουμε στοὺς ἀγρούς Του. Κι αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ μεγάλο κέρδος. Ἐμεῖς πολλὰς φορὲς εἴμαστε κολλημένοι στὴν ἀμοιβή. Γιὰ τὸ πόσο χρόνο θὰ τοῦ διαθέσουμε καὶ τί θὰ πάρουμε στὸ τέλος.

Ἡ παραβολὴ τῶν ἐργατῶν τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος (Ματθ 20:1-16) πού προσέλαβε ὁ οἰκοδεσπότης γιὰ διαφορετικὸ χρόνο ἐργασίας ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴν ἴδια ἀμοιβή στὸ τέλος, εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὴ. Ἡ διαμαρτυρία τῶν τῆς πρώτης ὥρας φαίνεται ἐκ πρώτης ὄψεως δικαιολογημένη. *Ἐμεῖς κοπιάσαμε πολὺ περισσότερο καὶ παίρνουμε τὰ ἴδια λεφτὰ μὲ τοὺς ἐργάτες τῆς ἐνδέκατης*. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ ἀπάντηση τοῦ ἐργοδότη εἶναι ἐπίσης ἀποστομωτικὴ. *Αὐτὴ ἦταν ἡ συμφωνία μας*.

Ὅλοι, ὅμως, ἐμεῖς πού ἐπιμένουμε στὸ νομικὸν τοῦ πράγματος ἀπὸ τὴ μία μεριά καὶ στὴ μεγαλοθυμία τοῦ ἐργοδότη νὰ παράσχει ἰσότητα εὐκαιριῶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη, ξεχνᾶμε τὸ μεγάλο εὐεργέτημα τῶν τῆς πρώτης ὥρας. Δὲν εἶναι οἱ χαμένοι τῆς ἱστορίας καὶ οἱ ἀδικημένοι. Οἱ τῆς ἐνδέκατης ἀπολαμβάνουν τὴν ἴση εὐκαιρία νὰ εἰσπράξουν ἀμοιβὴ τῶν πρώτων. Ἀσχετο τί συμφώνησαν οἱ πρῶτοι γιὰ τὸ τέλος, ἀμείφθηκαν μὲ τὴ μεγάλη εὐκαιρία πού τοὺς

δόθηκε νὰ δουλέψουν γιὰ τὸν Κύριο ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς βάρδιας καὶ νὰ ἐργασθοῦν γι' Αὐτὸν πολὺ περισσότερο χρόνο ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους. Αὐτὸ δίνει τὴν ὑπεραξία στὸ χρόνο τους, τὸ περισσότερο, ποὺ μὲ τὰ στενὰ ὅρια καὶ τοὺς ὅρους τοῦ δοῦναι καὶ λαβεῖν χάνεται σ' ἓνα παράπονο συνδικαλιστικοῦ τύπου.

Τὸ ἴδιο θὰ μπορούσαμε νὰ ποῦμε γιὰ τὸ παράπονο τοῦ μεγάλου ἀδελφοῦ στὴν παραβολὴ τοῦ ἀσώτου υἱοῦ (Λουκ. 15:11-32). Καὶ ἐκεῖ ἔχουμε διαμαρτυρία τοῦ μεγάλου, τοῦ τῆς πρώτης ὥρας, γιὰ ὅλα ἐκεῖνα ποὺ ἐπιδανίλευσε ὁ φιλόανθρωπος πατέρας στὸν γιὸ ποὺ ἐπέστρεψε. *Τόσα χρόνια σου δουλεύω καὶ δὲν μοῦ ἔδωσες οὔτε ἓνα κατσίκι γιὰ νὰ εὐφρανθῶ μὲ τοὺς φίλους μου.* Εἶχε ξεχάσει, ὅμως, αὐτὸ ποὺ τοῦ ἀπάντησε ὁ πατέρας. Δὲν τοῦ εἶπε τόσα χρόνια μου δούλεψες ἀλλὰ παιδί μου, *ἐσὺ εἶσαι πάντοτε μαζί μου.* Αὐτὸ τὸ *σὺ πάντοτε μετ' ἐμοῦ εἶ* εἶχε ξεχάσει. Τὸν ἐνδιέφερε κυρίως ἡ δουλειὰ μὲ τὶς ἀπολαβὲς καὶ ὄχι γιὰ τὸ γιὰ ποιὸν ἐργαζόταν. Ὁ χρόνος πῆρε μετρητὴ μορφή καὶ ἔγινε πληθυντικὸς χρόνος, χρόνια. Ὅπως καὶ στὴν περίπτωση τῶν ἐργατῶν τῆς πρώτης ὥρας ἐκεῖνο ποὺ μετροῦσε ἦταν οἱ ὥρες, οἱ ἐργατοῦρες καὶ ὄχι ὁ ἐργοδότης.

Αὐτὸ ὅταν μᾶς διαφεύγει χάνουμε τὸν συγχρονισμό μας καὶ ὁ χρόνος μας γίνεται μοναχικὸς φθάνουμε «νὰ δουλεύουμε γιὰ μᾶς»...



Δὲν πρέπει νὰ κάνεις τὸν χριστιανικὸ σου ἀγώνα μὲ Δκηρύγματα καὶ ἀντιδικίες, ἀλλὰ μὲ πραγματικὴ μυστικὴ ἀγάπη. Ὅταν ἀντιδικούμε, οἱ ἄλλοι ἀντιδροῦν. Ὅταν τοὺς ἀγαπᾶμε, συγκινοῦνται καὶ τοὺς κερδίζουμε. Ὅταν ἀγαπᾶμε, νομίζουμε ὅτι προσφέρουμε στοὺς ἄλλους, ἐνῶ στὴν πραγματικότητα προσφέρουμε πρῶτα στὸν ἑαυτὸ μας. Ἡ ἀγάπη χρειάζεται θυσίες. Νὰ θυσιάζουμε ταπεινὰ κάτι δικό μας, ποὺ στὴν πραγματικότητα εἶναι τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ο Χριστὸς εἶναι ἡ Ἐκκλησία καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ὁ Χριστός, ποὺ μᾶς ἔχει προσλάβει ὅλους στὸν ἑαυτὸ Του. Ὅταν ἀγαπᾶς τὸν Χριστό, ἀγαπᾶς συγχρόνως ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, χωρὶς νὰ ρωτᾷς ἂν οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι ἄξιοι τῆς ἀγάπης ἢ ἀκόμη ἂν τὴν ἀποδεχθοῦν ἢ τὴν ἀπορρίψουν. Ὅταν θέλεις νὰ συναντήσεις τὸν Χριστό, θὰ Τὸν βρεῖς στὸ χῶρο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, γιατί ἐδῶ εἶναι ἐνωμένη ὁλόκληρη ἡ ἀνθρωπότητα μὲ τὸν Θεὸ στὸ Πρόσωπο τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἐπικοινωνεῖς μὲ τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ νὰ μὴν τὰ ἔχεις καλὰ μὲ τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους.

Οχι, ὁ Θεὸς δὲν τιμωρεῖ, ὁ ἄνθρωπος αὐτοτιμωρεῖται, ἀπομακρυνόμενος ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Εἶναι, ἂς ποῦμε: Ἐδῶ νερό, ἐκεῖ φωτιά. Εἶμαι ἐλεύθερος νὰ διαλέξω. Βάζω τὸ χέρι μου στὸ νερό, δροσίζομαι, τὸ βάζω στὴ φωτιά, καίγομαι.

Γέροντας Πορφύριος

Περὶ τῆς Ἀληθοῦς Ἐννοίας τοῦ ΛΘ' (39ου) Ἀποστολικοῦ Κανόνος

Ἀρχιμανδρίτου Ἐπιφανίου Θεοδωροπούλου (+1989), «Ἄρθρα, Μελεται, Επιστολαί», τόμος Α', Ἀθήναι 1986, σελ. 212 κ. ἐ.

Τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια ἔχουμε ὅλοι μας γίνει μάρτυρες τοῦ δεσποτισμοῦ τῶν ἐπισκόπων, τουλάχιστον στὴν Ἐκκλησίᾳ τῆς Ἑλλάδος. Ὁ δεσποτισμὸς αὐτός, ποὺ παίρνει διάφορες μορφές, ὅλο καὶ ἰσχυροποιεῖται δεδομένου ὅτι δὲν ἀφορᾷ πλέον μόνο σὲ προσωπικὰ θέματα τῶν κληρικῶν ἀλλὰ ἔχει βαθύτερους σκοποὺς καὶ στόχους. Στόχος εἶναι πλέον ἡ φήμιση κάθε ἀντιθέτου φωνῆς κάθε ἀντιστάσεως στὰ κατεδαφιστικὰ σχέδια τῆς Νέας Ἐποχῆς ποὺ ἔχει δυναμικὰ εἰσβάλλει στὴν «ἐκκλησίᾳ» καὶ προσπαθεῖ μὲ καινοτομίες, καὶ προοδευτικές, δῆθεν, ἐνέργειες νὰ ἀλλοιώσει τὸ Ὅρθόδοξο φρόνημα καὶ κριτήριό. Οἱ ἐπίσκοποι μας, στηριζόμενοι στὸν ΛΘ' ἀποστολικὸ κανόνα, τὸν μόνον ποὺ φρόντισαν νὰ ἀποστηθίσουν, ἔχουν μετατραπῇ ἀπὸ πνευματικοὺς πατέρες σὲ αὐταρχικοὺς διοικητὲς δημοσίων ὑπηρεσιῶν καὶ σὲ ἀκριβῆ ἀντίγραφα τοῦ «Φύρερ». Ἄς δοῦμε ὅμως πῶς ὁ ἅγιος γέροντας π. Ἐπιφάνιος Θεοδωρόπουλος μιλοῦσε γιὰ τὸ θέμα μερικὰ χρόνια πρὶν ὅσο κι ἂν ὁ δεσποτισμὸς δὲν εἶχε ἀκόμα τόσο πολὺ ἐνισχυθεῖ.

Τὸ κείμενο ποὺ ἀκολουθεῖ εἶναι ἓνα ἄρθρο ποὺ ἔγραψε ὁ π. Ἐπιφάνιος στοὺς «Τρεῖς Ἱεράρχες», τὸν Ἰανουάριο τοῦ 1963 καὶ στὸ ὁποῖο δίνει τὴν πραγματικὴ καὶ ὀρθὴ ἐρμηνεία τοῦ παρεξηγημένου καὶ ἐκμεταλενομένου κανόνος.



Ελάχιστοι ἀναμφιβόλως κανόνες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἡμῶν παρανοοῦνται καὶ παρερμηνεύονται τόσο πολὺ, ὅσον ὁ ΛΘ' Ἀποστολικὸς Κανὼν. Ἐπειδὴ δ' ἐσχάτως εἶδον τὸ φῶς δύο ἀκόμη παρανοήσεις τοῦ εἰρημένου Κανόνος, ἐκρίναμεν ἀναγκαῖον νὰ διασαφήσωμεν δι' ὀλίγων τὴν ἔννοιαν αὐτοῦ.

Οἱ πρεσβύτεροι καὶ οἱ Διάκονοι, λέγει ὁ Κανὼν, ἄνευ γνώμης τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου μηδὲν ἐπιτελείτωσαν. Αὐτὸς γάρ ἐστὶν ὁ πεπιστευμένος τὸν λαὸν τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ τὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ψυχῶν αὐτῶν λόγον ἀπαιτηθόμενος.

Ποῖα ἄραγε εἶναι ἡ ἔννοια τῆς φράσεως «μηδὲν ἐπιτελείτωσαν»; Τὶ ἀκριβῶς ἐννοεῖ ἐκεῖνο τὸ «μηδὲν»; Εἶνε ἀπόλυτος ἡ ἔννοια αὐτοῦ ἢ σχετικὴ καὶ περιορισμένη;

Νομίζομεν, ὅτι ἀρκεῖ νὰ ἔχη τις τὸν κοινὸν νοῦν, ἵνα ἀποκρούσῃ καὶ ἀποκλείσῃ πᾶσαν σκέψιν περὶ ἀπολύτου ἐννοίας. Ἡ ἀπόλυτος ἔννοια θὰ ἦτο καὶ φυσικῶς ἀδύνατος καὶ λογικῶς ἀπαράδεκτος. Διότι, ἐν ἐναντίᾳ περιπτώσει, θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ εἴπωμεν, ὅτι ὁ Κληρικὸς χρειάζεται ἄδειαν τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου καὶ διὰ νὰ φάγῃ ἢ νὰ πῖῃ ἢ νὰ κοιμηθῇ ἢ νὰ ἐνδυθῇ ἢ νὰ περιπατήσῃ. Ἀλλὰ τοῦτο θὰ ἦτο ἀδιανόητον.

Οὔτε ὅμως καὶ διὰ τὰς καθαρῶς ἐκκλησιαστικὰς ἐνεργείας αὐτοῦ χρειάζεται ἄδειαν τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου ὁ Κληρικὸς, ἐφ' ὅσον εὐρίσκεται ἐν τῷ κύκλῳ τῆς ἀρμοδιότητος αὐτοῦ. Σκέπτεσθε τὴν θέσιν Ἐπισκόπου τινός, οὐ οἱ Κληρικοὶ θὰ ἐξήτουν καθ' ἐκάστην ἡμέραν τὴν ἄδειαν, ἵνα τελέσωσι

τὰ Θεῖα Μυστήρια ἢ ἄλλας Ἱεράς Ἀκολουθίας, ἢ ἵνα κηρύξωσιν, ἢ ἵνα νουθετήσωσιν καὶ συμφιλιώσωσιν ἀντιμαχομένους, ἢ ἵνα συζητήσωσιν μετὰ αἰρετικῶν, ἢ ἵνα βοηθήσωσιν πτωχοῦς, ἢ ἵνα δημοσιεύσωσιν θεολογικὰς διατριβάς ἢ γενικῶς θρησκευτικὰ βιβλία ἢ ἄρθρα κ.λ.π.; Δὲν θὰ ἡδύνατο νὰ ἐπαρκέσῃ εἰς τὸ ἀπαντᾶν, οὔτε καὶ ἐὰν δέκα μόνον Κληρικοὺς εἶχεν ὑπ' αὐτόν!...

Δι' οὐδὲν λοιπὸν τῶν ἀνωτέρω ἀπαιτεῖται ἄδεια τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου. Ἐὰν δὲ τι αὐτῶν δὲν τελεσθῇ ὡς δεῖ, τότε ὑπάρχει βεβαίως εὐθύνη διὰ τὸν Κληρικόν, ἀλλ' εὐθύνη παραβάσεως ἄλλων Κανόνων ἢ παραδόσεων καὶ ἐθίμων, οὐχὶ δὲ τοῦ ΛΘ' Ἀποστ. Κανόνος.

Παράδειγμα: Τερεὺς τις, μετὰ τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν τοῦ Ἱ. Εὐαγγελίου, ἐρμηνεύει αὐτὸ εἰς τὸν λαόν. Κατὰ τὴν ὁμιλίαν δ' αὐτοῦ ἐκτρέπεται εἰς αἰσχρολογίας ἀφορήτους. Ἀναμφιβόλως πρέπει νὰ τιμωρηθῇ. Θὰ τιμωρηθῇ ὁμως οὐχὶ διότι δὲν ἔλαβε πρὸ τοῦ κηρύγματος ἄδειαν τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου (τοιαύτην ἄδειαν δὲν ἐχρειάζετο, ἐφ' ὅσον, α) εἶνε κανονικὸς ἱερεὺς καὶ β) εὐρίσκετο ἐντὸς τοῦ Ναοῦ εἰς ὃν ἀνήκει), ἀλλὰ διότι ἐγένετο, διὰ τῆς αἰσχρολογίας αὐτοῦ, αἷτιος σκανδαλισμοῦ τοῦ λαοῦ.

Ἔτερον παράδειγμα: Τερεὺς τις δημοσιεύει θεολογικὴν πραγματείαν, ἐν ἣ ὑπάρχουσιν αἰρετικαὶ διδασκαλίες. Καὶ οὗτος θὰ τιμωρηθῇ, οὐχὶ ὁμως ἐπὶ παραβάσει τοῦ ΛΘ' Ἀποστ. Κανόνος (διότι ἐξέδωκεν βιβλίον ἄνευ ἀδείας τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου), ἀλλ' ἐπὶ ἀθετησίᾳ τῶν δογμάτων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας.

Τρίτον παράδειγμα: Τερεὺς τις φέρει εἰς φῶς φυλλάδιον ἢ ἄρθρον, ἐν ᾧ ἄσκει κριτικὴν ἐπὶ ἐκκλησιαστικῶν πραγμάτων. Εἶνε δυνατόν νὰ κατηγορηθῇ ἐπὶ παραβάσει τοῦ εἰρημένου Κανόνος, διότι δηλ. δὲν ἔλαβε προκαταβολικῶς ἄδειαν τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου; Ἀλλ' ἂν μὴ τι ἄλλο, ὁ Ἐπίσκοπος, ὅστις θὰ διετύπου τοιαύτην κατηγορίαν, θὰ ἐκινδύνευε νὰ ἐγκληθῇ ὑπὸ τοῦ εἰσαγγελέως ἐπὶ παραβίασει τοῦ Συντάγματος, ὅπερ ἀπαγορεύει τὴν προληπτικὴν λογοκρισίαν καὶ παρέχει ἐλευθερίαν διατυπώσεως τῶν στοχασμῶν ἐκάστου. Ἐὰν δὲ τυχὸν τὸ εἰρημένον κείμενον τοῦ ἱερέως περιέχῃ ὕβρεις ἢ συκοφαντίας ἢ βωμολοχίας ἢ ὁ,τιδήποτε ἄλλο κατὰκριτον πρᾶγμα, τότε βεβαίως θὰ ἐγκληθῇ μὲν οὗτος, οὐχὶ ὁμως ἐπὶ παραβίασει τοῦ ΛΘ' Ἀποστ. Κανόνος, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῇ βάσει τῶν πρὸς τὸ ἀδίκημα αὐτοῦ συναφῶν Κανόνων.

Εἰς τι λοιπὸν ἀναφέρεται τὸ «μηδὲν ἐπιτελείσθω»; Εἰς ὅ,τι ἀνήκει τῇ δικαιοδοσίᾳ τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου! Ἐξ' αὐτῶν πάντων οὐδὲν δύναται νὰ ἐπιτελέσῃ οἰοσδήποτε Κληρικὸς ἄνευ ἐξουσιοδοτήσεως τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου. Ἴνα δὲ μὴ νομισθῇ, ὅτι ἡ τοιαύτη τοῦ Κανόνος ἐρμηνεία εἶνε ἡμετέρα αὐθαίρετος εἰκασία, ἐπικαλούμεθα τὰς γνώμας τῶν ἐγκυροτέρων

Κανονολόγων:

α) Ζωναρᾶς: Τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις καὶ διακόνους, ὑπὸ τοὺς κατὰ χώραν τελοῦσιν ἐπισκόπους, ἀφ' ἑαυτῶν τι πράττειν οὐκ ἐκκεχώρηται, οἷον ἐπιτιμᾶν καὶ ἀφορίζειν οὐδς βούλονται καὶ ὀπηνίκα· ἢ λύειν ἀφορισμὸν ἢ μειοῦν ἢ ἐπιτείνειν· ταῦτα γάρ τῆς ἀρχιερατικῆς εἰσιν ἐξουσίας· καὶ εἰ μὴ παρὰ τοῦ ἐπισκόπου τὸ ἐνδόσιμον λάβοιεν, τοιοῦτον τι ποιεῖν οὐκ ἐφεῖται αὐτοῖς αὐτοῖς. (Γ. Ράλλη - Μ. Ποτλῆ «Σύνταγμα...» κ.τ.λ., τόμ. Β' σελ. 54).

β) Βαλσαμών: Τὸ μηδὲν ἐπιτελεῖν τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους καὶ διακόνους ἄνευ γνώμης τοῦ ἐπισκόπου, μὴ εἴπῃς καθολικὸν εἶναι, ἀλλ' εἰπέ μὴ ἔχειν ἐπ' ἀδείας τούτους ποιεῖν τὸ ὅτι οὐκ ἀνήκον τῷ ἐπισκόπῳ, χωρὶς γνώμης αὐτοῦ, οἷον τὸ ἐκδιδόναι ἀκίνητα τῆς ἐκκλησίας, τὸ εἰσοδιάζειν τὰ περὶ αὐτὴν, τὸ ἐπιτιμᾶν καὶ ἕτερα τοιαῦτα. (Αὐτόθι).

γ) Ἀριστηνός: Ἄτερ ἐπισκόπου ποιεῖν πρεσβύτερος οὐδὲν, καὶ διάκονος· καὶ γάρ οὗτος πεπίστευται τὸν λαόν. Οὐκ ἐξεστὶ πρεσβύτερον ἢ διάκονον, ἄνευ γνώμης τοῦ ἰδίου ἐπισκόπου, ἢ τὸν λαὸν ἀφορίζειν, ἢ αὔξειν, ἢ μειοῦν ἐπιτίμια, ἢ ἕτερον τι τοιοῦτον ποιεῖν, ὡς τοῦ ἐπισκόπου τὸν λαὸν ἐμπιστευομένου, καὶ τὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ψυχῶν αὐτῶν λόγον ἀπαιτηθησομένου. (Αὐτόθι).

δ) Ἅγιος Νικόδημος: Ὁ παρὼν Ἀποστολικὸς Κανὼν διορίζει, ὅτι οἱ Πρεσβύτεροι καὶ οἱ Διάκονοι, χωρὶς τὴν γνώμην καὶ ἄδειαν τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου τῶν, δὲν ἡμποροῦν νὰ ἐνεργήσουν κανένα ἱερατικὸν λειτουργήμα, τόσον ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνα ὅπου ἀνήκουσιν εἰς τὴν ἀρχιερατικὴν ἐξουσίαν τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου, ὅσον καὶ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνα τῶν ὁποίων ἔχουσι μὲν αὐτοὶ τὴν δύναμιν, διὰ τοῦ Μυστηρίου τῆς χειροτονίας, τὴν δὲ ἐνέργειαν αὐτῶν νὰ ἐπιτελέσουν δὲν ἡμποροῦν χωρὶς τοῦ Ἀρχιερέως τὴν γνώμην. Ταῦτα δέ, χάριν παραδείγματος, εἶναι τὸ νὰ μὴ ἐξομολογῶν μήτε νὰ συγχωροῦν τοὺς μετανοοῦντας, κατὰ τὸν ς', ζ', καὶ ν' τῆς ἐν Κερθαγενῇ· τὸ νὰ ἀφιερώνωσι τὰς παρθένους εἰς τὸν Θεόν, κατὰ τὸν ς' τῆς αὐτῆς· τὸ νὰ μὴ χειροθετοῦν καὶ κείρουν Ἀναγνώστας ἢ μοναχοὺς καὶ ἄλλα ΠΑΡΟΜΟΙΑ («Ἱ. Πηδάλιον», ἐκδοσις ς, ἐν Ἀθήναις 1957, σελ. 44).

Συμπέρασμα

Ἐπὶ κλησὶς τοῦ ΛΘ' Ἀποστολικοῦ Κανόνος ἐναντίον κληρικῶν, οἵτινες οὔτε ἐξωμολόγησαν ἄνευ ἐπισκοπικοῦ ἐνταλτηρίου, οὔτε ἐπέβαλον ἢ ἔλυσαν ἀφορισμὸν, οὔτε ἔχειραν Μοναχοὺς ἢ Μοναχάς, οὔτε ἐχειροθέτησαν Ἀναγνώστας, οὔτε Ναοὺς ἢ Μονὰς ἱδρυσαν, οὔτε ἀδείας γάμων ἐξέδωσαν, οὔτε ἀκίνητα τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἐπώλησαν, οὔτε ἄλλο τι τοιοῦτον ἐποίησαν, ἐπὶ κλησὶς, λέγομεν, τοῦ εἰρημένου Κανόνος ἐναντίον τοιούτων Κληρικῶν, ἐπ' οὐδενὶ λόγῳ δύναται νὰ εὐσταθήσῃ.



["Narrow Is the Way" -- continued from page 12]

no less dangerous and ruinous. The harm that comes from our choice is not as evident; the poison that infects our desires is more subtle, but it operates just as effectively, and it is just as fatal. One person desires wealth; another, delectable food and rare wines; a third, success in sexual exploits, and so forth. In their deleterious consequences, all these desires are no better than the desire of King Midas. They may do it more slowly, but they act similarly, killing the person and his soul.

If our desires are so irrational, how can we trust them? Who can say where they will lead us? How often it happens that, after considerable labors and effort, a person finally attains the fulfillment of his desires only to realize, to his surprise and disappointment, that he was chasing after shadows, and that the dazzling dream that had so captivated him, once it was realized, lost all its charm.

It is like a soap bubble: once a prism of beautiful colors, when caught by the hand it bursts, leaving only a slimy mess. At best, time and energy are lost; at worst, instead of happiness and satisfaction, one acquires a vexing burden, harmful and totally useless. Like moths, we often fly towards a flame only to burn our wings.

I knew one very talented young fellow, who imagined that his happiness lay in a career as an actor. He was intoxicated with the glare of the footlights, with the flamboyant costumes, the magical beauty of life portrayed on the stage, with the noise of applause, the adulation of the crowds. And in order to capture this "happiness," he gave nearly his whole life and all his considerable talents. He attained that which he so desired: he achieved great success in the theater world—and only then did he realize that he had made a grave mistake, that he had absolutely no use for the stage or for success, and that the backstage life of an actor was loathsome to him. It was well nigh impossible for him to change tracks: the dissolute life of an actor had consumed his strength, his health, his talents, and it was already too late to make a new start. His young life, so full of promise, was ruined.

St. Nilus of Sinai, a man of profound spiritual experience, said the following about his desires: *How many times have I prayed for what seemed a good thing for me, and persisted with my petition, foolishly importuning God's will, and not leaving it to God to do what, as He knows best, is useful for me. But, having obtained (what I had asked for), I found myself in great distress, and precisely because I had not asked for it to be, rather, according to God's will; for the thing proved not what I thought it to be.* Here is the valuable testimony of a great ascetic, who through experience learned the full deceitfulness of man's desires.

How much better it is wholly to give oneself over to the will of God, to reject one's own desires and strivings! After all, God's will is good, pleasing, and perfect; His will is for our good, for He is our Almighty, loving Father, *Who desires all*

men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. We can trust implicitly in the Lord, for He knows best what we really need and what is really good for us, and He can best guide us. He cares and loves us more than we ourselves.

If the Lord said, *I seek not Mine own will but the will of the Father Who sent Me*; if the angels, mighty in power, *always submit to the word of God and perfectly fulfill His will* (Pss 52:20-21), then how can we, who are *without strength* (Rom 5:6), who have *turned aside from the true path* (Rom 3:12), who have lost Him from sight and who are unable in and of ourselves to attain unto Him—how can we not desire to draw near to the *Light that enlighteneth every man* (Jn 1:9), and, having learned what is the will of God, as revealed to us by His only-begotten Son, not do it to our best abilities, for herein lies all that is good in our life.

Listen to what Saint John of Kronstadt writes: *Adam and Eve were given one specific commandment in order that by fulfilling this one commandment—which was, moreover, a very easy one—men might acquire the habit of fulfilling the will of God, the fulfillment of which constitutes the whole well-being of creatures, and might be strengthened in the love of God. If we turn our attention to the contrary—to the non-fulfillment of the will of the Creator and the fulfillment of our own will, in opposition to the Creator's—we observe that little by little a man changes for the worse and perverts his own high nature, created after the image and likeness of God, and becomes God's enemy. So important is the fulfillment of God's commandments, and so destructive is their non-fulfillment! By giving to the first men His definite commandment not to eat the fruits of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the Lord God revealed Himself as the Guide of the newly-created reasonable creatures, of His children by adoption. Whose fault was it that this guidance was rejected, and that man preferred to be governed by his own will? Even until now, notwithstanding all the treasures of human wisdom, neither the man of ancient nor of modern times can educate himself, because he rejected even from the beginning the guidance of God; for, say, who but God should be our guide? And both at present and in the past only those men successfully completed their mental and moral education who trusted in God and lived in accordance with His commandments, or who now live in accordance with the Gospel and the teaching of the Church, submitting themselves to her guidance. (My Life in Christ).*

Lord! Teach us to do Thy will, for Thou art our God, for in Thee is the fountain of life!



The Jesus Prayer is the foundation of perfection. There is no other way to purification and sanctification except through the Jesus prayer. This prayer has filled Paradise with holy men and women.

Blessed Elder Amphilochios of Patmos (+1971)

NEW HIEROMARTYR DANIEL: A RIGHTEOUS LIFE, DEDICATED TO THE LORD

Source: Various articles from the web pages of <http://www.pravoslavie.ru>.



Editor's Note: In a world of material comfort and spiritual lethargy, our Holy Orthodoxy continues to produce saintly figures from among His flock. Such an exemplary figure of a life in Christ was the recently murdered Russian Orthodox priest and new hieromartyr Fr. Daniel Sysoev. He was a remarkable missionary among his own people and his active missionary activity and

polemics with Muslims resulted in frequent criticism as well as threats.

On November 19th, 2009, he was mortally wounded in the yard of the Church of the Prophet Daniel (according to other reports, in the church itself) by two bullets fired from a pistol. The killers, who were wearing masks, escaped.

Fr. Daniel leaves behind a wife and three children. May his memory be eternal and may he serve as an icon among all Orthodox missionaries, worldwide.



Death is the last event in a person's earthly life. For a missionary, death is the last homily, the last message preached, the last witness for Christ, Whom the missionary loved with complete readiness to sacrifice his or her life for the sake of the triumph of the Faith.

Father Daniel Sysoev, shot dead in his church in Moscow on November 19th, 2009, had prepared himself for this sacrifice long before. Even in his younger years, when studying at the Moscow Theological Seminary where this writer taught Fundamental Theology, Father Daniel was pierced through with the fiery conviction that only Orthodoxy contained the fullness of saving truth. Possessed with great talents, as a seminarian he already knew the church canons and passionately contested with students and instructors when they allowed themselves the slightest compromise. To people who were indifferent to the spreading and deepening of the faith, his aversion to compromise seemed strange; and some of them fell into judgment and condemnation; however, his death as a priest in the church which he himself had built, gave proof of his earnestness, his zeal, his single-minded commitment to Jesus Christ and His Church.

From the very beginning of his priesthood, Father Daniel chose the most difficult form of ministry—missionary

outreach, which was initiated by the Apostles. In the early Church, missionary work was identical with martyrdom. "The martyrs were preachers of Christianity, continuers of the Apostolic ministry; and this mission they fulfilled precisely as martyrs*, that is, presenting themselves as witnesses." (Bolotov V.V., Lectures on the History of the Early Church. 1. The Post-Apostolic Church and the Roman Empire. in Russian). After the Bolsheviks seized power in 1918, their first blow was directed specifically against missionaries. Murdered were the missionary Bishop Ephrem Kuznetsov, Protopriests John Kochurov, John Vostorgov, Konstantin Golubev, diocesan missionary Nicholas Varzhansky and other such missionaries. [*martyrs: the Greek root μάρτυς (martyrs) means "witness"]

Father Daniel Sysoev carried out his missionary activity among Moslems. His Evangelical preaching was very successful. He converted and baptized many people; he received death-threats in response. His answer to such threats was to preach Christ with still greater zeal. Therefore his death is a Christian sacrifice for the sake of the great cause to which he felt called by Jesus Christ. Such a death is an open and manifest victory, because "warriors for Christ are not killed, but crowned." (St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistle 66*).

The early Christians referred to the day of death of their brothers and sisters in the faith as their birthday—birth into a new life. With the coming to earth of the Saviour, mankind's relationship with death was changed forever. "If we believe in Christ, and if through faith in His word and promises we shall never die, then we ought with joyful daring to go to Christ, by Whom and with Whom we shall live and reign forever. It is through temporal death that we cross over to immortality; and eternal life can begin for us only after our departure from here. And this is not really a departure but only a crossing over or resettlement into eternity after our temporal sojourn on earth. Who would not hasten to cross over to that which is better? Who would not desire to be changed and transfigured according to the image of Christ and the sooner to partake of heavenly glory?" (St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Book on Mortality*).

To him (or her) who dedicates himself to the service of Christ are given various means to bring people to the Truth: preaching by word, and preaching by one's life as a living example of self-sacrificing service. These earthly labors for Father Daniel have ended. There remains the brightest and most powerful preaching: the preaching of death. *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.*" (Rev 14:13).

His Autobiography

I, Priest Daniel Alekseevich Sysoev, was born on January 12th, 1974, in Moscow to a family of teachers and artists. My father, Priest Aleksei Nikolaevich Sysoev, is now rector

of the Church of St. John the Theologian at the 'Iasenevo' Orthodox Classical Orthodox Gymnasium, and is also a clergyman of the Sts. Peter and Paul Church in Iasenevo. My mother, Anna Midkhatovna Amirova, teaches catechism at the same school.

I was found worthy of Baptism on October 31st, 1977, in the Church of the Life-Giving Trinity at Vorobyovy Hills by Priest Eugene. From that time, we were regular parishioners of the Church of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker in Kuznetsky Sloboda. Then we attended the small cathedral of the Donskoi Monastery, the Church of the Deposition of the Robe in Shabolovka. When my father was sacristan (Ed., an officer who is charged with the care of the sacristy, the church, and their contents) of the Church of the Beheading of St. John the Baptist I helped him in the altar and sang in the choir. In the summer of 1988, I took part in the restoration work at the renewed Optina monastery. When the restoration of the Church of All Saints at the former Novoalekseev Monastery began, I sang in a choir there and its rector, Fr. Artemii Vladimirov, recommended that I enter the Moscow Theological Seminary.

After completing secondary school in 1991, I entered the Moscow Theological Seminary. While studying there, I had the obedience of choir singer and as leader of a mixed choir. On December 19th, 1994, His Eminence, Bishop Rostislav of Magadan and Chukotka, ordained me a reader.

On January 22nd, 1995, I married Iulia Mikhailovna Brykina. The Mystery of Marriage was celebrated in the Church of St. John the Theologian by Priest Dionisii Pozdniaev. In the same year, my first daughter, Justina, was born.

On May 13th, 1995, His Eminence, Bishop Evgenii of Verey, ordained me a deacon. I graduated from the Moscow Theological Seminary at the top of the class on June 14th, 1995, and enrolled in the correspondence course of the Moscow Theological Academy, from which I graduated in 2000. On June 9th, 2000, the council of the Moscow Theological Academy Council approved my candidate's thesis, *Anthropology and Analysis of the Seventh Day Adventists and the Watchtower Society*.

After graduation from the Seminary, by Patriarchal decree, I was appointed a clergyman in the church of the Dormition of the All-Holy Mother of God in Gonchary, the Bulgarian Metochian. From September 1995, I taught the Law of God in the senior classes of the 'Iasenevo' Orthodox Classical Gymnasium. On May 24th, 2000, I was awarded a Letter of Commendation for my teaching by the Department of Religious Education and Catechesis.

From August 1996, with the blessing of His All-Holiness, the Patriarch, I held missionary Biblical conversations in the Kriutitsy Patriarchal Metochian with people who had suffered from the influence of sects and occultists. I began my work at the Rehabilitation Center of St. John of Kronstadt, directed by Hieromonk Anatoly (Berestov), after its creation.

In 1999, with the blessing of His All-Holiness, the Patriarch, my book *The Chronicle of the Beginning*, dedicated to the defense of the patristic doctrine of creation, was published by the Publishing House of Sretensky Monastery. In 2000 I graduated from the Moscow Theological Academy as a Candidate of Theology. In 2001 I was ordained a priest. In the same year my second daughter, Dorofeya, was born.

I served in the Church of Sts. Peter and Paul in Yasenevo in Moscow. I was secretary of the 'Shestodnev' mission-

ary-educational center and a member of the rehabilitation centre for victims of totalitarian cults and pseudo-religious movements in the name of Saint John of Kronstadt. I am the author of the book *The Chronicle of the Beginning* (Moscow, 1999), editor of the anthology *Hexaemeron Against Evolution* (Moscow, 2000) and the anthology *Divine Revelation and Contemporary Science*. I have published over a dozen articles on creation and anti-sectarian issues.

His Last Sermon

I congratulate you all on this Sunday, the day of Resurrection! And now, in these days of autumn, I wanted to make you

aware of a temptation that comes more and more often among people. This temptation is the constant squabbling of people among themselves. Unfortunately, there is a sense that lately the enemy of the human race is exclusively occupying himself with poisoning Christians, especially among themselves, for the most paltry reasons. People have indeed become so unusually agitated and are continually in some abnormal, inhuman state of soul.

Of course, on one side, psychology says that an increased autumnal stress is occurring among people. But on the other hand, the most important thing is that people have forgotten that they are—first of all—Christians, children of the Father in Heaven, that we are brothers and sisters amongst each other because we all came from the same Baptismal font, we are all anointed by the same Holy Spirit through Holy Chrism, that we all partake from the same Holy Chalice. And, incidentally, the Lord says *Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.* (Mt 5:9). He who reconciles people does a great virtuous work.



And the Apostle Paul says, *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.* (Rom 12:18). Nonetheless, Orthodox Christians constantly fall into this trap, “What party do you belong to?” “What is your relationship to a certain trend?” “Whose son or daughter are you?” Isn’t it so my brothers and sisters?

The same was true for the church at Corinth. Whose are you? *Every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?* (1 Cor 1:12-13). Truly, it is not becoming for a Christian to relate himself to any party.

We all belong to the party of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. You and I are Christians. We are His portion. We are chosen by God from all the nations of the Earth. We are the chosen of God. We are a royal priesthood. People separated from the darkness by God, brought to the miraculous light of Divine love.

Why do we conduct ourselves as if we were living in the despicable rebelliousness of this world? Why do we serve the devil who divides and not Christ Who unites? Why do we consider it within our rights to hate and be angry, to continually gossip and create scandals? Why do we consider it our right to be roused to indignation?

Such a thing is displeasing to the Lord. Such a thing is truly from Satan, who wants to divide Christians and destroy peace. Remember that the fate of the world and those countries where we find ourselves (including Russia) does not rest on the actions of atheists. What can you take from them? Understand that such a person is in darkness and under the influence of the devil.

Naturally, concerning those of another group, he hates and is angry; you can’t even expect anything else from them. But something more astonishing is that people, instead of remembering that we are indebted to live in peace, begin to bring that despicable rebelliousness of the world into the Holy Church. This, obviously, proceeds from the mouth of the devil. It is precisely he who inspires us with his monstrous, evil idea to divide us amongst ourselves.

We cannot live like those who are without. As the Lord has said, How will they know that you are my disciples? Because you have love for one another. But if, as the apostle says, You hate one another, envy and offend, take heed that ye be not consumed of one another.

Truly, right now the devil wants to divide Christians and then to destroy everything that the Christians depend on. It is because of Christians that God maintains

the world. Because of Christians, the Lord gives peace to nations. Why are there wars? It happens when Christians forget about their unity, when they relate themselves to this world...

On the Death of My Husband

The matushka of the martyred priest Daniel speaks and reveals that a prophecy has been fulfilled:

Dear brothers and sisters, thank you for your support and prayers. This is the pain which cannot be expressed in words. This is the pain experienced by those who stood at the Cross of the Saviour. This is the joy which cannot be expressed in words, this is the joy experienced by those who came to the empty Tomb. O death, where is thy sting?

Father Daniel had already foreseen his death several years before it happened. He had always wanted to be worthy of a martyr’s crown. Those who shot him wanted, as usual, to spit in the face of the Church, as once before they spat in the face of Christ. They have not achieved their goal, because it is impossible to spit in the face of the Church. Fr. Daniel went up to his Golgotha in the very church which he had built, the church to which he gave up all his time and all his strength. They killed him like the prophet of old—between the temple and the altar and he was indeed found worthy of a martyr’s calling. He died for Christ, Whom he served with all his strength.

Very often he would say to me that he was frightened of not having enough time, time to do everything. He was in a hurry. Sometimes, as a human-being he exaggerated, he got things wrong, he tripped up and made mistakes, but he made no mistake about the main thing: his life was entirely dedicated to HIM.

I did not understand why he was in a hurry. The last three years he was busy serving, never taking days off or taking holidays. I moaned, just now and again I wanted simple happiness, that my husband and my children’s father would be with my children and me. But another path had been prepared for him.

He used to say that they would kill him. I would ask him who would look after us. Me and the three children. He would answer that he would put us in safe hands. “I’ll give you to the Mother of God. She’ll take care of you.”

These words were forgotten too soon. He told us which vestments to bury him in. Then I joked that there was no need to speak about that, we still did not know who would bury whom. He said that I would bury him. Once our conversation turned to funerals, I don’t remember the details but I did say that I had never been to a priest’s funeral. And



he answered that it did not matter because I would be at his funeral.

Now I remember many words which have gained a meaning. Now my doubts have dissolved, the misunderstandings have gone. We did not say goodbye in this life, we did not ask each other forgiveness, we did not embrace one another. It was just another day; in the morning he went to the liturgy and I did not see him again. Why didn't I go to the church that day to meet him? I had thought of it, but I decided I had better get the evening meal ready and put the children to bed. It was because of the children that I did not go there.

There was a hand that did not let me go. But the evening before I had gone to the church and met him. I had felt as if dark clouds were gathering over us. And in the last few days, I had tried to spend more time with him. Over the last week I had thought only about death and about life after death. I couldn't get my head around either the first or the second. That day my head was spinning with the words: "Death is standing right behind you."

During this last week, everything was so very hard, as if a huge load had been emptied out on top of me. I am not broken. He is supporting me, I feel as if he is standing by me. Then we said so many affectionate words, which we had never said to each other in our whole life before. Only now do I understand how much we loved each other.

The memorial service for the forty days of Fr. Daniel took place on the eve of his nameday and the patronal feast of the future church, 29th December, and 30th December is the feast of the holy prophet Daniel. According to the prophecy of an elder, "the church would be built but Fr. Daniel would not serve in it." The second part of the prophecy has already been fulfilled...



We ought to have the most lively spiritual union with all of the heavenly inhabitants; with all the saints, apostles, prophets, martyrs, prelates, venerable and righteous men, as they are all members of one single body, the Church of Christ, to which we sinners also belong, and the living Head of which is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

This is why we call upon them in prayer, converse with them, thank and praise them, It is urgently necessary for all Christians to be in union with them, if they desire to make Christian progress; for the saints are our friends, our guides to salvation, who pray and intercede for us.

Saint John of Kronstadt
My Life in Christ

JOHN THE BLESSED

By Photios Kontoglou.

The Nativity Feast having passed, St. Basil took his staff and traversed all of the towns, in order to see who would celebrate his Feast Day with purity of heart. He passed through regions of every sort and through villages of prominence, yet regardless of where he knocked, no door opened to him, since they took him for a beggar. And he would depart embittered, for, though he needed nothing from men, he felt how much pain the heart of every impecunious person must have endured at the insensitivity that these people showed him.

One day, as he was leaving such a merciless village, he went by the graveyard, where he saw that the tombs were in ruins, the headstones broken and turned topsy-turvy, and how the newly dug graves had been turned up by jackals. Saint that he was, he heard the dead speaking and saying: "During the time that we were on the earth, we labored, we were heavy-burdened, leaving behind us children and grandchildren to light just a candle, to burn a little incense on our behalf; but we behold nothing, neither a priest to read over our heads a memorial service nor *kóllyva*, as though we had left behind no one." Thus, St. Basil was once again disquieted and he said to himself, "These villagers give aid neither to the living nor to the deceased," departing from the cemetery and setting out alone in the midst of the freezing snow.

On the eve of the New Year, he came upon a certain hamlet, which was the poorest of the poor villages in all of Greece. The freezing wind howled through the scrub bush and the rocky cliffs, and not a living soul was to be found in the pitch-dark night! Then, he beheld in front of him a small knoll, below which there was secreted away a sheepfold. St. Basil went into the pen and, knocking on the door of the hut with his staff, called out: "Have mercy on me, a poor man, for the sake of your deceased relatives, for even Christ lived as a beggar on this earth." Awakening, the dogs lunged at him.

But as they drew near him and sniffed him, they became gentle, wagged their tails, and lay down at his feet, whimpering imploringly and with joy. Thereupon, a shepherd, a young man of twenty-five or so, with a curly black beard, opened the door and stepped out: John Barbákos—a demure and rugged man, a sheepman. Before taking a good look at who was knocking, he had already said, "Enter, come inside. Good day, Happy New Year!"

Inside the hut, a lamp was suspended overhead from a cradle that was attached to two beams. Next to the hearth was their bedding, and John's wife was sleeping. As soon as St. Basil went inside, John, seeing that the old man was a clergyman, took his hand and kissed it, saying, "Your

blessing, Elder,” as though he had known him previously and as though he were his father. And the Saint said to him: “May you and your entire household be blessed, together with your sheep, and may the peace of God be upon you.”

The wife then arose, and she, too, revered the Elder and kissed his hand, and he blessed her. St. Basil looked like a mendicant monk, with an old *skouphia*, his *rása* worn and patched, and his *tsarouchia* (a traditional leather slipper, usually adorned with a pompom at the end of the shoe) full of holes; as well, he had an old empty-looking satchel.

John the blessed put wood on the fire. Straightway the hut began to glisten, as though seemingly a palace. The rafters seemed to be gilded with gold, while the hanging cheesecloth bags (filled with curing cheese) looked like vigil lamps, and the wooden containers, cheese presses, and all of the accessories used by John in making cheese, they all became like silver, as though decorated by diamonds, as did all of the other humble things that John the blessed had in his hut. The wood burning in the hearth crackled and sang like the birds that sing in Paradise, giving off a fragrance wholly delightful. The couple placed St. Basil near the fire, where he sat, and the wife put down pillows on which he could rest. Then the Elder took the satchel from around his neck, placing it next to him, and removed his old *ráson* (outside cassock), remaining in his *zostikó* (inner cassock).

Together with his farmhand, John the blessed went out to milk the sheep and to place the newborn lambs in the lambing pen, and afterwards he separated the ewes that were ready to birth and confined them within the enclosure, while his helper put the other sheep out to graze. His flock was sparse and John was poor; yet, he was blessed. And he was possessed of great joy at all times, day and night, for he was a good man and he had a good wife. Anyone who happened to pass by their hut they cared for as though he were a brother. And it is thus that St. Basil found lodging in their home and settled in, as if it were his own, blessing it from top to bottom. On that night, he was awaited, in all of the cities and villages of the known world, by rulers, hierarchs, and officials; but he went to none of these. Instead, he went to lodge in the hut of John the blessed.

So, John, after pasturing the sheep, came back in and said to the Saint: “Elder, I am greatly joyful. I wish to have you read to us the writings about St. Basil (i.e., the appointed hymns to the Saint). I am an illiterate man, but I like all of the writings of our religion (once again, the hymns and services of the Church). In fact, I have a small book from an Hagiorite Abbot (i.e., from Mt. Athos), and whenever someone who can read and write happens to pass by, I get him to read out of the booklet, since we have no Church near us.”

In the East, it was dimly dawning. St Basil rose and stood, facing eastward, making his Cross. He then bent down, took a booklet from his satchel, and said, “Blessed is our God, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.” John the blessed went and stood behind him, and his wife, having nursed their baby, also went to stand near him, with her arms crossed over her chest. St. Basil then said the hymn, “God is the Lord...” and the *Apolytikion* of the Feast of the Circumcision, “Without change, Thou hast assumed human form,” omitting his own *Apolytikion*, which states, “Thy sound is gone forth unto all the earth.” His voice was sweet and humble, and John and his wife felt great contrition, even though they did not understand all of the words.

St. Basil now said the whole of Matins and the Canon of the Feast, “Come, O ye peoples, and let us chant a song unto Christ God,” without reciting his own canon, which goes, “O Basil, we would that thy voice were present...” Thereafter, he said aloud the entire Liturgy, pronounced the dismissal, and blessed the household.

As they sat at the table, having eaten and finished their food, the wife brought the *Vasilopeta* (a sweet bread or cake baked in honor of St. Basil on the New Year) and placed it on the serving table. Then St. Basil took a knife and with it traced the sign of the Cross on the *Vasilopeta*, saying, “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” He cut a first piece, saying, “for Christ,” a second, afterwards, saying, “for the Panagia,” and then “for the master of the house, John the blessed.”

John exclaimed, “Elder, you forgot St. Basil!”

The Saint replied, “Yes, indeed,” and thus said, “And for the servant of God, Basil.” After this, he resumed: “... and for the master of the house,” “for the mistress of the house,” “for the child,” “for the farmhand,” “for the animals,” and “for the poor.” Thereupon, John the blessed said, “Elder, why did you not cut a piece for your reverendship?”

And the Saint said, “But I did, O blessed one!” But John, this blissful man, did not understand.

Afterwards, St. Basil stood up and said the prayer, “O Lord my God, I know that I am not worthy that Thou shouldest enter under the roof of the house of my soul.”

John the Blessed then said: “I wonder if you can tell me, Elder, since you know many things, to what palaces St. Basil went this evening? And the rulers and monarchs—what sins do they have? We poor people are sinners, since our poverty leads us into sin.”

St. Basil said the same prayer, again—with tears—though changing it: “O Lord my God, I have seen that Thy servant John the simple is worthy and that it is meet that Thou shouldest enter into his shelter. He is a babe, and it is to babes that Thy Mysteries are revealed.”

And again John the blissful, John the blessed, understood nothing...

THE GREATEST SCANDAL IN AMERICAN ORTHODOXY

Source: Solomon Hezekiah blog, November 16, 2009.

After seeing an article about the clash over abortion between US Rep. Patrick Kennedy and his diocesan bishop Thomas Tobin of Providence, RI, I decided to look into the voting records of the one senator and five representatives who are members of the Orthodox Church. The results are not surprising, but equally as shameful. I almost don't know where to start.

The teaching of the Orthodox Church concerning abortion is just as clear and just the same as the teaching of the Catholic Church. It doesn't matter that it is an issue the Ecumenical Patriarch avoids, perhaps because it may take deflect his focus of addressing and being part of environmentalist conferences and exhibitions. And just like the Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church has members who have been elected to public office and act in direct opposition to the Orthodox Christian faith. It is not a matter of what they do in their private lives, for which they should go to confession and after which their priest should happily partake with them of the most precious body and blood.

Rather, it is a matter of what they lead their country to do. They have chosen to take a public stand against the teaching of the Church. They have appropriated the public purse for the killing of unborn children. They have otherwise refused to protect the unborn and directly facilitated those who would kill them.

It is the duty of the diocesan bishops of those members of the Orthodox Church who openly and knowingly pay for, or otherwise facilitate, the killing of the unborn to excommunicate those persons. Any bishop who knows what a Congressperson who claims to be under their spiritual authority is doing in this regard is failing in their responsibilities if they do otherwise. Thus, any Orthodox bishop, including the Ecumenical Patriarch, who praises or elevates such a person in the Church is causing a scandal far worse than the misappropriation of funds in the OCA. Every clergy and every lay person of such a diocese who cares about the integrity of the Orthodox Church should be writing to their bishop.

I already knew the views of Olympia Snowe. She has been one of the most social liberal Republican members of Congress since she entered the US House in 1979. She has been in the Senate since 1995. She has consistently voted against the unborn. Has Metropolitan Methodius of Boston spoken out against her? No.

Pro-abortion senator and archon of the Orthodox Church Paul Sarbanes may be out of the upper chamber, but now his son John represents Maryland's 3rd district. Equally as pro-abortion, this year Rep. Sarbanes has voted to fund the State Department under Hilary Clinton to promote abortion projects throughout the world, fund abortions in the District of Columbia, fund Planned Parenthood to provide abortions, and to provide federal subsidies to insurance companies to pay for abortions. Has Metropolitan Evangelos of New Jersey taken a stand against him? No.

Rep. Zach Space of 18th District in Ohio may be a Blue Dog Democrat, but he voted with Sarbanes on all but the last of the four legislative measures mentioned above. He also voted with Sarbanes for the DeGette clone-and-kill bill, and the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, among others. I'd like to hear something from Metropolitan Nicholas of Detroit on this. If you hear anything, let me know.

Rep. Niki Tsongas is the widow of pro-abortion Sen. Paul Tsongas and has been elected to serve the 5th district of Massachusetts. She has also voted against unborn life 100% of the time. Still nothing from Metropolitan Methodius.

The Greeks do not have a monopoly on Orthodox representation in Congress. The Serbs have Melissa Bean of Chicago in Illinois' 8th district. Bean actually lives in the adjoining 10th district, but it's all the same for our purposes. She has also voted against the unborn 100% of the time. Bishop Longin of the Diocese of New Gracanica – Midwestern America needs to say something and do something.

The one that stands out the most as a bad example of Orthodoxy on Capitol Hill has to be Alice Costandina "Dina" Titus, from the 3rd District of Nevada. Not only had she voted against the unborn 100% of the time like the others, she makes the strongest public claim to Orthodoxy. On the home page of her website, she boldly declares "Congresswoman Dina Titus Sworn-In on Grandfather's Greek Bible" (if it has moved from the home page by the time you read this, try this direct link to the article). The article, written by Andrew Manatos, notes "Congresswoman Dina Titus' rise to national prominence is a story that will make all Hellenes and Orthodox Christians proud." Clearly for Manatos, like so many Greeks, Hellenic culture and background and Orthodoxy are the same. And clearly for Manatos and for Congresswoman Titus, the important thing about being Orthodox is being Greek, not adhering to the unchanging teaching of the Church, particularly about the sanctity of life.

Let me make this clear: Dina Titus' rise to national prominence is a story that should make all Orthodox Christians, Hellenic or not, ashamed. Has Metropolitan Gerasimos of



31-32 weeks

San Francisco denounced Congresswoman Titus' votes to fund the killing of the unborn?

There is one Orthodox member of Congress who has not sacrificed the children of America to Moloch. Gus Bilirakis represents the 9th district of Florida. He has a 100% pro-life voting record. Whether his votes have been guided by his Orthodoxy or by his adherence to the Republican Party and conservatism, I don't know.

As for the others, I think every American Orthodox Christian who adheres to the teaching of the Orthodox Church has a responsibility to write to every Orthodox Congressperson who votes in opposition to Orthodoxy and call them to account. Likewise, they should write to every Orthodox hierarch who has refused to demand the protection of the unborn and refused to excommunicate those who lead the nation in opposition to the moral teaching of the Orthodox Church and call them to account.

If the Orthodox hierarchy will not stand up, the Orthodox laity must stand up. I'm not so naïve to imagine that either the Congresspersons or the hierarchs will actually listen. The Congresspeople have shown that their loyalty lies with their political party and the hierarchs have shown that their loyalty lies with their ethnicity. No matter. Orthodoxy doesn't change because of either. The unborn are being murdered in their thousands every day and the faithful need to declare to those who are complicit in these murders: You do not speak for me! You do not represent the Holy Orthodox Church, the Holy Tradition and it's unchanging inerrant understanding of the Holy Scriptures.

I think every Congressperson should be free to vote their conscience. If that conscience says the teaching of the Orthodox Church through the Holy Scriptures is wrong, then they should leave the Orthodox Church. They should excommunicate themselves and go be Episcopalians or whatever semblance of Christian form suits them.



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

THE BLIND GIRL...

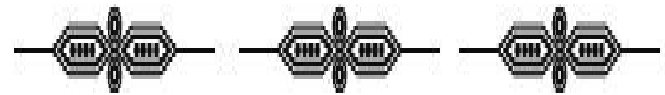
Author Unknown.

There was a blind girl who hated herself because she was blind. She hated everyone, except her loving fiance. He was always there for her. She told her fiance, "If I could only see the world, I will marry you."

One day, someone donated a pair of eyes to her. When the bandages came off, she was able to see everything, including her boyfriend. He asked her, "Now that you can see the world, will you marry me?"

The girl looked at her fiance and saw that he was blind. The sight of his closed eyelids shocked her! She hadn't expected that. The thought of looking at them the rest of her life led her to refuse to marry him.

Her fiance left in tears and days later wrote a note to her saying: "Take good care of your eyes, my dear, for before they were yours, they were mine."



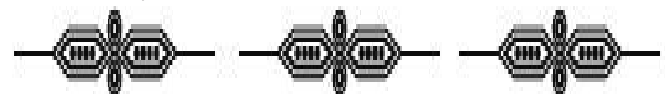
ON LEGALIZED ABORTION

From the Editors of OH

Legalized abortion is our silent national nightmare. It is the demon that insults our national character. Every evil act of abortion is in absolute contradiction to the rights afforded to the citizens of this nation by its fathers and to the principles of our Declaration of Independence.

There is no circumstance that could ever render the act of abortion as morally good, or even morally neutral. It violates the principles subscribed to from the beginning of Western Civilization and, most important, it is a grievous sin that is certain to bring upon us the wrath of Almighty God.

God did not establish governments to destroy life but to preserve it. Allowing our representatives to vote in favor or stand in support of related legislation brings into question not only our national but personal character as well. Most important, it threatens our salvation and is in absolute violation of anything and everything that Orthodox Christianity is about.



As is written in the Gospel, nobody knows the time of the coming of the Antichrist. But there are already signs that he will come soon. Seeing the persecution against the faith and the striving to destroy it, and also much else, we must think that this time is approaching. But still it is impossible to say anything exactly.

Hieromartyr Nikon of Optina (+1931)

ETHICS AND TECHNOLOGY

By St. Nikolaj Velimirovic, from the Complete Works of Bishop Nikolai [in Serbian], Book 12, p. 23, translated by Marija Miljkovic.

Originally, religion was the mother of ethics and technology. First of all, religion was a torrential spring flowing from hidden depths, ethics a life carrying river, and technology with the help of artistic channels, carried the water from this river into all the arteries of man's life.

God announced to man the law of faith, the law of behavior, and the knowledge of technology. By the directions of God, Noah built a boat that traveled one of the longest journeys in the history of navigation.

By God's inspiration Bezalel was filled with wisdom in understanding, in knowledge, and all kinds of craftsmanship, to make artistic designs for work in gold, in silver, and in bronze, and in the cutting of stones for settings, and in carving of wood, that he may work in all kinds of craftsmanship. (Ex 31:1-11)

In the same way, the Temple of Solomon, one of the greatest architectural wonders of the old world, was built by people taught by the Spirit of God and directed by the hand of the Lord. This is the witness of the Holy Scriptures.

God was the reason of true faith and good behavior and of the knowledge of technology among people. While people continually felt God above them, before them, and around them, in the same way air and light is felt, they attributed and dedicated all their technological works and handiwork to Him, their Lord and Creator.

When the feeling of God's presence became dulled and spiritual vision darkened, that is when pride entered into tradesmen and technologists, and they started to give glory exclusively to themselves for their buildings, handiwork and intellectual works, and began to misuse their work that is when the shadow of cursedness began to fall on technology.

Many complain against technology. Many accuse modern technology for all the woes in the world. Is technology really to blame, or those who create technology and use it? Is a wooden cross to blame if somebody crucifies someone on it? Is a hammer to blame if a neighbor crashes his neighbors skull?

Technology feels neither good nor evil. The same pipes can be used for drinking water or as part of the sewer system. Evil does not come from unfeeling, dead technology, but from the dead hearts of people.

Completely conscious of the presence of God and without any pride, Noah built a wondrous ship that was for his salvation and of the new mankind's that was to be born.

In a darkened consciousness regarding God's presence, people filled with pride agreed among themselves, "Let us

build a city and a tower whose top shall reach heaven, and make a name for ourselves." That was the building of the tower of Babel.

When King Solomon finished building the glorious Temple of God, he lifted up his hands to heaven, and in humbleness cried out, "Behold, heaven and the heavens above the heavens I cannot comprehend you, let alone this Temple I have built."

This wondrous Temple lasted for eleven generations. It was destroyed to dust and ashes when the godless descendants of King Solomon in deed, turned it from a "house of prayer, into a house of trade."

Not to the credit of technology did the Temple remain standing for centuries, nor to the blame of technology did it vanish from the face of the earth.

Technology is deaf, mute, and un-answering. It is completely dependant on ethics, as ethics on faith.

Well known is the Biblical story of King Nebuchadnezzar. He built the city of Babylon with palaces, and hanging towers, with such technological workmanship and beauty as the world till then had not seen. The King looked down at the city he had built, standing on the roof of his palace and said proudly, "Is this not Babylon the Great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" While he was yet speaking these conceited words, God smote him with insanity and he became insane, and in insanity he lived for seven years like a beast among the beasts of the forests.

His city Babylon the Great became a heap of rubble and was sneered at, and was a desert without any inhabitants, exactly how the Prophet Jeremiah prophesied. (Jer 51:37). Wherever the fear of God vanishes, and the moral law of God is trampled, that is where the mountain of human technology falls into the dust from which it was built.

That is how the Eiffel Tower and the German cathedrals, and the American skyscrapers, the towers of human technology and architecture, will collapse into formless dust if human pride, and that yet even Christian, fight in defiance against God, and pass all measures of pride and sinfulness and succeed in ending the long suffering of God.

Why are so many glorious civilizations buried deep beneath the earth that on top of them the plowers plow the ground not even realizing that their towers and bones are lying beneath the plowed ground? How is it that out of all the glorious marble buildings of the Greeks nothing is left but the Acropolis?

How has the earth dared to conceal from the sun and the eyes of men the titanic temples in Balbekka and Egypt, as well as the glorious cities Egbata, Perzopolis, Tyre, Sidon, and Troy, that now cows peacefully graze on top of them,

and pigs bellow, and shepherds build stables from the scattered marble? Why did the proud cities and temples and castles of King Montezuma vanish without a trace? Also the kingdoms of the very cultured Incas and Peruvians? What unmerciful hand rolled mounds of mud over all these human constructions, who by their strength and design, and beauty, could compete with the best modern constructions?

Why are there breaks and not continuity in the civilizations of mankind? It is because none of them were pleasing to the One Holy God.

None of those buried civilizations were destroyed by time nor by the lack of solid technological construction, but by sin against holy faith and holy ethics. Instability of ethics and not technology buried them all in deep darkness.

And you O Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades. This prophecy of Christ, in the days when Capernaum shined with glory, like a fairytale city beside a lake, was fulfilled. It was so dreadfully fulfilled, that when a traveler finds himself among the thorns and snakes, where once the rich and proud city of Capernaum exalted itself, frightfully asks, "Is it possible that this loathsome place was once a dwelling place of men?"

Ethics are long-lasting and unchanging, that is, evangelic ethics, but technology is always changing. Ethics are likened to a lady, and technology like her handmaiden. That is why ethics have to control technology. Eternal values are the territory of ethics and not technology. It is devastating for an entire people to put the purpose of their lives in technology, and all of their labor and sweat they sacrifice to the advancement of technology, dragging behind them ethics, like Achilles dragged the dead Hector tied to a chariot. A people like that can succeed to build all of their cities from ivory and gold, but if people like Ahab and Jezebel live in them, dogs will have the last word and not people. Between honor and skill it is easy to choose. An honest man even without skill is more respected in our time than a skillful man without honesty.

Technology changes man's relation towards nature, but not towards man and God. Whoever thinks otherwise values things more than people, and dust more than the spirit. A horrible tragedy of our time is the war between men and God.

God wants to raise up and exalt man's identity above dumb and lifeless materiality, while men want to bury their identity and forget their Creator, and make the sole purpose of their lives technology and material wealth.

Many people who are spiritually and morally handicapped by their unbelief in Christ, create out of modern technology idols that they worship, and call upon all peoples and nations to bring sacrifices to those idols.

FROM THE LIFE OF ST. PACHOMIUS

By St. Theodore the Sanctified, disciple of St. Pachomius.

One day an angel of the Lord told our father Pachomius to teach a brother about his salvation. This brother was engaging in great practices and a harsh asceticism, but he was doing so not for God but for vainglory. Our father Pachomius took him aside and told him, "It is written, *I have come down from heaven not to do my own will, but to do the will of the one who sent me.* Now obey me: when the signal is given at midday to call the brothers to eat, you shall go too and you shall eat a little. And whatever food they eat you shall take a little of it too, although without eating your fill. But at evening, when the signal is given again, let us go and eat properly. So obey me, for I see that the enemy envies you and wants to destroy all your labor."

The brother cheerfully obeyed the instructions our father addressed to him. Later, when the signal summoned the brothers for the midday meal, he got up too and went off to eat with the brothers. But once more he fell into his deception, saying to himself, "Where is it written, *You shall not fast?*" And so again he followed his vain judgment and did not go in to eat with the brothers.

Our father Pachomius was sad about this brother, and he called Theodore and sent him to him, saying, "Go and see what that brother is doing. If you find him in prayer, hold him till I come, and vainglory will at once show itself forth in a lively manner in him." Theodore arose and did as our father Pachomius had ordered him. And when he arrived where the brother was, he found him busy praying, and he held him. At once, the brother grew angry like a devil. He seized a big stone to throw at Theodore's head and kill him, and said to him, "Impious Theodore! Is it you who will keep me from praying to the Lord God?" Theodore rebuked him, and at once the demon who was living in him kept still. And the demon said, "Do you know that I am the one who is at work in those who sing the office for sheer pleasure? If you do not believe me, listen to that brother who is singing. He is going to say that verse nine times."

There was a brother in a cell who was singing the beginning of the Canticle of Moses with these words: Let us sing to the Lord, for He has been exalted gloriously. Theodore pricked up his ears, and what the demon had said happened. Reflecting on the devil's devices, he was awestruck, and wondered if the man would be able to escape a lot of trouble. While Theodore was seated near the brother and watched over him, our father Pachomius came. He stood, as did Theodore, and they prayed together over the brother. The Lord healed him. He opened the eyes of his heart so that he could understand how he must behave, "not as a fool but as one wise." And he gave glory to God...

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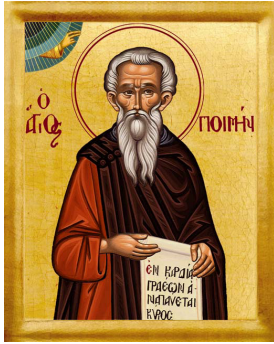
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ON SORROW

By Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Sorrow is the great birth-agonny of immortal powers, sorrow is the great searcher and revealer of hearts, the great test of truth; for Plato has wisely said, sorrow will not endure sophisms—all shams and un-realities melt in the fire of that awful furnace. Sorrow reveals forces in ourselves we never dreamed of. The soul, a bound and sleeping prisoner, hears her knock on her cell door, and awakens. Oh, how narrow the walls! Where are we? What is this prison? What IS beyond? Oh for more air, more light! When will the door be opened? The soul seems to itself to widen and deepen; it trembles at its own dreadful forces; it gathers up in waves that break with wailing only to flow back into the everlasting void.

The calmest and most centered natures are sometimes thrown by the shock of a great sorrow into a tumultuous amazement. All things are changed. The earth no longer seems solid, the skies no longer secure; a deep abyss seems underlying every joyous scene of life. The soul, struck with this awful inspiration, is a mournful Cassandra; she sees blood on every threshold, and shudders in the midst of mirth and festival with the weight of terrible wisdom.

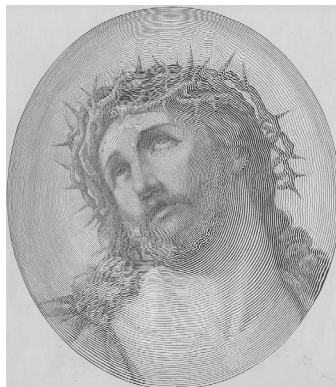
And yet sorrow is God-like, sorrow is grand and great, sorrow is wise and far-seeing. Our own instinctive valuations, the

intense sympathy which we give to the tragedy which God has in-woven into the laws of nature, show us that it is with no slavish dread, no cowardly shrinking, that we should approach her divine mysteries.

What are the natures that cannot suffer? Who values them? From the fat oyster over which the silver tide rises and falls without one pulse upon its fleshly ear, to the hero who stands with quivering nerve parting with wife and child and home for country and God, all the way up is an ascending scale, marked by increasing power to suffer; and when we look to the Head of all being, up through principalities and powers and principedoms, with dazzling orders and celestial blazonry, to behold by what emblem the infinite Sovereign chooses to reveal himself, we behold, in the midst of the throne, “a lamb as it had been slain.”

Sorrow is divine. Sorrow is reigning on the throne of the universe, and the crown of all crowns has been one of thorns. There have been many books that treat of the mystery of sorrow, but only one that bids us glory in tribulation, and count it all joy when we fall into divers afflictions, that so we may be associated with that great fellowship of suffering of which the Incarnate God is the head, and through which He is carrying a redemptive conflict to a glorious victory over evil.

If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him!



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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March-April 2010

Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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THE GOD-MAN: THE FOUNDATION OF THE TRUTH OF ORTHODOXY

By St. Justin Popovich (+1979).

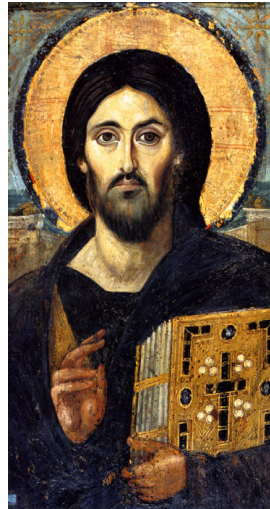
All the truths of Orthodoxy emerge from one truth and converge on one truth, infinite and eternal. That truth is the God-Man Christ. If you experience any truth of Orthodoxy to its limit, you will inevitably discover that its kernel is the God-Man Christ. In fact, all the truths of Orthodoxy are nothing other than different aspects of the one Truth—the God-Man Christ.

Orthodoxy is Orthodoxy by reason of the God-Man, and not by reason of anything else or anyone else. Hence another name for Orthodoxy is God-Manhood. In it nothing exists through man or by man, but everything comes from the God-Man and exists through the God-Man. This means that man experiences and finds out about the fundamental eternal truth of life and the world only with the help of the God-Man, in the God-Man. And it means something else: Man learns the complete truth about man, about the purpose and meaning of his existence only through the God-Man. Outside of Him a man turns into an apparition, into a scarecrow, into nonsense. Instead of a man you find the dregs of a man, the fragments of a man, the scraps of a man. Therefore, true manhood lies only in God-Manhood; and no other manhood exists under heaven.

Why is the God-Man the fundamental truth of Orthodoxy? Because He answered all the questions that torture and torment the human spirit: The question of life and death, the ques-

tion of good and evil, the question of earth and heaven, the question of truth and falsehood, the question of love and hate, the question of justice and injustice. In brief, the question of man and God.

Why is the God-Man the fundamental truth of Orthodoxy? Because He proved in the most obvious way by His own earthly life that He is the incarnate, humanized, and personified eternal Truth, eternal Justice, eternal Love, eternal Joy, eternal Power: Total-Truth, Total-Justice, Total-Love, Total-Joy, Total-Power.



He brought down all the divine perfections from heaven to earth. And He did not just bring them down, but also taught them to us and gave us grace-filled power to transform them into our life, into our thoughts, into our feelings, into our deeds. Hence, our calling is to incarnate them in ourselves and in the world around us.

Consider the best of the best people in the human race. In all of them it is the

God-Man that is best, most important and most eternal. For He is the holiness of the Saints, the martyrdom of the Martyrs, the righteousness of the Righteous, the apostleship of the Apostles, the goodness of the Good, the mercy of the Merciful, the love of the Loving.

Why is the God-Man each and every aspect of Orthodoxy? Because He, as One of the Holy Trinity, the incarnate Son of God, is distinct as God, as Comforter, as Defender, as Teacher, and as Saviour. Only in Him, in the all-merciful Lord Jesus, does man, tormented by earthly tragedies, find the God who can truly give meaning to suffering, the Comforter who can truly give comfort in every misfortune and sorrow,

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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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the Defender who can truly defend from every evil, the Saviour who can truly save from death and sin, the Teacher who can truly teach eternal Truth and Justice.

The God-Man is each and every aspect of Orthodoxy, for He infinitely magnifies man. He elevates him to God; He makes him a god by grace. And He did this without reckoning man less than God, but filled man with all divine perfections. The God-Man has glorified man as no other has. He has given him life eternal, Truth eternal, Love eternal, Justice eternal, Joy eternal, Goodness eternal, Blessedness eternal. Man has become divine majesty through the God-Man.

While the God-Man is the fundamental truth of Orthodoxy, the fundamental truth of every heterodoxy is man, or fragments of his being—reason, the will, the senses, the soul, the body, expertise. Integral man does not exist in heterodoxy; the whole man is divided into atoms, into particles. And it is all for the glory of man's greatness. But just as "art for the sake of art" is nonsense, so also is it nonsense to say "man for the sake of man." That path leads to a most pitiful pandemonium, where man is the supreme idol—and nowhere is there a more pitiful idol than he.

The first truth of Orthodoxy is that man does not exist for the sake of man, but for the sake of God or, more fully, for the sake of the God-Man. Therefore, we stay with the God-Man in the name of man. In Him alone is an understanding of man's being possible; in Him alone is a justification for man's existence possible. All the mysteries of heaven and earth are attained in this truth, all the values of all the worlds that man can contemplate, all the joys of all the perfections that man can attain.

Indirectly and directly, the God-Man is everything in Orthodoxy, and thus man is in Him, but in heterodoxy there

is merely man. In its very essence, Orthodoxy is nothing other than the Personality of the God-Man Christ extended across all ages, extended as the Church. Orthodoxy has its own seal and sign by which it distinguishes itself. It is the radiant Person of the God-Man Jesus.

Everything that does not have that Person is not Orthodox. Everything that does not have the God-Man's Justice, Truth, Love, and Eternity is not Orthodox. Everything that wants to carry out the God-Man's Gospel in this world through the methods of this world and through the methods of the kingdoms of this world is not Orthodox, but implies enslavement to the third temptation of the devil.

To be Orthodox means to have the God-Man constantly in your soul, to live in Him, think in Him, feel in Him, act in Him. In other words, to be Orthodox means to be a Christ-bearer and a Spirit-bearer.

A man attains this when, in the body of Christ—the Church, his whole being is filled with the God-Man Christ from top to bottom. For this reason the Orthodox man *is hidden with Christ in God*. (Col. 3:1-3).

The God-Man is the axis of all worlds, from the world of the atom to the world of the cherubim. Whatever being breaks off from that axis, tumbles into terror, into tortures, into agony. Lucifer broke off—and became Satan; angels broke off—and became demons; man broke off in large part—and became inhuman ("non-man"). Anything created that breaks off from it inevitably plunges into chaos and grief. And when a people, as a group, deny the God-Man, their history turns into a journey through hell and its horrors.

The God-Man is not just the fundamental truth of Orthodoxy, but the power and omnipotence of Orthodoxy as well; for He alone saves man from death, sin, and the devil.

No man whatsoever, nor even mankind as a whole ever could, can, or will be able to do that. The outcome of man's struggle with death, sin, and the devil is always defeat, unless he is led by the God-Man. Only through the God-Man Christ can man conquer death, sin, and the devil.

Hence, the purpose of man is to fill himself with the God-Man, in His body—the Orthodox Church; to be transfigured in Him through grace-filled feasts; to become omnipotent. Even while he walks prayerfully through the gloomy earthly anthill in the body, his soul lives above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God, for his life is constantly stretched out between earth and heaven by prayers, like a rainbow that connects the summit of heaven with the abyss of earth.

Thus, man's purpose is to become immortal in Him by the power of the Holy Spirit, to become God, to become the God-Man—this is the purpose, the true purpose of the whole human race. It is also the joy, the only joy in this world of boundless sorrow and toxic bitterness.

Orthodoxy is Orthodoxy through the God-Man. And we Orthodox, by confessing the God-Man, indirectly confess the Christ-image of man, the divine origin of man, the divine exaltation of man, and thus also the divine value and sacredness of the human personality.

In fact, the struggle for the God-Man is the struggle for man. Not the humanists, but the people of the Orthodox faith and life of the God-Man are struggling for true man, man in the image of God and the image of Christ.



In the Saracen encampment they asked St. Cyril: "How can Christians wage war and at the same time keep Christ's commandment to pray to God for their enemies?" To this, St. Cyril replied: "If two commandments were written in one law and given to men for fulfilling, which man would be a better follower of the law? The one who fulfilled one commandment or the one who fulfilled both?" The Saracens replied: "Undoubtedly, he who fulfills both commandments."

St. Cyril continued: "Christ our God commands us to pray to God for those who persecute us and even do good to them, but He also said to us, *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* (Jn 15:13).

That is why we bear the insults that our enemies cast at us individually and why we pray to God for them. However, as a society, we defend one another and lay down our lives, so that the enemy would not enslave your brethren, would not enslave their souls with their bodies, and would not destroy them in both body and soul."

St. Nikolai Velimirovic (+1956)

ON CHURCH ATTENDANCE

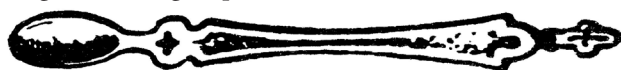
By St. Theophan the Recluse.

Do not be tempted to indulge yourself in not coming to church at the beginning of the service or leaving before it is over. Remember, each service is a complete unit and it can provide its full benefit only in its entirety. Just as food is tasty only when it is fully seasoned, so the service can completely satisfy the spiritual taste only when it is heard in full. Thus, he who misses the beginning or does not remain until the end is laboring, but he deprives himself of the fruit of his labor; he creates with one hand and destroys with the others.

Further, one must go to church not inattentively. For, it is always possible that one may go to church not in a way worthy of praise but rather of condemnation, i.e., by going and not receiving any spiritual benefit.

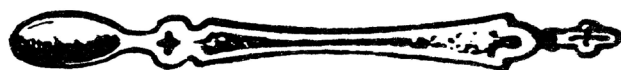
Approaching the church, you must leave every care and worry about your affairs at the threshold in order to enter with a serene mind. Entering the church, you must put on reverence like a garment, remembering to Whom we are coming and to Whom we intend to address our prayers. Having taken your place in the church (best of all, the same place each time), you should gather your thoughts and mentally stand before the face of the omnipresent God, offering Him reverent worship in body and spirit, with a contrite heart and in humble reverence. After this, you must follow, without wandering thoughts, everything that is going on—what is being sung and read in the church—all the way to the end of the service.

That is all! In this way, we will not be bored in church, looking here and there and starting conversations, and we will not be wishing that the service be over soon. Instead, passing from one prayerful feeling to another and from one reverent thought to the next, we will be like those in a fragrant garden, moving from one group of flowers to another.



The spiritual life has need of great care. It is very sweet; but for anyone to experience its sweetness, he has to struggle a great deal. For a man to be saved, he has to wash himself, either in his blood or his tears. The holy Martyrs were washed in their blood. We—at least—should shed a few tears...

Elder Ieronymos of Aegina (+1966)



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

THE LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS

Adapted from a series of various Orthodox articles.

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is one of the most beautiful and meaningful liturgies in the Orthodox Church. It may be characterized, without exaggeration, as the heart, the center of the Great Lent services. In some ancient manuscripts of the service books, it is known as the "Liturgy of the Great Quadregesima." [Ed: Quadregesima is the term utilized by the Orthodox Christians of the pre-Schism West to denote the 40-day pre-Paschal season of preparation by fasting and prayer, i.e., the Great Lent.] In fact, it is the service which best typifies this sacred time of the year.

The essence of this service is revealed in its very name: It is the *Liturgy of Gifts Presanctified*. This distinguishes it from the liturgies of St. Basil the Great and of St. John Chrysostom, in which the Eucharist, the offering and sanctification of the Gifts, takes place during the liturgy itself.

During this *Liturgy of the Great Quadregesima* we are offered the Holy Gifts "presanctified," i.e. already sanctified at a liturgy served on a previous day. These Holy Gifts are offered to us that we might have the opportunity to commune of them and be sanctified by them. In other words, the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is essentially not a "liturgy" in the sense of the liturgies of St. John Chrysostom or St. Basil the Great, but is rather a special rite of Communion.

The joyousness which accompanies the performance of the divine liturgies of St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom was regarded by the early Church as not suitable for the penitential season of the Great Fast. For this reason, the Synod in Laodicea (363 AD) forbade the performance of the divine liturgies during the Great Lent, except on Saturday, Sunday, the Feast of the Annunciation, and Holy Thursday.

In order to understand why a rite of Communion of presanctified Holy Gifts came into being, one must consider its history. Its roots lie in the ancient practice of the Church. In the early centuries of Christian history, the faithful approached to receive the Holy Gifts at each liturgy. It was even a practice among the faithful, when there was no weekday liturgy, that they would privately commune of the Holy Gifts left over from the Sunday liturgy.

As St. Basil the Great states, the faithful of that time were used to receiving Communion not only on Saturdays and Sundays, but also at least twice during the week—on

Wednesdays and Fridays. Therefore, the question arose: How could they commune outside the liturgy? The answer had already been provided: They could commune of the Holy Gifts sanctified at one of the earlier liturgies.

In those days, fasting meant complete abstinence from food until sunset, and Communion of the Holy Gifts was the crown, the end, of the Lenten day. For this reason, on those weekdays, it took place after Vespers.

On this foundation, a special rite of prayer crystallized within the monasteries: All of the monastics would pray together before Communion, and afterwards, together they would thank God, Who had enabled them to be Communicants of the Holy Mysteries. This would be done either after Vespers or after the ninth hour (about 3:00 pm).

In time, this rule of prayer took on the form of a short service, somewhat similar to the rite of the liturgy. Thus developed what we now call the *Order of the Typica*, in contemporary practice served after the Sixth and Ninth Hours. The very name *Typica* points to the fact that, in some measure, this short service typifies the liturgy. It is in this sense a precursor to our Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts.

The full rite of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts consists of Vespers, at the conclusion of which the Holy, Presanctified Gifts are offered, and the prayers before Communion are read. Communion itself takes place, and is followed by prayers of thanksgiving.

The service's connection to Great Lent is reflected in its special "mournful" character. The Altar Table and sacred vessels containing the Holy Gifts are covered with dark-colored vestments. Prayers are read with a sense of humility and tenderness. Overall, the entire service is marked by a special sense of mystery.

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts was first documented by St. Gregory Dialogos of Rome, a sixth-century pope. At one time it was supposed that he alone had composed the liturgy himself, but now it is generally supposed that he simply recorded what was otherwise being practiced at Constantinople. In the Presanctified liturgy itself, he is still commemorated as its traditional author. The present service, however, is likely the inspired liturgical creation of Christian Byzantium.

This liturgy is also mentioned in the Canons of the Quinisext Council, of 692: *On all days of the holy fast of Great Lent, except on the Sabbath (i.e. Saturday), and the Lord's Day (i.e. Sunday) and the holy day of the Annunciation, the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is to be served.* (Canon 52, Quinisext Council, 692 AD).



In parishes, the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is usually served on Wednesday and Friday evenings (although some parishes may celebrate it on only one of these days). It comes in the evening after a day of spiritual preparation and total abstinence. The faithful who are unable to make the effort of total fasting because of weakness or work, however, normally eat a light Lenten meal in the early morning.

The Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts consists of Vespers, with special prayers together with a portion of the divine liturgy, omitting its most important part, the consecration of the Holy Gifts; and the Third, Sixth and Ninth Hours (with the typical psalms) are used in a particular manner at the beginning.

The Sacred Elements, consecrated at the divine liturgy on Saturdays and Sundays, are preserved on the holy Altar in the tabernacle. During the psalms of Vespers, the Presanctified Gifts are prepared for communion. The priest places the Gifts

on the *diskos* with prayer and incensing after the Great Litany, during the chanting of the psalms (*kathisma*). He carries them in solemn procession around the back of the Altar, and to the Table of Oblation.

The evening psalm, *Lord I call upon You*, is then sung with the special hymns for the day. This is followed with the evening entrance, the hymn *Gladsome Light*, and two Biblical readings; from Genesis and from Proverbs. The Bible readings are punctuated by the priest blessing the faithful with the censer and a lighted candle proclaiming *The Light of Christ illumines all*. This blessing symbolizes the light of Christ's Resurrection, which illumines the Old Testament Scriptures and the entire life of mankind. This is the very Light with which Christians are illuminated in the life of the Church through Holy Baptism.

The Prayer of St. Ephraim is read after the singing of the evening psalm *Let my prayer rise in Your sight as incense*. The augmented litany is chanted, and the Presanctified Gifts are brought solemnly to the altar table. This is when the following special entrance hymn is chanted:

Now the powers of heaven do serve invisibly with us.

Lo, the King of Glory enters.

Lo, the mystical sacrifice is upborne, fulfilled.

Let us draw near in faith and love, and become communicants of life eternal.

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

The Prayer of St. Ephraim is read again, accompanied with a litany and a special prayer before Holy Communion. *Our Father Who art in heaven ...* is sung and the faithful receive Holy Communion to the singing of:

O taste and see that the Lord is good. Alleluia.

The communicants *depart in peace* with thanksgiving to God for His Coming. The special dismissal prayer asks God for a successful fulfillment of Lent and to worthily celebrate the Great Feast of Pascha—the Resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord.

O Almighty Lord ... Who has brought us to these all-holy days for the purification of the soul and body, for the controlling of carnal passions ... and the hope of the Resurrection ... enable us to fight the good fight, to accomplish the course of the Fast, to preserve inviolate the Faith ... to be accounted victors over sin ... and uncondemned, to attain unto and to adore Thy Holy Resurrection...

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is one of the great masterpieces of Orthodox piety and liturgical creativity. It reveals the central Christian doctrine and experience in its form and content; namely that our life must be spent in prayer and fasting in order to be in communion with Christ who will come

like 'a thief in the night'. It tells us that all of our life, and not only on fast periods, is completed with the Presence of the Victorious Christ who is risen from the dead. It witnesses to the fact that Christ will come at the end of the ages to judge

the living and the dead, and to establish God's Kingdom *of which there shall be no end*. It tells us that we must be ready for His arrival, and to be found watching and serving; in order to be worthy to *enter into the joy of the Lord*.



Divine eros is the highest level of pure, burning love. Christianity is an eros love. The trouble with Christianity today is the loss of this eros love. Christianity without this flame, without this burning of the heart, is a cold Christianity, a frozen Christianity.

Sometimes, I do not know, why we talk about the Mysteries in a legalistic way like the fulfillment of a certain duty, but the Mysteries are not something that we must go through out of a sense of duty; they are paths that lead to life. They are tunnels or channels that lead us to life, to God.

What is the thing that we call peace, anyway? What do you think? Precisely this, when the passions tone down, subside and when someone breaks through this critical barrier, he possesses the gift of peace.

Elder Athanasios Mitilinaios (+2006)

(from his homilies on the *Book of the Revelation*)

THE THREE VISITS OF MARY MAGDALENE TO THE TOMB OF CHRIST

By Metropolitan Antony Khrapovitsky (+1936).

We have read various discussions about the apparent lack of accord among the Gospel narrations of Christ's Resurrection. There have been a number of attempts at demonstrating a concordance among the Evangelists in this regard, but not all have been successful. I wish to offer some considerations on the subject, and I wish to begin by mentioning the most obvious point of seeming lack of accord.

In Matthew's Gospel, we read that upon being greeted by the risen Lord with the word *rejoice*, Mary of Magdala and the other Mary immediately embraced His feet. Nevertheless, we read elsewhere (Jn 20:11-17) that, when Mary of Magdala was weeping at the empty tomb, she did not recognize Christ, but thought that He was the caretaker of the garden. When she did finally recognize Him, she was forbidden to touch Him.

These narratives do not appear to conform with one another and attempts of readers to reconcile them only produce strained interpretations and unconvincing contrivances.

The four Gospels do not describe the appearances of the Lord to the Myrrh-bearing women in an identical manner. What is most perplexing is the lack of accord between the accounts given by Matthew and John. It is evident that the Lord appeared to Mary of Magdala twice—once alone and the other time together with the other Mary—but the relationship of these two appearances perplexes interpreters.

The thesis by which we intend to resolve this question may be expressed as follows: The Evangelist Matthew speaks of the journey of the two Marys to the Lord's tomb, already knowing that Christ had risen from the dead.

What Matthew is describing took place after the appearance described by John when Mary of Magdala had gone to the tomb and mistaken Christ for the gardener. She had informed the apostles how she had seen the Lord and He had spoken to her, then she informed the other Mary, and both of them went to the tomb. They did not go at that time to anoint the body of Jesus, because they knew that He was risen, but they went *to see the tomb*, knowing it to be empty, but knowing also that the winding strips in which He had been buried were still there. It was not only them and the two apostles who rushed to the tomb to verify what Mary of Magdala had seen, but later, the other myrrh-bearers and more than eleven others also went (Lk 24:9, 24). The Evangelist informs us that the two Marys were made worthy of a second appearance of the angel and then of the Lord Himself.

What other evidence do we have, besides Matthew's words that they went *to see the tomb*, that the events in that gospel took place after the events described in John's gospel? The second evidence is that John describes the events that occurred *while it was yet dark*, while Matthew clearly speaks of something that happened *at dawn on the first day of the week*.

The third point which requires our attention is the reaction of the myrrh-bearers to the angel's words, and to Christ Himself. In John's Gospel, Mary appears so unprepared for the event that she cannot assimilate it and takes Christ for a gardener; in Mark's account, the angel's words bring the myrrh-bearers to such terror that they *said nothing to anyone because they were afraid*. Luke writes that they were overcome with fear and prostrated themselves on the ground.

Matthew's narration, on the other hand, encounters the myrrh-bearers already prepared for the encounter, though the angel reassures them: *Do not be afraid. Go and see the place where the Lord lay*. In Mark's gospel, we read of the other myrrh-bearing women that they *said nothing to anyone because they were afraid*. Matthew, however, relates of the two Marys that they ran *with fear and joy to announce to His disciples* that He had risen. For Mary Magdalene, this was the second encounter, and the other Mary who knew about it from her receives the news again from the Saviour Himself, being already prepared for it. From whence is this evident?

The answer to this is over fourth proof that the two women had gone to see the tomb already knowing about the Resurrection. This answer will also tell us why the Lord did not allow Mary Magdalene to touch Him the first time, but shortly after allowed both Marys to embrace His feet.

In the *Pentecostarion*, on the feast of the Myrrh-bearing women, we read in the ninth *stichera* that Mary Magdalene, *...is sent away without touching Christ...* What does it mean? Mary, who had earlier wept over her beloved teacher, seeing Him buried, is now seized with an overwhelming joy. Without comprehending His divinity or thinking about the meaning of His mysterious Resurrection, she forgets herself and wishes to embrace Him as one dear to her whom she thought to be dead and gone, but is now seen alive. She gives herself over to enthusiastic joy, without comprehension.

Moreover, something is not yet complete, for He must *ascend* to the Father. Later, the Lord behaves differently to the two Marys. This time, the two women are fully aware that the Lord is appearing to the faithful as the victor over death and Hades, as one ascending to the Father in the eternal kingdom, and with all authority, sending the Apostles to preach the victorious struggle with the world. Now, both women, encountering him and hearing Him greeting, *rejoice*, no longer think in a worldly manner, but reverence Him as the living Son of God. Thus, He does not prevent their reverent adoration as *embrace His feet and worship Him* (Mt 28:9).

Very well, we have seen the accord between the gospels of Matthew and John, but how will we reconcile the narrative of the other two evangelists? At what point will we place the arrival of Mary of Magdala with spices and ointments, at the tomb, in the company of the other women mentioned in Mark and Luke?

The main point of our reply is that Mary Magdalene did not accompany the other women to the Lord's tomb with the spices, but the other women came after Mary had been there, and perhaps after the two Marys had seen the Lord at His second appearance, but they did not yet know about the Resurrection. These other women arrived completely unprepared for the revelation of the Resurrection, and there is no need to conclude that Mary Magdalene was with them; indeed, the evangelists leave open the possibility of the opposite conclusion. Both the other evangelists divide the narrative into three events:

1. The purchase of the Myrrh and spices (Mark) and the storing of them for later use (Luke);
2. The arrival at the tomb and conversation with an angel (Mark) or angels (Luke); and
3. The announcement to the apostles.

Let us begin with this last event. It is not necessary to conclude from Mark's narration that the women did not ever inform the apostles of the appearance of the angel. Mark only notes that they could not do so immediately, and that the apostles heard the news from Mary Magdalene, to whom the Lord had *appeared first*. (Mk 16:9).

You see, Mark singles her out from the group of other myrrh-bearers and, consequently, separates the informing of the apostles from the bringing of the spices and myrrh. Mark does not speak of her as participating in the bringing of the spices to the tomb, but only of her participation in the purchase of them (16:1)—which took place on Saturday evening, after the end of the Sabbath restrictions, that is, after the sixth hour.

Mary Magdalene went to the tomb alone *while it was still dark*, and without the spices and ointments. The other women came with the myrrh and spices *at sunrise* (16:2). The Lord did not appear to all of them but only to Mary Magdalene who, therefore, was not with the others (16:9). Mark names those who purchased the spices and ointments, and those who had watched the Lord's burial, but does not repeat the names when he speaks about the bringing of the spices to the tomb.

Luke does not name the ones who prepared the myrrh, nor the ones who brought it to the tomb, but indicates that the two groups were not identical (*together with some others*—Lk 24:9). Evidently some of them had obtained myrrh and spices already on Friday after the Saviour's death, but remained at rest on the Sabbath according to the law (Lk 23:55), while others purchased ointment and spices after the end of the prescribed Sabbath rest (Mk 16:1). Luke does not name the

women who brought the spices, but only says of someone, "returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to the other disciples. Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the Mother of James who told this to the apostles" (Lk 24:10).

In fact, as John and Mark recall, it was Mary of Magdala who began the spreading of the good news. Since the news was spread to all the disciples in addition to the eleven, this did not happen all at once. The women had to go from house to house—not only the two Marys, but the other myrrh-bearers as well. The testimony of Mary relates to the words of the third gospel and the gospel of John that Peter and John ran to the tomb. Peter entered the tomb and saw the linen winding strips.

Thus, the four gospels are in perfect agreement on this succession of events:

1) Some of the women purchased spices and ointment on Friday before the end of the day (Luke), while others, including Mary Magdalene, did so at the end of the Sabbath—after the sixth hour on Saturday (Mark).

2) Mary Magdalene left the others and went to the tomb at night before the morning of Sunday. There, she does not find the body of Christ (John).

3) She runs to tell Peter and John (Luke, John), and then stands alone outside the tomb weeping, when an angel appears to her, and then Jesus, whom she does not recognise. She rushes to Him, but is not allowed to touch Him.

4) Obeying His command, she goes to announce the news to the apostles (John, Mark) and the other disciples (Luke).

5) Not knowing about all this, the other myrrh-bearers come to the tomb and encounter the angels (Mark, Luke) and return too tearful to speak at first (Mark), but later also proclaim the news to everyone (Luke).

6) Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, already aware of the Resurrection, go to look at the tomb and the Lord's burial bandages, which Peter and John had seen (Luke, John), but which Mary herself had not seen for herself. Coming to the tomb, this time both Mary's enter it, as the angel advises them to (Matthew).

7) The angel now instructs them to confirm the news of the Resurrection to the disciples and announce the coming of Christ's ascension.

8) Now fully comprehending the events, both Mary's hasten to find the apostles again, but meet the Saviour along the way, and this time, they are allowed to touch Him, embracing His feet (Matthew).

9) By the end of the day, not only the whole company of the disciples, but even the Pharisees and scribes have heard the news. These latter begin to attempt to cover up the facts.

It is clear that the two Marys went to the tomb together after Mary Magdalene had already been there alone, and that both already knew of the Resurrection.

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

By His Eminence Hierotheos Vlachos, Metropolitan of Nafpaktos and Saint Vlassios, from the book "Life after Death," (edited for length).

All of the events that are linked to the Second Coming of Christ are called "eschatological" because they pertain to the last, the ultimate day; in other words, they pertain to the events that will take place after the present world has come to its end. Just as the world will not be destroyed altogether but will be renovated, so will mankind not be annihilated but transformed; and History likewise will also never cease, but merely change its content and its life.

Thus, whenever we refer to eschatological events, we mainly refer to all those things that will take place during the Second Coming of Christ, when He will be passing judgment on mankind. Therefore, although we may be waiting for those eschatological events, we can nevertheless say that—from the aspect of our way of living—the "final times" are already present, given that saints are already savoring the Kingdom of God, from this lifetime; the saintly persons are already given a foretaste of all those things that are to be revealed during the so-called "end of Time."

We focus on three specific topics that are linked to the eschatological events that have to do with Christ's Second Coming. First of all, we shall take a general look at Christ's Second Coming; secondly, we shall set out the theological truth behind the resurrection of our bodies and thirdly, we shall examine the events pertaining to God's Judgment, which are linked to both the Coming of Christ and the bodily resurrection of Man.

The Glorious Coming of Christ

Throughout our biblical-patristic tradition, it is stated that Christ will come once again to this world, this time to judge mankind. This is a fact that cannot be doubted by Christians. Christ Himself speaks of His new and glorious arrival. He says ... *when the Son of man comes, in all His glory...* (Mt 25:31). The word "when" is not a hypothetical term; it is a temporal one, which implies that there is a time when Christ will come to this world once again, and in fact with immense glory. And elsewhere, Christ said ... *and then they shall behold the son of man, arriving in clouds...* (Mk 13:26).

In the Acts of the Apostles, where Christ's Ascension is recorded, it is said that the angels had remarked to the astonished disciples ... *men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing towards the heavens? This Jesus, who was swept away from you up*

to the heavens, will come in the same manner that you had seen Him heading towards the heavens... (Acts 1:11). The manner in which He rose to the heavens will therefore be the same one, when He returns to earth.

The Apostle Paul teaches us that those who will be alive at the time of arrival of the Son of Man—and in fact those who are righteous—will be seized *within clouds, to encounter the Lord in the air...* (1 Thess 4:17). And it is also written in the Book of Revelations that: ... *behold, He comes with the clouds, and every eye shall behold Him...* (Rev 1:7).

These passages declare our belief that Christ will come to earth to judge mankind, when the end of this world comes, along with the beginning of the new life. That is the reason the Creed includes the confession ... *and coming once again in glory, to judge the living and the dead, Whose Kingdom is never-ending...*

The Bible divulges the Coming of Christ in several areas. First of all, the second coming of Christ is referred to as *Day*, and in fact *the Day of the Lord* and *Judgment Day*. St. Paul writes ... *for the day of the Lord cometh...* (2 Pet 3:10). Elsewhere, he calls it the *Day of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Cor 1:8), or "*the Day of Christ*" (Phil 1:10) and elsewhere, *the Day that will declare everything* (1 Cor 3:13). Furthermore, John the Evangelist calls it the *day of judgment* (1 Jn 4:17). It is called *Day* because compared to this present life—which is darkness—it denotes a new reality. The image of *day* is not irrelevant to the image of *sun* given that Jesus is the *Sun of Justice*, Who will be appearing at that time hence the use of the term *Day*.

John the Evangelist links this *Day* to the end-Times events, calling it the *Day of end-times*. In the Gospel of John, Christ Himself speaks of *the last day* saying that He will resurrect man *on the last day* (Jn 6:39) and elsewhere that His word shall judge mankind *on the last day* (Jn 12:48). Here, the word *Day*, which is linked to the term *last* rather indicates the last day prior to the commencement of the Kingdom of God.

The Day of the Lord is inseparably linked to the presence of the Coming Christ. It is for the same reason that other expressions are also used, to denote this reality. It is characterized as *the day of the epiphany of God's glory* (Tit 6:13). It is also called *the day of the epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Tim 6:14). Elsewhere it is linked to the notion of *presence*, because that is when Christ will present Himself.

The disciples had asked Christ *and what shall be the sign of Your presence and the end of the world?*" (Mt 24:3). On that day,



the glory of God is to be revealed, and all of mankind—including those who were ignorant of it until that moment—shall behold it. The Apostle Peter had spoken of the *revealing of God's glory* (1 Pet 4:13) and the Apostle Paul respectively of the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ *from the heavens, along with His angelic hosts* (2 Thess 1:7).

However, while it is certain that Christ will be coming to judge mankind, from what we can see in the Holy Bible, it remains entirely unknown when this immense and glorious day will be. Christ Himself had said to His disciples: *As for that day or hour, nobody knows a thing; not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, except only the Father.* (Mk 13:32). After the Resurrection, when the disciples thought that day had in fact come, Christ rid them of their incorrect perceptions, by clarifying that *it is not for you to know the years or the seasons that the Father has placed within His own jurisdiction.* (Acts 1:7)

Of course when Christ says that no-one else knows that point in time except for the Father, it does not mean that He, as God, is also ignorant of it. The fact is, that humans and angels are ignorant of the exact time. It is understood that whatever the Father knows, the Son also knows. St. Symeon the New Theologian, on interpreting this detail, says that *no-one knows, except only the Holy Trinity—the one, indivisible Godhead.* The Triadic God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Who share a common essence and nature, are definitely aware of when the world will end and when Christ will return. Christ's claim, that even the Son is ignorant of when the world will end, *implied that He was ignorant according to His human nature, and not according to His Divinity.*

The hour and the day of Christ's Second Coming is not only unknown; in fact, it will even catch us unawares. When revealing this truth, Christ specifies that it will happen in the manner that lightning strikes. Just as a bolt of lightning appears suddenly from one end of the sky to the other, *thus like will be the Son of Man, on that day of His.* (Lk 17:24).

St. Paul uses another image, to demonstrate the sudden arrival of Christ. This image is borrowed from the act of robbery. Just as a robber enters a house without any prior warning, that day will come upon us in the same way: *"Know ye, that the Day of the Lord shall thus come, like a robber in the night."* (1 Thess 5:1-2) When the time is appropriate *the blessed and only master, the king of kings and ruler of rulers.* (1 Tim 6:15) will indicate the day of His epiphany.

When teaching about the unknown element of the grand day of His epiphany, Christ brought as an example that two people would be in the fields and the one shall be swept up while the other shall be left there. Two women shall be at the mill grinding—the one will be swept up and the other will be left behind. (Mt 24:40-41)

When referring to this reality, St. Paul elucidates that those who are still living on that day and have not yet died, will be

transformed in an instant—in no more than the blinking of an eye *...as none of us shall be put to sleep (die), for all of us will be changed, in the blinking of an eye, during the sounding of the last trumpet...* (1 Cor 15:51-52).

Despite the obscurity and the unexpectedness of that day, there are certain signs that proclaim its arrival. One cannot be fully aware of this event, but, depending on one's degree of preparedness and spiritual alertness, one can perceive the criticality of the times by certain external characteristics. These were described by Christ Himself (Mt 24) and are that the Gospel will be preached throughout all of creation; an immense apostasy will prevail all over the world and many false prophets will make their appearance; antichrist, with the miracles and the signs that he will employ, will strive to deceive even the chosen; wars, persecutions, famines, earthquakes will be prevalent, etc.

The Church thus cultivates the eschatological sermon, however, She simultaneously determines that it is no easy task interpreting the major events of every generation. Only those who are enlightened nous, and those who have received a revelation by God are able to faintly discern whether the events taking place are in fact the events that are precedent to the Coming of Christ, **for the sole purpose of leading the people to repentance and their return to God.** But even so, they still cannot pinpoint the arrival of that day, in accordance to Christ's specification. This is why, in the Orthodox Church, we avoid appointing the years and the seasons that we think these eschatological events will take place. These are the bounds that the Holy Fathers also limit themselves to.

We will now highlight a few points from patristic teaching, which are quite indicative:

First point: The claim pertaining to the judgment of mankind, which will follow the Second Coming of Christ, is *difficult to interpret*, according to St. Symeon the New Theologian, because it does not involve present or visible events, but future and invisible ones. This is why those who speak and those who hear are in great need of much prayer, much study and much cleansing of the nous. And this is imperative, so that those who do speak, will know things well, and those who listen, can hear prudently.

There are people who speak of eschatological events in a rather man-centered manner, and in the long run, distort the words of the Bible and the Fathers, thus causing delusions but also desperation among men. There are likewise others, who perceive the words of the Scripture and the Fathers according to their personal ideas. That is why one requires spiritual prudence and profound discretion to comprehend these words and be led to repentance; because everything that leads us to psychological fear and human desperation is not Orthodox. On the contrary, the true and Orthodox is what leads man, through spiritual fear, to a hope according to God, to repentance and prayer.

Second point: St. Symeon the New Theologian says that the day of Christ's Coming is called *the Day of the Lord* not because it is the last of the terrestrial days, nor because Christ is going to come on that day, and not even because that is the day on which Judgment will take place, but *because it is precisely then that God and master of all will shine forth with all the glory of His Godhood*. Thus, this day is called *the Day of the Lord* for the manifestation of the light of Divinity, and not for an ordinary presence. In the way that all the stars are extinguished during the daytime by the radiance of the tangible sun, the same thing will happen on that day. Everything visible will recede and give way to the Creator of heaven and earth. Then, the One Who is invisible to all, shall be the only One Who will be *both daytime and God*.

Third point: In the Holy Bible, whenever there is a reference to Christ's Coming, lightning, clouds, thrones and other such images are also mentioned. St. Gregory Palamas says that all information on the Second Coming of Christ involves a condescension; all the events described are naturally beyond the potential of the human mind, logic and senses to grasp. Christ, on the other hand, knowing exactly what is going to take place, *is displaying a condescendence, which corresponds to the perceptiveness of those being taught, by rendering to them the information they are able to perceive*.

Christ has used familiar images and representations. Of course there will be a judgment day, there will be a rejoicing of the righteous and affliction for the sinners and there will be Paradise and Hell, but all these will not be tangible things, since we know full well from Patristic Tradition that these are not created things. Thus, we must not remain fixed to the tangible examples and lose the essence of what is being said. Nor, of course, should we merely observe the essence of these things and totally overlook the examples; because, if Christ used them, we too should adhere to them and explain their more profound meanings, thus leading mankind towards repentance and not to fearlessness.

Fourth point: The Second Coming of Christ is juxtaposed to His first coming. When referring to His First Coming, we are referring to the Incarnation of Christ and when referring to His Second Coming, we are referring to Christ coming again, to judge mankind. There is of course an obviously clear difference between the First and the Second Coming.

St. Gregory Palamas outlines the difference between these two Comings, saying that during the First Coming, the glory of Christ's Divinity was hidden within the flesh that He had assumed (for our salvation). Even now, the glory of His Divinity continues to be veiled before the Father, with His divine-like flesh. But during His Second Coming, *He shall disclose His full Glory*; He will then be appearing in His full radiant splendor, illuminating the far reaches of the universe with the rays of His Divinity. And when interpreting the words of Christ, that *when the Son of Man*

comes in all His glory, and all His angels with Him, he clarifies that during His first coming, Christ had brought His angels with Him and was in fact surrounded by His angelic hosts (only invisibly) and that He had purposely suppressed their zeal against God's opponents; however, during His Second Coming, Christ will come with all his angels, visibly, in all His glory and majesty.

Fifth point: In the works of St. Symeon the New Theologian, we can trace one more truth regarding the Second Coming of Christ, and especially with the judgment of mankind. St. Symeon extensively analyzes how the Second Coming and the future Tribunal will be taking place chiefly for the sinners who have been living in vices and sins, and not for the saints, who are already living in the Presence of Christ. All those who are children of that Light, and all those who become the sons of the future Day, *the day of the Lord shall never arrive*. Christ will of course come to judge mankind, however, they have already been judged from this lifetime and no Tribunal will be awaiting to try them.

I will quote a remarkable passage by St. Symeon the New Theologian, because I cannot overlook it and not bring it to your attention, and also it is impossible for it to be presented in my own words: *Such a person shall also not be judged in the future Tribunal, for he has been judged beforehand; nor shall he be checked by that Light, for he has received the light beforehand; nor shall he upon entering the fire be tested or burned, for he has been tested beforehand; nor shall he then perceive the day of the Lord, for on account of his conversing and his union with God, he shall himself have already become a bright and glorious day*.

The statement of St. Symeon is amazing. Judgment essentially takes place from this lifetime; the person who sees the light is baptized in the Holy Spirit and he does not need to think about the day of the Lord, because with his union to God, he is already a bright and glorious day. We need to note the word *union* which is indicative of man's communion with God. It is a fact, that if man becomes a bright and glorious day himself, he will not be able to discern the arrival of that Day.

Thus, the Second Coming will be apparent mainly to the sinners, who have lived during the present lifetime with their vices and did not keep God's commandments. For the saints, it will be a natural state, which they already experience from the present time. Of course the saints also await the Second Coming of Christ, for the resurrection of their bodies, which are presently waiting in an incorruptible state, so that the whole of man will eventually taste the bounteous gifts of the great Day and glorious epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Consequently, the Second Coming of Christ is an indisputable fact, since it is testified by the revelatory word of God, the reassurance of the Apostles, and by the experiences of the saints, who are already savoring the Kingdom of God.

THE DEATH OF A REPENTANT SINNER

Source: "On the Banks of God's River," by St. Nilus (translated by the St. Herman Brotherhood, 1969).

From my birthplace where I had been occupied for nearly twenty years, it pleased the Lord to move me first to St. Petersburg and then to that blessed corner of the Novgorod province, to that quiet and God-fearing little town of Valdai, where only recently one could still hear the forlorn tinkling of the bell affixed to the arch of the coachman's troika, (which has since given way, alas! to a new railroad). There my wife and I developed a close friendship with one of the local priests who also became our spiritual father. Once, during confession with my wife, he had occasion to say to her: "But you know, even in this day and age some people are bestowed the gift of seeing their guardian angel!"

Our dear priest communicated no details and I decided to question him properly at the first opportunity. Here is what I discovered, as I recorded in my notebook.

Today (April 25, 1907) I reminded our spiritual father about my wife's confession and asked: "Batiushka, what was it that you told my wife during confession about an angel appearing to one of your spiritual children?"

"Yes," he replied, "that actually happened, but I learned of it through the confession of one of my parishioners, and confessions are to be kept secret."

I wasn't deterred and began to press:

"But," I asked, "is this parishioner still living?"

"No, he died."

"In that case," I said, "what can hinder you from making it known, especially if what you have to tell can serve to benefit us sinners?"

My spiritual father thought and thought, and then related to me the following:

I had among my parishioners in the village a man by the name of Dimitri. He was a peasant and led a bad life; he stole, he cursed, he was a drunkard and a debauch. In short, he appeared to be at the bottom of the barrel. He had been living this way for a long time and there was no hope for any change. Then one day, as he was preparing to go to the fields to do some tilling, he came into the passage which led out from his dwelling, and suddenly he felt as though someone with tremendous force hit him on the back of the head. The blow was such that one minute he was standing upright and the next minute he was lying with his face smashed flat to the floor. There had been no one in the passageway at the time

and Dimitri was perfectly sober. The swiftness of what had happened stunned and terrified him.

"I arrived at the field," Dimitri later told me in confession, "my face a bloody mess, I washed it in the stream, but couldn't seem to get down to work; my mind was fixed on puzzling out what had happened. I sat at the edge of the field lost in thought; I recalled my wicked life. For a long time I sat, turning this over in my mind until finally I determined that I was done with my sinful habits and that I will begin a new life as pleases God and befits a Christian. In tears I stood on my knees in the middle of my field. Making the sign of the cross, I loudly cried out to God: 'In Thy Name I vow to Thee that from henceforth I shall sin no more!' And since then I have become a different man; I broke loose from my old ways: I stole no more, I stopped drinking, stopped swearing, ceased my wanton behavior..."

"Do you mean to say," I asked Dimitri, "that since making your vow you haven't even met with any temptations?"

"How could that be! Of course I have, Batiushka. Often times I have felt a strong pull towards my old habits, but God has helped me and I have been able to resist. Once, however, it did happen that I gave in, the neighboring village was celebrating its parish feast and holding a fair. There I was making my way when what should I see lying in the road but someone's wallet. It was stuffed tight and without thinking twice I snatched it up and into the pocket, I didn't even stop to count the money—I was afraid someone might be watching. I had time only to see that the wallet contained a



lot of bills and a lot of silver. I continued on my way, thinking to myself: Well, I certainly won't return this wallet, and if I should meet its owner... Hey, but isn't this a tidy sum that's come my way! And suddenly... BAM! I was down flat against the stoney surface of the road. And just as before, my whole face was cut and bleeding, and I hadn't been drinking. Getting to my feet, I saw—where the dickens!—a monstrous rock lying in the middle of the road where it had no business. I must have tripped over it. Here I let out with the blackest, most foul curse, and at that very moment, above me, directly over my head, something suddenly made a noise, like some gigantic bird. I glanced upwards and froze: over me, face to face, hovered an angel beating its wings. "Dimitri," he said severely, "where is your vow to God? I heard you make it in your field, I saw you pray. And now you're again back to your old ways?"

My entire body was shaking when suddenly I found courage to cry out to him: "Who are you? One of hell's demons, or an angel from heaven?"

"I am from those above, not from those below!" replied the angel and became invisible.

"It was awhile before I came to myself. When I did, I took from my pocket the wallet and flung it away from me as far as I could.

I did not continue to the festival but returned home pondering what I had seen."

"That," said Batiushka, "is what Dimitri told me in confession. And here is what later happened. To the amazement of all who knew him, reports began to spread of Dimitri's goodness, his kindness. He became utterly transformed to the good down to the very soles of his feet. Ten years passed since the angel's appearance. Dimitri remained true to his vow. In the eleventh year I was called to Dimitri's village. 'Batiushka! Dimitri has fallen ill; he asks that you come to see him.' I went without delay. Coming into his cottage I found Dimitri in bed, his eyes closed. I called to him and was startled when he suddenly sat bolt upright and thrust his arms towards me. I moved away, frightened, as I was carrying the Holy Gifts.

"Watch yourself!" I said, "don't you see, I have the Holy Gifts! I all but dropped them!"

"Batiushka!" cried Dimitri gasping excitedly, "just now before you came I again saw the angel. He told me to prepare myself as I am to die this very night."

"What was he like?" I asked.

"I was blinded by his light!" replied Dimitri in a tone of spiritual rapture.

"Did you ask him if God will forgive your sins?"

"God will forgive that which a spiritual father absolves," replied Dimitri firmly. "Whatever you loose here will also be loosed there!"

I prepared to hear his confession.

I gave him Holy Communion and, sinner that I am, I didn't think he looked so very sick. He was still a robust peasant, not yet old. I left him fully persuaded that he would recover. About the angel—I didn't know what to think.

That night Dimitri reposed...

This is what I was told, according to his priestly conscience, by the kind pastor of one of the churches in the peaceful town of Valdai.

ON OUR DIVINE SERVICES

Bt St. Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow (+1867).



When the time comes, and especially the time put aside for God and His temple, a Feast Day or the hour of Divine Services, hurry to tear yourself away from business and worldly cares and voluntarily and zealously offer yourself to God in His church.

When you enter the church bring to mind the promise of the Lord to those that gather in

His name: *For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* (Mt 18:20); and stand reverently in church, as before the very face of Christ, and pray to Him that he sanctify you by His holiness, animate you by His prayer, and enlighten you with the word of the Gospel and the Grace of the Mysteries.

Take note of this, too: In the church, Angels serve with us and guard the holiness dwelling there. Once, in the Lavra of Saint Theodosius near Jerusalem, Abba Leontius, coming one Sunday to church to receive the Holy Mysteries, saw an Angel standing on the right side of the Holy Table, and when the elder, being afraid, turned to run to his cell, the voice of the Angel called to him: "From the time this Holy Table was consecrated, I have been charged to stay by it."

Remember this, beloved, and stand reverently. And, if you feel that only your body is standing in church, while your mind thinks of home, or the market, or a place of merriment, collect yourself. Hurry to bring back your mind that has strayed, join it to God in your heart, force it to strive towards God, Who looks upon you. When you hear the Word of God, open up not only your bodily ears, but your spiritual ones as well, open your heart, receive this heavenly Bread and with it nourish not only your memory, but also your life and work.



For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. [2 Cor 5:10]



G luttony is hypocrisy of the stomach. Filled it moans about scarcity; stuffed, and crammed, it wails about its hunger.

St. John Climacus

Τὰ Τρία Πάσχα

Τοῦ κ. Δημ. Γ. Καραχάλιου, τ. Γυμνασιάρχου-Φιλολόγου, ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἐφημερίδα «Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος», 17 Ἀπριλίου, 2009.

Ὁ Θεόπνευστος ὑμνογράφος τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας μας εἰς ἓν ἀναστάσιμον στιχηρόν του ὀνομάζει τὴν ἀνάστασιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ «Πάσχα καινόν» καὶ «Πάσχα μέγα». Ἡ λέξις ὁμως Πάσχα εἶναι Ἑβραϊκὴ καὶ σημαίνει διάβασις καὶ διαβατήριον. Ἀλλὰ διατί ἐπεκράτησεν εἰς τὴν Ὁρθοδοξίαν; Αὐτὸ θὰ φανῇ ἀπὸ τὴν σύγκρισιν τῶν τριῶν Πάσχα πὺν ὑπάρχουν: Τοῦ Ἑβραϊκοῦ, τοῦ Χριστιανικοῦ καὶ τοῦ Οὐρανίου.

Τὸ ἀρχαιότερον εἶναι τὸ Ἑβραϊκὸν Πάσχα. Ἡ ἐορτὴ αὐτὴ ὠνομάσθη Πάσχα, ἐπειδὴ οἱ Ἑβραῖοι ἐπρόκειτο κατ' εὐδοκίαν Θεοῦ νὰ διαβοῦν τὰ σύνορα τῆς Αἰγύπτου, ὅπου ἐπὶ τετρακοσίους χρόνους ἦσαν σκλάβοι τῶν Αἰγυπτίων, καὶ νὰ ἐπιστρέψουν εἰς τὴν πατρίδα των. Τὸ δὲ Πάσχα αὐτὸ κατ' ἐντολὴν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔπρεπε νὰ τὸ ἐορτάσουν, προτοῦ νὰ φύγουν ἀπ' ἐκεῖ, κατ' αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπον: Κάθε Ἑβραῖος οἰκογενειάρχης ἔπρεπε νὰ σφάξῃ ἓνα ἄμνον ἑνὸς ἔτους ἢ ἐν ἐρίφιον, χωρὶς κανένα ἐλάττωμα, κατὰ τὰς τρεῖς μετὰ μεσημβρίαν τῆς 14^{ης} ἡμέρας τοῦ Ἑβραϊκοῦ μηνὸς Νισάν, καί, ἀφοῦ τὸν ψήσουν, νὰ τὸν φάγουν μετὰ ἄζυμον ἄρτον καὶ πικρὰ χόρτα, διὰ νὰ ἐνθυμοῦνται τὴν πίκραν τῆς δουλείας των, ἀλλὰ καὶ χωρὶς νὰ σπάσουν κανένα ἀπὸ τὰ ὀστᾶ του. Ἐπίσης ἔπρεπε μετὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἄμνου νὰ χαράξουν ἓνα σταυρὸν εἰς τὸ ἀνώφλιον καὶ εἰς τὸ κατώφλιον τῆς θύρας τῆς οἰκίας των.

Κατὰ τὴν ἰδίαν ἡμερομηνίαν καὶ κατὰ παρόμοιον τρόπον ἐορτάζουν τὸ Πάσχα των, καὶ ὅσοι ἀπὸ τοὺς σημερινοὺς Ἑβραίους δὲν πιστεύουν ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι ὁ προφητευθεὶς καὶ ἀναμενόμενος Λυτρωτὴς καὶ Σωτὴρ τοῦ κόσμου. Αὐτοὶ μετὰ τὸ Πάσχα ἐορτάζουν τὴν ἀπελευθέρωσιν τῶν προγόνων των ἀπὸ τοὺς Αἰγυπτίους. Τὸ ἐορτάζουν ὁμως κατὰ τρόπον ἀξιοθαύμαστον. Δηλαδή, προτοῦ νὰ φάγουν τὸ πασχαλινὸν ἄμνον, ὁ ἀρχηγὸς κάθε Ἑβραϊκῆς οἰκογενείας διαβάζει ἀπὸ τὴν Ἁγίαν Γραφὴν τὸ τμῆμα ἐκεῖνο, πὺν περιγράφει λεπτομερῶς τὸ πρῶτον Πάσχα τῆς αἰχμαλωσίας (Ἐξοδ. 12:7-8), καὶ μετὰ ἀρχίζουν νὰ τρώγουν καὶ συγχρόνως νὰ ψάλλουν ὅλοι μαζί μερικὸς ψαλμοὺς τοῦ Δαβίδ. Αὐτὸ λοιπὸν εἶναι τὸ Ἑβραϊκὸν Πάσχα, τὸ ὁποῖον ὁμως προεικονίζει προφητικῶς τὸ Χριστιανικὸν Πάσχα.

Τὸ Χριστιανικὸν Πάσχα, ἂν καὶ ἔχη μερικὰς ἐξωτερικὰς ὁμοιότητας μετὰ τὸ Ἑβραϊκὸν Πάσχα, διαφέρει ἀπ' αὐτὸ τόσο πολὺ, ὅσον διαφέρει ἡ σκιὰ κάποιου σώματος ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα. Δηλαδή ὁ σφαγιαζόμενος ἄμνος κατὰ

τὸ Ἑβραϊκὸν Πάσχα ἐσυμβόλιζε προφητικῶς τὸν ἴδιον τὸν Χριστόν, τὸν ὁποῖον μᾶς ἀπέστειλεν ὁ Θεὸς διὰ νὰ θυσιασθῇ ὡς ἀρνίον καὶ νὰ σηκώσῃ μετὰ τὴν σφαγὴν καὶ τὴν θυσίαν Του ὁλόκληρον τὴν ἁμαρτίαν καὶ τὴν ἐνοχλήν τοῦ κόσμου ἐξαλείφον αὐτήν. (Ἰωάν. 1:29). Ὁ Θεὸς παρήγγειλε τότε εἰς τοὺς Ἑβραίους μετὰ τὸν Μωϋσῇ νὰ μὴ σπάσουν κανένα ὀστοῦν τοῦ σφαγιασθέντος ἄμνου (Ἐξοδ. 12:10)· τὸ ἴδιον δὲ ἔπραξαν καὶ οἱ στρατιῶται, δηλαδή κατὰ θεῖαν ἐμπνευσιν δὲν ἔσπασαν τὰ σκέλη τοῦ Χριστοῦ (Ἰωάν. 19:33), διὰ νὰ ἐπαληθεύσῃ τὸ χωρίον τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς: «Δὲν θὰ συντιβῇ κανέν ἀπὸ τὰ ὀστᾶ Του» (ἐ.ἀ. 36). Ἀλλῃ προφητικὴ ὁμοιότης εἶναι ὅτι κατὰ τὸ πρῶτον Ἑβραϊκὸν Πάσχα ὁ ἄμνος ἔπρεπε νὰ σφαγῇ εἰς τὰς τρεῖς μετὰ μεσημβρίαν, διότι κατὰ τὴν ὥραν αὐτὴν θὰ παρέδιδε τὸ πνεῦμα Του ἐπὶ τοῦ Σταυροῦ καὶ «ὁ ἄμνος τοῦ Θεοῦ», ὁ Χριστὸς, τοῦ ὁποῖου ὁ ἄμνος τοῦ πρώτου Ἑβραϊκοῦ Πάσχα ἀποτελεῖ τὴν ὁλοζώντανην εἰκόνα Του.

Ἀλλὰ ἡ ἀνάστασις τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι γεγονὸς ἀσύγκριτον μετὰ τὰ γεγονότα τοῦ Ἑβραϊκοῦ Πάσχα, διότι εἶναι ἡ ὁλοκλήρωσις τοῦ ἀπ' αἰώνων Θεϊκοῦ σχεδίου διὰ τὴν σωτηρίαν ὅλων τῶν ἀνθρώπων κάθε ἐποχῆς, τὸ ὁποῖον ἀποτελεῖται ἀπὸ τὸν ἄξονα:

(α) Πτώσις καὶ ἔξωσις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀπὸ τὸν Παράδεισον.

(β) Προαιώνιον Θεϊκὸν σχέδιον σωτηρίας του.

(γ) Ἐνανθρώπησις τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

(δ) Ἐξιλαστήριος σταυρικὴ θυσία τοῦ Κυρίου.

(ε) Ἀνάστασις, καὶ

(δ) Συνανάστασις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

Ἐπίσης ἡ Ἀνάστασις τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔχει

καὶ ἄλλας σωτηρίους διαστάσεις. Δηλαδή δι' αὐτῆς:

(α) Ἐπιβεβαιώνεται ἡ Θεότης τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

(β) Ἀποδεικνύεται ἡ ἐγκυρότης τῆς οὐρανίου διδασκαλίας Του.

(γ) Ἐξασφαλίζεται δὲ καὶ ἡ ἀξιοπιστία τῶν θαυμάτων, πὺν ἔκανε.

(δ) Ἀκόμη δὲ εἰς τὴν Ἀνάστασιν στηρίζεται καὶ ὁλόκληρον τὸ οἰκοδόμημα τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Χριστιανικῆς πίστεως, ὅπως διεκήρυξεν ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος: *Ἐάν ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν ἀνέστη, εἶναι ματαία καὶ κούφια ἀπὸ περιεχόμενον ἡ πίστις σας.* (Α' Κορ. 15:17).

Ἐκτὸς ὁμως ἀπ' αὐτά, ἡ Ἀνάστασις εἶναι καὶ ἀπόλυτος βεβαιότης ὅτι ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἔχει μόνον ἀρχὴν καὶ οὐδέποτε τέλος, ὅπως ἔγραψε καὶ εἰς τοὺς Κορινθίους ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος: *Ὁ Χριστὸς ἀνέστη πρῶτος ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους καὶ βεβαιώνει μετὰ τὴν Ἀνάστασιν του ὅτι θὰ ἀκολουθήσῃ ἔπειτα ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀποθαμένων κατὰ τὴν Δευτέραν Παρουσίαν.*



Τὸ τελειότερον ὁμως Πάσχα εἶναι τὸ Οὐράνιον. Αὐτὸ τὸ ἐορτάζουν κατὰ τρόπον ἀπολύτως πνευματικὸν μόνον οἱ Ἄγγελοι, οἱ Ἅγιοι καὶ οἱ σεσωσμένοι μέσα εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὅπου καὶ τὸν βλέπουν πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον, δηλαδὴ *ὅπως εἶναι, εἰς τὴν κατάστασιν τῆς θείας δόξης* (Α' Ἰωάν 3:2). Δι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ ἱερὸς ὑμνογράφος εὐχεται νὰ ἐορτάζη ἐκεῖ κάθε ἄνθρωπος τὸ Οὐράνιον Πάσχα, ὅταν θὰ διαβῇ κάποτε τὰ ὅρια τοῦ παρόντος κόσμου: *Ὡ Πάσχα τὸ μέγα καὶ ἱερώτατον Χριστέ· ὦ σοφία καὶ λόγε τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ δύναμις· δίδου ἡμῖν ἐκτυπώτερον (ζωηρότερα) σοῦ μετασχεῖν ἐν τῇ ἀνεσπέρῳ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς βασιλείας σου.* (Θ' ὥδη κανόνος τοῦ Πάσχα).

Ἀλλὰ διὰ νὰ ἐορτάση θεαρέστως κάθε Χριστιανὸς τὸ Πάσχα, πρέπει νὰ ἔχη Θεογνωσίαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ πράττῃ τὸ χριστιανικῶς ὀρθόν. Ἡ ἀνάστασις τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι ὑπὲρ λόγον πραγματικότης. Εἶναι τὸ μεγαλύτερον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς γεγονὸς ὅλων τῶν αἰώνων, τὸ ὁποῖον ἔχει κοσμογονικὰς συνεπειὰς διὰ κάθε ἄνθρωπον· αὐτός, δηλαδὴ, πὺ πιστεῦει εἰς τὴν Ἀνάστασιν, ζεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν παροῦσαν ζωὴν καὶ τὴν ἰδικήν του, ἐνῶ ἐκεῖνος πὺ ἀπιστεῖ, ἤδη ἔχει ἀποθάνει, διότι ἔχει ἀποχωρισθῇ αὐτεξουσίως ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστόν.

Ὁ θεάρεστος ἐορτασμός τοῦ Πάσχα εἶναι διάβασις ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμον τοῦ πνευματικοῦ θανάτου εἰς τὸν τῆς Χάριτος τοῦ Χριστοῦ· εἶναι πνευματικὴ πανήγυρις τῆς ψυχῆς. Εἶναι τὸ ἄνοιγμα τῶν πνευματικῶν ὀφθαλμῶν τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ πρὸς βαθυτέραν κατανόησιν ὅλων τῶν γεγονότων τοῦ Γολγοθᾶ εἶναι ἢ χωρὶς ἐπιφύλαξιν πίστις καὶ πεποίθησις ὅτι ὄντως ἀνέστη ὁ Χριστός. Εἶναι ἢ γλυκεῖα ἐλπίς εἰς ἐκεῖνα τὰ μέλλοντα ἀγαθὰ, πὺ μᾶς ὑπεσχέθη ὁ Χριστός, δηλαδὴ τὴν ἀνάστασιν τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ τὴν μακαριότητα τῆς Οὐρανίου Βασιλείας Του. Πρὸ πάντων εἶναι ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν Θεὸν καὶ τὸν συνάνθρωπον.

Οἱ σημερινοὶ ὁμως ἀντίχριστοι ἀγωνίζονται νὰ διαψεῦσουν τὴν ἀνάστασιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ τὸ ἐντελὲς διαφορετικόν, πὺ αἰσθάνεται ἢ καρδιὰ τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ κατὰ τὴν ἡμέραν τοῦ Πάσχα, εἶναι ἢ πλεόν φανερά ἀπόδειξις ὅτι ὅπωςδῆποτε ἀνέστη ὁ Χριστός.



Τὴν ὥρα τῆς ἀκολουθίας, ἢ ψυχὴ ὀφείλει νὰ περιμαζέψῃ μετὰ κατάνυξη τοὺς λογισμούς της, πὺ περιπλανιῶνται ἐδῶ καὶ ἐκεῖ, σὰν τὴ μάνα πὺ συγκεντρώνει τὰ παιδιὰ της, ἔστω κι ἂν ἅλι ἢ ἁμαρτία τοὺς σκορπίζει· καὶ νὰ περιμένει μετὰ βέβαιη πίστις τὸν Κύριο, γιὰ νὰ τὴν ἐπισκεφθεῖ καὶ νὰ τῆς διδάξῃ τὴν ἀληθινὴ καὶ ἀπερίσπαστη προσευχή, ὥστε νὰ ζητάει μονάχα Ἐκεῖνον.

Ἀββὰς Μακάριος ὁ Μέγας

Εὐαγγελισμός-Ἑλληνισμός

Ἀριστοτέλης Βαλαωρίτης (1824-1879).

Μὲ μιὰς ἀνοίγει ὁ οὐρανός, τὰ σύγνεφα μεριάζουν, οἱ κόσμοι ἐμείνανε βουβοί, παράλυτοι κοιτάζουν. Μία φλόγα ἀστράφτει, ἀκούονται ψαλμοὶ καὶ μελωδία. Πετᾶει ἐν' ἄστρο... σταματᾷ ἐμπρὸς εἰς τὴ Μαρία... *Χαῖρε τῆς λέει ἀειπάρθενε, εὐλογημένη χαῖρε! Ὁ Κύριός μου εἶναι μετὰ σέ. Χαῖρε Μαρία, Χαῖρε!*

Ἐπέρασαν χρόνοι πολλοί... Μία μέρα σὰν ἐκείνη ἀστράφτει πάλι ὁ οὐρανός... Στὴν ἔρμη τῆς τὴν κλίνη λησμονημένη, ὀλόρφανη, χλωμὴ κι ἀπελπισμένη, μία κόρη πάντα τήκεται, στενάζει ἀλυσωμένη. Τὰ σιδερά εἶναι ἀτάραγα, σκοτάδι ὀλόγυρά της. Ἡ καταφρόνια, ἢ δυστυχία σέπουν τὰ κόκαλά της. Τρέμει μετὰ μιὰς ἢ φυλακὴ καὶ διάπλατη ἢ θυρίδα φέγγει κι ἀφήνει καὶ περνᾷ ἐν' ἄστρο, μίαν ἀχτίδα. Ὁ Ἄγγελος ἐστάθηκε, διπλώνει τὰ φτερά του... *Εὐπνα, ταράζου, μὴ φοβοῦ, χαῖρε, Παρθένε, χαῖρε. Ὁ Κύριός μου εἶναι μετὰ σέ, Ἑλλάς ἀνάστα, χαῖρε.*

Οἱ τοῖχοι εὐθὺς σωριάζονται. Ἡ μαῦρ' ἢ πεθαμένη νοιώθει τὰ πόδια φτερωτά. Στὴ μέση της δεμένη χτυπάει ἢ σπάθα φοβερή. Τὸ κάθε πάτημά της ἀνοίγει μνημ' ἀχόρταγο. Ρωτᾷ γιὰ τὰ παιδιὰ της... Κανεὶς δὲν ἀποκρένεται... Βγαίνει, πετᾷ στὰ ὄρη... Λιώνουν τὰ χιόνια ὅθε διαβεῖ, ὅθε περάσει ἢ Κόρη. *Εὐπνᾶτε ἐσεῖς πὺ κοιτέστε, ξυπνᾶτε ὅσοι κοιμᾶστε, τὸ θάνατο ὅσοι ἐγεύτητε, τώρα ζωὴ χορτάστε.*

Οἱ χρόνοι φεύγουνε, πετοῦν καὶ πάντα ἐκείνη ἢ μέρα εἶναι γραμμένο ἐκεῖ ψηλὰ νὰ λάμπει στὸν αἰθέρα μ' ὅλα τὰ κάλλη τ' οὐρανοῦ. Στολίζεται ὅλη ἢ φύση μετὰ χίλια μύρια λούλουδα γιὰ νὰ τὴ χαιρετήσῃ. Γιортάστε τὴν, γιортάστε τὴν. Καθεὶς ἂς μεταλάβῃ ἀπὸ τὴ χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ σεῖς καὶ σεῖς οἱ σκλάβοι, ὅσοι τὴ δάφνη στὴ καρδιὰ νὰ φέρετε φοβᾶστε, ἀφορεσμένοι νᾶστε...



Κι ὅσο ἀγαπῶ τὴν πατρίδα μου δὲν ἀγαπῶ ἄλλο τίποτα. Νάρθη ἑνας νὰ μοῦ εἰπῇ ὅτι θὰ πάγῃ ὀμπρὸς ἢ πατρίδα, στέργομαι νὰ μοῦ βγάλῃ καὶ τὰ δύο μου μάτια. Ὅτι ἂν εἶμαι στραβός, καὶ ἢ πατρίδα μου καλὰ, μετὰ θρέφει. Ἄν εἶναι ἢ πατρίδα μου ἀχαμνὰ, δέκα μάτια νὰ ἔχω, στραβός σὰ νὰ εἶμαι. Ὅτι σ' αὐτεῖν θὰ ζήσω, δὲν ἔχω σκοπὸν νὰ πάγω ἄλλον.

Στρατηγὸς Μακρυγιάννης (1794 - 1864)

Χωρίς Στεφάνι

Τοῦ κυρ-Ἀλέξανδρου Παπαδιαμάντη.

Τάχα δὲν ἦτον οἰκοκυρά κι αὐτὴ στὸ σπίτι της καὶ στὴν αὐλὴν της; Τάχα δὲν ἦτο κι αὐτὴ ἕναν καιρὸν νέα μὲ ἀνατροφὴν; Εἶχε μάθει γράμματα εἰς τὰ σχολεῖα. Εἶχε πάρει τὸ δίπλωμά της ἀπὸ τὸ Ἀρσάκειον.

Κι ἐτῆρει ὅλα τὰ χρέη της τὰ κοινωνικά, καὶ μετήρχετο τὰ οἰκιακὰ ἔργα της καλλίτερον ἀπὸ καθεμίαν. Εἶχε δὲ μεγάλην καθαριότητα εἰς τὸ σπίτι της, κι εἰς τὰ κατώφλια της, πρόθυμη ν' ἀσπρίζη καὶ νὰ σφουγγαρίζη, χωρὶς ποτὲ νὰ βαρύνεται καὶ χωρὶς νὰ δεικνύη τὴν παραξενιὰν ἐκείνην, ἥτις εἶναι συνήθης εἰς ὅλας τὰς γυναῖκας, τὰς ἀγαπώσας μέχρις ὑπερβολῆς τὴν καθαριότητα. Καὶ ὅταν ἔμβαιεν ἡ Μεγάλῃ Ἑβδομάδι, ἐδιπλασίαζε τὰ ἀσπρίσματα καὶ τὰ πλυσίματα, τόσον, ὅπου ἔκαμνε τὸ πάτωμα ν' ἀστράφη καὶ τὸν τοῖχον νὰ ζηλεύη τὸ πάτωμα.

Ἦρχετο ἡ Μεγάλῃ Πέμπτῃ καὶ αὐτὴ ἀναφετὴ τὴ φωτιάν της, ἔσθηνε τὴν χύτραν της, κι ἔβαφε κατακόκκινα τὰ πασχαλινὰ αὐγά. Ὑστερον ἡτοίμαζε τὴν λεκάνην της, ἐγονάτιζεν, ἐσταύρωνε τρεῖς φορὲς τ' ἀλεῦρι κι ἐζύμωνε καθαρὰ καὶ τεχνικὰ τὶς κουλοῦρες, κι ἐνέπηγε σταυροειδῶς ἐπάνω τὰ κόκκινα αὐγά. Καὶ τὸ βράδυ, ὅταν ἐνύχτωνε, δὲν ἐτόλμα νὰ πάγῃ ν' ἀνακατωθῇ μὲ τὰς ἄλλας γυναῖκας, διὰ νὰ ἀκούσῃ τὰ Δώδεκα Εὐαγγέλια. Ἦθελε νὰ ἦτον τρόπος νὰ κρυβῇ ὀπίσω ἀπὸ τὰ νῶτα καμιᾶς ὑψηλῆς καὶ χονδρῆς ἢ εἰς τὴν ἄκραν οὐρὰν ὅλου τοῦ στίφους τῶν γυναικῶν, κολλητὰ μὲ τὸν τοῖχον, ἀλλ' ἐφοβεῖτο, μήπως γυρίσουν καὶ τὴν κοιτάξουν...

Τὴν Μεγάλην Παρασκευὴν, ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν, ἐρρέμβαζε κι ἔκλαιε μέσα της, κι ἐμοιρολογούσε τὰ νιάτα της, καὶ τὰ φίλτατά της, ὅσα εἶχε χάσει, καὶ ὠνειρεύετο ζυπνητὴ, κι ἐμελετοῦσε νὰ πάγῃ κι αὐτὴ τὸ βράδυ, πρὶν ἀρχίσῃ ἡ Ἀκολουθία, ν' ἀσπασθῇ κλεφτὰ κλεφτὰ τὸν Ἐπιτάφιον, καὶ νὰ φύγῃ, καθὼς ἡ Αἰμόρρους ἐκείνη, ἡ κλέψασα τὴν ἱασίν της ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστόν. Ἀλλὰ τὴν τελευταίαν στιγμὴν, ὅταν ἤρχιζε νὰ σκοτεινιάζῃ, τῆς ἔλλειπε τὸ θάρρος καὶ δὲν ἀπεφάσιζε νὰ ὑπάγῃ. Τῆς ἤρχετο παλμός.

Ἀργὰ τὴν νύκτα, ὅταν ἡ ἱερὰ πομπή, μετὰ σταυρῶν καὶ λαβάρων καὶ κηρίων, ἐξήρχετο τοῦ ναοῦ, ἐν μέσῳ ψαλμῶν καὶ μολπῶν καὶ φθόγων, ἐναλλάξ τῆς μουσικῆς τῶν ὀρφανῶν Χατζηκώστα, καὶ θόρυβος καὶ πλῆθος καὶ κόσμος εἰς τὸ σκιάφως πολὺς, τότε ὁ Γιαμπῆς, ὁ ἐπίτροπος, προέτρεχεν νὰ φθάσῃ εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν του, διὰ νὰ φορέσῃ τὸν μεταξωτὸν κεντητὸν του σκοῦφον, καὶ κρατῶν τὸ ἡλεκτρινὸν κομβολόγιόν του νὰ ἐξέλθῃ εἰς τὸν ἐξώστην μὲ τὴν ματαιουμένην ἀπὸ ἔτους εἰς ἔτους ἐλπίδα, ὅτι οἱ ἱερεῖς θὰ ἀπεφάσιζον νὰ κάμουν στάσιν καὶ ν' ἀναπέμψουν δέησιν ὑπὸ τὸν ἐξώστην του· τότε καὶ ἡ πτωχὴ αὐτὴ, Χριστίνη ἡ Δασκάλα (ὅπως τὴν ἔλεγον ἕναν καιρὸν εἰς τὴν γειτονιάν), εἰς τὸ μικρὸν παράθυρον τῆς οἰκίας της, μισοκρυμμένη ὀπισθεν τοῦ παραθυροφύλλου,

ἐκράτει τὴν λαμπαδίτσαν της, μὲ τὸ φῶς ἴσα μὲ τὴν παλάμην της, κι ἔρριπτεν ἄφθονον μοσχολίβανον εἰς τὸ πῆλινον θυμιατόν, προσφέρονσα μακρόθεν τὸ μύρον εἰς Ἐκεῖνον, ὅστις ἐδέχθη ποτὲ τὰ ἀρώματα καὶ τὰ δάκρυα τῆς ἁμαρτωλοῦ, καὶ μὴ τολμῶσα ἐγγύτερον νὰ προσέλθῃ καὶ ἀσπασθῇ τοὺς ἀχράντους καὶ ἡλοτρήτους καὶ αἰμοσταγεῖς πόδας Του.

Καὶ τὴν Κυριακὴν τὸ πρωῒ, βαθιὰ τὰ μεσάνυκτα, ἴστατο ἄλιν μισοκρυμμένη εἰς τὸ παράθυρον, κρατοῦσα τὴν ἀνωφελὴ καὶ ἀλειτούργητην λαμπάδα της, καὶ ἤκουε τὰς φωνὰς τῆς χαρᾶς καὶ τοὺς κρότους κι ἔβλεπε κι ἐξήλενε μακρόθεν ἐκείνας, ὅπου ἐπέστρεφαν τρέχουσαι, φροῦ φρού, ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, φέρουσαι τὰς λαμπάδας τῶν λειτουργημένων, ἀναμμένas, ἕως τὸ σπίτι, εὐτυχεῖς, καὶ μέλλουσαι νὰ διατηρήσωσι δι' ὅλον τὸν χρόνον τὸ ἅγιον φῶς τῆς Ἀναστάσεως. Καὶ αὐτὴ ἔκλαιε κι ἐμοιρολογούσε τὴ φθареῖσαν νεότητά της.

Μόνον τὸ ἀπόγευμα τῆς Λαμπρῆς, ὅταν ἐσήμαινον οἱ κώδωνες τῶν ναῶν διὰ τὴν Ἀγάπην, τὴ Δευτέραν Ἀνάστασιν καλούμενην, μόνον τότε ἐτόλμα νὰ ἐξέλθῃ ἀπὸ τὴν οἰκίαν, ἀθορύβως καὶ ἐλαφρὰ πατοῦσα, τρέχουσα τὸν τοῖχον - τοῖχον, κολλῶσα ἀπὸ τοῖχον εἰς τοῖχον, μὲ σχῆμα καὶ μὲ τρόπον τοιοῦτον ὥς νὰ ἐμελλε νὰ εἰσέλθῃ διὰ τι θέλημα εἰς τὴν αὐλὴν καμμιᾶς γειτονίσσης. Καὶ ἀπὸ τοῖχον εἰς τοῖχον ἐφθάνεν εἰς τὴ βόρειον πλευρὰν τοῦ ναοῦ, καὶ διὰ τῆς μικρᾶς πλαγινῆς θύρας, κρυφὰ καὶ κλεφτὰ ἔμβαινε μέσα.

Εἰς τὰς Ἀθήνας, ὡς γνωστόν, ἡ πρώτη Ἀνάστασης εἶναι γιὰ τὰς κυράδες, ἡ δευτέρα γιὰ τὰς δοῦλες. Ἡ Χριστίνη ἡ Δασκάλα ἐφοβεῖτο τὰς νύκτας νὰ ὑπάγῃ εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, μήπως τὴν κοιτάξουν, καὶ δὲν ἐφοβεῖτο τὴν ἡμέραν νὰ μὴ τὴν ἰδοῦν. Διότι οἱ κυράδες τὴν ἐκοίταζαν, οἱ δοῦλες τὴν ἔβλεπαν ἀπλῶς. Εἰς τοῦτο δὲ ἀνεύρισκε μεγάλην διαφορὰν. Δὲν ἤθελε ἢ δὲν ἤμποροῦσε νὰ ἔρχεται εἰς ἐπαφὴν μὲ τὰς κυρίας, καὶ ὑπεβιάζετο εἰς τὴν τάξιν τῶν ὑπηρετριῶν. Αὕτη ἦτο ἡ τύχη της.

Ὁραῖον καὶ πολὺ ζωντανόν, καὶ γραφικόν καὶ παρδαλόν, ἦτο τὸ θέαμα. Οἱ πολυέλαιοι ὀλόφωτοι ἀναμμένοι, αἱ ἅγαι εἰκόνες στίλβουσαι, οἱ ψάλται ἀναμέλποντες τὰ Πασχάλια, οἱ παπάδες ἱστάμενοι μὲ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον καὶ τὴν Ἀνάστασιν ἐπὶ τῶν στέρνων, τελοῦντες τὸν Ἀσπασμόν.

Οἱ δοῦλες μὲ τὰς κορδέλας τῶν καὶ μὲ τὰς λευκὰς ποδιάς τῶν, ἐμοίραζαν βλέμματα δεξιὰ κι ἀριστερά, καὶ ἐφλυάρουν πρὸς ἀλλήλας χωρὶς νὰ προσέχουν εἰς τὴν ἱερὰν ἀκολουθίαν. Οἱ παραμάννες ὠδήγουν ἀπὸ τὴν χεῖρα τριετῇ καὶ πενταετῇ παιδία καὶ κοράσια, τὰ ὅποια ἐκράτουν τὰς χρωματιστὰς λαμπάδας τῶν, κι ἔκαιον τὰ χρυσόχαρτα, μὲ τὰ ὅποια ἦσαν στολισμένοι, κι ἔπαιζαν κι ἐμάλωναν μεταξύ τῶν, κι ἐζητοῦσαν νὰ καύσουν ὀπισθεν τὰ μαλλιά τοῦ πρὸ αὐτῶν ἱσταμένου παιδιοῦ. Οἱ λοῦστροι ἔρριπτον πυροκρόταλα εἰς πολλὰ ἄγνωστα μέρη, ἐντὸς τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ κατετρόμαζον τὶς δοῦλες. Ὁ μοναδικὸς

ἀστυφύλαξ τοὺς ἐκυνηγοῦσεν, ἀλλ' αὐτοὶ ἔφευγον ἀπὸ τὴν μίαν πλαγινὴν θύραν κι εὐθὺς ἐπανήρχοντο διὰ τῆς ἄλλης. Οἱ ἐπίτροποι ἐγύριζον τοὺς δίσκους, κι ἔρραινον μὲ ἀνθόνερον τὲς παραμάννες.

Δυὸ ἢ τρεῖς νεαρὰι μητέρες τῆς κατωτέρας τάξεως τοῦ λαοῦ, ἐπτά ἢ ὀκτὼ παραμάννες ἐκρατοῦσαν πεντάμηνα καὶ ἐπτάμηνα βρέφη εἰς τὰ ἀγκάλας. Τὰ μικρὰ ἤνοιγον τεθηπότα τοὺς γλυκεῖς ὀφθαλμούς των, βλέποντα ἀπλήστως τὸ φῶς τῶν λαμπάδων, τῶν πολυελαίων καὶ μανουαλίων, τοὺς κύκλους καὶ τὰ νέφη τοῦ ἀνερχομένου καπνοῦ τοῦ θυμιάματος, καὶ τὸ κόκκινον καὶ πράσινον φῶς, τὸ διὰ τῶν ὑάλων τοῦ ναοῦ εἰσερχόμενον, τὸ ἀνεμίζον ράσον τοῦ ἐκκλησιάρχου καλογήρου, τρέχοντος, μέσα - ἔξω εἰς διάφορα θελήματα, τὰ γένεια τῶν παπάδων, σειόμενα εἰς πᾶσαν κλίσιν τῆς κεφαλῆς, εἰς πᾶσαν κίνησιν τῶν χειλέων, διὰ νὰ ἐπαναλάβουν εἰς ὅλους τὸ Χριστὸς ἀνέστη. Βλέποντα καὶ θαυμάζοντα ὅλα ὅσα ἔβλεπον, τὰ στίλβοντα κομβία καὶ τὰ στριμμένα μουστάκια τοῦ ἀστυφύλακος, τοὺς λευκοὺς κεφαλοδέσμους τῶν γυναικῶν, καὶ τοὺς στοίχους τῶν ἄλλων παιδιῶν, ὅσα ἦσαν ἀραδιασμένα ἐγγὺς καὶ πόρρῳ, παίζοντα μὲ τοὺς βοστρύχους τῆς κόμης τῶν βασταζουσῶν, καὶ ψελλίζοντα ἀνάρθρους ἀγγελικοὺς φθόγγους.

Δυὸ ὀκτάμηνα βρέφη εἰς τὰς ἀγκάλας δυὸ νεαρῶν μητέρων, αἵτινες ἴσταντο ὦμον μὲ ὦμον πλησίον μιᾶς κολώνας, μόλις εἶδαν τὸ ἐν τὸ ἄλλο, καὶ πάραυτα ἐγνωρίσθησαν καὶ συνῆψαν σχέσεις, καὶ τὸ ἐν, ὠραῖον καὶ καλὸν καὶ εὐθυμον, ἔτεινε τὴ μικρὰν ἀπαλὴν χεῖρα του πρὸς τὸ ἄλλο, καὶ τὸ εἶλκε πρὸς ἑαυτὸ, καὶ ἐψέλλιζεν ἀκαταλήπτους οὐρανίους φθόγγους.

Ἀλλ' ἡ φωνὴ τοῦ βρέφους ἦτο λιγεία, καὶ ἠκούσθη εὐκρινῶς ἐκεῖ γύρω, καὶ ὁ Γιαμπής, ὁ ἐπίτροπος, δὲν ἠγάπα ν' ἀκοῦη θορύβους. Εἰς ὅλας τὰς νυκτερινὰς ἀκολουθίας τῶν Παθῶν, πολλάκις εἶχε περιέλθει τὰς πυκνὰς τῶν γυναικῶν τάξεις, διὰ νὰ ἐπιπλήτῃ πτωχὴν τίνα μητέρα τοῦ λαοῦ, διότι εἶχε κλαυθυρίσει τὸ τεκνίον της. Ὁ ἴδιος ἔτρεξε καὶ τώρα, νὰ ἐπιτιμήσῃ καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν πτωχὴν μητέρα, διὰ τοὺς ἀκάκους ψελλισμούς τοῦ βρέφους της.

Τότε ἡ Χρηστὶνὰ ἢ Δασκάλα ἦτις ἴστατο ὀλίγον παρέκει, ὀπίσω ἀπὸ τὸν τελευταῖον κίονα, κολλητὰ μὲ τὸν τοῖχον, σύρριζα εἰς τὴν γωνίαν, ἐσκέφθη ἀκουσίως της—καὶ τὸ ἐσκέψθη ὅχι ὡς δασκάλα, ἀλλ' ὡς ἀμαθὴς καὶ ἀνόητος γυνὴ ὅπου ἦτον—ὅτι, καθὼς, αὐτὴ ἐνόμιζε, κανεῖς, ἅς εἶναι καὶ ἐπίτροπος ναοῦ, δὲν ἔχει δικαίωμα νὰ ἐπιπλήξῃ πτωχὴν νεαρὰν μητέρα, διὰ τοὺς κλαυθυρισμούς τοῦ βρέφους της, καθὼς δὲν ἔχει δικαίωμα νὰ τὴν ἀποκλείσῃ τοῦ ναοῦ, διότι ἔχει βρέφος θηλάζον. Καθημερινῶς δὲν μεταδίδουν τὴ θεῖαν κοινωνίαν εἰς νήπια κλαίοντα; Καὶ

πρέπει νὰ τὰ ἀποκλείσουν τῆς θείας μεταλήψεως, διότι κλαίου; Ἔως πότε ὅλη ἡ αὐστηρότης τῶν «ἀρμοδίων» θὰ διεκδικηθῇ καὶ θὰ ξεθυμαίνῃ μόνον εἰς βάρος τῶν πτωχῶν καὶ τῶν ταπεινῶν;

Ἐκ τοῦ μικροῦ τούτου περιστατικοῦ ἔλαβεν ἀφορμὴν ἡ Χρηστὶνὰ νὰ ἐνθυμηθῇ, ὅτι πρὸ χρόνων, μίαν νύκτα, κατὰ τὴν ὕψωσιν τοῦ Σταυροῦ, ὅταν ἐπῆγε νὰ ἐκκλησιασθῇ εἰς τὸν ναῖσκον τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἐλισσαίου, παρὰ τὴν Πύλην τῆς Ἀγορᾶς, ἐνῶ ὁ ἀναγνώστης ἔλεγε τὸν Ἀπόστολον, ὅταν ἀπήγγειλε τὰς λέξεις «τὰ μωρὰ του κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ Θεός», αἰφνης, κατὰ θαυμασίαν σύμπτωσιν, ἀπὸ τὸν γυναικωνίτην ἐν βρέφος ἤρχιζε νὰ ψελλίζῃ μεγαλοφῶνως, ἀμιλλώμενον πρὸς τὴν φωνὴν τοῦ ἀναγνώστου. Καὶ ὅποιαν γλυκύτητα εἶχε τὸ παιδικὸν ἐκεῖνο κελάδημα! Τόσον ὠραῖον πρέπει νὰ ἦτο τὸ Ὡσαννά, τὸ ὅποιον ἔψαλλον τὸ πάλαι οἱ παῖδες τῶν Ἑβραίων πρὸς τὸν ἐρχόμενον Λυτρωτὴν. *Ἐκ στόματος νηπίων καὶ θηλαζόντων καταρτίσω αἶνον, ἔνεκα τῶν ἐχθρῶν σου, τοῦ καταλύσαι ἐχθρὸν καὶ ἐκδικητὴν.*



Τοιαῦτα ἀνελογίζετο ἡ Χρηστὶνὰ, σκεπτόμενη, ὅτι καμμία μήτηρ δὲ θὰ ἦτο τόσον ἀφιλότιμος, ὥστε νὰ μὴ στενοχωρῆται, καὶ νὰ μὴ σπεύδῃ νὰ κατασιγάσῃ τὸ βρέφος της, καὶ νὰ μὴ παρακαλῇ ν' ἀνοιχθῇ πλησίον της εἰς τὸν τοῖχον διὰ θαύματος θύρα, διὰ νὰ ἐξέλθῃ τὸ ταχύτερον. Περιτταὶ δὲ ἦσαν αἱ νοουθεσίαι τοῦ ἐπιτρόπου, πρόσθετον προκαλοῦσαι θόρυβον, καὶ ἀφοῦ πρὸς βρέφος θηλάζον ὅλα τὰ συνήθη μέσα τῆς πειθοῦς εἶναι ἀνίσχυρα, μόνη δὲ ἡ μήτηρ εἶναι κάτοχος ἄλλων μέσων πειθοῦς, τὴ χρῆσιν τῶν ὁποίων περιττὸν νὰ ἔλθῃ τρίτος τις διὰ νὰ τῆς τὴν ὑπενθυμίση. Κι ἔπειτα λέγουν ὅτι οἱ ἄνδρες ἔχουν περισσότερον μυαλὸ ἀπὸ τὰς γυναῖκας!

Οὕτω ἐφρόνει ἡ Χρηστὶνὰ. Ἀλλὰ τί νὰ εἴπῃ; Αὐτῆς δὲν τῆς ἔφευγε λόγος. Αὐτὴ ἦτον ἡ Χρηστὶνὰ ἢ Δασκάλα, ὅπως τὴν ἔλεγαν ἕναν καιρὸν. Παιδιά δὲν εἶχε, διὰ νὰ φοβῆται τὰς ἐπιπλήξεις τοῦ ἐπιτρόπου. Τὰ παιδιά της τὰ εἶχε θάψει, χωρὶς νὰ τὰ ἔχῃ γεννήσει. Καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ τὸν ὅποιον εἶχε, δὲν ἦτο σύζυγός της.

Ἦσαν ἀνδρόγυνον χωρὶς στεφάνι...

Χωρὶς στεφάνι! Ὅποσα τοιαῦτα παραδείγματα!

Ἀλλὰ δὲν πρόκειται νὰ κοινωνιολογήσωμεν σήμερον. Ἐλλείπει ὅμως ἄλλης προνοίας, χριστιανικῆς καὶ ἠθικῆς, διὰ νὰ εἶναι τουλάχιστον συνεπεῖς πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς καὶ λογικοί, νὰ ψηφίσωσι τὸν πολιτικὸν γάμον.

Ἀπὸ τὸν καιρὸν ὅπου εἶχεν ἀνάγκην ἀπὸ τὰς συστάσεις τῶν κομματάρχων διὰ νὰ διορίζεται δασκάλα, εἰς τῶν κομματάρχων τούτων, ὁ Παναγῆς ὁ Ντεληκανάτας, ὁ ταβερνιάρης, τὴν εἶχεν ἐκμεταλλευσθῇ. Ἄμα ἡλλαξε τὸ ὑπουργεῖον, καὶ δὲν ἴσχυε πλέον νὰ τὴ διορίσῃ, τῆς εἶπεν:

- Έλα νὰ ζήσουμε μαζί, καὶ ἀργότερα θὰ σὲ στεφανωθῶ.
 - Πότε;
 - Μετ' ὀλίγους μῆνας, μετὰ ἓν ἐξάμηνον, μετὰ ἓνα χρόνον.

Ἐκτοτε παρήλθον χρόνοι καὶ χρόνοι, καὶ ἐκεῖνος ἀκόμα εἶχε μαῦρα τὰ μαλλιά καὶ αὐτὴ εἶχεν ἀσπρίσει. Καὶ δὲν τὴν ἐστεφανώθη ποτέ.

Αὐτὴ δὲν ἐγέννησε τέκνον. Ἐκεῖνος εἶχε καὶ ἄλλας ἐρωμένας. Καὶ ἐγέννα τέκνα μὲ αὐτάς.

Ἡ ταλαίπωρος αὐτὴ, μανθάνουσα, ἐπιπλήττουσα, διαμαρτυρομένη, ὑπομένουσα, ἐγκαρτεροῦσα ἔπαιρνε τὰ νόθα τοῦ ἀστεφανώτου ἀνδρός της εἰς τὸ σπίτι, τὰ ἐθέρμενεν εἰς τὴν ἀγκαλιάν της, ἀνέπτυσσε μητρικὴν στοργήν, τὰ ἐπονοῦσε. Καὶ τὰ ἀνέσταινε, καὶ ἐπάσχιζε νὰ τὰ μεγαλώσῃ. Καὶ ὅταν ἐγίνοντο δυὸ ἢ τριῶν ἐτῶν, καὶ τὰ εἶχε πονέσει πλέον ὥς τέκνα της, τότε ἤρχετο ὁ Χάρος, συνοδευόμενος ἀπὸ τὴν ὀστρακιάν, τὴν εὐλογιάν καὶ ἄλλας δυσμόρφους συντρόφους, καὶ τῆς τὰ ἔπαιρνε ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγκαλιά της.

Τρία ἢ τέσσερα παιδιὰ τῆς εἶχαν ἀποθάνει οὕτω ἐντὸς ἐπτὰ ἢ ὀκτὼ ἐτῶν. Καὶ αὐτὴ ἐπικραίνετο. Ἐγήρασκε καὶ ἄσπριζε. Καὶ ἔκλαιε τὰ νόθα τοῦ ἀνδρός της, ὥς νὰ ἦσαν γνήσια ἰδικά της. Καὶ ἐκεῖνα τὰ πτωχά, τὰ μακάρια, περιίπταντο εἰς τ' ἄνθη τοῦ παραδείσου ἐν συντροφίᾳ μὲ τ' ἀγγελουδιὰ τὰ ἐγχώρια ἐκεῖ. Ἐκεῖνος οὐδὲ λόγον τῆς ἔκαμνε πλέον περὶ στεφανώματος. Καὶ αὐτὴ δὲν ἔλεγε πλέον τίποτε. Ὑπέφερεν ἐν σιωπῇ.

Καὶ ἔπλυνε καὶ ἐσυγύριζεν ὅλον τὸν χρόνον. Τὴ Μεγάλην Πέμπτην ἔβαπτε τ' αὐγὰ τὰ κόκκινα. Καὶ τὰς καλὰς ἡμέρας δὲν εἶχε τόλμης πρόσωπον νὰ ὑπάγῃ καὶ αὐτὴ εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν.

Μόνον τὸ ἀπόγευμα τοῦ Πάσχα, εἰς τὴν ἀκολουθίαν τῆς Ἀγάπης, κρυφὰ καὶ δειλὰ εἰσῆρπεν εἰς τὸν ναόν, διὰ ν' ἀκούσῃ τὸ «Ἀναστάσεως ἡμέρα» μαζί μὲ τὰς δοῦλες καὶ τὰς παραμάννες.

Ἄλλ' Ἐκεῖνος, ὅστις ἀνέστη *ἐνεκα ταλαιπωρίας τῶν πτωχῶν καὶ τοῦ στεναγμοῦ τῶν πενήτων*, ὅστις ἐδέχθη τῆς ἁμαρτωλῆς τὰ μύρα καὶ τὰ δάκρυα, καὶ τοῦ ληστοῦ τὸ *Μνήσθητί μου*, θὰ δεχθῇ καὶ αὐτῆς τῆς πτωχῆς τὴν μετάνοιαν, καὶ θὰ τῆς δώσῃ ὡρον καὶ τόπον ἡλιόφρον, καὶ ἄνεσιν καὶ ἀναψυχὴν εἰς τὴ βασιλείαν Του τὴν αἰώνιαν...

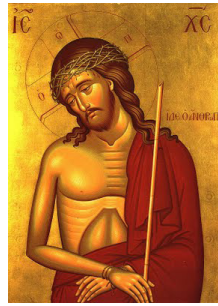


Ἄν ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲν ἔχει ριζωμένη στὴν καρδιά του τὴν πεποίθησιν πὺς εἶναι ἁμαρτωλός, ὁ Θεὸς δὲν εἰσακούει τὴν προσευχή του. Γιατὶ ὁποῖος συλλογίζεται τὸ βάρος τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν του δὲν βλέπει τίς ἁμαρτίες τοῦ πλησίον.

Ἀββὰς Μωυσῆς

Ὁ Νυμφίος Χριστὸς

Ἐκ τοῦ Διαδικτυακοῦ τόπου τῆς Ἱ. Μητροπόλεως Δημητριάδος.



Ὁ ἔρωτας εἶναι τὸ σῆμα κατατεθὲν τῆς ἐποχῆς μας. Ὅπου καὶ ἂν σταθεῖ κανεὶς, ὅπου καὶ ἂν βρεθεῖ, γι' αὐτὸν θ' ἀκούσει νὰ μιλᾷνε. Ὁ ἈΛΛΟΣ εἶναι ἐκεῖνο τὸ ἰδιαίτερο στοιχεῖο ποὺ λείπει, τὸ συμπλήρωμα, τὸ μισό. Γι' αὐτὸ ὅλοι σχεδὸν οἱ ἄνθρωποι βρίσκονται σὲ μία διαρκὴ ἀναζήτησιν τοῦ ἄλλου, προσπαθοῦν νὰ καλύψουν

τὸ κενὸ ποὺ αἰσθάνονται μέσα ἀπὸ τὴν κοινωνία μὲ τὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ ἄλλου.

Αὐτὴ τὴν ἀγάπην καὶ τὴν ἀναζήτησιν τοῦ ἄλλου προβάλλει ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας αὐτὲς τίς μέρες, πέρα ἀπὸ ὅ,τιδήποτε. Ὁ Νυμφίος Χριστὸς εἶναι ἐκεῖνος ὁ ἀλλιώτικος Ἄλλος, ὁ ὁποῖος πλησιάζει ἐν τῷ μέσῳ τῆς νυκτός, στέκεται ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν πόρτα τῆς καρδιάς μας, κτυπᾷ καὶ περιμένει νὰ τοῦ ἀνοίξουμε. Περιμένει νὰ τὸν ἀφήσουμε νὰ μπεῖ στὴν καρδιά μας, νὰ τὴν πληρώσῃ καὶ νὰ μᾶς δώσῃ ἐκείνη τὴ γνησιότητα καρδιάς, αἰσθημάτων καὶ αἰωνιότητος, νὰ μᾶς δώσῃ τὸ ἔπαθλο τοῦ ἔρωτά του, ποὺ δὲν εἶναι ἄλλο ἀπὸ τὴ σωτηρία!

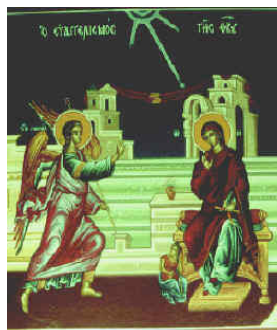
Μακάριος ὁποῖος τοῦ ἀνοίξει. Γιατὶ θὰ μάθει ὅτι κοινωνεῖ τὴ ζωὴ. Καὶ ἡ ζωὴ δὲν κοινωνεῖται μὲ τὰ πάθη, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὸ πάθος, δηλαδὴ μὲ τὴ θυσία γιὰ τὸν ἄλλο. Καὶ εἶναι ἐκεῖνος ὁ πρῶτος Ἄλλος, ὁ ὁποῖος ὑπέστη τὸ πάθος γιὰ τὴν ξεχωριστὴ ὑπαρξὴν τοῦ καθενὸς ἀπὸ μᾶς. Καὶ μᾶς δείχνει τὸ δρόμο. Ὅτι δὲν μπορεῖς νὰ κοινωνήσῃς γνήσια μὲ τὸν ἄλλο, δὲν μπορεῖ ὁ ἄλλος νὰ γίνῃ τὸ συμπλήρωμά σου, οὔτε ἐσὺ τὸ δικό του, ἂν δὲν ὑποστῇς τὸ πάθος.

Κοινωνία δὲν ἐπιτυγχάνεται μέσα στὴν ἁμαρτία, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴ θυσία τοῦ ἐγωισμοῦ καὶ τῆς κακίας. Κοινωνία δὲν ἐπιτυγχάνεται μὲ τὸ συμφέρον, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴν ἀγάπην ποὺ ὑπερβαίνει τὸ συμφέρον. Κοινωνία δὲν ἐπιτυγχάνεται μὲ τὴν γαστριμαργία τοῦ καταναλωτισμοῦ, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴν ἐγκράτεια καὶ τὴ νηστεία. Κοινωνία δὲν ἐπιτυγχάνεται μὲ τὴ δουλεία στοὺς διαμορφωτὲς τοῦ νοῦ, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴν ἐλευθερία νοῦ καὶ ψυχῆς. Κοινωνία δὲν ἐπιτυγχάνεται μὲ λεκιασμένη συνείδηση, ἀλλὰ μὲ μετανοημένη πορεία.

Αὐτὸς ὁ Ἄλλος ἔρχεται ξανὰ καὶ ξανὰ στὴ ζωὴ μας. Δὲν εἶναι μόνο τὸ Πάσχα. Ξέρει ὅτι ἡ καρδιά μας δὲν ἔχει καὶ πολλὰ περιθώρια ἀνοίγματος· ἀλλὰ ἐπιμένει μὲ τὴ φλόγα τοῦ ἐρωτευμένου, ὁ ὁποῖος ὑπερνικᾷ κάθε ἐμπόδιο προκειμένου νὰ φτάσῃ στὸ πρόσωπο ποὺ ἀγαπᾷ. Καὶ ἀφιερώνει «ὅττω ἔραται» τὸ πάθος Του καὶ περιμένει τὴ δική μας δῖνα γιὰ γνήσια κοινωνία. Καὶ ὅπως ὁ ἐρωτευμένος ξεκινᾷ ἔστω ἀπὸ μία ἀπλὴ ματιὰ ἢ ἓνα χαμόγελο τοῦ προσώπου ποὺ ἀγαπᾷ, ἔτσι καὶ ὁ Νυμφίος θέλει ἓνα μικρὸ τόπο στὴν καρδιά μας. Γιὰ νὰ τὴν κάνει νὰ πλημμυρίσῃ ἀπὸ μία γεύση διαφορετικῆς. Τὴ γεύση τῆς Βασιλείας Του.

Ἡ Εἰκόνα τοῦ Εὐαγγελισμοῦ

Ἀπὸ ἑνα Ἑλληνορθόδοξο φυλλάδιο τῆς Τερᾶς Μητροπόλεως Καισαριανῆς, Βύρωνος καὶ Ὑμηττοῦ.



Ἡ εἰκόνα εἶναι ἀγιογραφημένη τὸ 1547, ἀπὸ ἄγνωστο καλλιτέχνη καὶ εἶναι βασισμένη στὸ εὐαγγελικὸ κείμενο τοῦ Εὐαγγελιστῆ Λουκᾶ (1:26-38), τὸ ὁποῖο ἀναφέρεται στὸ γεγονός τοῦ Εὐαγγελισμοῦ τῆς Θεοτόκου.

Ἡ σκηνὴ περιλαμβάνει δύο βασικὰ πρόσωπα, τοῦ Ἀρχαγγέλου Γαβριὴλ καὶ τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου. Ὁ Ἀρχάγγελος Γαβριὴλ εἶναι ὁ μαντατοφόρος τοῦ μεγάλου μηνύματος τῆς Σαρκώσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ-Λόγου. Εἶναι αὐτός πού ἔμαθε πρῶτος τὸ χαρμόσυνο νέο καὶ χαρούμενος τὸ μεταφέρει σ' Ἐκείνη πού ἐπρόκειτο νὰ γίνη ἡ «Θεομήτωρ».

Ἡ στάση τοῦ Ἀρχαγγέλου δείχνει ζωγραφικὰ μὲ ἄριστο τρόπο, τόσο τὸ χρόνο πού λαμβάνει χώρα τὸ γεγονός, ὅσο καὶ τὴν δική του οὐράνια προέλευση. Ὁ Ἀρχάγγελος ἔχει μόλις φθάσει στὸ χῶρο—αὐτὴ ἀκριβῶς τὴ στιγμή πατάει τὸ ἓνα πόδι του—ἐνῶ τὸ ἐνδυμὰ του ἀκόμη ἀπὸ τὴν κίνηση ἀνεμίζει. στὸ ἀριστερό του χέρι κρατᾷ σκῆπτρο, σημάδι τῆς διακονίας του ὡς ἀγγελιοφόρου καὶ ἀκόμα ὡς ἐνδειξὴ τῆς ἐξουσίας πού ἔχει περιβληθεῖ σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἀποστολή του. Τὸ δεξιὸ του χέρι ἐκτείνεται πρὸς τὴν κατεύθυνση τῆς Θεοτόκου, σὲ χειρονομία πού καταδείχνει ὅτι πρὸς Ἐκείνη ἀπευθύνεται καὶ ὅτι αὐτὸ πού τῆς λέει εἶναι ἓνα ἰδιαίτερο καὶ μοναδικὸ μήνυμα, πού ἀφορᾷ ἀποκλειστικὰ τὸ πρόσωπό Της.

Ἡ Θεοτόκος Μαρία εἶναι ἡ ἀγνὴ κόρη ἡ κεχαριτωμένη, πού σ' ἄλλες εἰκόνες τὴ βλέπουμε νὰ στέκεται ὀρθία καὶ σ' ἄλλες καθισμένη σὲ θρόνι «σεμνοπρεπῶς». Ὅταν ἡ Θεοτόκος εἰκονίζεται καθισμένη σὲ θρόνι, ὁ ἀγιογράφος θέλει νὰ τονίσει τὴν ὑπεροχὴ Της ἀπέναντι στὸν Ἀρχάγγελο, ἀφοῦ εἶναι Ἐκείνη πού θ' ἀναδειχθεῖ *Τιμιωτέρα τῶν Χαρουβίμ καὶ ἐνδοξότερα ἀσυγκρίτως τῶν Σεραφίμ*.

Σ' ἄλλες εἰκόνες ὁ ἀγιογράφος τὴν ἀπεικονίζει ὀρθία θέλοντας ἔτσι νὰ τονίσει τὴν ἐτοιμότητά Της ν' ἀκούσει τὸ οὐράνιο μήνυμα καὶ νὰ ὑποταχθεῖ σ' αὐτό.

Στὸ ἀριστερό Της χέρι κρατᾷ χαλαρά, ἔτοιμο σχεδὸν νὰ πέσει, ἓνα ἀδράχτι, δηλώνοντας ἔτσι τὸ ξαφνικὸ καὶ ἀπροσδόκητο τῆς Ἀρχαγγελικῆς ἐπισκέψεως. τὸ δεξιὸ Της χέρι προτείνεται συκρατημένα πρὸς τὸν Ἀρχάγγελο, γιὰ νὰ τοῦ θέσει τὴν ἐρώτηση: «Πῶς θὰ γίνη αὐτό;». Ἡ ἀπάντηση τοῦ Ἀρχαγγέλου (*Πνεῦμα Ἅγιο θὰ ἔρθει ἐπάνω Σου καὶ δύναμη τοῦ Ὑψίστου Θεοῦ θὰ Σέ ἐπισκιάσει*) δηλώνεται μὲ τὶς φωτεινὲς ἀκτίνες πού ξεπροβάλλουν ἀπὸ τὸ οὐράνιο στερέωμα, μὲ κατεύθυνση τὴν ἁγία κεφαλὴ Της.

Ὁ ἐσωτερικὸς χιτῶνας τῆς Θεοτόκου εἶναι πράσινος, σύμβολο τοῦ γήινου καὶ τοῦ χοϊκοῦ τῆς φύσης Της, ἐνῶ τὸ Μαφόριό Της εἶναι σκοῦρο πορφυρὸ χρῶμα πού συμβολίζει τὸ βασιλικὸ καὶ τὸ οὐράνιο. Μ' αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο ἀπεικονίζεται χρωματικὰ, ἀπὸ τὸ ἓνα μέρος ἡ ἀνθρώπινη φύση τῆς Παρθένου, καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη τὸ Πρόσωπο Ἐκείνης, ἡ ὁποία ἐπισκιάστηκε ἀπὸ τὴ Θεία Χάρη, καὶ δὲν εἶναι τώρα πλέον ἡ Μαριάμ ἀλλὰ ἡ «Κεχαριτωμένη Κόρη», ἡ «Βασίλισσα τῶν Οὐρανῶν».

Τὰ κτίρια εἰκονίζονται πίσω ἀπὸ τὴ σκηνὴ τοῦ Εὐαγγελισμοῦ. Ἡ κατακόρυφη τομὴ τους ἀνοίγει ὁπτικὸ πεδίο στὸ θεατὴ, ὥστε νὰ παρακολουθήσει λεπτομερῶς ὅσα συμβαίνουν στὰ ἔνδον τοῦ Παρθενικοῦ καταπετάσματος. Αὐτὸ τὸ καταπέτασμα ἦταν χῶρος κλειστός, ἀφοῦ Ἐκείνη ἦταν «ἡ κεκλεισμένη πύλη», πού ἀνοίξε μὲ τὸ «γένεϊτο» γιὰ νὰ φέρει στὸ ἀνθρώπινο γένος τὸ Σαρκωμένο Θεό-Λόγο, νὰ ξαναφέρει στὴ γῆ τὸν χαμένο Παράδεισο.

Πίσω ἀπὸ τὰ κτίρια, ὅπως συνηθίζεται καὶ σ' ἄλλες εἰκόνες ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ τῆς Παναγίας, ξεπροβάλλει ἓνα δέντρο. Μ' αὐτὸ ὁ ἀγιογράφος θέλει νὰ πεῖ πῶς ἡ Παρθένος—σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν προφητεία τοῦ Ἡσαΐα—εἶναι *Ἡ ῥάβδος πού βλάστησε ἀπὸ τὴ ρίζα τοῦ Ἰεσσαὶ*» (Ἠσ.11:19).

Ἐπάνω στὴ σκεπὴ τοῦ ἀριστεροῦ κτιρίου κρέμεται ἓνα κόκκινο πανί. Αὐτὸ στὴν εἰκόνα ἐδῶ καλύπτει μονάχα τὸ ἓνα κτίριο. Μ' αὐτὸ ὁ ἀγιογράφος θέλει νὰ καταδείξει, πῶς ὡς αὐτὴ τὴ στιγμή, βρισκόταν σὲ ἰσχὺ ὁ Νόμος καὶ ἡ Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη. Ἀργότερα, σ' ἄλλες εἰκόνες μὲ τὴ ζωὴ τῆς Θεομήτορος, τὸ ὕφασμα αὐτὸ θὰ ἐπεκταθεῖ καὶ θὰ καλύψει καὶ τὸ ἄλλο κτίριο. Θὰ δείχνει δηλαδὴ τότε ὅτι, ἡ σκηνὴ πού παριστάνεται ἐξελίσσεται στὴν ἐποχὴ τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης.

Υπάρχουν βέβαια καὶ ἄλλες εἰκόνες τοῦ Εὐαγγελισμοῦ, Βυζαντινῆς ἐποχῆς, πού τὸ κόκκινο ὕφασμα ἐμφανίζεται νὰ καλύπτει καὶ τὶς δύο ὁροφές. Θέλει ἔτσι ὁ ἀγιογράφος νὰ φανερῶσει ὅτι ἡ σκηνὴ ἀναφέρεται χρονικὰ στὴ στιγμή πού ἡ Θεοτόκος εἶχε ἤδη καταθέσει τὴ συγκατάθεσή Της στὸ Θεῖο Θέλημα καὶ ἐπομένως ἡ ἐνσαρκὴ παρουσία τοῦ Θεοῦ στὸν κόσμον εἶχε ἤδη συντελεστεῖ...



Νὰ ἔχεις ἀδιάσπαστη προσοχὴ στὴν προσευχή σου. Καὶ ἀφοῦ ἀρνηθῇς τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν ψυχὴ, ζήσε νοερά. Αὕτη εἶναι ἡ πρώτη προϋπόθεση, ἐνῶ ἡ δευτέρη εἶναι: Νὰ προσεύχεσαι στὸν ἱερὸν τόπον τῆς προσεχῆς ὀχι φαρισαϊκῶς ἀλλὰ τελωνικῶς, γιὰ νὰ δικαιωθῇς καὶ ἐσὺ ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριον. Τρίτη προϋπόθεση τῆς καλῆς προσευχῆς εἶναι: Νὰ μὴ θέλῃς νὰ γίνονται τὰ ζητήματά σου, ὅπως νομίζεις ἐσύ, ἀλλὰ ὅπως θέλει ὁ Θεός, καὶ θὰ εἶσαι ἀτάραχος καὶ γεμάτος εὐγνωμοσύνη στὴν προσευχή σου.

Ἅγιος Νεῖλος ὁ Ἀσκητὴς

Ἐν Λείπει εἰς τὸν Κλῆρον

Γράφει ὁ θεολόγος κ. Νικόλαος Ἰω. Σωτηρόπουλος.

Ὁ λόγος γιὰ ἔλλειψι. Ἐλλειψι στὸν κλῆρο. Καλὸς πρέπει νὰ εἶνε ὁ λαός. Ἀλλ' ὁ κλῆρος πρέπει νὰ εἶνε καλλίτερος. Διότι ὁ κλῆρος εἶνε ξεχωρισμένος ἀπὸ τὸ λαὸ καὶ τοποθετημένος σὲ ἀνώτερη ἀπὸ τὸ λαὸ καὶ ὑπεύθυνη θέσι λόγῳ τῆς ιερωσύνης. Ὅλοι οἱ βαπτισμένοι χριστιανοὶ διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος ἀφιερώνομεθα στὸ Θεό, τὸν Πατέρα, τὸν Υἱὸ καὶ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα. Ἀλλ' οἱ ιερωμένοι διὰ τῆς ιερωσύνης ἀφιερώνονται στὸ Θεὸ σὲ μεγαλύτερο βαθμό. Ἀναλαμβάνουν ιερὰ καὶ ὑψηλὴ ἀποστολὴ ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ λαοῦ, γιὰ νὰ δουλεύουν γιὰ τὸ Θεὸ καὶ τὸ λαὸ οἱ διάκονοι, περισσότερο οἱ πρεσβύτεροι, καὶ ἀκόμη περισσότερο οἱ ἐπίσκοποι.

Ὁ κλῆρος πρέπει νὰ εἶνε στήριγμα τοῦ λαοῦ, καλὸ παράδειγμα γιὰ τὸ λαὸ, καὶ καύχημα τοῦ λαοῦ. Ἀλλὰ γιὰ νὰ εἶνε ὁ κλῆρος ὅπως τὸν θέλει ὁ Θεὸς καὶ ὁ λαὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, γιὰ νὰ εἶνε, μεῖς ἄλλες λέξεις, ἄξιος τῆς ὑψηλῆς ἀποστολῆς του, ἀπαιτοῦνται ὠρισμένα προσόντα. Καὶ ἐρωτᾶται: Ἐχει ὁ σημερινὸς κλῆρος τὰ ἀπαιτούμενα προσόντα; Εἶνε θλιβερή, θλιβερωτάτη ἀλήθεια, ὅτι μέσα στὸν κλῆρο ὑπάρχουν ἀκατάλληλα πρόσωπα, ξεροὶ ἐπαγγελματίες, τελείως ἀδιάφοροι γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ τὴ δική τους σωτηρία, ἄπιστοι, ἀνήθικοι, σκανδαλοποιοί, παραδείγματα πρὸς ἀποφυγὴ καὶ στηλίτευσι.

Βεβαίως τέτοια πρόσωπα ὑπῆρχαν πάντοτε στὸν κλῆρο, ἀφοῦ καὶ στοὺς δώδεκα ἀποστόλους ὁ ἓνας ἦταν ἀνάξιος καὶ προδότης τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἀλλὰ στὴν ἐποχὴ μας ὁ ἀνάξιος δὲν εἶνε ἓνας στοὺς δώδεκα, ἀλλὰ τὸ ποσοστὸ εἶνε μεγαλύτερο. Ἡ ἀνομία πληθύνθηκε στὸν κόσμο, κατὰ τὸν προφητικὸ λόγον τοῦ Κυρίου. Καὶ ἡ ἀποστασία, κατὰ τὸν ἀποστολικὸ λόγον, ἦλθε καὶ προχωρεῖ, γιὰ νὰ ἐμφανίσῃ στὸ ἀποκορύφωμά της τὸν Ἀντίχριστο. Ἡ δὲ ἀνομία καὶ ἡ ἀποστασία δὲν ἀφήνουν ἀνεπηρέαστο τὸν κλῆρο, ἢ, μᾶλλον, σφόδρα τὸν ἐπηρεάζουν, ἀφοῦ ὁ Σατανᾶς περισσότερο πολεμεῖ τοὺς κληρικούς.

Ὁ ἅγιος Κοσμᾶς ὁ Αἰτωλός, ὁ μέγας αὐτὸς προφήτης τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, εἶπε καὶ αὐτὴ τὴν προφητεία: Οἱ κληρικοὶ θὰ γίνουν οἱ χειρότεροι τῶν πάντων. Ἀλλὰ, δόξα τῷ Θεῷ, ἡ φοβερὴ προφητεία τοῦ ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ δὲν ἔχει ἀκόμη ἐκπληρωθῇ ἐξ ὁλοκλήρου. Ὑπάρχει ἀκόμη σημαντικὸ ποσοστὸ καλῶν κληρικῶν στὴν Ἐκκλησία.

Ἡ βασικώτερη ἀρετὴ στὸ Χριστιανισμὸ εἶνε ἡ ταπεινοφροσύνη. Οἱ κληρικοὶ, ἐπειδὴ εἶνε φορεῖς τῆς ιερωσύνης, ἀνώτερης καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ βασιλικὸ ἀξίωμα· ἐπειδὴ οἱ ἄνθρωποι ὑποκλίνονται ἐνώπιόν τους καὶ φιλοῦν τὸ χέρι τους· ἐπειδὴ ἐπίσης οἱ ἄνθρωποι ζητοῦν τὴς εὐχῆς τους καὶ τὴς προσευχῆς τους, γι' αὐτὸ ἔχουν τὸν πειρασμὸ νὰ ὑπερηφανευθοῦν. Καὶ πολλοὶ ὑπερηφανεύονται, ἰδίως ἐπίσκοποι. Ἀλλ' ὑπάρχουν καὶ οἱ ταπεινόφρονες κληρικοὶ, οἱ ὅποιοι στὴ σκέψι, ὅτι ἐγιναν κληρικοὶ, καὶ ἀνέλαβαν

εὐθύνες ἐναντὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ λαοῦ, καὶ εἰσῆλθαν στὸ ἐσώτερο τοῦ καταπετάσματος, καὶ κρατοῦν στὰ χέρια τους τὰ ἅγια Δισκοπότηρα, συντρίβονται καὶ ταλανίζονται αὐτούς, καὶ ἐσωτερικῶς καὶ ἐξωτερικῶς λέγουν: Τί εἴμεθα ἐμεῖς καὶ κυκλώνουμε τὸ ἅγιο καὶ φρικτὸ θυσιαστήριον; Ἀνάξιοι εἴμεθα, καὶ ὁ Θεὸς νὰ μᾶς ἐλεῇ.

Ὑπάρχουν κληρικοὶ σπουδαρχίδες, ἀρχιμανδριῖτες, οἱ ὅποιοι «ψοφοῦν» γιὰ προαγωγή, γιὰ νὰ γίνουν ἐπίσκοποι, γιὰ νὰ πάρουν μίτρα, ἐγκόλπιο καὶ πατερίτσα. Ἀλλ' ὑπάρχουν καὶ ταπεινόφρονες κληρικοὶ, ἀδιάβλητοι καὶ προσοντοῦχοι, πού ὁ λαὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ θὰ ἤθελε νὰ γίνουν ἐπίσκοποι, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνοι οὐδέποτε ἐπιδιώκουν ἐπισκοποποίησι. Ἐνα ἐπιδιώκουν, τὴ σωτηρία τους καὶ τὴ σωτηρία τοῦ λαοῦ.

Στὴν ταπεινοφροσύνη ἀκολουθεῖ ἡ πίστι. Ἄν ἔχῃς ταπεινοφροσύνη, ἔρχεται χάρι καὶ ἀποκτᾷς καὶ πίστι. Ἄν ἔχῃς ὑπερηφάνεια, σ' ἀφήνει ὁ Θεὸς νὰ σὲ βασανίσῃ ἢ ἀμφιβολία καὶ ἡ ἀπιστία πρὸς τιμωρίαν σου. Ὑπάρχουν κληρικοὶ ἄπιστοι, ναί, ἄπιστοι! Ἐγιναν κληρικοὶ γιὰ λόγους ἐπαγγελματικούς. Μερικοὶ ὁμολογοῦν τὴν ἀπιστία τους. Ἀλλ' ὑπάρχουν καὶ κληρικοὶ μετὰ πίστι καὶ ζῆλο Θεοῦ. Ἐγιναν κληρικοὶ ἀπὸ πίστι, καὶ ἀγωνίζονται ὡς κληρικοὶ γιὰ τὴν πίστι. Ἀγωνίζονται μετὰ προσευχή, μετὰ λόγια, μετὰ κήρυγμα καὶ μετὰ παράδειγμα ζωῆς, γιὰ νὰ φέρουν ψυχὰς στὴν πίστι, στὴν Ἐκκλησία, στὸ Θεό. Καὶ φέρουν ψυχὰς ἀπὸ τὴν ἀπιστία στὴν πίστι, ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμον στὴν Ἐκκλησία, ἀπὸ τὸ Σατανᾶ στὸ Θεό.

Ἡ βασικώτερη ἀρετὴ εἶνε, ὅπως εἶπαμε, ἡ ταπεινοφροσύνη, ἡ ὑψηλότερη εἶνε ἡ ἀγάπη. Ὑπάρχουν κληρικοὶ ἐστερημένοι ἀγάπης πρὸς τὸ Θεὸ καὶ τοὺς συνανθρώπους, ψυχροὶ, ἀδιάφοροι, ἐνδιαφερόμενοι μόνο γιὰ τοὺς αὐτούς των καὶ τὴς οἰκογένειάς των. Ὁρῶσκεία τους εἶνε ἡ παπαδιά τους καὶ τὰ παπαδόπουλά τους... Ἀλλ' ὑπάρχουν καὶ κληρικοὶ μετὰ ἀγάπη, θερμὴ ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸ Θεὸ καὶ τοὺς συνανθρώπους. Ἐξ ἀγάπης ἀγωνιοῦν γιὰ τοὺς συνανθρώπους, καὶ μέρα καὶ νύχτα σκέπτονται τί μποροῦν νὰ κάνουν, γιὰ νὰ τοὺς βοηθήσουν πνευματικῶς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑλικῶς. Γιατί στίς ἡμέρες μας ἀναδείχθηκε ἅγιος ὁ ἱερομόναχος Βησσαρίων τῆς Ἱ. Μ. Ἀγαθωνος; Προπάντων διότι ἦταν ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς καλωσύνης. Μέρα καὶ νύχτα σκεπτόταν τοὺς ἀδελφούς, καὶ ἔτρεχε καὶ ἔκανε καλωσύνες.

Τὸ χρήμα εἶνε μέγας πειρασμός. Γκρέμισε καὶ ἓνα ἀπὸ τοὺς δώδεκα ἀποστόλους. Καὶ πολλοὶ δυστυχῶς κληρικοὶ εἶνε φιλοχρήματοι, φιλάργυροι. Δὲν ζοῦν γιὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησία, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία. Δὲν ζοῦν γιὰ τὸν Χριστό, ἀλλὰ γιὰ τὸν χρυσό. Ὑπάρχουν ὅμως καὶ κληρικοὶ ἀφιλοχρήματοι, ἀφιλάργυροι, σπλαγγνικοὶ καὶ ἐλεήμονες. Ἐρευνοῦν, ἀνακαλύπτουν περιπτώσεις δυστυχίας καὶ βοηθοῦν. Δὲν βοηθοῦν μόνο μετὰ χρήματα, τὰ ὅποια τοὺς προσφέρουν χριστιανοὶ γιὰ τοὺς πτωχοὺς· βοηθοῦν καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ μισθὸ τους. Ζοῦν ζωὴ λιτὴ, γιὰ νὰ περισσεύουν

χρήματα για να κάνουν έλεημοσύνες. Όταν κανείς έχει μεγάλη ανάγκη, δεν πηγαίνει σε πολιτικούς να ζητήσει βοήθεια, σε κληρικούς πηγαίνει.

Η ήθικη καθαρότης είναι απαραίτητη, για να γίνη κανείς κληρικός. Δυστυχώς όμως υπάρχουν κληρικοί, που δεν είναι ανώτεροι ήδονων. Ανήθικοι, φαῦλοι, σκανδαλοποιοί κληρικοί, που τροφοδοτούν με τὰ σκάνδαλά τους τὰ σκανδαλοθηρικά Μ.Μ.Ε. και γίνονται αἰτία δυσφημίσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τῆς ἁγίω τάτης Θρησκείας του. Ἀλλ' υπάρχουν και κληρικοί καθαροί, ἄγνοϊ. Ἄγνοϊ μπῆκαν στὴν ἱερὴ τάξη τοῦ κλήρου, καὶ ἄγνοους διατηροῦν τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς των, δὲν μόλυναν τὸ τιμημένο ράσο τους. Ὁ δὲ λαὸς ἰδιαίτερος ἐκτιμᾷ τοὺς ἠθικοὺς αὐτοὺς κληρικούς.

Κληρικοί πρέπει νὰ γίνωνται πρόσωπα ἱκανὰ καὶ δραστήρια, γιὰ νὰ κάνουν ἔργα σπουδαῖα καὶ θεάρεστα. Ἀλλὰ δυστυχῶς κληρικοί γίνονται καὶ πρόσωπα, πού δὲν ἔχουν ἱκανότητα καὶ δὲν ἀναπτύσσουν δραστηριότητα. Πρόσωπα ἀνίκανα καὶ νωχελῆ, πού χαντακώνουν ἐνορίες καὶ ἐπισκοπές. Ὑπάρχουν ὅμως καὶ κληρικοί ἱκανοί, ἱκανώτατοι, καὶ δραστήριοι, δραστηριώτατοι, πού μπορεῖ νὰ παραλάβουν νεκρὲς ἐνορίες καὶ ἐπισκοπές, καὶ νὰ τὶς ζωοποιήσουν, καὶ νὰ τὶς καταστήσουν ὑποδειγματικές. Ἐπίσης ὑπάρχουν κληρικοί, πού δημιουργοῦν ἱεραποστολικὲς Ἀδελφότητες με σπουδαῖο καὶ θαυμαστὸ ἔργο στὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ τὴν κοινωνία.

Τέλος μέσα στὸν κλῆρο ὑπάρχουν καὶ ἅγιοι καὶ χαρισματοῦχοι, με χαρίσματα τοῦ προφορικοῦ καὶ τοῦ γραπτοῦ λόγου πρὸς οἰκοδομὴν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἐπίσης με διορατικό, προορατικό καὶ ἱαματικό χάρισμα, καὶ με ἄλλα χαρίσματα τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ὅπως π.χ. τὸ διοικητικό, τὸ ὀργανωτικό καὶ τὸ ποιμαντικό χάρισμα. Ναί, μέσα στὸν κλῆρο ὑπάρχουν καὶ ἅγιοι καὶ χαρισματοῦχοι καὶ θαυματουργοί! Ὅσοι διψοῦν γιὰ πνευματικὰ πράγματα ἀνακαλύπτουν καὶ γνωρίζουν τέτοια πρόσωπα, θαυμαστὰ καὶ ὑπερθαύμαστα. Οἱ ἄλλοι γνωρίζουν ποδοσφαιριστές, τραγουδιστές, ἡθοποιούς...

Μέσα στὸν κλῆρο βρίσκουμε λοιπὸν καὶ κληρικούς με ταπεινοφροσύνη, με πίστι καὶ ζῆλο, με ἀγάπη, με ἔργα καλωσύνης, με ἀφιλοχρηματία καὶ φιλανθρωπία, με καθαρότητα καὶ ἀγνότητα, με ἱκανότητα καὶ δραστηριότητα, με ἀγιότητα καὶ ποικίλα χαρίσματα τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ἀκόμη καὶ με τὸ χάρισμα τῆς θαυματουργίας. Τί εἶνε τότε αὐτὸ τὸ ἕνα, τὸ ὁποῖο, κατὰ τὸν τίτλο τοῦ παρόντος ἄρθρου, λείπει στὸν κλῆρο; Εἶνε ἡ ἀνδρεία, ὁ ἥρωισμός.

Ἐκτὸς ἄλλων κακῶν καὶ σκανδάλων ἀπὸ ἐκκλησιαστικούς ἡγέτες γίνεται καὶ τὸ χεῖριστο ὅλων, προδοσία τῆς πίστεως. Ὅλοι σχεδὸν οἱ Προκαθήμενοι τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων Ἐκκλησιῶν εἶνε οἰκουμενιστές, με πρῶτο τὸν Οἰκουμενικὸ Πατριάρχη κ. Βαρθολομαῖο. Μετὰ δὲ τοὺς ἡγέτες, καὶ κατὰ τὸ παράδειγμα αὐτῶν, οἰκουμενιστές εἶνε καὶ ἄλλοι, κληρικοί καὶ λαϊκοί. Ὁ ἀρχιοικουμενιστὴς δὲ

Πατριάρχης καὶ οἱ ὁμόφρονές του με δηλώσεις καὶ ἐνέργειές τους ἀντιευαγγελικὲς καὶ ὑπὲρ τῶν Αἱρέσεων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων Θρησκειῶν προδίδουν τὴν ὀρθὴ πίστι, τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία. Τὸ κακὸ παράγινε. Οἱ δὲ παραμένοντες πιστοὶ στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία κληρικοὶ ὤφειλαν νὰ διακόψουν τὸ μνημόσυνο τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριάρχῃ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων Οἰκουμενιστῶν Ἱεραρχῶν. Ἀλλὰ δυστυχῶς δὲν τὸ διακόπτουν, με ἐξαίρεσι ἕνα ἱερομόναχο, τὸν π. Εὐθύμιο Τρικαμινᾶ, καὶ ἕνα ἢ δύο ἀκόμη κληρικούς τοῦ δευτέρου βαθμοῦ τῆς ἱερωσύνης.

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ὀνομάζεται στρατευομένη. Καὶ στὴ στρατευομένη Ἐκκλησία οἱ λαϊκοὶ εἶνε στρατιῶτες, οἱ διάκονοι εἶνε ὑπαξιωματικοί, οἱ πρεσβύτεροι εἶνε ἀξιωματικοί, καὶ οἱ ἐπίσκοποι εἶνε στρατηγοί. Καὶ σὰν στρατηγοὶ οἱ ἐπίσκοποι ὀφείλουν πρῶτον νὰ πολεμοῦν γιὰ τὴν πίστι. Ἀλλ' ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐπισκόπους κανεὶς δυστυχῶς δὲν ἐλέγχει με σθεναρὴ φωνὴ καὶ προσωπικῶς, ὀνομαστικῶς, τὸν Οἰκουμενικὸ Πατριάρχη καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους Οἰκουμενιστὲς Ἱεράρχες καὶ δὲν παύει τὸ μνημόσυνό τους.

Γιατί; Διότι λείπει τὸ σπουδαιότερο, πού χρειάζεται στὸν πόλεμο, ἡ ἀνδρεία. Οἱ ἐπίσκοποι φοβοῦνται νὰ πράξουν τὸ καθήκον τους στὸ ζήτημα τῆς πίστεως ἀπέναντι τῶν Οἰκουμενιστῶν, διότι ἐπικρατεῖ σ' αὐτοὺς ἡ σκοπιμότης, θέλουν νὰ «τὰ ἔχουν καλὰ» με τοὺς ἰσχυροὺς, δὲν θέλουν περιπέτειες καὶ θυσίες.

Ὁ π. Εὐθύμιος Τρικαμινᾶς γιὰ τὴν ἐκτέλεσι τοῦ καθήκοντός του καθαιρέθηκε. Νὰ ὑποστοῦν καὶ αὐτοὶ περιπέτειες καὶ καθαιρέσεις; Δὲν εἶμαι πλασμένος γιὰ ἀγῶνα, εἶπε κάποιος ἀπ' αὐτοὺς. Οἱ στρατηγοὶ δηλαδὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἶνε γιὰ λαμπρὲς χοροστασίες καὶ λειτουργίες, εἶνε γιὰ φεστιβάλ, εἶνε «γιὰ τὰ πανηγύρια»! Καὶ ἐπειδὴ οἱ στρατηγοὶ δὲν πολεμοῦν, γι' αὐτὸ οἱ Οἰκουμενιστὲς ἔγιναν ἀδίστακτοι καὶ προχωροῦν ἀκάθεκτοι γιὰ τὴν πραγματοποίησι τῶν σχεδίων τους πρὸς χαρὰν τῶν ἐχθρῶν τῆς πίστεως καὶ λύπην καὶ σκανδαλισμὸν τῶν πιστῶν.

Σὺ, Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, πού δημιούργησες τὴν Ἐκκλησία με τὸ αἷμα σου, στείλε σ' αὐτὴ Ἀθανασίους, Γρηγορίους Θεολόγους, Φωτίους, Μάρκους Εὐγενικούς, Γρηγορίους Παλαμᾶδες, Κοσμᾶδες Αἰτωλούς, γιὰ νὰ πολεμήσουν γιὰ τὴν πίστι καὶ νὰ εὐφράνουν τοὺς Ὁρθοδόξους καὶ νὰ καταισχύουν τοὺς κακοδόξους.



Γενικὰ οἱ Ἕλληνες εἶναι ἀγράμματοι καὶ ἀγνοοῦν τοὺς θησαυροὺς τῆς πατρίδας τους. Θὰ γίνουν θρησκοὶ ὅσο μορφώνονται. Ἀντιθετὰ με ἄλλους πού ὅσο μορφώνονται παύουν νὰ εἶναι θρησκοὶ...

Γιάννης Τσαρούχης, Ζωγράφος (1910-1989)

SATURDAY OF LAZARUS

By Archpriest Alexander Schmemmann (+1983), "The Christian Way," 1961 (dited for length and content).

The joy that permeates and enlightens the service of Lazarus Saturday stresses one major theme: the forthcoming victory of Christ over Hades. "Hades" is the Biblical term for Death and its universal power, for inescapable darkness that swallows all life and with its shadow poisons the whole world. But now, with Lazarus' resurrection, *death begins to tremble*. A decisive duel between Life and Death begins giving us the key to the entire liturgical mystery of Pascha. Already in the fourth century Lazarus' Saturday was called the "announcement of Pascha." For, indeed, it announces and anticipates the wonderful light and peace of the next—The Great—Saturday, the day of life-giving Tomb.

Lazarus, the friend of Jesus, personifies the whole of mankind and also each man, as Bethany, the home of Lazarus, stands for the whole world—the home of man. For each man was created as a friend of God and was called to this friendship. And this friendship resulted in the knowledge of God, the communion with Him, the sharing of life with Him: *In Him was Life and the Life was the light of men*. (Jn 1:4). And yet this Friend, whom Jesus loves, whom He has created in love, is destroyed, annihilated by a power which God has not created; the power of death.

In His own world, the fruit of His love, wisdom and beauty, God encounters a power that destroys His work and annihilates His design. The world is but lamentation and sorrow, complaint and revolt. How is this possible? How did this happen? These are the questions implied in John's slow and detailed narrative of Jesus' progression towards the grave of His friend. And once there, Jesus wept, says the Gospel (Jn 11:35). Why did He weep if He knew that moments later He would call Lazarus back to life?

The Orthodox Church teaches that all the actions of Christ, both Divine and human, are actions of one and the same person, the Incarnate Son of God. He Who weeps is not only Man but also God, and He who calls Lazarus out of the grave is not God alone but also Man. And He weeps because He contemplates the miserable state of the world, created by God, and the miserable state of man, the king of creation... *It stinketh*, say the Jews trying to prevent Jesus from approaching the corpse, and this *it stinketh* can be applied to the whole of creation.

God is Life and He called the man into this Divine reality of life and *he stinketh*. At the grave of Lazarus, Jesus encounters Death—the power of sin and destruction, of hatred and despair. He meets the enemy of God. And we who follow Him are now introduced into the very heart of this hour of Jesus, the hour that He so often mentioned. The forthcoming darkness of the Cross, its necessity, its universal meaning, all this is given in the shortest verse of the Gospel—and *Jesus wept*.

We understand now that it is because He wept, i.e., loved

His friend Lazarus and had pity on him, that He had the power of restoring life to him. The power of Resurrection is not a Divine power in itself, but the power of love, or rather, love as power. God is Love, and it is love that creates life; it is love that weeps at the grave and it is, therefore, love that restores life...

This is the meaning of these Divine tears. They are tears of love and, therefore, in them is the power of life. Love, which is the foundation of life and its source, is at work again recreating, redeeming, restoring the darkened life of man: *Lazarus, come forth!* And this is why Lazarus Saturday is the real beginning of both the Cross, as the supreme

sacrifice of love, and the Common Resurrection, as the ultimate triumph of love.

Christ—the Joy, Truth, Light and the Life of all and the resurrection of the world, in His love appeared to those on earth and was the image of Resurrection, granting to all Divine forgiveness.

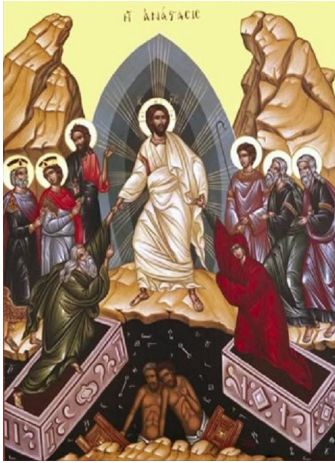


The Passion on the Cross and the life-bearing Resurrection of our Jesus—our sweet deliverance and the light of our darkened souls—which expiate every sinful soul, are reenacted in every Divine Liturgy. And if in the old law, in the shadow of things to come, the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer cleansed those who partook, how much more the all-holy Blood of Christ, which is partaken of in the holy altars of the holy Orthodox churches of God, will cleanse us from every sin and warm our souls with the divine eros of our sweetest Jesus!

From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"—The Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST IS THE ANNIHILATION OF DEATH

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



The Resurrection of Christ is the most significant event to take place in History. It is the event that differentiates Christianity from every other religion. Other religions have mortal leaders, whereas the Head of the Church is the Resurrected Christ.

Resurrection of Christ implies the deification and the resurrection of human nature, and the hope for deification and resurrection of our own hy-

postasis. Since the medicine has been discovered, then there is hope for life.

Through Christ's Resurrection, both life and death take on a new meaning. "Life" now means communion with God. "Death" is no longer the end of this present lifetime, but the distancing of man from Christ. The separation of the soul from the mortal body is no longer seen as "death"; it is only a temporary slumber.

It is Christ's Resurrection, which justifies His uniqueness and exclusiveness, as the Saviour Who is able to truly vitalize us and transfuse His death-defeating life into our perishable lives. Christ is one; the Resurrection is one; and the possibility for salvation-deification is also one. This is why our expectation to transcend all the impasses that muddle our lives is oriented towards Christ; to the Christ of the saints; to the Christ of history.

The distorted "Christ" found in heresies or the "relativized" Christ found in the religious syncretism of the new-age pan-religion constitute a rejection of the real Christ, as well as the salvation offered by Him.

The Christ of our saints is also the Christ of History, and He rules out every possibility of confusing Him with all the other redemptive substitutes invented for misleading the masses; because that is the only way deception can maintain something fraudulent: by facilitating the dominion of antichrist powers (which may quite easily have infiltrated even the Church); powers, which albeit spread death in their path, nevertheless can appear as "angels of light" and "deacons of justice."

When studying the experience of our saints, we become aware that there are no existences as tragic as those "who have no hope"—hope for resurrection—inasmuch as they regard biological death as destruction and the end. Unfortunately, science has also succumbed to this tragic state, by

desperately seeking methods for prolonging man's lifespan and by conveying the illusion of being able to overcome natural death. However, equally tragic are those—even Christians—who become entrapped in "hermetically tight" Chiliast visions of universal bliss and mundane eschatology (thus losing the true meaning of the Resurrection) and sacrificing the hyper-cosmic to the endo-cosmic; the eternal to the transient.

The Resurrection of Christ as the resurrection of man and all of Creation acquires a meaning only in the framework of patristic soteriology; in other words, in the co-crucifixion and the co-resurrection with Christ. This is the way that Hellenism also preserved the Resurrection during its historical course. Forever faithful to the Resurrection of Christ, Orthodoxy has been characterized as "Church of the Resurrection," because it is on the Resurrection that it structures its entire historical presence, grafting the resurrectional hope into the conscience of peoples; a fact that is revealed in their cultural continuance.

Among them, the Hellenic people also learnt to dispel—in the light of the Resurrection—the darkness that permeated their years of slavery (as was the Turkish occupation) during which, they would not hesitate, on wishing each other "Christ is Risen!" to add: "and Hellas is risen!" And they preserved this, for a full four hundred years...

It is within this notional framework that the hope-filled invitation of *Come forth and receive Light!* is contained. It is an invitation to the resurrectional, uncreated Light, which is bestowed only on those who have cleansed their heart of vices and passions. Without the "catharsis" of the heart—in other words, repentance—one cannot commune with the Light of the Resurrection. Repentance is the transcending of sin, the cause of our death.

This is the fact that we are constantly reminded of, by the peculiar (to the uninitiated ear) monastic saying: *If you die before you die, then you will not die when you die!*

Christ is Risen!



The soul of a true human being is beautiful, full of inner purity; and this beauty is not only present within the soul, but is carried over to one's appearance. The divine sweetness of God's love is so pervasive that we can see it in a person's face. Our soul's inner beauty will make us beautiful and holy inside, and will even alter our appearance. We will be betrayed by the presence of God's grace in us, so that even if our clothing is poor and ugly, it will appear beautiful and holy to those who met us.

Elder Paisios the Athonite

THE SPREADING OF DISEASES AND THE MYSTERIES OF OUR CHURCH

By the Metropolitan of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki, the Rev. Nikolaos Hatzinikolaou.

Dear brethren:

Recently, on account of the outbreak of the pandemic of Swine Flu, the matter of possible transmission of sicknesses through Holy Communion was also—unnecessarily—brought up. Unfortunately, with an unbecoming vocabulary, a sarcastic attitude and argumentation that was not in the least well-meaning, one more attempt has been made to dismantle our Faith, at a time when we have no other support to hold on to.

So, with this opportunity, I think it proper to provide certain truths, which are necessary for preserving the priceless treasure of our Faith inside us.

Our Church has been transmitting the grace of Her Mysteries for two thousand years, in the familiar, very humane and simultaneously blessed way, for the “healing and therapy of soul and body.” She has never needed to speculate with the contemporary logic of irreverent doubting, but has been living day to day with the experience of affirmation of a supreme miracle. How is it ever possible for communion with God to be a cause of sickness or even the slightest harm? How is it ever possible for the Body and the Blood of our Lord and God to pollute our body and our blood? How is it possible for a daily experience of over two thousand years to be quashed by mere rationalism and the cold shallowness of our time?

Faithful people, both healthy and sick, have been receiving Holy Communion for centuries, distributed by the same holy Communion spoon—which is never washed and never disinfected—and never has anything been observed. Priests who serve in hospitals, even in hospitals for contagious diseases, all distribute Holy Communion to the faithful and then consume the remaining contents of the Chalice with reverence, and all of them enjoy long lives. Holy Communion is everything that we as a Church and as people hold holy; it is the supreme medication for soul and body. That is likewise the teaching and the experience of our Church.

Those who are distrustful of the miracle of the Lord’s Resurrection, all those who scorn His birth by a Virgin, all those who deny the fragrance that emanates from holy relics, all those who show contempt towards everything holy and sacred, all those who conspire against our Church, all those who seek to eradicate the slightest trace of faith from our souls will naturally strive to exploit the opportunity to also insult the most sacred mystery of the Divine Eucharist.

The fact that the Anglicans and the Catholics have decided for “precautionary reasons” to cease the distribution of holy communion in England and New Zealand respectively,

if true, is not a show of prudence and freedom—as some would maintain—but instead, it actually highlights in the best possible way the huge distance between our Church, which is eucharistic in Her theology and Her life and who lives, believes and preaches that Mystery/Sacrament, and the remaining “Christian” groups, which are indirectly confessing the absence of Grace and God’s signs from their so-called sacraments, as well as the loss of their ecclesiastic identity. Life without a Mystery resembles a serious illness without a remedy.

Unfortunately, the big problem is not the flu virus—as the mass media are wont to advertise—nor is the virus of worldwide panic—as supported by the medical unions; it is actually the virus of irreverence and the microbe of disbelief. And the best vaccine is our frequent participation in the mystery of Holy Communion, *with a clean conscience* and an *irreprehensible* one. Our response to this unholy provocation of our time is our very way of life.

It would be advisable, if our spiritual fathers could exhort the faithful (with due discernment, and provided there are no spiritual obstacles) to receive Holy Communion more frequently during these difficult times, while those of us who already have our spiritual fathers’ blessings should also approach the Cup of Life more frequently. But always *with the fear of God, very much faith and sincere love...*

† † †

His Eminence the Most Reverend Metropolitan Nikolaos Hatzinikolaou was born in Thessaloniki, Greece in 1954. He is a graduate from the Physics Department of the University of Thessaloniki and holds Master’s degrees in Astrophysics from Harvard University in Boston, Mechanical Engineering from MIT in Boston, Theological Studies from Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, and Theology from Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Boston.

In 1986 he earned a Doctoral Degree from Harvard University. Specialized in Biomedical Engineering (Bio-fluid dynamics) and in 2003 a Doctoral Degree from Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki, School of Theology. Specialized in Bioethics. In 2008 he was given an honorary Doctoral Degree from University of Athens, School of Theology (Science and Religion).

He has worked as research fellow for various hospitals in Boston and as a consultant in space medical technology for Arthur D. Little and NASA. In January 1988, he went to Mount Athos, and since May 1990 to April 2004 served as a priest-monk at the Athonite Metochion of Ascension in Athens. He teaches the course «Hemodynamics Pathophysiology of Vascular Diseases» at the Medical School of Crete and he has been the Director of the Hellenic Center for Biomedical Ethics since 1992. He is also, President of the Bioethics Committee of the Church of Greece and member of the National Bioethics Committee. He was elected and ordained Metropolitan of Mesogaea and Lavraeotica, April 30th, 2004.

EVOLUTION: THE NEW FUNDAMENTALISM

By Fr. Serafim Gascoigne (Fr. Serafim is the Rector of Holy Protection of the Theotokos Orthodox Church in Seattle, Washington, a parish of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem).

The theory of evolution has become a part of our everyday thinking and behavior. In most people's minds, the word evolution is synonymous with progress and presupposes growth towards a better future. This progress is measured in terms of social, political, and religious growth or achievement and has become part of our everyday vocabulary—an integral part of how we act and think.

All aspects of life are now modeled on evolution. For example, there is scientific evolution, a nihilistic philosophy which sees man as a piece of driftwood thrown up by time onto the shores of existence. There is social and political evolution that measures progress and human development in terms of the intellect and the amazing achievements of technology. And finally, there is religious evolution: Religion that is evolving towards the "Omega Point" envisioned by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (d. 1955) or towards the "Age of the Spirit" anticipated in the works of Nikolay Berdyaev (d. 1948). Currently there is ecumenism, with its roots in the Masonic movement, which promotes evolution towards universal brotherhood under a "supreme deity."

For many people, evolution is also synonymous with Charles Darwin and his theory of biological evolution. In fact for over a century Darwin's theory has been a basic element of scientific and cultural thought. Life, according to his theory of evolution, is ever moving from a preexistent form to a more complex—and therefore better—form. Although the factual evidence to support this view is virtually nonexistent, scientists nevertheless accept evolution as a priori in scientific research.

Oddly enough, Darwin was not the actual inventor of the theory of evolution; evolutionary ideas and interpretations were being discussed in the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries by such scientists as Denis Diderot (d. 1784), Benjamin Franklin (d. 1790) and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (d. 1829). I believe also that evolutionary ideas have been developing for much longer than we normally imagine and have, therefore, greatly influenced the development of western civilization.

Blessed Justin (Popovich) of Serbia (+1979), in his book *Orthodox Faith and Life in Christ*, identifies Darwin's views with the New Age Religion. To understand this, let us examine the historical perspective that preceded the emergence of Darwinism and in particular, the writings of the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (d. 1860) and

the influence his philosophy exerted on other evolutionary thinkers.

An Historical Perspective

Western Christianity and consequently Western civilization promoted humanism from early times. The deviant theology of the Latin church readily provided the impetus for the cultivation of humanistic thinking. From the first few centuries of Christianity in Rome, there was a rebirth of pagan Caesar worship, which in subsequent centuries was inappropriately transferred to the Patriarch of Rome, a process that eventually culminated in the anti-Christian doctrine of the infallibility of the Pope. The teaching about Papal supremacy over the Church (the Body of the God-Man Christ) inevitably replaced the God-Man as Head of the Church with a man, in the person of the Pope of Rome.

The belief in this doctrine later provided fuel for the Renaissance. Man, being at the center of the universe "did not need God." The significance of this human idolatry was not simply political but cosmological, for man now became the focal point of theological thought, which in turn, fostered humanism. The Pope is the intermediary between God and man, and curiously enough does not have to be a priest, but

can be a layman. It is not, of course the object of this article to examine the details of this degeneration in the concept of Church from a Divine-human community to a human-secular one. However, we need to be aware of the historical development of humanism, in order to grasp the significance of its effect upon our thinking today.

In time, this humanistic idolatry gave rise to the divinization of science and civilization, and in our own time, the divinization of education, the main object of which is to illumine man without Christ. When the God-Man, that is Christ, is eliminated, man becomes the center of the universe. This is to fulfill the aspiration of Satan, who told our ancestors that they would become gods without God.

Removing Christ from man, we produce the mechanistic man of the Empiricist philosophers, such as John Locke (d. 1704) and David Hume (d. 1776). According to these Empiricists, the nature of man is derived from the senses. Unfortunately, this new man of Empiricism proved very primitive and terribly boorish. So the next stage in history was to progress to man as intellect, building on the rationalistic philosophies of Rene Descartes (d. 1650) and culminating in Immanuel Kant (d. 1804).

But the true nature of man, argued Schopenhauer in the nineteenth century, is volition. Man's essence cannot be summed up in his senses or in his reason, since he is neither of these. Rather, he is foremost comprised of volition. Man as volition is the true man. For Schopenhauer, the nature of



man is based on his will to live. However, individual wills produce strife and, therefore, only through the renunciation of self-desire can one find peace.

Schopenhauer's philosophy was based on his study of Kant and, in addition, the mystical works of Hinduism and Buddhism, and the Western mysticism of Meister Eckhart (d. 1327) and Jakob Boehme (d. 1624). His book *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (The World as Will and Idea, 1819) greatly influenced Friedrich Nietzsche (d. 1900) and, later, Darwin. Nietzsche developed the ideas of Schopenhauer further by promoting man as an inferior being who aspires to the *Uebermensch*—"superman"—of the future. The production of this superman, according to Nietzsche, is the reason for the existence of the earth and the purpose of history. Superman represents the goal of human evolution.

Because of his exercise of creative power and his ability to rise above transient sensual pleasure, superman is spiritual man. In today's language, he recognizes his own characteristic of creative-intuitive power as opposed to critical-rational power. He is the final stage in evolution. "What is ape to man? He is an object of laughter... This must be true for what man is to the superman." (Zarathustra, 1891). In this worldview, man is nothing but the (missing!) link between animal and superman.

A grim product of the philosophy of the superman was Dachau, for volition destroys compassion and conscience. Admittedly, the Nazi phenomenon was a perversion of Nietzsche's thought, but it is nonetheless the superman concept that forms the basis for many fascist and socialist ideologies.

A Scientific Perspective

The historical advancement of evolutionary thought reached a watershed with Darwin's introduction of the theory of biological evolutionism. By placing evolution on a scientific footing, Darwin ensured its survival as an axiom of modern thought. Darwin and those of like mind directed their search for the new man among inferior creatures in order, using the animal kingdom as justification to create man without God.

The outcome of these efforts was the reduction of the theory of evolution to a kind of religious fundamentalism. Time and again, Darwinism has been used to cover up scientific ignorance of how the wonders of the world could have been created. In America, in the earlier part of this century, Darwinism was supported by such eminent figures as the paleontologist Henry Osborn (d. 1935), whose scientific opinion was greatly influenced by the discoveries of "Piltdown Man" (a hoax using a chimpanzee's skull and reluctantly recognized many years later by the British Museum, which had to change its display of the ascent of man) and "Nebraska Man" (another hoax using a pig's tooth).

The opinions of such eminent scientists as Osborn were based on the premise that, however wrong the current answers

were to their views of evolution, they would stand until a better answer arrived. This scientifically untenable attitude is comparable to saying that a criminal defendant should not be allowed to present an alibi unless he can also show who in fact committed the crime.

Such fundamentalism bases itself on a technique known as reductionism, the attempt to boil down complex systems or phenomena into simple terms or easily digestible facts, the ideal goal being to discover the lowest common denominator. (Incidentally, in the sphere of religion, **the ecumenical movement is the embodiment par excellence of the philosophical application of reductionism.**) The driving supposition here is that all living phenomena may be explained by molecular biology.

According to reductionism, just one or two basic molecular causes account for all living phenomena. There is, indeed, no phenomenon in a living system that is not molecular, yet there is none that is only molecular either. The living cell is a system and, however much we study its constituent parts, these parts are not the cell in toto, but simply its characteristics. Knowing how reflexes work in an artist does not tell us about his style or his subject matter; the study of a telephone directory does not tell us about the richness of life in the city.

As the biologist Paul Weiss writes: "It is one thing not to see the forest for the trees, but then to go on to deny the reality of the forest is a more serious matter; for it is not just a case of myopia, but one of self-inflicted blindness." (Beyond Reductionism: The Alpbach Symposium, London: Koestler & Smythies, 1972).

Reductionism is still popular today, despite the fact that many scientists are uncomfortable with such a fundamentalist approach to scientific research. Because in the last three hundred years the scientific application of reductionism has been so successful in gaining control over the forces of nature, our present society is far more receptive to rational-mechanistic philosophies (e.g., Ludwig Feuerbach (d. 1872—"We are what we eat") than to other philosophies, simply because it considers such views innately "more scientific" than other alternatives.

Reductionism leads to a view of the universe as a great system of physical forces, and the mind with all its powers of imagination and creative insights as a mere by-product of these forces. Viktor Frankl in Vienna has concluded that reductionism has led to some of the major psychiatric disorders current in the world today (Beyond Reductionism). In fact, it has led to a new type of neurosis called the existential vacuum. If man is no more than the product of some chemical determinism, he then has no meaning. Frankl aptly describes reductionism as the nihilism of today.

However, reductionism is not necessarily the view of all scientists. There are those such as Weiss and Von Bertalanffy, who are concerned with biological systems and organization. For

example, Bertalanffy states: "There is a non-random feature, perhaps at the very basis of natural order, which may well have to be taken ultimately into account by biological theorists. Where is the mind? If we dissect the brain, we don't find the mind. The brain is a system and is more than its constituent parts. We have to move from entities to qualities possessed by a system as a whole, which cannot be split up and located. We often think that when we have completed our study of one we know all about two, because two is one and one. We forget that we still have to make a study of 'and'. At the molecular level, we study 'and'—that is to say, organization." (Beyond Reductionism).

Again, the square is contained in the cube. It serves as its foundation and basis. However, if we say that the cube is nothing but a square, then we are shutting out a whole dimension, the third dimension. The blinkered vision of Darwin and the reductionists is ironically condemned by their mentor Schopenhauer: "Every man takes the limits of his own field of vision for the limits of the world." (Studies in Pessimism, 1851).

To be a true scientist, one has to have faith. To be objective without a hunch is not to be scientific, but to be technical. Such "objectivity" is characteristic of the technocrat, not the true scientist. This applies especially to modern medicine, in which doctors have become simple technicians, rather than physicians, regarding man as merely a biological machine. Such an approach in turn breeds discontent. People demand better results, more health and more security. They want a techno-kingdom on earth, which will replace the heavenly one. Here, especially, we can see the inherent fundamentalism of current evolutionary thought; a blind faith in the inevitability of progress and the belief that things can only get better. As Hoelderlin (19th century) referring to political systems in his day, reminds us: "What has always made the state a hell on earth has been precisely that man has tried to make it his heaven."

A Social Perspective

With its new-found scientific credibility, evolution rapidly permeated all fields of inquiry, eventually resulting in a radically new social perspective. In the words of Theodosius Dobzhansky: "Evolution need no longer be a destiny imposed from without; it may conceivably be controlled by man, in accordance with his wisdom and his values."

Acclaimed by the American Academy of Sciences and St. Vladimir's Theological Seminary, he is billed as "the greatest evolutionist of our century and a lifelong Russian Orthodox" (P. E. Johnson, *Darwin on Trial*, Chicago: InterVarsity Press). While Dobzhansky's Orthodoxy is obviously nominal, he is beyond doubt a true believer in the New Fundamentalism: "Evolution is much more than a theory—it is a general postulate to which all theories, all systems henceforth must bow and which they must satisfy in order to be thinkable and true. Evolution is a light which

illuminates all facts, a trajectory which all lines of thought must follow."

In short, Evolution is the god we must worship. We are, therefore, basically passionate stone-age people who are capable of creating technology, but not controlling it. If humanity is to avoid extinction, it must summon up the political will to take control of evolution and make it in the future a matter of human choice, rather than blind selection.

What concerns me is that the influence of evolutionary thinking in our lives is subtly hidden and thus taken for granted. It has gradually taken root in our collective subconscious. Thus, in schools it is a "given" that man evolved from apes. Lax chronological interpretations and the assumption that things are improving all the time are handily used to gloss over the painfully evident deficiencies of the theory of evolution. For those who have accepted evolution—deficiencies or not—God has become redundant.

But it is precisely through the correct understanding of man that we come to know God. St. Gregory of Nyssa (395) confirms this when he says: *For it seems to me, the make-up of man is awesome and inexplicable, portraying many hidden mysteries of God in itself.*

What are the implications of evolutionism for Orthodox Christians?

Evolution has given rise to the dominance of the brain—the intellect. Paradoxically, one can be highly intelligent, yet stupid at the same time. But for the evolutionists, man's intelligence puts him at the pinnacle of creation. It is his brain that is important and not his heart, since the latter is only a pump! Technology is founded upon intelligence, not the heart.

But as Orthodox Christians, we know that without the heart, there is no morality. When Antichrist comes, he will find a planet of spiritual morons, a highly intelligent species which is nonetheless spiritually ignorant. Intelligence, according to St. Anthony of Egypt (d. 356) is the fear of God, not sophistry, clever argumentation, or learning (i.e., technology) per se. You may counter: "Did not God use evolution in His creation? I am willing, as a rational being and an Orthodox Christian, to accept theistic evolution, but not the 'Big Bang' theory of the atheists."

But in saying this, you are rejecting the miraculous creation of the universe. You are implying that suffering, sin and death are somehow intrinsic to God's creation, thereby refuting the Christian doctrine that man originally fell and continually falls through the spiritually destructive exercise of his own will.

Again, you may say that you do not support the theory of evolution, that in fact, you do not believe in it. If this is true, then why do you subscribe to liberal thinking in education, child-rearing and health? Why do you have a passion for comfort- to reach out for the pill of pleasure? If you fail to lead an ascetic life, you are not an Orthodox Christian, but a hedonist,

a crypto-evolutionist! Evolution is setting us up for a takeover by demonic forces which will be able to exploit our spiritual ignorance. And do not think that a knowledge of the Fathers or some knowledge of theology will help us. If we succumb to the Zeitgeist, the spirit of the age, psychologically and intellectually, we will not be able to resist these forces.

The Case for “Devolution”

The Orthodox standpoint—agreeable to true scientists who objectively acknowledge the inexorable reality of entropy—posits universal devolution: “The world doth wax old as doth a garment.” Civilization as we know it is declining, not progressing. We witness everyday the breakdown of morality and the falling away from the faith.

But, nevertheless, secular society is confident and optimistic about the future, since we are becoming “gods” as Satan promised in the garden. We are becoming gods who can control our own destiny. Thus as early as 1933, John Dewey (d. 1952) could write: “If blind nature has somehow produced a human species with the capacity to rule the earth wisely, and if this capacity has previously been invisible only because it was smothered by superstition, then the prospects for human freedom and happiness are unbounded.”

Unfortunately, Dewey could not foresee the product of his educational philosophy—homo-technicus. Instead of being a demigod, homo-technicus as a species is, in fact, subhuman. He is subhuman since everything that is supernatural or spiritual has been ripped from him. His reasoning is based on *Psychologie ohne Seele* (“Psychology Without Soul”). This man has finally devolved to a totally materialistic life in which he can find satisfaction only in whatever is earthly and not heavenly. An officer of the Allied Forces, upon entering Dachau camp asked: “Where is God to allow such suffering?” A survivor answered him: “We know where God is, but where is man?”

The evolutionists are proud that they are not descended from Christ and His Heavenly Father, but from apes instead. They are perfectly able to become false gods, simply because they recognize no other God than themselves. “We want to be free. Evolution is the star that guides us,” they cry.

Our answer as Orthodox Christians must be: *Some glory in chariots and some in horses; but we will glory in the Name of the Lord our God.* (Pss 19:7).



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.”

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

CHURCH AND PRISON

By His Eminence Neophytos, Metropolitan of Morphou (Cyprus)—a homily delivered at the University of Cyprus on 11/24/2003.

The law of this world is closely interwoven with the notions of penalty and of punishment. Prison, therefore, is a natural consequence of the law, which has prescribed the deprivation of one’s freedom as punishment for those who transgress its stipulations. Despite Her entirely different handling of those who fall, who transgress God’s law—not with penalties, but with forgiveness and absolution of sins—the Church is nevertheless quite qualified to talk about prison.

The reason for this is because She is familiar with imprisonment, both from the outside as well as the inside—as strange as that may seem. First of all, Christ Himself—but also the majority of the Saints of the Church—had acquired a personal experience of imprisonment, and even of tortures. Saint Mammias, the Patron Saint of our Metropolis, was born inside a prison. Before the time of Constantine the Great, the whole Church lived in a privation of freedom, in a prison. This continued, in various degrees, during the centuries that followed, and even up until our time. Let us bring to mind for example how many thousands of Christians were up until recently held in the prisons of atheist regimes, simply because of their faith.

However, beyond all this, Christ Himself made prison and prisoners a part of His Gospel, with this special reference on the topic: *I was a stranger, and you took me in; naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in a prison, and you came to me...* (Mt 25:36). Prisoners, therefore, regardless of the reason, are (according to the words of our Lord) those in a difficult situation and require our visit, our concern and our support. In fact, Christ places so much importance on this matter, that He says whoever visits a prisoner, visits Christ Himself.

Prison is therefore a marginal situation, which interests us from many aspects. That is why, from the very beginning of our ministry in the bishopric, we have also included the central prisons in our program. So, what I will say tonight is mostly empirical, given that after so many years of visiting prisons and becoming acquainted with prisoners, I can safely say that I have formed a first-hand picture of the world of imprisonment.

What has impressed me therefore from the very first moment is the following: Not a single prisoner has ever confronted a bishop’s visit in prison negatively or disparagingly, as is the case sometimes in our “free society.” Regardless whether they consent to confession or not, all prisoners see my presence in prison in a positive manner; in fact, they feel that they are bestowed a special honor when visited by a bishop, whom they usually refer to as “our priest”. Equally noteworthy is a general feeling of victimization that perme-

ates prisoners. Not in the sense that they believe themselves to be innocent, but the feeling that others have committed far greater offences without being punished, while they are finally the ones who pay the price for everyone and everything.

Naturally, the topmost issue that preoccupies every prisoner without exception is the fact of his imprisonment—the deprivation of his freedom, which he feels in a most intense way—with an intensity that cannot be perceived by someone who has not lived in prison. The aim of all of them is to get out as soon as possible, or at least improve their situation by being transferred from a closed prison to a so-called “open prison”; in other words, to find themselves as close as possible to that much-desired freedom. That is why many of them, by linking the rank of bishop to certain secular connections, ask for my intercession to either be granted a pardon, or to secure improved conditions for their incarceration.

As I mentioned earlier, prisoners are in a marginal situation; they are branded by a feeling of being rejected by society. That is why they are first of all in need of a friendly presence. One prisoner used to say to me in a philosophical mood: “When you come here, always bring with you the Confessor’s Stole, a smile, a kind word and.... a packet of cigarettes...” Thus, the presence of a priest, a bishop in prison is imperative. It should somehow become an element incorporated in the world of imprisonment, providing with its presence a certain possibility.

But apart from this, the Church has another immense role to play, especially with regard to the preparation of the prisoner for his release from prison. At that crucial moment, when the prisoner is about to rejoin society, the underworld which ardently awaits his return will be hastening to embrace him as an experienced individual, a graduate of crime. His old environment will be waiting for him with outstretched arms, ready to drag him deeper into lawlessness. That is why our work must be multi-faceted so that this triumphant reinstatement might be averted and that person dissociates himself completely from the sphere of crime. This must be addressed both from inside the prison, as well as after his release.

During their incarceration, the Church must strive to sensitize the prisoners so that they can confront the reality of their situation; thus, a spiritual father’s basic job is to try to extract from inside them the predisposition for revenge. This is because quite often, prisoners who have committed serious crimes find themselves caught between conflicting criminal interests and they may have connections in factions and gangs that are at each others’ throats; thus they often

feel that after their release, their life will be threatened and they must therefore “settle scores” or just take their revenge on those who they believe are chiefly responsible for their incarceration.

The onus of a spiritual father is therefore to try and bury the past on one hand (not entering into details that pertain to the crime or the prisoner’s previous life) and on the other hand, to try and set the basis for a normal future life, away from the world of crime, and without the desire for retaliation. In short, he must assist that broken human being to utilize his imprisonment spiritually and through repentance, give a whole new meaning to his life. In other words, to see his imprisonment not as an end but as an opportunity for a beginning on another basis.

Of course this cannot be achieved through conversation and personal contact only. Other, more specific actions are also required, which the Church must undertake. For example, She should assist that person in his reinstatement in society after his release from prison by finding a job for him. This is why the Church must maintain Her connections to related services or organizations that can help.

The first period after someone’s release from prison is indeed a crucial one; that is the phase that will determine which way the scales will tilt. If the strong feeling of rejection that has been cultivated inside a person during his incarceration is amplified (by his inability to be re-incorporated normally in society by finding a steady job, a house, certain social contacts, etc.) then it is very likely that he will return even more violently to the world of crime. And we all know that he will be welcomed there with open arms.

The Church must also arrange (wherever there is a need) to financially assist the families of prisoners; apart from the actual need of the family, this assistance will also have a beneficial effect on the prisoner. It is also very helpful when priests or Bishops visit the people of their parish or metropolitan area who are in prison. This helps to preserve an extremely important bond—the feeling of belonging to the local Church—because this bond will act as a counterweight to any potentially bad influences that the prisoner may have acquired during his incarceration and will also help to minimize the feeling of social rejection that he already has.

It is for all the above reasons that the Church has to intensify Her presence in the field of prisons, given that nowadays it is somewhat limited since there is only one elderly priest for conducting the Liturgy and Fr. Marios Demetriou from Kaimakli for the Sacrament of Confession. A much stronger presence is obviously necessary.



From my experience thus far, I also believe that further help in the direction described above can also be attained through special treatment of imprisoned youngsters and drug addicts. Young people who are imprisoned for some minor misdemeanor will inevitably confront in prison a world of accumulated criminal experiences. If they become initiated in that world, most of the time they will become worse individuals instead of becoming corrected (which is what one would expect from a correctional institution). In other words, they will become capable of even worse crimes and their return to a normal life will become increasingly more improbable.

As much as this may not be admitted, even drug addicts can worsen in prison. You might say "How?" Well, I don't know. However, I have seen specific cases of light addictions, where prisoners went from bad to worse in prison and eventually ended up as users of hard narcotics. Then there are others, who have had to struggle superhumanly to avoid getting more involved with narcotics.

It is for all the above reasons that I believe it is imperative that there be a different approach for imprisoned young offenders and for those who are addicted to narcotic substances.

In closing this brief outline, I would also like to briefly mention how our society sees prison and prisoners. Unfortunately, from a certain point in time onwards, our society became imbued with an "imported" moralistic mentality; because of this, the broadly accepted view is that the "bad guys" are the ones who are (or should be) in prison, whereas those who aren't in prison (the "good guys" and peace-loving citizens) are the ones who are entitled to enjoy their lives undisturbed.

But things are not like that. There are no "good guys" and "bad guys", or, rather, they might exist, but only in cheap American movies... In reality, prisoners are no different at a moral level to the rest of us, because it doesn't matter what a person has committed in his past. It only matters what he chooses to do with the rest of his life today, and more so how he judges himself in the face of his actions and generally how he judges himself.

Inside prisons, I have witnessed cases of overwhelming repentance, but also of astonishing engrossment. I have seen exactly the same outside prisons as well. Therefore, no one has been judged and no one can be judged—quite simply, because the One Who will judge has not come yet. So, it behooves us to discard this self-centeredness that has become lodged within our conscience. And most of all, we should never consider that there exists a given dividing line that separates those who are inside prisons with those who are outside prisons. Prisoners are a part of our own body and (as the Apostle Paul says) when one part is in pain, then the entire body is in pain.

These profound truths regarding prison were expressed in the most soul-stirring manner by another great prisoner, the Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky. His novel, "The House of the Dead" is (if I can call it like that) a "diatribe" on the issue of prisons and prisoners. In this unusual book, which I recommend unreservedly because in my opinion it is a theological book, one clearly sees the immeasurable depths of the human soul unfold. In that convict society of Siberia, we can discern the endless range of human passions, the tremendous willpower of a person in determining his own destiny, and the overthrowing of those prefabricated notions of "good guy" and "bad guy". And most of all, we will see an approach to evil as a matter related to freedom.

Because in the long run, that is what it is all about: Evil is one potential of human freedom. However, it is that same freedom which can lead a person to deification, and that same freedom can have a starting point whenever and wherever, even inside of a prison...



Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. (Rom 13:1)

When the Emperor Focas the Tyrant had taken over the reigns of Byzantium (602AD), he inflicted upon his people several atrocities and massacres with the aid of the evil "Vonoso the Tormentor." During that same time, there was a certain pious monk in Constantinople, a holy man, who having much boldness towards God and as if he was being afflicted by Him, kept asking with great simplicity, "Lord, why did You give us such a king?" And then, after asking this for quite a few days, a voice from God came to him, which said:

Because I could find none worse...

**St. Anastasios the Sinaite
Bishop of Antioch (8th Century AD)**

[*Athonite Witness*, vol. 7, March-May, 1990, pages 98-99]



Do not be amazed, my child, since you are on a way leading upwards, if sometimes you fall into thorns or mud and at other times the ground is smooth. All those who struggle sometimes fall and sometimes succeed. The great Job said: *Is not the life of man upon earth a state of trial?*" (Job 7:1).

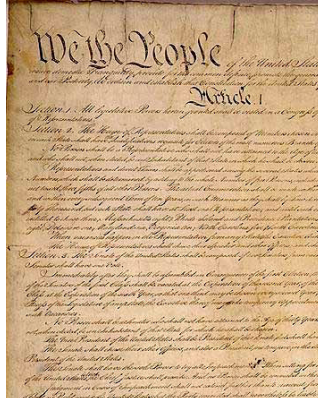
St. Dorotheos of Gaza

SOCIAL OXYMORA

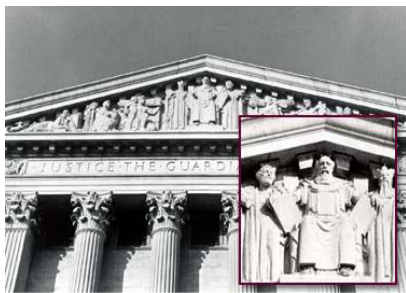
By George Karras, "Orthodox Heritage" Editor.

Oxymora (plural of oxymoron) is a series of statements (in our case facts) that stand as a revelation of the paradox we observe in our days relative to Christianity and the Christian foundation of this Nation. We would deem it quite proper if any of our readers, during their next debate with a pseudo-atheist that is liberally bound to an agnostic state of existence, utilized them accordingly. Here they are:

(1) Fifty-two of the 55 founders of the Constitution were members of the established Christian and (by today's standards) morally conservative churches in the colonies. They were all God-fearing people that could never contemplate an America absent of Christ or a Nation whose government instituted laws that deviate it that far from His Will.



(2) One of them was James Madison, the fourth president of our Nation, also known as *The Father of Our Constitution*. He made the following statement of interest to all of us: "We have staked the whole of all our political institutions upon the capacity of mankind for self-government, upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to control ourselves, to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God."



(3) As one walks up the steps to the building which houses the U.S. Supreme Court, he / she can see near the top of the building a row of statues of the world's law givers; each one is facing inwards (towards the one in the middle). The middle is facing forward, in a full frontal view. It is Moses and he is holding the Ten Commandments! So, when in 2003 Alabama's judicial ethics panel removed Chief Justice Roy Moore from office (for defying a federal judge's order to remove a Ten Commandments monument from the state Supreme Court building) all of us should wonder and demand that our politicians and the U.S. media bring forth a balanced and accurate picture of the "controversy."

(4) Thomas Jefferson was extremely concerned about the behaviors of Courts in the future; in specific, he often voiced his fear that the Judiciary branch may one day overstep their authority and instead of interpreting the law would begin making law an oligarchy and the rule of few over many.

(5) Surveys of our days indicate that 86% of Americans believe in God. It is therefore very hard to understand why there is such a mess about having the Ten Commandments on display or 'In God We Trust' on our money and having God in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Perhaps the 86% of us need to kindly request that the other 14% quiet down and remind them that this is still the world's oldest continuous democracy and that democracy is and shall remain the prevailing political system on this and all other matters!



THE EAGLE AND THE ROOSTER

A parable by St. Silouan the Athonite.

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.



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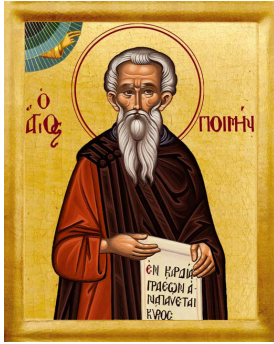
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OUR IRRELIGIOUS HUMANISTIC CONSCIOUSNESS...

By Alexander Solzhenitsyn (an excerpt from his address at Harvard class day afternoon graduation exercises, June 8, 1978).

As long as we wake up every morning under a peaceful sun, we have to lead an everyday life. There is a disaster, however, which has already been under way for quite some time; it is **the calamity of a despiritualized and irreligious humanistic consciousness.**

To such consciousness, man is the touchstone in judging and evaluating everything on earth. **Imperfect man**, who is never free of pride, self-interest, envy, vanity, and dozens of other defects. We are now experiencing the consequences of mistakes which had not been noticed at the beginning of the journey. On the way from the Renaissance to our days we have enriched our experience, but we have lost the concept of a Supreme Complete Entity which used to restrain our passions and our irresponsibility. We have placed too much hope in political and social reforms, only to find out that we were being deprived of our most precious possession: our spiritual life. In the West, commercial interests tend to suffocate it. This is the real crisis. The split in the world is less terrible than the similarity of the disease plaguing its main sections.

If humanism were right in declaring that man is born to be happy, he would not be born to die. Since his body is doomed to die, his task on earth evidently must be of a more spiritual nature. It cannot be unrestrained enjoyment of everyday life. It cannot be the search for the best ways to obtain material goods and then cheerfully get the most out of them. It has to be the

fulfillment of a permanent, earnest duty so that one's life journey may become an experience of moral growth, so that one may leave life a better human being than one started it. It is imperative to review the table of widespread human values. Its present incorrectness is astounding. It is not possible that assessment of the President's performance be reduced to the question of how much money one makes or of unlimited availability of gasoline. Only voluntary, inspired self-restraint can raise man above the world stream of materialism.

It would be retrogression to attach oneself today to the ossified formulas of the Enlightenment. Social dogmatism leaves us completely helpless in front of the trials of our times.

Even if we are spared destruction by war, our lives will have to change if we want to save life from self-destruction. We cannot avoid revising the fundamental definitions of human life and human society. Is it true that man is above everything? Is there no Superior Spirit above him? Is it right that man's life and society's activities have to be determined by material expansion in the first place? Is it permissible to promote such expansion to the detriment of our spiritual integrity?

If the world has not come to its end, it has approached a major turn in history, equal in importance to the turn from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. **It will exact from us a spiritual upsurge**, we shall have to rise to a new height of vision, to a new level of life where our physical nature will not be cursed as in the Middle Ages, but, even more importantly, our spiritual being will not be trampled upon as in the Modern era.

This ascension will be similar to climbing onto the next anthropologic stage. **No one on earth has any other way left but upward...**

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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IS ORTHODOXY JUST ANOTHER RELIGION?

*By Fr. John Romanides (+2001). This is an excerpt from the book *Patristic Theology*, by Protopresbyter John S. Romanides ("The University Lectures of Father John Romanides"), translated and published by Uncut Mountain Press, available at Amazon.com.*

Many are of the opinion that Orthodoxy is just one religion among many and that its chief concern is to prepare the members of the Church for life after death, securing a place in Paradise for every Orthodox Christian. Orthodox doctrine is presumed to offer some additional guarantee, because it is Orthodox, and not believing in Orthodox dogma is seen as yet another reason for someone to go to Hell, besides his personal sins that would otherwise send him there.

Those Orthodox Christians who believe that this describes Orthodoxy have associated Orthodoxy exclusively with the afterlife. But in this life such people do not accomplish very much. They just wait to die, believing that they will go to Paradise for the simple reason that while they were alive they were Orthodox Christians.

Another section of the Orthodox is involved with and active in the Church, interested not in the next life, but chiefly in this life, here and now. What interests them is how Orthodoxy can help them to have a good life in the present. These Orthodox Christians pray to God, have priests say prayers for them, have their homes blessed with holy water, have services of supplication sung, are anointed with oil, and so forth, all so that God will help them to enjoy life in the present: So that they do not get sick, so that their children find their place in society, so that their daughters are ensured a good dowry and a good groom, so that

their boys find good girls to marry with good dowries, so that their work goes well, so that their businesses go well, even so that the stock market goes well, or the industry they work in, and so on. So we see that these Christians are not so very different from other people who follow other religions, for those people do the very same things.

From what we have said, we can clearly see that Orthodoxy has two points in common with all other religions. First, it prepares believers for life after death, so that they will go to Paradise, whatever they imagine that to be. Second, Orthodoxy protects them in this life so that they will not have to experience sorrow, difficulties, disaster, sickness, war, and the like—in other words, so that God will take care of all their needs and desires. Thus, for this second type of Orthodox Christian, religion plays a major role in the present life and on a daily basis at that.

But among all these Christians we have just discussed, who cares deep down whether God exists or not? Who really yearns for Him and seeks Him out? The question of God's existence does not even come up, since it is clearly better for God to exist, so that we can appeal to Him and ask Him to satisfy our needs, in order for our work to go well and for us to have some happiness in this life.

As we can see, human beings have an extremely strong predisposition to want God to exist and to believe that God exists, because we have a need for God to exist in order to ensure everything we have mentioned. Since we need God to exist, therefore, God exists. If people were not in need of a God and could take measures to ensure sufficiency for the necessities of life by some other means, then who knows how many would still believe in God. This is what happens in Greece as a rule.

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So we see that many people who were previously indifferent to religion become religious towards the end of their lives, perhaps after some event that has frightened them. This happens because they feel that they cannot live any longer without appealing to some god for help—that is, it is the result of superstitious beliefs. For these reasons, human nature encourages man to be religious. This holds true not only for Orthodox Christians, but also for adherents to all religions. Human nature is the same everywhere. Since as a result of the Fall the human soul is now darkened, people are by nature inclined toward superstition.

Now the next question is this: Where does superstition stop and real belief begin? The Holy Fathers' views and teachings on these matters are clear. Consider first someone who follows, or rather thinks that he follows the teachings of Christ, simply by going to Church every Sunday, communing at regular intervals, and having the priest bless him with water, anoint him with oil and so on, without examining these things very closely.⁽¹⁾ Does this person who remains at the letter of the law, but does not enter into the spirit of the law, stand to gain anything of any account from Orthodoxy?

Now consider someone who prays exclusively for the future life, for himself and for others, but is completely indifferent towards this life. Again, what particular benefit does such a person stand to gain from Orthodoxy? The former tendency can be seen in parish priests and those who flock around them with the attitude described above. The latter tendency can be seen in some elders in monasteries, usually retired archimandrites waiting to die, and the few monks who follow them.⁽²⁾

Since purification and illumination are not their main focus or concern, both these tendencies, from the viewpoint of the

Holy Fathers, have set the wrong goals for themselves. But insofar as purification and illumination become their focus and the Orthodox asceticism of the Fathers is practiced with a view towards attaining noetic prayer, then and only then can everything else be placed on a firm foundation. These two tendencies are exaggerations that reflect two extremes and share no common core.

But there is a common core, a structure that runs throughout Orthodoxy and holds it together. When we take into account this one core, this unique structure, then every subject that concerns Orthodoxy finds its proper place on a firm foundation. And this core is purification, illumination, and theosis.

What will happen to man after death was not an overriding concern for the Holy Orthodox Fathers. Their primary concern was what will become of man in this life. After death, his nous cannot be treated. The treatment must begin in this life, because *in Hades there is no repentance*.⁽³⁾ This is why Orthodox theology is not outside of this world, futuristic, or eschatological, but is clearly grounded in this world, because Orthodoxy's focus is man in this world and in this life, not after death.

Now why do we need purification and illumination? Is it so that we can go to Heaven and escape Hell? Is that why they are necessary? What are purification and illumination and why do Orthodox Christians want to attain them? In order to find the reason for this and to answer these questions, you need to have what Orthodox theology considers the basic key to these issues.

The basic key is the fact that, according to Orthodox theology, everyone throughout the world will finish their earthly course in the same way, regardless of whether they are Or-

thodox, Buddhist, Hindu, agnostic, atheist, or anything else. Everyone on earth is destined to see the glory of God. At the Second Coming of Christ, with which all human history ends, everyone will see the glory of God. And since all people will see God's glory, they will all meet the same end. Truly, all will see the glory of God, but not in the same way—for some, the glory of God will be an exceedingly sweet Light that never sets; for others, the same glory of God will be like “a devouring fire” that will consume them. We expect this vision of God's glory to occur as a real event. This vision of God—of His Glory and His Light—is something that will take place whether we want it to happen or not. But the experience of that Light will be different for both groups.

Therefore, it is not the Church's task to help us see this glory, since that is going to happen anyway. The work of the Church and of her priests focuses on how we will experience the vision of God, and not whether we will experience the vision of God. The Church's task is to proclaim to mankind that the true God exists, that He reveals Himself as Light or as a devouring fire, and that all of humanity will see God⁽⁴⁾ at the Second Coming of Christ. Having proclaimed these truths, the Church then tries to prepare Her members so that on that day they will see God as Light, and not as fire.⁽⁵⁾

When the Church prepares her members and everyone who desires to see God as Light, She is essentially offering them a curative course of treatment that must begin and end in this life. The treatment must take place during this life and be brought to completion, because there is no repentance after death.

This curative course of treatment is the very fiber of Orthodox tradition and the primary concern of the Orthodox Church. It consists of three stages of spiritual ascent: purification from the passions, illumination by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and theosis, again by the grace of the Holy Spirit. We should also take note. If a believer does not reach a state of at least partial illumination in this life, he will not be able to see God as Light either in this life or in the next.⁽⁶⁾

It is obvious that the Church Fathers were interested in people as they are today at this moment. Every human being needs to be healed. Every human being is also responsible before God to begin this process today in this life, because now is when it is possible, not after death. Everyone must decide for himself whether or not he will pursue this path of healing.

Christ said, *I am the Way*. (Jn 14:6) But where does this Way lead? Christ is not referring to the next life. Christ is primarily the Way in this life. Christ is the Way to His Father and our Father. First, Christ reveals Himself to man in this life and shows him the path to the Father. This path is Christ Himself.⁽⁷⁾ Thus, if a man does not see Christ in this life, at least by sensing Him in his heart, he also will not see the Father or the Light of God in the life to come.

NOTES:

(1) Of course, genuine Orthodox Christians do these same things and it is not wrong for them to desire to do them. The problem is when someone stagnates at this level.

(2) As a rule, this is seen when the spiritual father and his monks are not interested in hesychasm.

(3) St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book II, Chapter IV.

(4) Of course, all people have a partial experience of this vision of God immediately after the departure of the soul from the body at their biological death.

(5) “In the fire of revelation on the final day, the deeds of each will be tested by fire as Paul says. If what one has built up for himself is a work of incorruptibility, it will remain incorruptible in the midst of the fire and not only will it not be burned up, but it will be made radiant, totally purified of the perhaps small amount of filth...” St. Nikitas Stithatos, “On Spiritual Knowledge,” §79, *The Philokalia*, vol. III, page 348 [in Greek] [in English, page 165].

(6) “We have fallen so far from the vision of Him, corresponding to the dimness of our sight, since we have voluntarily deprived ourselves of His Light in this present life.” St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Extant Works*, Discourse 75 [in Greek].

(7) “...At Christ's Second Coming, all mankind will be raised and will be judged according to their works. The sinners who did not acquire spiritual eyes will not cease to exist. They will continue to exist ontologically as persons, but they will not participate in God. The righteous will both participate in God and commune with Him. As Saint Maximos the Confessor teaches, the sinners will live with an ‘eternal lack of well being,’ while the righteous will live in a state of ‘eternal well being.’” Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos, *The Person in Orthodox Tradition* (Levadia: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1994), p. 162 [in Greek].



God knows all those who belong to Him, always—no matter where they hide you, even if they squeeze you into some storage room or into some basement. When people want to make you invisible and totally insignificant by disregarding you and discarding you, God watches you. He knows you. He singles you out. You are His. Don't worry! What a great consolation this can be. God knows me. I am His. He knows me.

Fr. Athanasios Mitilinaios (+2006)

From the *100 homilies on the Book of the Revelation*
(translated by Constantine Zalalas)

THE HOLY MOUNTAIN: A PLACE WITH ECUMENICAL COORDINATES AND A HEAVENLY ORIENTATION

By the Rev. Metropolitan of Mesogaia and Lavreotiki, Metropolitan Nikolaos, from the magazine "Pemptousia," issue No. 22, December 2006 - March 2007.

Editor's Note: *The spiritual brilliance, splendor, and warmth of the Holy Mountain are undeniable; innumerable souls have attained sainthood there. Countless pilgrims, over the centuries, have also come to know therein spiritual peace, as well as guidance and support. For the Greek Orthodox in America, the Holy Mountain carries special significance as the spiritual oases of the Greek Orthodox monasteries in northern America were established under the spiritual guidance and work of Athonite monastics.*

† † †

The higher one climbs, the more—we are told by scientists—gravity weakens; the less one can feel earth's pull, the more one's ties to earth are loosened; it becomes so much easier for one to depart from earth's demanding and contending presence. One becomes so much lighter.

However, one also feels so much closer to the heavens, which, albeit undefined, nevertheless feel so real and so desirable. Albeit less tangible, the heavens appear more real than the earth. The higher one goes, the cleaner the air becomes, the more perceptive one's hearing becomes, the horizon becomes broader, and one's association with what is true, intensifies. Truth is far more convincing than reality.

The Holy Mountain is the par excellence place in Orthodoxy where monasticism for more than a thousand years is being lived in its most absolute form. The centuries may have left their secular imprint on its body; it may be (and it is natural) that the people there show their flaws, even their vices; it may also be that today's civilization has caused some damage, however, the Mountain in some inexplicable secret way manages to preserve its blessed mien, its continuous and unique proofs of Grace, its rare and unique spiritual power, its larger-than-life association with the site of God's Kingdom and with God's "timeframe." Its ideology is not endangered by wrong choices; it is not harmed by ill-meant modernization; it is not deteriorated by seasons and by people—any people. Its truth is resistant.

It resembles a rock, where the only thing accomplished by the breaking waves of political influence, the thoughtless use of technology, tourism, the inter-monastic quarrels, rivalries, even hatreds, or the localist perceptions and the various kinds

of enemies is that these all temporarily wash over it, or simply glide over its exterior, leaving its interior literally intact.

There is something there that does actually safeguard it. It could be its monastic multiformity; perhaps its perennial endurance; perhaps the natural feeling behind its monastic expression; perhaps it is the maternal shelter and protection of the Theotokos; perhaps its special charm. Despite its theocracy, the mighty "Byzantium" finally fell, after 11 centuries of glory. The Mountain is currently covering the 14th century of its life, yet it is still pacing along with the pace of the aeon to come, giving one the feeling that it is a place not of this world (Jn 18:36), whose association with Time is equivalent to the contact of its surface with the air, while its polity is found in Heaven (Phil 3:20).

Majestic Mountain, Rugged Mountain (Pss 68)

By retaining a loose association with secular and ephemeral things, and by perpetually looking towards the End of Time



and upwards at the heights, it resembles an embrace that accommodates everyone, and a gaze that discerns the beyond, of both Time and Logic. The Mountain may have its geographical coordinates in Hellas, but it does not belong to her.

It might just be the par excellence part of Orthodox life, which underlines the catholicity and the ecumenicity of the Church; among its monasteries, it has a Russian one, a Serbian one and a Bulgarian one. It has two Rumanian scetes and it offers hospitality to monks from such faraway civilizations as Peru and Colombia. Divine Worship is performed within its geographical terrain in a number of languages; a variety of cultures are expressed; numerous traditions are displayed; there exists a wonderful and balanced variety. None of these factors hinders the unity of faith, the catholicity of the Orthodox spirit, or the ecumenicity of ecclesiastic witness.

On the contrary, they all prove that the word of God is not confined by languages; it is not enclosed by borders; it does not asphyxiate from the various cultural expressions—perhaps not even from other religions. It is interesting to note that out of all the members of the "Friends of the Holy Mountain" association, only one third of them are Orthodox. The non-Orthodox authors who deposit their impressions and their suspicion of the Mountain's secret power are continually increasing in number. The Mountain touches every heart.

Space and Time acquire another dimension and perspective. One's association with everything mortal, ephemeral, corruptible, is entirely conventional. Notions such as 'money,' 'possessions,' 'wealth,' 'investment,' 'entertainment,' 'competition,' 'interest,' all degenerate into totally secondary terms.

Of all the temporal things, only the absolutely necessary ones are selected. The soul soars towards the heavens. What dominates here is a concern for the eternal; for the kingdom of God. History does not exist in order to be worshipped, but only to lay the foundations of the Present. The Future is not portrayed for the purpose of relieving one's suppressed feelings, but to transform the Present. Time itself is condensed, in the Mountain's embrace. The Mountain observes the old calendar, fully aware that it is inaccurate, but without this being an annoyance and with the thought that it is intended for a tested place. Even the Byzantine daily schedule—which is so awkward in practice—appears to have a reason here. The Mountain lives in its own Time; it has slipped away, even from the tightest clutches, and it has conquered even the almightiest of dominions.

Time is not binding. Tradition does not confine. The liturgical rubric does not imprison. National identity and language are not absolutized. Education does not constitute a privilege. Discriminations are nonexistent. Comparisons are avoided. What prevails is one's incessant presentment before God and the embracing of the entire world.

**Let Us Lift Ourselves up to The Mountains,
My Soul,
from Where Help Will Come (Pss 121:1)**

The first characteristic of Athos is that it is a Mountain, and in fact an intelligible one. It is a high place. It represents a life that is approached as an ascent; it is enjoyed by lofty minds; it reports to the heart that gazes upward, that seeks the One who lives aloft—the Lord on High. It is interesting how—in the Tradition of our Church—there are four scriptural references to mountains, on which revelatory events had taken place:

Mount Sinai—Moses received the ten commandments there; the expression of Divine Will. Moses conversed with Him; he heard His voice, and he had sight of His back. (Exodus, ch. 19 & 20).

Mount Carmel—The Prophet Elijah prayed there; his voice was heard, he received God's reply and could feel His presence. He was given a taste of His power. (Kings III ch. 18, 19 and 20).

Mount of Olives—where the event of the Divine Ascension took place, of the Lord who deifies that which He had taken on, and, by lifting upon His shoulders the deluded human nature did present it to God the Father. Here can be discerned the glory and the honor bestowed on human nature. (Acts 1:12).

Mount Tabor—Finally, the Mountain on which the Lord revealed His glory (to the degree that human nature was able to perceive it) and emanated His Divine Light. (Mt 17:1-8)

The Mountain is a mountain of the divine commandments; it is the place of a practiced lifestyle; a place of patience, humility, love; a place for divine investments. It is a place of perpetual

constraint on one's nature and an uninterrupted guarding of one's senses; it is a place of extreme, incessant and unrelenting asceticism and renouncing.

It is a place of prayer and of signs. Praying is incessant, by many, extensive and lengthy. Ascetics begin their night-vigil at sunset; the coenobites (monastery dwellers) take over at midnight. In the morning, the Divine Liturgy is performed. During the daytime are the services of the Hours. In the cell, during their quiet time and their pious chats, one hears the repetition of the divine meanings of the Prayer, continuously, and by many. Tongues pray; the architecture of the temples underlines the intensity of prayer; the program, the long services, the hearts of the monks, are all overcome by the fragrance of melodious praying.

The Mountain reveals the extremity of human conditions. It has on average the discerning ethos, with the divine extremeness of an absolute and uncompromising lifestyle and ideology, but without any unjustified extremes. The daily vigils, the absence of feminine consolation, even as an image, the given obedience, the lifestyle without any choices, all underline the natural feeling of a situation beyond nature. On the Mountain, the majesty of human nature is highlighted. The place functions as a workshop for theosis. The Athonite community chants: *Your life in the flesh had astonished the angelic hosts*, thus honouring its father, saint Athanasios the Athonite. Human measures are taken to their limits.

Here, saints like St. Gregory Palamas become observers of Godhood. Saints, like St. Maximos the Hut-burner, shed their temporal gravity, so that they stand suspended above the ground. Saints, like St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, express their intelligence as enlightenment and they transform their knowledge into a revelatory word. Saints, like our contemporary Elder Paisios, Elder Ephraim, the Elder Joseph the Hesychast, all combine constraint along with Divine Grace in their lives, just like the olden-time elders in ascetic literature. Saints, like St. Kosmas of Aetolia, or our contemporary father Sophrony and Porphyrios, draw strength from the Athonian fountain for a certain number of years, then are transformed into universal reformers and preachers and lifelong theologians.

But the Mountain is not only a place for Man's spiritual glory. In all four of the aforementioned Mounts the presence of God is indicated by the appearance of a cloud—on Sinai, as a dark fog-like cloud, in which Moses entered, thus feeling but not seeing the Lord (Ex 19:16 & 24). On Carmel, the cloud breaks the silence of the heavens and brings forth rain in a miraculous manner (Kings III 18:44). On the Mount of the Divine Ascension, a cloud lifted up the Lord to the heavens (Acts 1:9). Finally, on Mount Tabor, a bright cloud *overshadowed* the disciples and a voice from within the cloud saying *this is my beloved Son, in Whom I have shown favor; harken unto Him* (Mt 17:5) are a positive indication of the co-presence of God the Father.

The Mountain lives within a cloud of God's Graces. Holy relics of saints exude fragrance; holy icons exude myrrh, the expected is overturned, the anticipated are transcended, surprises go beyond customary events, God acts far more powerfully than the natural laws or logic. In this Hagiorite cloud, you enter as a visitor and you realize, just like Moses, that in your hands have been placed the tablets with the divine commandments. You are enabled to keep those commandments. You are surprised by its presence and taken aback by the sign of God's grace raining down.

You can sense it as a mystery, and you fall prostrate on your face, in great fear, just like the disciples on Mount Tabor; you look upon it and you hear God the Father's voice inside you. You can feel it, as an intangible divine majesty and you gaze towards heaven, like the Apostles at the Mount of Olives, and you return, with an immense, secret joy.

If the Mountain of divine presence illuminates with the sight of revelations, the cloud of divine mystery fills the heart with the humility of uncreated Grace. On the Holy Mountain, you live the miracle, you perceive sanctity, you are enlightened by everything you can see, you are nourished by everything you cannot reach, your attitude is that of Jesus Christ (Phil 2:5).

Some years ago, a young student had approached me and with immense hesitation, stated that he was an atheist who however wanted very much to believe but couldn't. For years and years he had tried and had searched, but without any success. He had spoken to professors and other educated people. But his thirst for something more serious was not quenched. Someone told him about me, so he decided to share his existential concerns with me. He asked me to give him scientific proof of God's existence.

-Do you know anything about integrals or differential equations? I asked him.

-Unfortunately, no, he replied. I am in Philosophical studies.

-Shame! Because I was aware of a proof of that kind, I said—obviously jokingly.

He felt somewhat uneasy, and for a while remained silent.

-Look, I said to him. I apologize for teasing you a little. But God isn't an equation, or a mathematical proof. If He were something like that, then all the educated people would believe in Him. You must know that God is approached in a different way... Have you ever been to the Holy Mountain? Have you ever met an ascetic?

-No, father. But I am thinking of going there, I've heard so much about it. So many things... If you tell me to, I will go

there, even tomorrow. Do you know any educated person that I can go and meet there?

-What do you prefer? An educated one who may bewilder you, or a saint who may awaken you?

-I prefer an educated one. I'm afraid of saints.

-Faith is a matter of the heart—go ahead and try a saint. What is your name? I asked.

-Gabriel, he replied.

I sent him to an ascetic. I described how he can get there and gave him the appropriate instructions. We even made a diagram.

-You will go there, I said, and you will ask the same thing. You will say I am an atheist and I want to believe. I want proof of God's existence.

-I'm scared, I'm embarrassed to do that, he replied.

-Why be embarrassed and afraid of the ascetic and not of me? I asked. Just go, and simply ask him the same thing.

A few days later, he went there and he found the ascetic talking to a young man in the yard. Opposite them, there were four others sitting on some logs. Gabriel discreetly sat himself next to them. No more than ten minutes had passed, and the Elder's conversation with the young man ended.

-How are you all, my children? he asked. Did you all help yourselves to a sweet? Did you drink some water?

-Thank you, father, they replied, with conventional, secular politeness.

-Come over here, he said, addressing Gabriel after isolating him from the others. I will go and bring the water, and you take this box of sweets. And come closer, so that I can tell you a secret: It's fine to be an atheist, but for someone to have the name of an angel and be an atheist? Well, that's a first for me!

Our friend nearly had a heart attack, with this revelatory surprise. How did the Elder know his name? Who revealed his problem to him? And most of all, what was the Elder trying to tell him?

-Father, can I speak to you for a minute? He could just barely mumble those words.

-Look, it's getting dark; take the sweet, drink some water and go to the nearest monastery to sleep overnight.

-Father, I want us to talk—isn't it possible?

-What is there for us to talk about, my young man? What was the reason you came here?

-On hearing this question, he told us, I immediately felt my breath relaxing, my heart being flooded with faith, my inner world becoming warmer, my queries solved without any logical argument, without any discussion, without the existence of



an explicit answer. Inside me, all the 'ifs,' the 'why's' and the 'perhaps' crumbled, and the only thing that was left, was the 'what,' from now on...

Everything that the thoughts of the educated had not given him was bestowed on him through the polite innuendo of a saintly person—a mere graduate of the fourth grade of primary school. **Saints are very discreet.** They perform an operation on you without anesthesia and you do not feel any pain. They perform a transplant without opening up your belly. **They take you up to inaccessible heights, without the ladders of secular logic.** They plant faith in your heart, without tiring your mind.

Untrodden and God-Trodden

The Holy Mountain is a university of the heart; it is the infirmary of inner man. It provides hospitality on spiritual summits that you cannot approach—not even with the most modern aerostat of secular cogitation. Here, Divine Grace gives unusual expressions to the truth.

The basic question on the Mountain is not whether God exists. That seems to have received the definitive reply, a long time ago. Nor if our God is better than the others'. That word, 'our,' is in no way perceived possessively, i.e., "God is mine;" it is formulated in a filial sense, 'vacatingly,' i.e., I strive to become His. What one strives for, is to partake of His divine nature (2 Pet 1:4); it is the advantageous use of kinship with Him; the acquiring of that sense of His presence.

The Mountain's worth does not lie in its isolated charismatic monks—regardless how many or how great they may be. Its majesty is found in the fact that it is a resting place of God. For reasons unknown to us, in certain icons (which depict the same person as in other ones), He condescends differently and gives a special grace to those icons, which He does not give to the other icons, just as among the twelve dear disciples, He had one beloved one; just as among His people He had selected a chosen one; just as only in specific places, such as the Bethesda or the Siloam Founts, did He perform the miracles that revealed Him, so He selects places in His Creation that express His Grace particularly.

The Holy Mountain is truly God's Mountain!



Salvation is not gained when we speak idly or when we pass our days without keeping accounts. Be careful with your tongue and your thoughts, for guarding them fills the soul with the light of God. But he whose mouth is unbridled deposits various impurities in his soul.

By Elder Ephraim of Filotheou
From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain."

THE VIRTUE OF PUNCTUALITY

By Fr. Luke Hartung.

The time to arrive for any Divine Service is before it is scheduled to begin. Sadly, it has become the custom of most Orthodox Christians to come to Church late. We are not speaking here, about occasional tardiness due to unforeseen circumstances, but the habitual practice of being late due to a lack of concern for being on time.

Does it really matter? Evidently not in the mind of many, however not only do we hinder our own spiritual growth by consistently showing up late but, we also disturb our brothers and sisters in Christ who arrived on time and are already prayerfully communing with God. Hence, we should make the effort to arrive a few minutes early not simply to physically prepare ourselves but, more importantly, to shed the worldly baggage we bring with us — to "lay aside the earthly cares" — which, whether we are aware of it or not, has a profound impact on all those around us. Such faithful action not only nourishes our own soul, but sends an important message to our children, visitors and inquirers alike. Think of how odd it must appear to visitors who, more often than not, arrive early for Church, and find the place almost empty.

Brothers and sisters, it is absolutely vital that we constantly remind ourselves of the great blessing we've been given by God in Holy Orthodoxy! An Orthodox Church is that part of God's creation, which has been set apart and "reclaimed" for the Kingdom of God. Within its walls the heavenly God dwells and moves; the heavenly and earthly realms meet; Angels assist the Priest during the Divine Liturgy and Saints and members of the Church Triumphant join with the Faithful in the Divine Services. Coming into the Church, we, as it were, leave this world and enter the heavenly realm. Who would want to be late for that?

Given these very significant spiritual realities, beloved, let us begin to approach the Divine Services with a newfound attitude of awe and reverence. Do we not make every effort to be to our jobs and secular appointments on time? How much more effort then, should we make to arrive punctually at our meeting with the heavenly realm?



For someone to teach another, he must be healthy in his soul and free of passions. There is no use in building the house of another, your own being destroyed. Furthermore, he who teaches others, without putting to practice any of that which he teaches is like a spring which irrigates and flows over all that is around it, while it is filled with every sort of dirt.

Abba Poimen

CAPITALISM'S IDEOLOGY

By the Rev. Hierotheos Vlachos, Metropolitan of Nafpaktos and Saint Vlassios, from the Greek Newspaper "Τὸ Βήμα," October 19th, 2008.

Nowadays, two prominent ways of life prevail in mankind, which have been transformed into two ideologies respectively; that is, Western individualism and Eastern collectivism. In Western individualism, characterized by liberalism, an unbridled freedom of the individual prevails, along with competition which is a detrimental factor to society overall. In Eastern collectivism state dominance prevails, which undermines people's freedom. In both instances, man is overlooked as a persona, just as human society is not regarded as a society of human personae.

These two systems of living and ideological models are both made manifest in societal reality. Liberalism prevails in the West and its "headquarters" is the United States of America—the "Mecca" of globalization, while collectivism appeared in countries of the former Soviet Union, but also in countries of the Far East generally.

In both cases capital has a prominent place, except it is differentiated in who possesses it and who manages it. In liberalism, capital ends up among the few and it moves, mostly unrestrained, along the principle of market self-adjustment. In collectivism-communism, capital is state-controlled. In both cases the average person is victimized, the difference being that he is victimized either by the oligarchy of a handful of wealthy tycoons or by an insatiable State. Capitalism, therefore, has only a callous face to show.

The view has been expressed that capitalism is the creation of Western individualism and especially of Protestant morality, as indicated by Max Weber, and that it aspires to the accumulation of wealth by a few, while Marxism, which originated from Marx's views, is only a reaction to capitalism and is concerned with the whole of society. Deep down however, both these systems are the offspring of the same, Western metaphysics—given that Marx was a German Jew raised in the West—however his theories, which were born in the Western "sphere," were transfused to the East, because that was where the practice of Orthodox Christianity existed, with its principles of common ownership and communal use and could therefore be implemented.

In our day, we have become witnesses to the crumbling of both these two systems, but equally of their ideologies. In the period between 1989 and 1991, collectivism-Communism collapsed in the countries of the former Soviet Union where State power dominated over people's social and financial lives, while in our day, we are witnessing the collapse of liberalism with its mentality of "free markets" and the market's "self-adjustment," which functions to the detriment of society overall. Of course it should be noted

that the bankruptcy of Communism cannot be regarded as a vindication of Capitalism, just as the collapse of Capitalism cannot be ascribed to Communism. It is the failure of capital's ideology, which is totally disrespectful of people's poverty.

At any rate, both these systems are contrary to the Orthodox teaching in its perfect form, since neither liberalism nor Marxism—as ideologies and world theories—can be accepted by Holy Orthodox Tradition, in which extensive mention is made to avoid the passion of avarice, but also about the experiencing of love towards fellow-man, especially those who are suffering. This combination of love and freedom solves the problem altogether, given that the freedom of the individual/persona without the element of love will lead to unbridled liberalism, and the love of the whole minus the freedom of the individual will result in unbridled collectivism.

To anticipate a possible objection to the above, I will admit that unfortunately, the ideology behind the capitalist system with its two forms—the individualist and the state-controlled—has, in certain cases, influenced and continues to influence the lives of certain Orthodox communities. This can be discerned in several contemporary Orthodox communities also, which, instead of being examples of coenobitic living and the revival of the original community of Jerusalem, are nevertheless operating along the contemporary capitalist system's model, in which case, we could aptly label this phenomenon "Orthodox Capitalism."

This situation reminds me of certain Eastern European countries—Romania for example—where the people went hungry and were in fact non-possessors (albeit involuntarily) and yet its leaders amassed wealth and built majestic mansions-palaces (for example Nicolae Ceausescu). However, this mentality is not favoured by the teaching of the Church and stands against Orthodox principles and values.

We clergymen and monks need to understand that everything legal is not necessarily ethical, but also that everything ethical—according to the rules of social ethics—is not necessarily Orthodox, from the aspect that Orthodox Gospel ethics differs from secular ethics and is in reality ascetic by nature. We should not only condemn the amassing of material wealth by specific individuals; we also need to condemn the amassing of material wealth by "ecclesiastic communities" for display, as well as stigmatize the participation of ecclesiastic personages and communities in the games of the capitalist system and the liberal or neo-liberal market.

We Christians, especially the clergy and monks, must display in practice that which we believe in and preach, otherwise we will be dishonest and hypocrites. We must fend off the temptation to be possessed by a particular, "Christian capitalist" ideology.

“NO” TO COMMON PRAYERS!

A commentary by the His Eminence Paul, Metropolitan of Kyrenia, from the Greek Orthodox weekly newspaper “Orthodox Press,” July 31st, 2009.

By observing the words of our Lord to His disciples to *not meditate in advance how you should respond* (Lk 21:14), the Holy Fathers of the Church would speak and write—out of the inspiration of their enlightened heart as well as their enlightened intellect thanks to the Grace of God—only when the Most Holy Spirit would prompt them, inspire them and guide them. They would never embark on delicate theological teaching for the sake of an academic discussion or the imposition of personal, imperfect ponderings and farfetched views in order to impress or influence the faithful. Their constant concern was to preserve the integrity of the Immaculate Faith that was given by the Lord and received by the Holy Apostles, and their tireless care was the safeguarding of the unity of the Corpus of the Church and the securing of salvation for the faithful, as members of the Supremely Immaculate Body of Christ.

To safeguard the Body of the Church, they did not hesitate, when exercising their philanthropical poemantic (*for the flock*) ministry, to set down with an austerity of brotherly love a series of sacred Canons. Among them are several which expressly forbid the Orthodox from praying together with heretics—not just so that the faithful would not be “polluted” and their Orthodox sensor be blunted, but in the hope that repentance may be cultivated among the heretics and that they may even return to Christ’s proper fold, which is the Orthodox Church.

It is not our intention to quote the multitude of those sacred Canons, which outrightly forbid common prayers and leave no margin whatsoever for misinterpretation. One can easily refer to them collectively, in the two relative publications that became available in 2008 [1].

A recent attempt by a layman, a former University teacher, to convince that common praying with heretics is supposedly permitted, is both dogmatically perforate and theologically undocumented. As hard as one may try to present it as documented and scientific, this claim simply cannot hold water because it upholds exactly the opposite of the work of the Holy Spirit, which is the unity of the Faith and communion with Him by the faithful, and it furthermore goes against the pastoral spirit of the sacred Canons. It is also reminiscent of the opinions formulated from time to time by various expert assessors who, in their attempts to impose their positions and views, had presented as supposedly scientific the undocumented basis thereof. But these positions and views are unsupportable—in Orthodox dogmatic teaching as well as the **canonical spirit of the Church**, whose purpose is to save, not lose; to unite, not divide.

The Holy Fathers, with souls cleansed and sanctified by the uncreated Grace of God and in whose steps we must always follow, spoke and wrote from their place of ascesis and prayer, experientially, and inspired by the All-Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the aim of the God-bearing Fathers was not to satisfy any expediencies. Their words and their preaching were *not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in evidence of the Spirit and of power.* (1 Cor 2:4).

The determinant difference between the Holy Fathers and ordinary ecclesiastic authors is the sanctity of the formers’ lives and their sense of pastoral responsibility. This sense of pastoral responsibility of the Fathers is precisely the proof of their true and guileless love. This love is expressed, not only towards the faithful (in order that they remain in the proper faith), but is also extended towards heretics—even if expressed with austerity by forbidding common prayer. Their aim is for the heretics to realize that they are outside the Church, and to thereafter return in repentance to whatever the ancient Church teaches and be saved.

The distorting of the spirit of the sacred Canons shows just how much *the Spirit vivifies, whereas the letter destroys*. The meticulous endeavour to shroud the attempted misinterpretation of the sacred Canons by acknowledging the point in question—that is, the imposition of common prayers—cannot remain hidden. **Both the letter and the spirit of the sacred Canons explicitly forbid common prayers.** Hence, the intentions of the aforementioned teacher are obvious: to encourage the Orthodox to pray together with heretics, and to avert predictable reactions by the faithful. He furthermore wants to influence decision-making—normally a product of unbiased discussions in the Holy Spirit—thus trying to impose his own personal opinions and views. In that attempt, the Holy Fathers have been scorned.

St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain—a renowned interpreter of the sacred Canons—has thus been underestimated; he has additionally been accused of supposedly hating heretics, in the attempt to demote his objectivity and undermine the authority of his words. St. Nicodemos’ words are absolutely clear: *So, if those who are Catechumens are not excused to remain in place during the commencement of the Divine Liturgy, how can heretics?* [2].

Another important Canonologist, Theodore Valsamon, is considered a debatable case, because his interpretation does not seem to agree with his theories. *The sacred Canons do not constitute the expression of some legalistic spirit—which tends to render everything legalistic and confines the life of the spirit to legalistic formulas—but rather (they constitute) the expression of the pastoral care of the Church for the salvation of Her members* [3].

The Divine Liturgy is the capital of the Orthodox dogmas, the summary of the entirety of divine Providence, the heart of the Church, the center of Orthodox worship, the source of Orthodox spirituality and the seal of Orthodoxy's entire life. It is the Mystery of Mysteries, where the Canonical order and Tradition of the Church keep the uninitiated at a distance, and want only the faithful to participate and to approach it *with a fear of God, faith and love*.

The golden mouth of the Church, St. John Chrysostom, warns: *Let no-one commune with the non-pupils... I would first leave my soul, rather than undeservingly impart the Majestic Blood* [4]. One can discern here the pastoral responsibility displayed by this Holy Hierarchy; this in turn permits us to perceive how thoughtlessly (and lacking in theological sensitivity) certain lay people propagandize, but also how certain "theologizing" Orthodox clergymen encourage common prayers with the heterodox, without the necessary precedent unity—in the Faith and in the Communion of the Holy Spirit.

The faithful populace preserves its Faith sensor Orthodox, and its criterion of Orthodoxy fully developed and perceptive. It will never accept—much less tolerate—any novel interpretations in the topics of Dogma and Ethos, which it rightly regards as interlinked and unalterable.

† † †

NOTES:

[1] (a) Fr. Anastasios Gotsopoulos, (*An Approach to the Canonical Praxis of the Church*), "One must not pray with heretics or schismatics", Patrae, 2008. (b) Archmandrite Kyr. Kostopoulos, (*The Anti-Canonicity of Common Prayer with Heretics*), Patrae 2008.

[2] The Rudder (Pedalion), page 670.

[3] Archimandrite George Kapsanis (The Poemantic Ministry according to the sacred Canons), Piraeus, 1976, page 59.

[4] On the Gospel according to Matthew, 82, EPE 12, 220.



Abba Isaac recounted how a demon approached him disguised as a youth. "You are mine" he said. I asked how he could say that. "Because three Sundays running you have received Holy Communion whilst being at daggers-drawn with your neighbor," he said, and I told him he was lying. But he said, "Are you not harboring a grudge against him because of a plate of lentils? I am the one who is in charge of grudges, and, from now on, you are mine." When I heard that, I left my cell, went to the brother and prostrated myself before him in order to be reconciled with him. When I returned to my cell I found that my visitor had burned my mat on which I prostrated myself, because he was so consumed with jealousy for our love.

From "The Spiritual Meadow" of John Moschos

THE POWER OF PRAYER: A DESERT STORY

From the "The World of the Desert Fathers."

There was a presbyter from Kellis who was discerning. While coming into the church to complete the synaxis, he saw a number of demons outside the cell of one of the brothers. Some had taken the form of women who were speaking indecently, and others of blasphemous youths; others were dancing while still others were trying on different outfits.

The old man sighed and said, "The brother persists in negligence in every way, and because of it, the wicked spirits surround his cell in this disorderly manner." Therefore, when he had completed the synaxis, he returned and entered the cell of the brother, and said to him, "I am suffering, brother. I have faith in you, and if you pray for me, God will completely relieve my heart from suffering." The disciple was shamed, and said, "Father, I am not worthy to pray for you." The old man persisted, pleading and saying, "I will not leave unless you promise me that you will say one prayer for me every night." The brother obeyed the old man's command. The old man did this because he wanted a new way to ensure that the brother would pray at night.

Therefore, when the brother rose in the night, he said the prayer for the old man. After finishing the prayer, he was struck with contrition, and said to himself, "Wretched soul, you pray for the old man, but you do not pray for yourself." Therefore he offered one prayer for himself. He did this for a week, offering two prayers each night, one for the old man and one for himself.

On Sunday, while the old man was going to the church, he saw the demons once again standing outside the brother's cell, looking glum, and the old man knew that the demons were grieved because the brother prayed. He was filled with joy and went to the brother, saying, "Have charity and offer another prayer for me each night." After saying the two prayers for the old man, he was struck again with contrition, and said to himself. "O miserable one, offer another prayer for yourself." He did this for a whole week, offering four prayers each night.

When the old man came again, he saw the demons glum and silent, and gave thanks to God, and went in again to the brother and urged him to offer another prayer for him. The brother also offered one for himself, and said six prayers at night. When the old man came again to the brother, the demons were angry with the old man, furious about the salvation of the brother. The old man gave glory to God and after entering his cell and exhorting him not to be negligent but to pray unceasingly, let him alone. The demons, seeing the brother's perseverance in the prayers and in soberness, by the grace of God left him.

ARE THERE WONDERWORKERS IN OUR TIME?

By Saint Dimitri of Rostov, from a leaflet published by the Russian Skete of Prophet Elias on Mt Athos, No. 91, 1896.



St. Dimitri of Rostov is a great Russian hierarch that is best known for his 12-volume compilation of the *Lives of the Saints*, the favorite reading for many generations of Russian Orthodox, which is now becoming available in English translation.

Born near Kiev in 1651, the Saint was early inclined towards monasticism, and was tonsured at the age of 18. Six years later he was ordained a priest. He had excelled in rhetoric as a student, and was soon in demand as a preacher, moving his listeners not only by his eloquence but by his prayerful and ascetic disposition. He was abbot of several monasteries before being elevated, in 1702, to Metropolitan of Rostov. As a hierarch, he was especially concerned to combat the moral failings and theological ignorance among the clergy. "Alas for our wretched times," he wrote, "the priests are negligent and the people are astray. The priests do not preach the word of God, and the people do not listen or want to listen."

The great collection of *Lives of the Saints* was completed in 1705, after more than 20 years of intense labor. During this time, the Saint was granted several heavenly visions. He was resting one night after finishing the life of the holy martyr Orestes, when the martyr appeared to him and informed him of additional torments he had endured, which the Saint had not recorded. On another occasion, the Great-martyr Barbara appeared to him.

The Saint was praying in his cell when he reposed, on October 28th, 1709. In 1753, workmen repairing the roof of the cathedral where the Saint was buried, discovered his relics to be incorrupt.

† † †

Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you.
(Lk 6:2)

Some people are accustomed in expressing earnest disapproval of our times and they reproach contemporary humanity, saying, "There are no wonderworkers among men today, as there were in the past." That is not true! If you like, I'll show you that even today there are wonderworkers. Just listen: everyone who loves his enemy is a wonderworker. I will prove this to be true on the basis of Holy Scripture and the Holy Fathers.

What is a miracle? A miracle is considered to be that which is supernatural, i.e., outside the realms of nature, for what is according to nature is not a miracle, no one is amazed by it, no one calls it a miracle. But if something exceeds the power

of nature, this is a real miracle. It was not a wonder that the flames from the Babylonian furnace burned the Chaldeans who were standing nearby, for it is the nature of fire to burn, and it is the nature of human beings to be burned by fire. The miracle was that the fire could not touch the three youths who were inside the furnace; it did not harm them.

Similarly, it is not a wonder if a person loves those who love him; this is natural after all. The wonder is if a person loves his enemy, because this is above and beyond nature. Indeed, because of his fallen nature, man cannot tolerate offenses; we can see this in ourselves and in others. We sometimes behave as if we prefer to die than to endure any offense. If it is in our nature not to love our enemy, does it not follow that to love one's enemy is an act that is beyond nature and wondrous? Therefore he who loves his enemy is truly a wonderworker.

What wonders does such a wonderworker perform? Just listen.

He who loves his enemy and does good to him gives sight to the blind, not to his physical eyes but to his mental eyes. Nothing darkens the mental eyes as much as anger and rage. There are many examples of how people in a fit of anger have acted like unreasonable children; for example, in the lives of the holy Martyrs, we read that some of the torturers, in giving over Christians to be eaten by animals, would beat the animals when they were reluctant to touch the martyrs. From this it is clear that a man possessed by anger loses his mind and is like a blind man, unaware of where he is going or what he is doing.

What remedy is powerful enough to cure such blindness? Kindness, love, and charity on the part of him who is the recipient of such anger. For when an angry person observes that his anger is not reciprocated but is instead met by love, evil is conquered by good; anger then ceases and the guilty becomes ashamed of himself, recognizing his sin and the innocence of his neighbor. This is how it was between the wrathful Saul and innocent David. And thus it is that he who loves his enemy is a wonderworker and opens the eyes of the blind.

He who loves his enemy subdues the waves of the sea and stills the storm. St. John Chrysostom likens *an angry man to a sea agitated by the winds*. Just as a stormy sea throws all the dead bodies found in it onto the shore, so an angry man in his wrath divulges all the secrets of his friend, accusing and disgracing him. Who can calm such a sea? He who destroys the cause of the agitation.

A sea is not agitated if there are no winds, if there is no storm; similarly, an angry man stops being angry if he is not confronted by contradictions, strife, and arguments. Do not voice your contradictions, refrain from antagonism, do not enter into arguments, and you will destroy the cause of agitation, and you will see the sea grow calm. Since he who loves his enemy does not contradict, does not quarrel, does

not oppose, he calms the storm of anger. Thus we can now see that he who loves his enemy is a wonderworker, for he is capable of calming the raging of the sea.

He who loves his enemy quenches the power of fires. Malicious anger in a person is, as it were, like a fire that burneth a wood, and *as the flame setteth the mountains on fire* (Pss 82:14), for it burns up the height of virtues in the one who becomes angry, and destroys and turns to ashes, as it were, the good name and good repute of his neighbor. A flame is quenched either by water or by the scattering of whatever substance is burning. Similarly, anger is subdued either by silent meekness, like water, or by yielding, which acts like the scattering of burning material.

A meek and quiet man, who gives no cause for anger, not only will not ignite the flame of animosity but even quenches the flame that is already alight. As St. John Chrysostom says, there is nothing more powerful than meekness: *just as water quenches fire, so a meek word calms the soul which is burning with the anger of a fiery furnace*. The person who yields removes himself from the one who is angry and thereby deprives that person of food for his anger. Therefore, the Apostle also teaches: *Give place unto wrath* (Rom 12:19), i.e., condescend, yield, remove yourself for a time from the angry person. Because he who loves his enemy is meek, gentle, and condescending; he readily quenches his anger. Therefore, he is a wonderworker, for he extinguishes the power of fire.

He who loves his enemy transforms bitterness into sweetness, just as Moses did with the water of Marah. Human enmity is full of bitterness. The holy Apostle says, *Let all bitterness be put away from you*. What bitterness? ...*wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, ... with all malice*. (Eph 4:31). Can sweetness be found in the soul of an angry person? The thought in an angry soul is bitter because it is thinking about malice; the word is bitter, for it vexes, reproaches, defames. Every undertaking is bitter, especially for the one who is angry.

A good word and a good deed, both of them are valid remedies. About a good word, the Preacher says, *A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger*. (Prov 15:1); concerning good deeds, one of the Holy Fathers teaches: *If you discover that your brother is angry with you, send him a gift*. He who loves his enemy is always tenderhearted towards any angry person and does good to him as much as he can; he patiently endures the bitterness of his anger, while pouring the sweetness of love over him, and thus he transforms his enemy's anger into friendship and love. Thereby is such a person a wonderworker transforming bitterness into what is sweet.

He who loves his enemy expels demons. He who is filled with wrath and malice towards his brother, and is hot with revenge, such a person is like one possessed, and in fact sometimes runs the risk of becoming possessed. Indeed, any person

who is in a state of intense anger is like one possessed: his countenance becomes frightful, his voice terrifying; he bites his lips, grinds his teeth. The whole household fears him as if he were possessed; they avoid him, they hide from him.

Who or what can chase the demon of anger out of such a man? King Saul became possessed at times. This sickness came upon him especially when he became unreasonably angry at someone. He was most angry with the innocent David, of whom he was jealous on account of David's good repute. And from wrath he fell into possession. What did David do? He played for him on his harp and thereby chased away from Saul the unclean spirit. But it was not so much the music as it was David's meekness that healed Saul, for he did not oppose malice with malice. Now, inasmuch as he who loves his enemy conquers him with his gentleness and meekness, and gives out pleasing music of humble speech, calling himself the sinner that his adversary declares him to be, he drives away his wrath. And thus he is a wonderworker, expelling demons.

Finally, I shall tell about a wonder greater than any of these we have mentioned: He who loves his enemy becomes a son of God, as it is said: *Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and you will be sons of the Most High*. What is greater than this? What greater miracle can one possibly ask for? Therefore, love your enemy, and you will be a new wonderworker, saving his soul and your own. If you do not believe me, try it for yourself. Begin from henceforth to love everyone. The Son of God will be your guarantor: heaven and earth will pass away, but His words will never pass away! Without a doubt, you will become a son of the Most High. I desire this sonship for myself and for everyone of you! Amen.



The Abba John the Short asked the monks: "Who sold Joseph?" One monk replied: "His brothers." To that, the elder replied: "No brethren, rather his humility. Joseph could have said that he is their brother and could have protested to being sold but he remained silent. His humility, therefore, sold him. Afterward, this same humility made him master over Egypt."

In surrendering ourselves to the will of God, we defend ourselves too much from external unpleasantness, that is why we lose the good fruits which is harvested at the end of unpleasantness endured with humility.

Abba Poimen wisely spoke: "We have abandoned the easy yoke, i.e., self-reproach, and we have burdened ourselves with a heavy yoke, i.e., self-justification." The Christian accepts every unpleasantness as deserving of their present or their past sins; seeking in all, the will of God with faith and awaiting the end with hope.

St. Nikolai Velimirovich (+1956)

Βράδυ Δευτέρας, 28 Μαΐου 1453: Η Νύχτα που δὲν θὰ Ξημέρωνε Ποτέ...

Φειδίας Μπουρλάς, Αθήναι, 28 Μαΐου 2007.

Βράδυ Δευτέρας 28 Μαΐου 1453. Η νύχτα που δὲν θὰ ξημέρωνε ποτέ.[1] Ὁ σουλτάνος ὑπόσχεται στὸν στρατὸ του τριήμερη λεηλασία, καὶ πλούτη ἀμύθητα καὶ παρθένες καὶ παιδιά, στὴν γῆ καὶ στὸν οὐρανό. Τὰ στίφη τῶν ἀπίστων ἀλαλάζουν λυσσασμένα.

Οἱ λίγοι, ἥρωικοί, ἐξαντλημένοι ὑπερασπιστὲς τῆς Βασιλεύουσας, κρατώντας ἀκόμη μὲ ὑπεράνθρωπη, ἀπελπισμένη θέλησι τὰ ἀρχαῖα τείχη, ἀπέναντι στὴν βία τῶν λυσσασμένων, ἀναρίθμητων ὀρδῶν, τῶν μεγάλων πυροβόλων καὶ τῶν πολιορκητικῶν μηχανῶν, ξέρουν ὅ,τι ἔρχεται ἡ κρίσιμη ἡμέρα· ἡ στιγμή που ὁ καθένας μόνος του, καὶ ἡ χιλιόχρονη αὐτοκρατορία θὰ βρεθοῦν ἀπέναντι στὴν Μοῖρα. Μὲ δάκρυα ἀπελπισμένης πίστεως καὶ ἀποφασιστικότητας ἀποχαιρετοῦν παιδιά καὶ συζύγους, μεταλαμβάνουν γιὰ τελευταία φορὰ στὴν Ἁγία-Σοφία, ἐμψυχώνουν ὁ ἓνας τὸν ἄλλον στὶς πολεμίστρες· οἱ ἱερὲς εἰκόνες περιφέρονται στὰ τείχη, προσευχὲς ἀναπέμπονται στοὺς οὐρανούς καὶ δάκρυα πόνου καὶ ἀγωνίας ποτίζουν τὴν γῆ.

Ὁ Βασιλέας, πρῶτος στὴν μάχη, ἐμψυχώνει τοὺς στρατιῶτες του· συγκεντρώνει ἄρχοντες καὶ ἀπλοὺς στρατιῶτες καὶ τοὺς λέγει σοφά, ὅπως μᾶς τὰ παραδίδει τὸ Χρονικὸν τοῦ Σφραντζῆ[2]. Λόγια ἀπὸ τὴν καρδιά, γεμάτα πόνο, συγκρατημένον ὅμως μέχρι τέλους, καὶ λόγια ἀπὸ τὸ μυαλό μαζί, λόγια πολεμιστοῦ, ψύχραιμου στρατιωτικοῦ ἡγήτορος, πρὸς στρατιῶτες καὶ συμπολεμιστὲς. Λόγια ἐπίγνωσης, στήριξης ψυχικῆς καὶ λελογισμένου θάρρους.

Καὶ μαζί κάτι ἄλλο. Λόγια, που πέρα ἀπὸ τὴν λογοτεχνικὴ φροντίδα τοῦ ἱστοριογράφου τους, πέρα ἀπὸ τὸ γνήσιο αἶσθημα τῶν προσώπων ἐκεῖνες τὶς τραγικὲς στιγμές, παίρνουν καὶ μιὰ ἄλλη, παράξενη χοροῖα· σὰν νὰ φέρνουν μαζί τους μιὰ μακρυνή, μαγικὴ ἀντήχησι· «*φθόγγους ἀγέλαστους καὶ ἀκαλλώπιστους καὶ ἀμύριστους*» πλέον, ἡχώ χρησμῶν ἀπὸ ἀρχαῖες Θερμοπύλες, φθόγγους μυθικῶν ραψωδῶν. Διότι ἐκεῖ, τότε, ἡ Ἱστορία παγώνει· ὁ ρυθμὸς τοῦ Χρόνου ἀλλάζει, οἱ Αἰῶνες συμπυκνώνονται· ἐκεῖ, τότε, λίγες ὥρες μόνον πρὶν ὁ Βασιλέας ἀνεβεῖ γιὰ τελευταία φορὰ στὰ τείχη καὶ ἡ Στιγμὴ ταυτιστεῖ μὲ τὴν Αἰωνιότητα καὶ ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος Δραγάσης Παλαιολόγος, ὁ Βασιλέας, ὁ Στρατιώτης, γίνεῖ ἓνα μὲ τὴν αἰώνια Ψυχὴ

τοῦ Γένους, ἐκεῖ ἐπάνω στὴν Πύλη τοῦ Ἁγίου Ρωμανοῦ, ὁ Μαρμαρωμένος Βασιλεῆς.

...Γνωρίζετε καλῶς, λέγει ὁ Βασιλέας, κατὰ τὸν Σφραντζῆ, ἀπευθυνόμενος πρὸς ἄρχοντες, στρατιῶτες καὶ λαό, ὅ,τι ἔρχεται ἡ κρίσιμη ἡμέρα. Σταθεῖτε ἀνδρείως, τοὺς λέγει. «*Σὰς παραδίδω τὴν περίφημη πόλι καὶ πατρίδα μας, καὶ βασιλεύουσα τῶν πόλεων*».

Γιὰ τέσσερα πράγματα ἀξίζει ὅλοι μας νὰ πεθάνουμε, γιὰ τὸ καθένα μόνου τοῦ ξεχωριστά: «*Πρῶτον μὲν ὑπὲρ τῆς πίστεως ἡμῶν καὶ εὐσεβείας, δεύτερον δὲ ὑπὲρ τῆς πατρίδος, τρίτον δὲ ὑπὲρ τοῦ βασιλέως ὡς χριστοῦ κυρίου, καὶ τέταρτον ὑπὲρ συγγενῶν καὶ φίλων*». Καὶ τώρα κρίνονται καὶ τὰ τέσσερα αὐτὰ μαζί.

Ὁ ἀλιτήριος ὁ ἀμηνῶς, τοὺς λέγει, ἔχει ὅλα τὰ πολεμικὰ μέσα. Καὶ ἐν τούτοις, ἀντέχουμε τόσον καιρὸ καὶ διορθώνουμε τὶς ζημιὰς τοῦ τείχους. Ἀπέναντι στὰ στίφη τῶν ἀσεβῶν καὶ τὶς πολεμικὲς μηχανές, δύο

πράγματα ἔχουμε μόνον· πρῶτον μὲν τὴν πίστη στὴν ἀνίκητη δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ, δεύτερον δὲ τὰ ἴδια μᾶς τὰ χέρια καὶ τὴν ρωμαϊότητά μας, τὰ ὁποῖα μᾶς ἐδῶρισε ἡ θεία Δύναμις.

Σὺν Ἀθηνᾶ καὶ χεῖρα κίνει, συμβουλεῖ ὁ Βασιλέας! Καὶ δίδει ὁδηγίες πραγματικοῦ στρατιωτικοῦ ἡγήτορος καὶ ἐκεῖνες ἀκόμη τὶς ὥρες, προπάντων ἐκεῖνες τὶς ὥρες, πῶς μὲ τὴν σωστὴ χρῆσι τῶν ἀσπίδων καὶ τῶν δοράτων θὰ ἀντιμετωπίσουν τὰ λυσσασμένα, θρασεῖα στίφη. Καὶ γνωρίζω, λέγει, ὅ,τι εἴστε ἄξιοι καὶ ἔμπειροι στρατιῶτες!

Καὶ συνεχίζει νὰ ἐμψυχώνει τοὺς στρατιῶτες του. Σὰν ζῶα ἄλογα καὶ χειρότεροι ἀκόμη ὁρμοῦν ἐπάνω μας ἀλαλάζοντας τὰ στίφη τῶν ἀσεβῶν, τοὺς λέγει. Γι' αὐτὸ κι ἐσεῖς ἀντιμετωπίστε τους ὅπως οἱ κυνηγοὶ τοὺς ἄγριους χοίρους, «*γιὰ νὰ μάθουν οἱ ἀσεβεῖς ὅ,τι δὲν πολεμοῦν κατὰ ζῶων ἀλόγων ὅπως εἶναι αὐτοί, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τῶν κυρίων καὶ ἀφεντῶν τους, ἀπογόνων Ἑλλήνων καὶ Ρωμαίων*»!

Ἐξιστορεῖ μετὰ ὁ Βασιλέας τὶς ἀδικίες που διέπραξε ὁ σουλτάνος καὶ τὶς χῶρες που κατέκτησε. Καὶ τώρα, καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν Βασιλεύουσα, τὴν πόλι τῆς Παναγίας, τὸ «*καταφύγιον τῶν Χριστιανῶν, ἐλπίδα καὶ χαρὰν πάντων τῶν Ἑλλήνων, τὸ καύχημα πᾶσι τοῖς οὐσιν ὑπὸ τὴν τοῦ ἡλίου ἀνατολήν*», τὴν Πόλι μας, τολμᾷ ὁ ἀσεβὴς νὰ ἀπειλεῖ. Θυμηθεῖτε τὰ ὅλα αὐτά, ἀδελφοί, τοὺς λέγει, ὥστε ἡ μνήμη καὶ ἡ φήμη καὶ ἡ ἐλευθερία σας νὰ γίνουν αἰώνεις.

Εὐχαριστεῖ στὴν συνέχεια ὁ Βασιλέας τοὺς Ἐνετούς, Λιγουρίτες (Γενουάτες) καὶ λοιποὺς ξένους συμπολεμιστὲς.



Ὁ Μαρμαρωμένος Βασιλεῆς

Καὶ ἔπειτα ἀπευθύνεται πρὸς ὅλους, προτρέποντάς τους νὰ σταθοῦν στὶς θέσεις τους ὡς ἄξιοι στρατιῶτες.

Μὲ δάκρυα στὰ μάτια ὅλοι ἀπαντοῦν: «ἀποθάνωμεν ὑπὲρ τῆς Χριστοῦ πίστεως καὶ τῆς πατρίδος ἡμῶν». Καὶ ὁ Βασιλέας ἀκούγοντάς τους, μὴν συγκρατώντας οὔτε αὐτὸς πιά τὰ δάκρυά του, τοὺς εὐχαριστεῖ. Καὶ οἱ δυστυχεῖς Ρωμαῖοι, γράφει ὁ Σφραντζῆς, ἀκούοντες τὸν Βασιλέα, «καρδίαν ὡς λέοντες ἐποίησαν»· καὶ ἀγκαλιάζονταν δακρυσμένοι, συγχωροῦντες ὁ ἓνας τὸν ἄλλον. Ὁ Βασιλέας, ἀκολουθούμενος ἀπὸ ἄλλους πολλοὺς ἐπῆγε στὴν Ἁγία-Σοφία καὶ μετέλαβε τὰ ἄχραντα μυστήρια. Καὶ μετὰ ἐπέρασε ἀπὸ τὰ Ἀνάκτορα, γιὰ νὰ ἀποχαιρετίσει φίλους καὶ συγγενεῖς· «ἐν τῇδε τῇ ὥρᾳ τίς διηγῆσεται τοὺς τότε κλαυθμούς καὶ θρήνους τοὺς ἐν τῷ παλατίῳ; Εἰ καὶ ἀπὸ ξύλου ἄνθρωπος ἢ ἐκ πέτρας ἦν, οὐκ ἐδύνατο μὴ θρηνῆσαι», γράφει ὁ Σφραντζῆς. «Καὶ ἀναβάς ἐφ’ ἵππου ἐξήλθομεν τῶν ἀνακτόρων περιερχόμενοι τὰ τεῖχη...»

† † †

[1] «Μεσημέρι ἀπὸ νύχτα». (Οδυσσεὺς Ἐλύτης, «Θάνατος καὶ Ἀνάστασις τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Παλαιολόγου»).

[2] Βεβαίως δὲν εἶναι δυνατόν νὰ γνωρίζουμε ἐὰν καὶ πῶς ἀκριβῶς ἐμίλησεν ὁ Αὐτοκράτωρ· εἰκάζεται ἀπὸ ὀρισμένους μελετητὲς ὅ,τι ὁ Σφραντζῆς ἀνέπτυξε «κατ’ ἔννοιαν» συντομότερο λόγο τοῦ Αὐτοκράτορος, τὸν ὁποῖον λόγον ἀναφέρει στὴν ἐκθεσί του πρὸς τὸν πάπα τῆς Ρώμης ὁ καθολικὸς ἐπίσκοπος Λεονάρδος ὁ Χῖος (παρῶν, ὅπως καὶ ὁ Σφραντζῆς, στὴν Πόλι κατὰ τὴν Ἄλωσι), ἐπίσης ἀγνώστου ἀκριβείας. Ἀλλὰ ὁ λόγος ἐτοῦτος, καὶ ἐὰν δὲν γνωρίζουμε ἂν καὶ τί ἐλέχθη ἐκεῖνες τὶς ὥρες, ἐκφράζει πάντως, θεωρῶ, τὸ ἦθος τῶν στιγμῶν καὶ τῶν πρωταγωνιστῶν, ὅπως οἱ δημηγορίες τοῦ Θουκυδίδου.

[3] Ἡράκλειτος, Diels 92. («Σίβυλλα δὲ μαινομένῳ στόματι καθ’ Ἡράκλειτον ἀγέλαστα καὶ ἀκαλλώπιστα καὶ ἀμύριστα φθεγγομένη χιλίων ἐτῶν ἐξικνεῖται τῇ φωνῇ διὰ τὸν θεόν.» (Πλούταρχος, «Περὶ τοῦ μὴ χρᾶν νῦν ἔμμετρα τὴν Πυθίαν», 6, 397a))



Ἡ ἀγάπη μας πρὸς τὸ Θεό, παιδί μου, πρέπει νὰ εἶναι πάρα πολὺ μεγάλη καὶ χωρὶς νὰ ὑπάρχει καμιά διάσπαση σὲ ἄλλα πράγματα. Σοὺ φέρνω σὰν παράδειγμα τὸ ἐξῆς: Ὁ ἄνθρωπος μοιάζει νὰ ἔχει ἐντὸς του μιὰ μπαταρία μὲ ὀρισμένη ἐνέργεια. Ὅταν αὐτὴ τὴν ἐνέργεια τὴν ξοδεύει σὲ ἄλλα διάφορα πράγματα ἐκτὸς τῆς ἀγάπης πρὸς τὸν Θεό, ἡ ἐνέργεια ποὺ ἀπομένει μέσα του γι’ Αὐτὸν εἶναι ἐλάχιστη καὶ ἴσως πολλὰς φορὲς μηδαμινή. Ὅταν ὁμως διαθέτουμε ὅλη μας τὴν ἐνέργεια πρὸς τὸν Θεό, τότε ἡ ἀγάπη μας εἶναι μεγάλη πρὸς Αὐτόν.

Γέροντας Πορφύριος Καυσοκαλυβίτης (+1991)

Ἀφορισμός Ἐργάτου τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου

Πηγή: Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος, 29 Ἰανουαρίου, 2010.

Στὶς 14 Δεκεμβρίου 1993, ἡ λεγομένη Μείζων καὶ Ὑπερτελὴς Σύνοδος τοῦ Φαναρίου ὑπὸ τὴν προεδρία τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριάρχου κ. Βαρθολομαίου, ἀφώρισε τὸν θεολόγο καὶ ἱεροκλήρυκα κ. Νικόλαο Ἰω. Σωτηρόπουλο.

Στὶς ἡμέρες μας, ἀπὸ τὰ 10 ἑκατομμύρια τῶν Ἑλλήνων δὲν ἀφωρίσθηκε κανεὶς ἀσεβής, ὕβριστὴς τῶν ἱερῶν καὶ τῶν ὁσίων, ἐκκλησιομάχος καὶ ἀντίχριστος. Δὲν ἀφωρίσθηκε οὔτε ὁ Καζαντζάκης, ὁ χυδαῖος ὕβριστὴς τοῦ Θεανθρώπου.

Ἀφωρίσθηκε ὁ θεολόγος καὶ ἱεροκλήρυξ Σωτηρόπουλος, ὁ ὁποῖος δύο πανεπιστημιακὰ πτυχία καὶ ὅλη τὴ ζωὴ του ἀφιέρωσε στὴν ἱεραποστολή, στὸ προφορικὸ καὶ γραπτὸ κήρυγμα ὑπὲρ τῆς Πίστεως καὶ ἐναντὶ ἰὸν τῶν αἱρέσεων.

Ἡ Σύνοδος, ἡ ὁποία ἀφώρισε τὸν κ. Σωτηρόπουλο, ἦταν ἀντικανονική, διότι ἀπετελεῖτο ἀπὸ Ἐπισκόπους κατ’ ἐπιλογὴν. Κανονικὴ εἶνε μία Σύνοδος, ἂν σ’ αὐτὴ ἔχουν κληθῇ ὅλοι οἱ Ἐπίσκοποι μιᾶς τοπικῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Ἐκκλησίας, ἡ ὅλης τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Ἐκκλησίας. Ἀναρμοδίως δὲ ἡ Σύνοδος τοῦ Φαναρίου ἔκρινε καὶ ἀφώρισε τὸν κ. Σωτηρόπουλο. Διότι ὁ κ. Σωτηρόπουλος ἀνῆκε στὴν Ἐκκλησία τῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ ἀρμοδία νὰ τὸν κρίνῃ ἦταν ἡ Ἐκκλησία τῆς Ἑλλάδος. Σ’ αὐτὴν ἔπρεπε νὰ παραπεμφθῇ ἡ ὑπόθεσίς του.

Στὴν ἡμερησία διάταξι τῆς Συνόδου τοῦ Φαναρίου δὲν ὑπῆρχε θέμα Σωτηροπούλου. Τὸ θέμα ἐτέθη τὴν τελευταία ὥρα, κατ’ ἀπαίτησιν τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Αὐστραλίας κ. Στυλιανοῦ. Ποία δὲ ἡ αἰτία τοῦ ἀφορισμοῦ; Ἐκ τῶν ὑστέρων, ἐπειδὴ γιὰ τὸν ἀφορισμὸ ἠγέρθη θόρυβος μεγάλος καὶ ὑπῆρξε κατακραυγὴ τῶν πιστῶν κατὰ τοῦ Πατριάρχου καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἐνόχων γιὰ τὸν ἄδικο ἀφορισμὸ, γιὰ νὰ δικαιολογήσουν τὰ ἀδικαιολόγητα οἱ ἔνοχοι, ἰσχυρίσθηκαν ψευδῇ, π.χ. ὅ,τι ἀφώρισαν τὸν Σωτηρόπουλο, διότι δῆθεν ὠργάνωσε τὰ ἐπεισόδια στὸν ἱερὸ ναὸ Μεταμορφώσεως Κηφισιάς κατὰ τὸν ἑσπερινὸ τῆς ἐορτῆς 5 Αὐγούστου 1993.

Πραγματικὴ αἰτία τοῦ ἀφορισμοῦ ἦταν ὁ ἔλεγχος, τὸν ὁποῖον ἤσκησεν ὁ θεολόγος καὶ ἱεροκλήρυξ Σωτηρόπουλος κατὰ τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Αὐστραλίας γιὰ αἵρεσι καὶ βλασφημία κατὰ τοῦ προσώπου τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Συγκεκριμένως, ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Αὐστραλίας τὰ Χριστούγεννα τοῦ 1988 μὲ ἐγκύκλιο κήρυγμά του, τὸ ὁποῖο διαβάστηκε ἀπὸ τοὺς ἱερεῖς στοὺς ἱεροὺς ναοὺς τῆς Ἀρχιεπισκοπῆς Αὐστραλίας καὶ δημοσιεύθηκε στὸ δημοσιογραφικὸ ὄργανο τῆς Ἀρχιεπισκοπῆς «ΦΩΝΗ ΤΗΣ ΟΡΘΟΔΟΞΙΑΣ» (τεῦχος Δεκεμβρίου 1988), κήρυξε, ὅ,τι ὁ Χριστὸς ἀρχικῶς ἦταν ἀτελής καὶ ἁμαρτωλός, καὶ κατόπιν ἀγῶνος μεταξὺ τῶν δύο φύσεων καὶ τῶν δύο θελήσεών του

κατέκτησε τὴν ἀναμαρτησία. Σὲ ραδιοφωνικὴ δὲ ἔκπομπή του γιὰ τὸ περιβόητο ἔργο τοῦ Καζαντζάκη «Ὁ Τελευταῖος Πειρασμός» δήλωσε, ὅ,τι αὐτὸ τὸ ἔργο δὲν τὸν σκανδάλισε, δὲν τοῦ προ κάλεσε ἀγανάκτησι, ἀντιθέτως τοῦ προκάλεσε ἔντονη ἐντύπωση, εἶνε ἓνα ζωντανό, πολλὸ ζωντανὸ κείμενο, ποὺ παρουσιάζει τὴν ἀνθρώπινη πλευρὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ... Συμφώνως δηλαδὴ πρὸς αὐτὴ τὴ δήλωσι τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Αὐστραλίας γιὰ τὸ ἔργο τοῦ Καζαντζάκη «Ὁ Τελευταῖος Πειρασμός», ὁ Χριστὸς ἦταν ἐρωμένος τῆς Μαρίας τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς κ.ἄ.! Ἄς σημειωθῇ δέ, ὅ,τι τὴ φρικτὴ αἵρεσι καὶ βλασφημία τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Αὐστραλίας κατὰ τῆς ἠθικῆς ὑποστάσεως τοῦ Κυρίου ἤλεγξε καὶ ὁ Μητροπολίτης Φλωρίνης κ. Αὐγουστίνος καὶ ὁ ἀείμνηστος Καθηγητὴς Κων. Μουρατίδης.

Ὁ ἀφορισμὸς τοῦ κ. Σωτηροπούλου ἔγινε χωρὶς ἀπαγγελία συγκεκριμένης κατηγορίας, χωρὶς κλῆσι σὲ ἀπολογία καὶ χωρὶς κοινοποιήσι σ’ αὐτὸν τῆς ἀποφάσεως καὶ τοῦ σχετικοῦ πρακτικοῦ. Καὶ ὁ μεγαλύτερος κακοῦργος καλεῖται σὲ ἀπολογία. Καὶ μόνο δὲ γιὰ τὸ λόγο, ὅ,τι ὁ κ. Σωτηρόπουλος ἀφωρίσθηκε χωρὶς νὰ κληθῇ σὲ ἀπολογία, ὁ ἀφορισμὸς του εἶνε ἄκυρος. Οὐσιαστικῶς δηλαδὴ δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀφορισμὸς, ὑπάρχει μόνο τυπικῶς.

Τὴν εἶδισι, ὅτι ἀφωρίσθηκε ὁ Σωτηρόπουλος, ἕνας ἀνιδιοτελὴς καὶ πεπαρησιασμένος κήρυξ τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου καὶ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, καὶ σφοδρὸς πολέμιος τῶν αἰρετικῶν, ὁ πιστὸς λαὸς ἄκουσε σὰν μία ἐμπαθῇ καὶ γελοία ἀπόφασι τῆς Συνόδου τοῦ Φαναρίου καὶ πολλοὶ εἶπαν, «Νὰ στείλωμε τὰ ὀνόματά μας στὸ Φανάρι, γιὰ νὰ μᾶς ἀφορίσουν καὶ ἐμαῖς!».

Πολλά σχόλια και άρθρα γράφτηκαν για τὸν ἄδικο ἀφορισμὸ τοῦ κ. Σωτηροπούλου. Καὶ βιβλίο γράφτηκε. Καὶ πολλοί, μεταξύ τῶν ὁποίων καὶ Μητροπολίτες καὶ ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Χριστόδουλος, μίλησαν στὸν Οἰκουμενικὸ Πατριάρχη καὶ ζήτησαν τὴν ἄρσι τοῦ ἐπιτιμίου. Καὶ ἐγγραφὸ ἔστειλε ἡ Ἐκκλησία τῆς Ἑλλάδος στὸ Οἰκουμενικὸ Πατριαρχεῖο. Καὶ Συνδικές Ἐπιτροπὲς ὠρίσθησαν ἐπὶ Ἀρχιεπισκόπων Ἀθηνῶν Σεραφεῖμ καὶ Χριστοδούλου καὶ κάλεσαν τὸν κ. Σωτηρόπουλο καὶ συζήτησαν μαζί του τὸ θέμα καὶ ἐξέφρασαν τὴν ἐπιθυμία τῆς ἄρσεως τοῦ ἐπιτιμίου. Ἄλλ' ἤδη 17 μέχρι σήμερα ἔτη τὸ ἐπιτίμιο παραμένει.

Γιατί; Διότι ὁ Οἶκ. Πατριάρχης ἀπαιτεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν κ. Σωτηρόπουλος μετάνοια καὶ αἴτησι συγγνώμης...

Ὁ κ. Σωτηρόπουλος θεωρεῖ τὸ ἐπιτίμιο τιμὴ καὶ ὄχι μοιρφή. Διότι ἔχει τὴ συνείδησι, ὅ,τι δὲν ἔπραξε καμμία πράξι ἀξία ἀφορισμοῦ, ἀλλ’ ὑπεράσπισε τὴν Πίστι καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Ἀρχηγοῦ τῆς Πίστεως, τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Θεοῦ καὶ Σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ συνεπῶς τὸ Οἰκουμενικὸ Πατριαρχεῖο θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ ἐκφράσῃ εὐαρέσκεια πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ ὄχι νὰ προβῇ σὲ καταδίκη του. Ἄλλος ἔπρεπε νὰ καταδικασθῇ, καὶ ὄχι μόνο γιὰ μία, ἀλλὰ γιὰ πολλὰς αἰρέσεις. Ἐν τούτοις αὐτὸς ὁ ἄλλος παραμένει ἀκλόνητος στὸ θρόνον του, διότι διαθέτει τεραστία κοσμικὴ δύναμι.

Ὁ δὲ Σωτηρόπουλος καλεῖται νὰ μετανοήσῃ καὶ νὰ
ζητήσῃ συγγνώμην...

Καίτοι ουσιαστικῶς ὁ ἀφορισμὸς εἶνε ἀνύπαρκτος, ἐπειδὴ πολλοί, μάλιστα καὶ Ἐπίσκοποι, προέτρεψαν τὸν κ. Σωτηρόπουλο νὰ ἀπευθυνθῇ ὁ ἴδιος στὸν Πατριάρχη καὶ νὰ ζητήσῃ τὴν ἄρσι τοῦ ἀφορισμοῦ, γιὰ νὰ μὴ λυτήσῃ τὰ καλὰ αὐτὰ πρόσωπα ἔγραψεν ἐπανειλημμένως στὸν κ. Βαρθολομαῖο ἀξιοπρεπεῖς ἐπιστολὰς καὶ ἔδωκε ἐξηγήσεις σχετικῶς πρὸς τὸ θέμα. Ἄλλ’ ὁ Πατριάρχης ἐπιμένει νὰ μετανοήσῃ ὁ κ. Σωτηρόπουλος καὶ νὰ ζητήσῃ συγγνώμη, πρᾶγμα τὸ ὁποῖον ὁ κ. Σωτηρόπουλος ἀποκρούει μὲ ἱερὴ ἀγανάκτησι. Διότι ἐρωτᾷτε: Τί ἐπραξεν ἄξιον ἀφορισμοῦ, γιὰ νὰ μετανοήσῃ γι’ αὐτὸ καὶ νὰ ζητήσῃ συγγνώμη; Νὰ μετανοήσῃ καὶ νὰ ζητήσῃ συγγνώμη, διότι ὑπεράσπισε τὸ Χριστὸ καὶ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία; Ἄλλ’ αὐτὸ θὰ εἶνε προδοσία ἀρχῶν καὶ πίστεως. Ἄλλος πρέπει νὰ μετανοήσῃ καὶ νὰ ζητήσῃ συγγνώμη...

Καίτοι ὁ ἀφορισμὸς εἶνε ἀδικος καὶ ἄκυρος, ἐν τούτοις μερικοὶ Ἐπίσκοποι, ψοφοδεεῖς καὶ καιροσκόποι, λαμβάνουν αὐτὸν ὑπ' ὄψιν, καί, γιὰ νὰ μὴ περιέλθουν στὴ δυσμένεια τοῦ Πατριάρχου, ἀπαγορεύουν στὸν κ. Σωτηρόπουλο νὰ ὁμιλῇ στὶς Ἐπισκοπές τους. Καὶ γενικῶς ἀπαγορεύεται σ' αὐτὸ τὸ θεολόγο καὶ ἱεροκλήρυκα νὰ ἔχη πρόσβασιν στὰ ἐκκλησιαστικὰ μέσα ἐνημερώσεως, ἐνῶν ἔχουν πρόσβασιν καὶ ἀκατάλληλα καὶ ἀσεβῆ πρόσωπα. Σ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς Ἐπισκόπους, οἱ ὁποῖοι ὑπολογίζουν τὸν Βαρθολομαῖο καὶ ὄχι τὸν Θεό, καὶ παίρνουν τὸ μέρος τοῦ ἀδικήσαντος, ἐπειδὴ κοσμικῶς εἶνε ἰσχυρὸς, καὶ δὲν παίρνουν τὸ μέρος τοῦ ἀδικηθέντος, ἐπειδὴ κοσμικῶς εἶνε ἀνίσχυρος, ὑπενθυμίζουμε τὸν θεόπνευστο λόγο, ὅ,τι «ἀδικοὶ βασιλείαν Θεοῦ οὐ κληρονομήσουσι» (Α' Κορ. στ' 9).

Ποὺν πλανῶνται αὐτοὶ οἱ Ἐπίσκοποι, καὶ πρῶτοι βεβαίως οἱ διαπράξαντες τὸ ἀνοσιούργημα καὶ σκάνδαλο τοῦ ἐν λόγῳ ἀφορισμοῦ, ἂν νομίζουν, ὅ,τι δὲν ὑπάρχει ἡθικὴ νομοτέλεια καὶ δὲν θὰ λογοδοτήσουν γιὰ τὶς ἄδικες συμπεριφορὰς τους.



Ὁ ἀπομακρυσμένος ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ δέχεται τὴ δαιμονικὴ ἐπίδραση. Ἐνῶ αὐτὸς πού εἶναι κοντὰ στὸ Θεὸ δέχεται τὴ Θεία Χάρη. Σ' ὅποιο ἀφεντικό δουλεύεις, ἀπ' αὐτὸ θὰ πληρωθεῖς. Ἄν δουλεύεις στὸν μαῦρο (διάβολο) θὰ σοῦ κάμει μαύρη τὴ ζωή. Ἄν δουλεύεις στὴν ἁμαρτία θὰ πληρωθεῖς ἀπὸ τὸ διάβολο. Ἄν δουλεύεις στὴν ἀρετὴ θὰ σὲ ἀμείψει ὁ Θεός. Σ' ἐκεῖνον πού εἶναι πιστὸς, ἐξομολογεῖται, ἐκκλησιάζεται καὶ Κοινωνεῖ, δὲν ἔχει καμμία ἐξουσία, καμμία δύναμη ὁ διάβολος.

Γέροντας Παΐσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης (+1994)

Τὸ Πολιτικὸ Μανιφέστο τοῦ Ἀγίου Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ Μεγάλου

Απομαγνητοφωνημένη ὁμιλία τοῦ πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου Κωνσταντίνου Στρατηγόπουλου, στὸν Ἱερὸ Καθεδρικό Ναὸ τῶν Ἀγίων Κωνσταντίνου καὶ Ἑλένης Γλυφάδος, στίς 20/5/2008.

Σεβασμιώτατε, σεβαστοὶ πατέρες, λαὲ καὶ ἄρχοντες τοῦ τόπου αὐτοῦ· λαὲ ποὺ ὑπάρχεις γιὰ νὰ κυριαρχεῖς καὶ νὰ ἄρχεις τῶν παθῶν σου· ἄρχοντες ποὺ ὑπάρχετε γιὰ νὰ ἄρχετε καὶ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ τῶν παθῶν σας.

Πρὶν ἀπὸ τέσσερις-πέντε αἰῶνες πρὶν τὸ Χριστό, ὁ δικός μας μεγάλος φιλόσοφος Πλάτωνας εἶχε πεῖ μία ἰδέα, γράφοντας τὰ δικά του πλατωνικὰ ἰδεολογήματα στὴν ἰδεατὴ πολιτεία του. Σκέφθηκε πὼς θὰ ἦταν πολὺ καλὸ—θὰ ἤθελε πάρα πολὺ—οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἑνὸς τόπου νὰ εἶναι φιλόσοφοι. Θὰ ἦταν καλύτερη, σίγουρα, ἡ διοίκηση. Τέσσερις αἰῶνες μετὰ τὸ Χριστό, ὁ Πλάτωνας διαψεύστηκε καὶ ξεπεράστηκε. Ἕνας αὐτοκράτορας δὲν ἔγινε φιλόσοφος, ἔγινε ἅγιος!

Γιορτάζοντας σήμερα τὴ μνήμη τοῦ Ἀγίου Κωνσταντίνου μπορούμε νὰ δοῦμε αὐτὴ τὴν προοπτικὴ καὶ νὰ κάνουμε τὴ σύγκριση, μὲ τὸ πὼς καὶ γιατί ἕνας αὐτοκράτορας ἔγινε ἅγιος, ποιὲς ἦταν οἱ διεργασίες οἱ ὁποῖες ἔγιναν πάνω του καί, ἀκόμη περισσότερο, χρησιμοποιώντας τὸ λόγο του καὶ τὰ δικά του λεγόμενα, ποιὸ ἦταν—νὰ τὸ πῶ μὲ τὴ μοντέρνα λέξη—τὸ δικό του πολιτικὸ μανιφέστο. Ἄς τὸ ἀναφέρω σήμερα, γιὰ νὰ καταλάβουμε ὅσο μπορούμε πιὸ ἐνδελεχῶς, ποιὰ διεργασία συντελέστηκε πάνω του γιὰ νὰ γίνεῖ ἅγιος.

Τὸ βασικὸ του ἀξίωμα μέσα ἀπὸ αὐτὸ—ὅπως τὸ εἶπα—τὸ πολιτικὸ του μανιφέστο εἶναι τὸ ἑξῆς, καὶ τὸ λέει ὁ ἴδιος: *«Ποιὸς μπορεῖ νὰ πετύχει τὸ καλὸ ἂν δὲν γνωρίζει τὴν αἰτία τῶν καλῶν ποὺ εἶναι ὁ Θεός;»* Εἶναι πραγματικὰ συγκλονιστικὸ τὸ ἐρώτημα. Πὼς θὰ κάνεις καλὸ γιὰ τὸ λαὸ σου ἂν δὲν ξέρεις τὴν αἰτία τοῦ καλοῦ καὶ φυσικὰ καίρια θέση σ' αὐτὸ τὸ δικό του μανιφέστο κατέχει ἡ ἔννοια τῆς ἐνότητος, ἔννοια ποὺ ὅλοι οἱ ἄρχοντες τὴ θέλουν καὶ τὴν ἐπιθυμοῦν. Ποιὸ εἶναι τὸ μοντέλο τοῦ Ἀγίου Κωνσταντίνου γιὰ τὴν ἐνότητα; Λέει ἐκεῖνος ὁ, τι *«ἡ ἐνότητα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἶναι προϋπόθεση εὐημερίας τοῦ κράτους»*.

Αὐτὸ εἶναι συγκλονιστικὸ, γιατί ἕνας φορέας ἐνότητος μόνο ὑπάρχει· εἶναι ὁ τριαδολογικὸς φορέας ἐνότητος ποὺ βιώνεται μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία, μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ γεγονὸς τοῦ ἑνα καὶ τοῦ τρία τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδας, ὅπου ὑπάρχει περιχώρηση, ἀγάπη καὶ ταπείνωση. Χωρὶς λοιπὸν Ἐκκλησία καὶ χωρὶς ἐνότητα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, κράτος ποὺ

ἔχει ἐνότητα δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ὑπάρχει.

Κι αὐτὸ τὸ μανιφέστο τοῦ Ἀγίου Κωνσταντίνου ἀγγίζει τὸν πολιτικὸ τὸν λόγο. *«Δὲν εἶναι οὔτε πρέπον οὔτε θεμιτὸ νὰ φιλονικεῖτε γιὰ μικρὰ καὶ ἀσήμαντα πράγματα, ἐνῶ ἔχετε τὴν εὐθύνη τῆς καθοδήγησης τοῦ λαοῦ, μὲ συνέπεια νὰ διχογνωμοῦν τόσο ἄνθρωποι»*. Πολιτικὸς λόγος λοιπὸν δὲ σημαίνει φιλονικία γιὰ τὰ ἀσήμαντα. Καὶ ταυτόχρονα, ἀναφερόμενος στίς προϋποθέσεις καὶ τὸ ἥθος τοῦ λόγου, ξεπερνάει αὐτὸ ποὺ λέμε ἐμεῖς σήμερα «ξύλινο» πολιτικὸ λόγο. Τέτοιες συζητήσεις προκαλοῦνται ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνώφελη φλυαρία τῆς ἀργίας. *«Υπάρχει ὁ κίνδυνος ὁ λαὸς νὰ περιέλθει σὲ κατάσταση βλαστημίας ἢ σχίσματος ἂν ὁ λόγος εἶναι περιττός»*, καὶ ὅπως τὸ λέμε ἐμεῖς σήμερα «ξύλιнос».

Καὶ μετὰ μπαίνει στὴν προοπτικὴ καὶ τὴν οὐσία τῆς ποιότητος τῆς διοικήσεως. Ἀναιρεῖ τὴ δικτατορικὴ συμπεριφορὰ καὶ ἀκόμη, ὅπως θὰ τὴ λέγαμε ἐμεῖς, τὴ



δικτατορικὴ «δημοκρατία». Λέει: *«διαφωνῶ μὲ τὴν ἀλαζονικὴ δύναμη, μὲ τὴν ὑβριστικὴ συμπεριφορὰ τῶν ὑπερηφάνων, μὲ αὐτοὺς ποὺ ἔχουν ἔπαρση, ἀνταποδίδω ὁμῶς τὰ δέοντα στοὺς ἀγαθοὺς, στοὺς ἀνεξίκακους, στοὺς ταπεινοὺς»*. Καὶ κάνει ἕνα ἄγγιγμα, θὰ τολμοῦσα νὰ πῶ, στὸ ἀνύπαρκτό της πολιτικῆς ζωῆς—προσέξτε, στὸ ἀνύπαρκτο. *«Ὁ καθένας ἀπὸ ἐσᾶς νὰ συγχωρεῖ τὸν ἄλλον»*. Πόσο σπουδαῖο θὰ ἦταν μὲς στὸ χῶρο τοῦ λόγου τοῦ πολιτικοῦ καὶ τῆς πολιτικῆς διεργασίας νὰ ὑπῆρχε ἡ λέξη συγχώρεση. Ἀγγιγμα λοιπὸν στὸ ἀνύπαρκτο, κατὰ τὰ δεδομένα ποὺ βλέπουμε μπροστὰ μας.

Καὶ ταυτόχρονα ἀνατρέπει τὶς προοπτικὲς καὶ τὴν πίστη τῶν πολιτικῶν. Ὑπὸ ποία ἔννοια; Οἱ πολιτικοὶ πάντοτε πιστεύουν στὸ αὐριο, ἐκεῖνος, ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος ὁ Ἅγιος, πιστεύει στὸ Θεό. Γι' αὐτὸ τονίζει καὶ λέει *«περὶ τῆς πίστεως σπουδάζομεν»*. Καὶ πάλι ἐπανερχεῖται στὴν ἐνότητα: *«Προσπαθῶ νὰ ἐνώσω τὴν πρὸς τὰ θεῖα διάθεση ὁλῶν τῶν ἐθνῶν»*. Τὸ ἐργαλεῖο μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ ὁποῖο θὰ ἐπιτύχει τὴν ἐνότητα τῶν ἐθνῶν τῶν ὁποίων ἄρχει—καὶ εἶναι αὐτοκράτορας πρῶτα τῶν παθῶν του καὶ ἔπειτα τοῦ λαοῦ—εἶναι ἀκριβῶς τὸ στοιχεῖο αὐτό: ἡ ἐνότητα μέσα στὴ θεῖα διάθεση.

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος τοῦ πολιτικοῦ μάρκετινγκ—θὰ λέγαμε—ἡ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τοῦ μυστικοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ; Μία ἀναμέτρηση τὴν ὁποία προβάλλει ὁ Μέγας Κωνσταντῖνος καὶ Ἅγιος. *«Ἐπιδιώκω νὰ πραγματοποιήσω τὴν διοίκησιν αὐτοῦ τοῦ τόπου μὲ τὸν ἀπόρρητο ὀφθαλμὸ τῆς διανοίας»*, λέει. Ἕνα πολὺ σπουδαῖο στοιχεῖο. Ὅχι μὲ πολιτικὰ διαγράμματα, ὄχι μὲ πολιτικὲς ἰδεολογίες, ὄχι μὲ τὴ θεωρία τῶν πολιτικῶν

συστημάτων, αλλά με αυτή τη χάρη που του έδωσε ο Θεός μέσα του—σέ κάθε άνθρωπο την έδωσε—για να λειτουργεί τὰ του Θεοῦ. Αὐτὸς ὁ μυστικὸς ὀφθαλμὸς.

Καὶ θέτει μπροστά του καὶ τὴν ἔννοια τῆς ἐνότητας: ποία εἶναι ἡ προϋπόθεση τῆς ἐνότητας; Ἀκούστε: «*Ἐπανεέλθετε, λοιπὸν, πρὸς τὴ μεταξὺ σας φιλία καὶ χάρη, ἀγκαλιάστε ὅλο τὸ λαὸ καὶ γνωριστεῖτε μεταξὺ σας, ἀφοῦ προηγουμένως καθαρῖσετε τὴν ψυχὴ σας*». Βλέπετε; Ἡ προϋπόθεση τῆς ἐνότητας στὸ χῶρο τῆς ὁποιασδήποτε κοινωνικῆς ἢ πολιτικῆς διεργασίας εἶναι ἡ κάθαρση τῶν ψυχῶν—κι αὐτὸ τὸ γεγονὸς [εἶναι] τελείως ἀπρόσιτο στὰ σημερινὰ δεδομένα. Κι ἀναφέρεται ὁ Ἅγιος Κωνσταντῖνος στὰ κλειδιά τοῦ διαλόγου· τόσο ἀπαραίτητος ὁ διάλογος σὲ τόπους δημοκρατικῆς διεργασίας. «*Ἄς ζητήσει συγχώρεση ὁποῖος κάνει βιαστικὲς ἐρωτήσεις ἢ δίνει βιαστικὲς ἀπαντήσεις*».

Ἀλήθεια, πόσο σπουδαῖο θὰ ἦταν αὐτὸ τὸ στοιχεῖο γιὰ τὸ χῶρο καὶ τὴν ἔκφραση τοῦ σημερινοῦ πολιτικοῦ διαλόγου. Κι ἀγγίζει τὸ μεγάλο, τὸ πῶς ἕνας ἄρχοντας ἀγγίζει τὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ λαοῦ. Τὴν ἐποχὴ ἐκείνη ὑπῆρχε ἡ ἔννοια τῆς χαράξεως τοῦ προσώπου· ἂν κάποιος καταδικαζόταν γιὰ κάποιο μεγάλο ἔγκλημα, ἦταν ἐγγεγραμμένος, ἦταν χαραγμένος. Ὅλοι καταλάβαιναν ὅ,τι αὐτὸς ἦταν καταδικασμένος, εἶχε τὸ ποινικὸ του μητρώο ἀποτυπωμένο πάνω στὸ μέτωπό του. Μὲ ἕνα νόμο τοῦ ὁ Μέγας Κωνσταντῖνος ἀπαγορεύει τὴν παραμόρφωση τοῦ προσώπου τῶν καταδίκων. Γιατί, ὅπως λέει ἐκεῖνος, τὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ ἀνθρώπου δὲ στιγματίζεται ποτέ, ἀφοῦ εἶναι εἰκόνα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ κάλλους.

Ὅταν κινεῖται σὲ χώρους, διεργασίες κοινωνικὲς καὶ στέλνει ἐκπροσώπους, εἰδικὰ στὰ θέματα τὰ ἐκκλησιαστικά, συνηθίζει νὰ στέλνει ἐκπρόσωπό του ὃχι ὁποιοιοδήποτε πολιτικὸ πού ἔχει καριέρα, ἀλλὰ ἕναν ἅγιο, τὸν Ὅσιο—ἔτσι λεγόταν, τὸ ὄνομά του, γιατί ὄντως ἦταν Ὅσιος—ὁ Ὅσιος, ἐπίσκοπος Κορδοῦνης (τῆς σημερινῆς Κόρδοβα τῆς Ἰσπανίας). Ἐνας ἅγιος, ὁ ὁποῖος ἀναγνωρίστηκε ἀργότερα ἅγιος, ὁ Ὅσιος Κορδοῦνης, ἐκπροσωπεῖ αὐτόν. Γι' αὐτὸ λοιπὸν, γιὰ τὸν κατευνασμὸ τῶν παθῶν δὲν χρησιμοποιοῖ πολιτικὰ πρόσωπα, ἀλλὰ πρόσωπα πνευματικά καὶ ἁγίους. Καὶ ἔρχεται, μὲ τὶς κινήσεις πού κάνει, ἡ συντριβὴ τῆς ἐννοίας τῆς μονοκρατορίας.

Ἡ Ρώμη ὁλόκληρη ἦταν μονοκρατορική. Ποτέ ἡ Ρώμη—γιὰ πεντακόσια καὶ χρόνια—δὲν συγκάλεσε μία εὐρύτερη σύνοδο πού ξεπερνοῦσε τὴ μονοκρατορία. Ὅταν ἐκεῖνος συγκαλεῖ τὴν πρώτη Οἰκουμενικὴ Σύνοδο, ὑπόσχεται νὰ εἶναι θεατὴς καὶ ἀκροατὴς, ὃχι κυρίαρχος. Συντρίβει ἔτσι αὐτὸ τὸ μοντέλο πού ἔχει τὴν ἔννοια τῆς μονοκρατορίας τῆς Ρώμης. Καταργεῖ τὴ μονοκρατορία καὶ ὁ δικός μας ἱστορικός, ὁ Παπαρρηγόπουλος, τονίζει τὸ γεγονὸς ὅ,τι «ἡ Ρώμη οὐδέποτε συνεκάλεσε κοινὴ, πόλεων καὶ ἐθνῶν, Σύνοδον».

Καὶ σ' αὐτὴ τὴ Σύνοδο καλεῖ ἐπισκόπους πού δὲν ἀνήκουν στὸ Ρωμαϊκὸ κράτος· δέχεται τὴν Ἐκκλησία πού ἐκφράζει

τὴν οἰκουμενικότητα καὶ παγκοσμιότητα, ὃχι τὸ κράτος. Ἔτσι λειτουργεῖ μία ἀγαπητικὴ παγκοσμιότητα, μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ χῶρο τῶν ἐνωτικῶν δεσμῶν, τῶν πνευματικῶν, πού λειτουργεῖ ἡ Ἐκκλησία. Καὶ ἔρχεται ἐνάντιος στὴ σημερινὴ κερδοσκοπικὴ παγκοσμιότητα· σήμερα τὸ κέρδος εἶναι τὸ στοιχεῖο τῆς παγκοσμιότητας.

Καταργεῖ τοὺς τύπους. Ὅταν εἰσέρχεται ὡς αὐτοκράτορας στὴν πρώτη Οἰκουμενικὴ Σύνοδο, εἰσέρχεται χωρὶς τυμπανοκρουσίες, χωρὶς τιμητικὲς ὑποδοχές, χωρὶς συνοδεία ὀπλιτῶν. Κάθισε στὸ ὀρισμένο κάθισμα, ὅταν τοῦ ἐδόθη καὶ ἄδεια μάλιστα τοῦ ἐδόθη ἀπὸ τὸν πρόεδρο τῆς Συνόδου. Κάνει ἔκκληση στὸ λαὸ του: «*χαρίστε μου λοιπὸν ἡσυχες μέρες καὶ γαλήνιες νύχτες, ὥστε στὸ ἐξῆς νὰ μπορῶ καὶ ἐγὼ νὰ ἀπολαύσω τὴν εὐχαρίστηση τοῦ καθαροῦ φωτὸς καὶ τὴν εὐφροσύνη μίας ἡσυχῆς ζωῆς*».

Τὸ πολιτικὸ τοῦ αὐριο. Εἶναι σύνηθες τὸ πολιτικὸ αὐριο στοὺς πολιτικούς καὶ εἶναι συνηθισμένες οἱ προγραμματικὲς δηλώσεις. Εἶναι κάτι συγκλονιστικό. «*Θὰ σταματήσω μέχρις ὅτου σταματήσει αὐτὸς πού προχωράει μπροστά μου καὶ αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ Χριστός*». Ἡ ζωὴ του τελειώνει μὲ μία προσευχή. Λέει στὸ Χριστὸ «*σέ παρακαλῶ νὰ εἶσαι πρᾶος καὶ εὐμενὴς πρὸς τοὺς λαοὺς σου. Σέ σένα ἀφιέρωσα τὴν ψυχὴ μου μ' ἅγιο ἔρωτα κι ἀγνὸ καὶ σεβασμό. Επιθυμῶ νὰ εἰρηνεύσει ὁ λαός σου [προσέξετε: ὁ λαός σου, ὃχι ὁ λαός μου] καὶ νὰ εἶναι ἀδιατάρακτος πρὸς χάριν τῆς κοινῆς ὠφελείας ὅλων τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Καὶ ἂν ἀκόμη εἶναι θέλημα τοῦ Κυρίου τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τοῦ θανάτου νὰ συνεχιστεῖ ἡ ἐπίγεια ζωὴ μου καὶ νὰ συνυπάρχω μὲ τὸ λαὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, θὰ πλαισιώσω τὴ ζωὴ μου μὲ ὅλους ἐκείνους τοὺς κανόνες πού ἀρμόζουν στὸ Θεό*».

Ὁ ἅγιος Κωνσταντῖνος. Ὁ Μέγας Κωνσταντῖνος. Τὸ πολιτικὸ του—ὅπως εἶπα—μανιφέστο. Μιὰ ἄλλη προοπτικὴ στὸ χῶρο τῆς πολιτικῆς. Εἶναι μήπως ἡ μοναδικὴ προοπτικὴ, ἡ προοπτικὴ τῆς ὁποιασδήποτε πολιτικῆς διεργασίας στὰ μεγάλα σχήματα τῶν κρατικῶν μεγεθῶν ἀλλὰ καὶ στὰ μικρὰ σχήματα τῶν ομάδων πού διοικοῦμε καὶ κυβερνοῦμε; Ἀπὸ ὅ,τι γνωρίζω, ὁ χῶρος τῆς πολιτικῆς δὲν ἔχει προστάτη ἅγιο. Μήπως ἦρθε ἡ ὥρα νὰ ἀποκτήσει; Μήπως ἐκεῖνος εἶναι ἐκεῖνος πού μπορεῖ μέσα ἀπὸ αὐτὰ τὰ διδάγματα πού τὰ ἔκανε βιώματα τῆς ζωῆς του νὰ λειτουργήσει τὴν προστασία τοῦ παλινδρομοῦντος πολιτικοῦ λόγου;



Ἄν θέλεις νὰ προσευχηθεῖς σωστά, νὰ μὴ πικράνεις Ἀκαμιά ψυχὴ, γιατί ἀλλιῶς ἄδικα κοπιάζεις. Μὴ θέλεις νὰ ἔρχονται τὰ πράγματα ὅπως σέ συμφέρει, ἀλλὰ ὅπως εἶναι ἀρεστὸ στὸ Θεό. Ἔτσι θὰ εἶσαι τὴν ὥρα τῆς προσευχῆς γεμάτος γαλήνη καὶ χαρούμενος.

Ἀββᾶς Νεῖλος

19^η Μαΐου: Ημέρα Μνήμης τῆς Γενοκτονίας τῶν Ἑλλήνων τοῦ Πόντου

Τοῦ Παναγιώτη Πόδ., 2009.

Ἡμέρα αὐτὴ ἔχει ψηφιστεῖ ὁμόφωνα ἀπὸ τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ Κοινοβούλιο ὡς ἡμέρα μνήμης τῆς γενοκτονίας τῶν Ποντίων. Περίπου 353.000 Πόντιοι σκοτώθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸ Τουρκικὸ Κεμαλικὸ καθεστῶς κατὰ τὴν περίοδο 1915-1923. Δυστυχῶς οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς δὲν γνωρίζουμε τί συνέβη. Οἱ ἀκόλουθες φωτογραφίες εἶναι ἀρκετὲς γιὰ νὰ μᾶς κινήσουν τὸ ἐνδιαφέρον!

Δεῖτε τὴ φωτογραφία ἀπὸ πάνω. Οἱ Τούρκοι Κεμαλικοὶ φωτογραφίζονται μὲ τὰ κεφάλια τῶν θυμάτων τους!

Καὶ μετὰ ἡ Προσφυγιά καὶ οἱ ἐκτοπίσεις... Ἦταν ὁ τρόπος μὲ τὸν ὁποῖο ὁ Κεμάλ, ὁ «μεγάλος ἥρωας καὶ ἡγέτης τῶν Τούρκων», χρησιμοποίησε γιὰ νὰ ξεκάνει τὸ πληθυσμὸ ἐκείνων ποὺ ἐπιβίωσαν τὶς δολοφονίες. Ὁ διωγμὸς κράτησε ἀπὸ τὸ 1915



μέχρι τὸ 1923 καὶ ἀποτέλεσε τὸν ἀργὸ θάνατο ἑκατοντάδων χιλιάδων Ἑλληνορθοδόξων Χριστιανῶν τοῦ Πόντου.

Τὸ ἄρθρο αὐτὸ δὲν ἐγράφη γιὰ τὴν καλλιέργεια οὔτε τῆς

ἐμπάθειας ἀλλὰ οὔτε καὶ τοῦ μίσους μεταξὺ τῶν δυὸ λαῶν, ἀλλὰ γιὰ τὴν ἀξιοποίηση τοῦ δικαίωματος στὴ μνήμη ποὺ κάποιοι πολιτικοὶ καὶ ψευτο-Ἕλληνες προσπαθοῦν νὰ καταπατήσουν. Ἔτσι γίνεται καὶ ἓνα μνημόσυνο στοὺς ἀνθρώπους ποὺ σκοτώθηκαν ἐκεῖνες τὶς τραγικὲς μέρες καὶ ἔμειναν ἄθαφτοι στὶς πλατεῖες, μέσα στὰ ἴδια τους τὰ σπίτια, στὸ μαρτυρικὸ δρόμο γιὰ τὰ τάγματα ἐργασίας...



Παράλληλα ὁμως δὲν πρέπει νὰ ξεχνοῦμε καὶ τοὺς κρυπτοχριστιανοὺς τοῦ Πόντου, ποὺ πολλοὶ μάλιστα ἀγνοοῦμε τὴν ὑπαρξή τους, ἀλλὰ ἐκεῖνοι μᾶς περιμένουν. Δὲν εἶναι παραμύθι καὶ ὑπάρχουν ἀδιάψευστα σημερινὰ ντοκουμέντα ποὺ μαρτυροῦν τὴν ὑπαρξὴ τουλάχιστον 500.000 (!) κρυπτοχριστιανῶν στὴν σημερινὴ Τουρκία.

Ἄς ἀνασυρθεῖ ἐπιτέλους ἀπὸ τὴ λήθη τῆς ἐξωτερικῆς μας πολιτικῆς ἡ ὑπόθεση αὐτὴ καὶ ἂς μὴ θυσιάζονται πλέον στὸ βωμὸ τῆς ἑλληνοτουρκικῆς φιλίας οἱ αἰτήσεις τῶν ἀνθρώπων αὐτῶν γιὰ βοήθεια. Καὶ ἀσφαλῶς δὲν ζητοῦμε ἔνοπλες λύσεις ἀλλὰ εἰρηνικὲς διαπραγματεύσεις ἀπὸ τὴ γείτονα χώρα...

Δεῖτε πῶς περιγράφει τὸν πόνο τῆς μιᾶς μανά, ποὺ μέσα στὸ σπίτι τῆς, σκότωσαν τὸν ἄντρα τῆς καὶ τὰ παιδιὰ τῆς, σ' αὐτὸ τὸ ποίημα τῆς Χαρίκλειας Μπισμπίκα (ἀπὸ ἓνα βιβλίο τοῦ Γ. Ἀνδρεάδη):

Τὰ πόδια μου τσακίσανε
Σκοτώσαν τὰ παιδιὰ μου
Σκοτώσανε τὸν ἄνδρα μου
Ἔκαψαν τὴν καρδιά μου
Δυὸ μέρες, τρεῖς καὶ τέσσερις
Βρωμούσανε κοντά μου
Κανένα δὲν εἶχα βοηθὸ
Οὔτε παρηγοριά μου
Καὶ ποῖον νὰ πρωτοθυμηθῶ
Νὰ μὴν ἀναστενάξω
Τὸν ἄνδρα μου, γιὰ τὰ παιδιὰ,
Γιὰ νὰ μὴν ξανακλάψω
Δὲν ἔφτανε, ποὺ πεθάνανε
Καὶ τὰ ἔκλαιγα μπροστά μου
Δὲν ἔρχονται νὰ τὰ πάρουν
Νὰ ἀγούν νὰ τὰ θάψουν
Καθόμουν τὰ καθάριζα
Κι ἔβγαζα τὰ σκουλήκια
Καὶ τὸ μυαλό μου γύριζε
Σὰν ψάρι μὲς τὰ δίχτυα
Νικόλα μου, Χριστόφορε,
Παρασκευά μ', Μιχάλη
Δία σᾶς δὲν θὰ συμμαζεστεῖ
Ὁ νοῦς μου στὸ κεφάλι
Παιδιὰ μου, ὅπου μὲ θρέβατε
Μὲ τοὺς κελαηδισμοὺς σας
Τώρα πῶς ἐγὼ τὸν βαστῶ
Τὸν ἀποχωρισμὸ σας;

Τὰ λόγια τοῦ ἀξιοεῖμνηστου καὶ τελευταίου Μητροπολίτη Τραπεζοῦντος, Χρυσάνθου Φιλιππίδη, ἀποτελοῦν τὸν καλλίτερο ἐπίλογο αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἁρθρου:

«Υπὸ τὴν ἐνοχὸν ἀνοχὴν τῶν χριστιανικῶν δυνάμεων τῆς Δύσεως, κατεστράφη ἀκμαϊότητα Ἑλληνορθόδοξος Χριστιανικὸς πολιτισμὸς τῆς καθ' ἡμᾶς Ἀνατολῆς, ἐσβέσθη ἡ ἐκκλησία Τραπεζοῦντος καὶ ἡ κληρονομία

Ἑξομολόγησις: Τὸ Σβηστήρι τοῦ Θεοῦ

ΠΗΓΗ: Ἀπὸ κείμενο Ἱεράς Μονῆς Μεγίστης Λαύρας, Ἁγίου Ὁρους.



Στὴν ζωὴ μας κάναμε πολλὰ λάθη. Κάναμε λάθη ὅταν ἤμασταν παιδιά, ὅταν γίναμε ἔφηβοι καὶ νέοι, ἀλλὰ πολὺ περισσότερο κάναμε λάθη καὶ ἀργότερα ὅταν γίναμε γονεῖς. Ἡ ζωὴ μας εἶναι γεμάτη λάθη. Πολλὰ ἀπ' αὐτὰ ἦταν ἀνώδυνα, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλὰ ἀπ' αὐτὰ εἶχαν μεγάλες συνέπειες στὴ ζωὴ μας.

Ἀλλὰ δὲν εἶναι μόνον αὐτὰ τὰ λάθη ποὺ κάναμε. Κάναμε λάθη ἀπέναντι στὸ Θεό, οἱ περισσότεροι ἀποκοπήκαμε καὶ γυρίσαμε τὶς πλάτες σ' Αὐτόν, νομίσαμε πὼς μακριὰ Του θὰ ἤμασταν εὐτυχημένοι. Κυνηγήσαμε τὴν χαρὰ καὶ τὴν εὐτυχία στὶς ἡδονές, στὴ σάρκα, στὸν κόσμο. Χαράξαμε μία ζωὴ ὑλιστικὴ, μὲ γλέντια, διασκεδάσεις, τζόγο καὶ εὐκολὴ ζωὴ, ρουφήσαμε τὴν ἁμαρτία μέχρι τελευταίας σταγόνας. Δοκιμάσαμε τὰ πάντα, καὶ ὅμως ἡ πίκρα εἶναι ἀπλωμένη στὴ ζωὴ μας, τὸ κενὸ ποὺ ὑπάρχει μέσα μας αὐξάνει καθημερινά. Νομίζουμε πὼς αὕτὴ εἶναι ἡ μοῖρα μας καὶ τὸ τέλος μας.

Ἀλλὰ μέσα σ' αὐτὸ τὸ πυκνὸ σκοτάδι ἕνα φῶς λάμπει, δὲν τὸ προσέξαμε, δὲν τὸ εἶδαμε. Εἶναι ὁ ἀστέρας ποὺ 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 χαρίσῃ σωτηρία, λύτρωσι, ἐλευθερία ἀπὸ τὰ δεσμὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας. Ἴσως δὲν γνώρισες, δὲν ἐνδιαφέρθηκες γι' Αὐτόν· Αὐτὸς σὲ ἀγαπᾷ, σὲ ἀναζητᾷ, θέλει νὰ σὲ σώσῃ.

Γνωρίζεις ὅτι ὁ Κύριος ἔβαλε ἕνα σβηστήρι μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία Του, ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ σβήσῃ ὅλο τὸ παρελθόν σου, ὥστε νὰ μπορέσης ν' ἀνοίξης μία καινούρια σελίδα στὴ ζωὴ σου; Τὸ σβηστήρι αὐτὸ εἶναι ἡ μετάνοια, εἶναι ἡ ἐξομολόγησις, εἶναι τὸ λουτρὸ τῆς ψυχῆς. Ἐὰν θέλῃς ν' ἀλλάξῃς ἡ ζωὴ σου, ἐὰν θέλῃς νὰ νοιώσῃς 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 σώσῃ. Αὐτὸ ποὺ διαβάξεις αὕτὴ τὴν ὥρα εἶναι ἡ φωνὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ· μὴ κλείσῃς τὴν καρδιά σου στὴ φωνὴ Του, ἔλα κοντὰ Του, πῆγαινε νὰ βρῇς ἕνα πνευματικό, ἄνοιξε τὴν καρδιά σου στὸ Θεό, πὲς τὰ λάθη τῆς ζωῆς σου μὲ εἰλικρίνεια, μὲ ταπεινώσι, μὲ ἀληθινὴ μετάνοια, καὶ ὁ Θεὸς θὰ σὲ σώσῃ, θὰ σὲ ἀλλάξῃ, θὰ σὲ καταστήσῃ παιδί δικό του, θὰ σοῦ χαρίσῃ τὸ Πνεῦμα Του τὸ Ἅγιον, θὰ γίνῃς νέος ἄνθρωπος, καινὴ κτίσις, πολίτης τοῦ οὐρανοῦ!

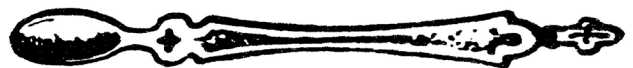
Γιὰ τὴν Πλάνη τῶν Πεντηκοστιανῶν

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον «Πνευματικὸς Ἀγώνας» Γέροντος Παΐσιου Ἀγιορείτου, Λόγοι Γ', Ἱερὸν Ἡσυχαστήριον «Εὐαγγελιστῆς Ἰωάννης Ὁ Θεολόγος» Σουρωτὴ Θεσσαλονίκης.

Γέροντα, αὐτὰ ποὺ λένε ὅσοι προχωροῦν στοὺς Πεντηκοστιανούς, ὅ,τι δηλαδὴ βλέπουν ὁράματα, μιλοῦν γλῶσσες κ.λ.π., εἶναι ἀπὸ φαντασία ἢ ἀπὸ δαιμονικὴ ἐνέργεια;

-Ἀπὸ δαιμονικὴ ἐνέργεια εἶναι. Γιατί, ὅταν πηγαίνουν στοὺς Πεντηκοστιανούς καὶ ξαναβαπτίζονται, περιφρονοῦν, ἀρνοῦνται τὸ Ἅγιο Βάπτισμα—«ὁμολογῶ ἐν Βάπτισμα εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν», λέει τὸ Σύμβολο τῆς Πίστεως—ὅποτε ξεβαπτίζονται, δέχονται δαιμονικὲς ἐνέργειες καὶ μιλοῦν βρρρ... ὁῦθεν γλῶσσες. «Μιλάει, λένε, τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς». Δὲν εἶναι τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα. Εἶναι ἕνα σωρὸ ἀκάθαρτα πνεύματα. Τί γλωσσολαλιές; Ἀσυναρτησιές εἶναι αὐτὰ ποὺ λένε. Οὔτε οἱ ἴδιοι τὰ καταλαβαίνουν. Τὰ μαγνητοφονοῦν κιόλας καὶ ὕστερα κάνουν στατιστικὲς καὶ βγάζουν συμπεράσματα: «Ἐχει τόσα «ἀλληλουῖα» στὴν τάδε γλῶσσα, τόσα στὴν τάδε». Μὰ μέσα στὰ τόσα «βρρρ...» κάτι θὰ βρῇς ποὺ θὰ μοιάζει καὶ μὲ «ἀλληλουῖα» σὲ κάποια ἀπὸ τὶς γλῶσσες τοῦ κόσμου! Καὶ βλέπεις, ἐνῶ κάτι εἶναι δαιμονικό, αὐτὸν τὸν δαιμονισμό τὸν θεωροῦν ἐνέργεια τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος καὶ λένε πὼς ζοῦν ὅ,τι ἔζησαν καὶ οἱ Ἀπόστολοι τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς. Εἶναι βλασφημίες αὐτὰ ποὺ πιστεύουν, γι' αὐτὸ δαιμονίζονται.

Γέροντα, γιατί ξαναβαπτίζονται;
-Γιατί λένε: «Ὅταν βαπτίσθηκα, ἤμουν μικρὸς καὶ δὲν ἤξερα. Τώρα βαπτίζομαι ἐν γνώσει μου». Ξαναβαπτίζονται καὶ δικαιολογοῦν τὶς ἁμαρτίες τους. Ἄν ἡ Ἐκκλησία δὲν εἶχε τὸν νηπιοβαπτισμό, ὅσοι θὰ πέθαιναν, πρὶν βαπτισθοῦν, τί θὰ γίνονταν; Γι' αὐτὸ γίνεται ὁ νουνὸς ἐγγυητής, λέει τὸ Σύμβολο τῆς Πίστεως καὶ ἔχει εὐθύνῃ γιὰ τὸ παιδάκι, ὥσπου νὰ μεγαλώσῃ. Μήπως ἀδικεῖται ποὺ βαπτίζεται μικρό; Ὁχι, ἴσα-ἴσα βοηθεῖται, γιατί κοινωνά. Καὶ ὅταν μεγαλώσῃ, ἂν μολύνῃ τὸ Ἅγιο Βάπτισμα μὲ κάποια ἁμαρτία, ὑπάρχει ἡ μετάνοια καὶ ἡ ἐξομολόγησις ποὺ θὰ ξεπλύνουν αὕτην τὴν ἁμαρτία, ὅχι νὰ πάῃ νὰ βαπτισθῇ ξανά!



Ὅταν ὁ Ἱερέας βγάζει μερίδες καὶ μνημονεύει τὰ ὀνόματα τῶν πιστῶν στὴν Ἱερὰ Πρόθεση κατεβαίνει Ἄγγελος Κυρίου καὶ παίρνει τὴν μνημόνευση αὕτὴ καὶ τὴν πηγαίνει καὶ τὴν ἐναποθέτει στὸ Θρόνον τοῦ Δεσπότη Χριστοῦ ὡς προσευχὴ γι' αὐτοὺς ποὺ μνημονεύθηκαν. Σκεφθεῖτε, λοιπόν, τί ἀξία ἔχει νὰ σᾶς μνημονεύσουν στὴν Ἁγία Πρόθεση!

Γέροντας Ἰάκωβος Τσαλίκη (+1991)

Ὁ Ἀντίχριστος Οἰκουμενισμός

Τοῦ Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου Διονυσίου Τάτση.

Πολλοὶ εὐσεβοφανεῖς επικρίνουν ἐκείνους ποὺ διαφωνοῦν μὲ τοὺς μεγαλόσχημους οἰκουμενιστές, γιατί, λένε, δὲν ταιριάζει οἱ μικροὶ καὶ ἁμαθεῖς νὰ μὴ δείχνουν τὸν προσήκοντα σεβασμὸ σὲ ἐξέχοντα πρόσωπα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Θεωροῦν ἀσέβεια ἕνας ἁπλὸς ἱερέας, ἕνας μοναχὸς ἢ ἕνας θεολόγος νὰ κρίνει τὶς πράξεις τῶν Μητροπολιτῶν, τῶν Ἀρχιεπισκόπων καὶ τῶν Πατριαρχῶν. Μόνο νὰ ἐπαινεῖ ἐπιτρέπεται. Ποτὲ νὰ διαφωνεῖ καὶ μάλιστα δημοσίως.

Οἱ ἱερεῖς καὶ οἱ μοναχοὶ πρέπει νὰ εἶναι πειθήνια ὄργανα τῶν προϊσταμένων τους, τῶν «ἡγουμένων» τους. νὰ καθυστεροῦν τὴ συνείδησή τους ἀποδεχόμενοι τὸ «ἔχουν γνῶσιν οἱ φύλακες» καὶ ἅς ἀποδεικνύουν τὰ γεγονότα τὸ ἀντίθετο. Συνηθίζουν ἐπίσης οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοὶ νὰ χαρακτηρίζουν τοὺς ζηλωτὲς ὡς φανατικούς, στενόμυαλους, ἀδιάκριτους, ἀδιάλλακτους καὶ προβληματικούς. Γιὰ τοὺς πρωτεργάτες ὅμως κι ἐνοχους καμιά λέξη. Δὲν θέλουν νὰ δυσανεστήσουν τοὺς μεγάλους καὶ νὰ χάσουν τὴν εὐνοιά τους.

Τὴν ἴδια τακτικὴ τηροῦν καὶ οἱ περισσότεροι καθηγητὲς στὰ Πανεπιστήμια, οἱ ὅποιοι ἐμφανίζονται ὡς γνῶστες ὄχι μόνο τοῦ παρελθόντος καὶ τοῦ παρόντος, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ ἀδελφου μέλλοντος! Ἐξουθενώνουν τοὺς ἁπλοὺς ζηλωτὲς τῆς πίστεως, ἐνὼ πλέκουν τὸ ἐγκώμιο στοὺς Πατριάρχες καὶ Ἀρχιεπισκόπους, προκειμένου νὰ ἐξασφαλίσουν τὴν ἱκανοποίησι προσωπικῶν τους αἰτημάτων. Δυστυχῶς, οἱ ἄνθρωποι αὐτοί, ἂν καὶ ἔχουν πανεπιστημιακοὺς τίτλους καὶ ἀξιώματα, τοὺς λείπει τὸ ἀγωνιστικὸ φρόνημα, ὁ ἱερός παλμός καὶ ἡ πίστις στὴν αἰωνιότητα. Εἶναι ἄνθρωποι τοῦ κόσμου καὶ ὄχι τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. Μοιάζουν μὲ σβησμένους φάρους, ποὺ δὲν προσφέρουν καμιά ὑπηρεσία στοὺς καπετάνιους.

Ἀπ' ὅλους αὐτοὺς δὲν περιμένουμε καμιά συμβουλὴ καὶ καμιά ὑπόδειξη. Ἐμεῖς, οἱ εὐαίσθητοι περὶ τὴν πίστιν ἅπλοι χριστιανοί, κληρικοὶ καὶ λαϊκοί, γνωρίζουμε ὅτι πρέπει νὰ ὁμολογοῦμε τὴν ὀρθόδοξη πίστιν μας καὶ νὰ ὑπερμαχοῦμε γι' αὐτή. Αὐτό, δηλαδή, ποὺ ἔκαναν οἱ ἀμέτρητες χιλιάδες τῶν παλαιῶν καὶ νεωτέρων ἁγίων μαρτύρων. Συγχρόνως δὲ νὰ ἀποκαλύπτουμε καὶ τὰ σχέδια ὅλων ἐκείνων ποὺ ὑπονομεύουν τὴν ἁγία πίστιν μας, χωρὶς δισταγμὸ καὶ φόβο. Αὐτὸ ἔκαναν οἱ ἅγιοι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, αὐτὸ συμβούλευαν καὶ οἱ σύγχρονοι Γέροντες.

Εἰδικότερα γιὰ τὸν οἰκουμενισμό, ποὺ ἀποτελεῖ τὸν μεγαλύτερο ἐχθρὸ τῆς πίστεώς μας, ὁ ἀείμνηστος Ἀρχιμ. Χαράλαμπος Βασιλόπουλος ἔλεγε τὰ ἐξῆς: «Εἰάν θέλωμε νὰ εἴμεθα μὲ τὸν Χριστό, πρέπει νὰ ξεσκεπάζωμε τὸν ἀντίχριστο Οἰκουμενισμό. Εἶναι ἀνάγκη νὰ ὑψώνουμε φωνὴ διαμαρτυρίας καὶ νὰ καταγγέλλωμε κάθε ἐνέργεια, κάθε κίνησι, καὶ κάθε πρᾶξι, ποὺ δὲν εἶναι σύμφωνη μὲ

τὴν γραμμὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Πίστεως. Ἔχουμε χρέος νὰ πολεμοῦμε τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τῆς Πίστεώς μας. Ἔχουμε καθήκον νὰ ξεσκεπάζωμε κάθε σκοτεινὸ σχέδιο δράσεώς των καὶ κάθε ὑπουλὴ δραστηριότητα ὀρισμένων Οἰκουμενιστῶν θεολόγων καὶ ἐνωτικῶν ρασοφόρων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων μεγαλόσχημων ἰσχυρῶν καὶ σκοτεινῶν δυνάμεων, ποὺ κρύβονται πίσω τους. Ἔχομε ὑποχρέωσιν ἡμεῖς ποὺ γνωρίσαμε τὴν ἀλήθεια, νὰ διαφωτίσωμε τοὺς ἀδελφούς μας, τὸν Ὁρθόδοξο Χριστιανικὸ λαό, διὰ νὰ μὴ παρασύρεται» («Ὁ Οἰκουμενισμὸς χωρὶς μάσκα», β' ἔκδοσις 1995, σελ. 267).



Ἐπέτειος τῆς Ἀλώσεως τῆς Πόλης

Μία μικρὴ παρένθεσι γιὰ τὴν σημαντικότητά τῆς 29ης Μαΐου.

Μία ἀκόμη ἐπέτειος τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ θὰ περάσῃ Μᾶθόρυβα καὶ χωρὶς νὰ τιμηθῇ. Ἡ λήθη καὶ ἡ παρακμὴ ἔχουν σκεπάσει τὴν ἱστορικὴ καὶ ἐθνικὴ μνήμη. Οἱ τελευταῖοι ὑπερασπιστὲς τῆς Πόλης καὶ ὁ τελευταῖος Αὐτοκράτορας ἔχουν πιά ξεπεραστεῖ ἀπὸ τὰ «ριάλιτι τηλεπαιχνίδια» καὶ τὶς ἀπαίσιες χορευτικὲς φιγούρες τοῦ ὑπουργοῦ τῶν Ἐξωτερικῶν καὶ τῶν βοηθῶν του. Ἡ ὅποιαδήποτε ἀναφορὰ στὴν κορυφαία αὐτὴ στιγμὴ τοῦ ἔθνους θεωρεῖται ἀπὸ πολλοὺς ἀσυγχώρητα ὀπισθοδρομικὴ καὶ μισαλλόδοξη ἐνέργεια.

Τὸ νὰ μιλᾷ κάποιος σήμερα, καὶ ἰδιαίτερα πολιτικὸ κόμμα, γιὰ Ἑθνικὴ τιμὴ καὶ ἀξιοπρέπεια θεωρεῖται τουλάχιστον «γραφικὸς». Ὅλα πρέπει νὰ ξεχαστοῦν στὸ ὄνομα τῆς Παγκοσμιοποίησης καὶ τῆς πολυπολιτισμικότητος. Ἡ οἰκονομικὴ εὐμάρεια τῶν λίγων ἐπιβάλλει τὸν θάνατο τῆς ἱστορικῆς μνήμης τῶν Ἑθνῶν.

Γιὰ εὐμᾶς, ὅμως, ἡ μνήμη τῆς ἀλώσεως παραμένει φωτεινὸ παράδειγμα θυσίας καὶ πίστεως στὰ δίκαιά του Ἑλληνισμοῦ. Κανένας ἀνιστόρητος ὑπουργὸς στὸ ὄνομα μίας ἀνύπαρκτης Ἑλληνοτουρκικῆς φιλίας δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ διαγράψῃ μίαν ἱστορικὴ πορεία αἰώνων τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ. Ὁ ἀγώνας γιὰ τὴν δικαίωση τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ, καὶ γιὰ τὴν Ἑθνικὴ ἀναγέννησι θὰ συνεχιστεῖ μέχρι τὴν τελικὴ νίκη.



«Ἡ Παναγία εἶναι πάντοτε μαζί μας. Ἐμεῖς δὲν τὸ καταλαβαίνουμε. Δὲν συμφέρει νὰ τὴν δοῦμε γιατί θὰ ὑπερηφανευτοῦμε». Αὐτὸς ὅμως τὴν ἔβλεπε. Κάποτε εἶδε τὴν Δέσποινά μας νὰ διασχίζει τὰ δωμάτια τῆς καλύβας του καὶ νὰ φανερώνῃ τὴν εὐαρέσκειά της γιὰ ὅλη τὴν συνοδεία του!

Γέροντας Ἐφραίμ Κατουνακιώτης

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CHURCH

The purpose of this study (from the Orthodox Outlet of Dogmatic Enquiries) is to point out certain differences between Protestantism and Orthodoxy, and to arouse the interest of Protestants who have never become properly acquainted with the Orthodox Church of the Lord.

Arbitrary Authority

It is customary amongst Protestant religions—when someone disagrees with certain of their dogmas—to break away and form another, independent team of their own. These teams quite often evolve into self-dependent, separate religions, which baptize, distribute bread and wine, ordain “elders” and pursue many other activities. There are also teams, even individual persons, who congregate and study the Bible without the presence of “elders,” or any other kind of infrastructure. The latter usually believe it is wrong for someone to belong to a religion and they maintain that a Christian should remain free of any commitments in any religious area. But, are these stances and customs proper? Could there be something that all these people have overlooked and should re-examine?

A first question that arises in the first instance is the issue of authority. Perhaps certain people should ask themselves: “With what authority am I creating a new religion? With what right do I baptize, or distribute bread and wine, or ordain elders? Is it really alright for one to proceed with such actions? Who put me in charge, who made me an elder, so that I too can superintend over a new congregation?”

Similarly, those who are “independent” of religions should ask themselves: “Is it possible for me to be following—as I claim—the paradigm of the Apostles and the first Christians, when I don’t belong to any Church the way they did? Where are the elders of my congregation? When was someone of us ordained, by someone who had this authority? With what authority do I baptize? Is my participation in the supper of the Lord a valid one, when it is an arbitrary participation? How can I be a part of the worldwide and all-time body of the Church, when I have no communion with any of the other Churches of the Lord? Or is my team, or my person, perhaps the only one that is Christian? So, which are the Churches of the Lord, according to the paradigm of the Apostles?”

As strange as it may sound to a Christian, there are many people who actually do act this arbitrarily in such important matters as faith and salvation. The reason for this behavior is that it has become a force of habit from their Protestant roots.

When Protestantism introduced Reform in the West, it did not comprise a continuation of an apostolically rendered arrangement; it was merely an autonomous and independent protest; there was no historical continuance in their protestation, and no-one with such authority ever ordained Luther or Calvin as elders in their new religion. Even if they had

been ordained by a former Papist (since there was no-one in this new religion to perform an ordination), this ordination would still not be valid, because the Papists had already been pronounced a heretic congregation at that time. No-one from another religion would undertake to ordain elders in a newly-formed, rivalrous faith. This would have been incongruous, because both the ordainer of the one religion and the ordained of the other religion are equally in heresy, and consequently, the ordination is deemed invalid.

So, given that Protestantism suddenly penetrated history, it naturally found itself without elders and without any legally bestowed authority to perform its religious obligations. It was therefore compelled to act arbitrarily, from the very first moment it appeared.

Conclusion: All Protestant “elders” officiate arbitrarily; they have no historical continuance and no authority to officiate. It is no wonder, that all affiliated Protestant groups act in a similar way; they just haven’t realized that what they do is impermissible.

The Paradigm of the Apostles

One excuse that is offered by Protestants is that since all Christians belong to a “Regal Priesthood,” they all have the authority to baptize and to elect elders, as well as to distribute bread and wine. Thus, they do not need any special ordination for these things. And although there is a multitude of Church regulations (Canons) that prove the absurdity of these assertions, we feel obliged to convince them of the facts, by referring them to the paradigm of the Apostles themselves, since they refuse to accept the regulations of the Church.

We shall therefore prove that in the era of the Apostles, the hieratic status of Christians did not comprise a prerequisite that allowed them to act arbitrarily. We shall see how ordination as well as a given mission was compulsory, in order for someone to be able to baptize, distribute bread and wine, or superintend the Christian congregations of the first centuries.

This continues to apply in the Church of the Lord to this day, as it always did, and as is witnessed by all the proto-Christian writings that have been preserved until now. In the narrations of the Acts of the Apostles, it is clear that God did not act independently of His Church, as Protestants assert.

Let’s look at a few examples:

When the seven deacons were elected in the Church, this didn’t take place arbitrarily; the laying on of the Apostle’s hands was necessary: *Whom they set before the Apostles, and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.* (Acts 6:6).

These seven deacons weren’t “appointed” by any arbitrary religious leadership; it was after the laying on of the hands of the Apostles themselves. As for the Apostles, they too had received authority for all this, from Jesus Christ Himself, and they also never acted arbitrarily: *Verily I say unto you,*

Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." (Mt 18:18-19). And, *Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.* (Jn 20:21-23)

It is therefore clearly evident that in the Church there is a line of authority: the Father sent forth the Son, the Son sent forth the Apostles, and they, with the tremendous authority that was bestowed upon them, commenced to distribute authority to others.

Let's examine a few more tracts of the Holy Bible as examples:

When Philip the evangelist preached in Samaria—despite all the miracles that he performed—he did not have the authority to transmit the Holy Spirit into the newly baptized, because only the Apostles had this authority at the time. *Now when the Apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John. Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost. (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them; only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.* (Acts 8:14-19)

Also, when Saul (the one who was later renamed Paul) converted to the Christian faith and was sent forth by Jesus Christ Himself, the mission and the instructions given by the very Lord were not enough! The Lord sent him Ananias (who was a Christian and had the power of healing), to baptize Saul and to transmit the Holy Spirit into him. (This narration is in Acts 9:1-19.) But even Ananias, when placing his hands on Saul, declares that he had received the authority to do so: *And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.* (Acts 9:17).

It is evident here, how significant the source of every authority for every action was, to the first Christians. Good intentions were not enough, not even the decision of the Lord; The act had to be endorsed by a Christian appointed by the Lord, so that everything be done in Ecclesiastic order.

But even so, the mission given directly by the Lord did not suffice for the Apostle Paul. Following a revelation, he sought

out the Apostles that preceded him, so that he might obtain from them the authority to perform his mission of preaching to nations. This narration is in Galatians 2:1-10: *Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas... And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them (the Apostles) that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain... And when James, Peter, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision...*

The exact same thing happened when the Lord sent Peter to Cornelius; the Lord didn't send the Holy Spirit to Cornelius directly; He first sent Peter, in order to baptize Cornelius as well. (Acts 10:44-48). Even in Antioch, when the Holy Spirit sent Paul and Barnabas on a mission, this took place only after those who had the authority laid their hands upon them. (Acts 13:1-3). The Apostle Paul in turn laid his hands upon Timothy, in order to convey authority to him, so that he may undertake the office of Bishop in Ephesus: *Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.* (2 Tim 1:6).

In the same way, both Timothy as well as Titus in Crete had been given the authority to ordain elders. (1 Tim 5:17-20, Titus 1:5): *For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.* (Titus 1:5). Saint Ignatius, a second century bishop, acted in the same spirit: "Without that (approval) of a Bishop, not even baptism is permitted..." (Smyrnaeans 8). "It (the Eucharist) is one, being under a Bishop." (Magnesians 6-7).

We see therefore, that the offices of the Church are not just for everyone who believes in Christ; the officiator has to first receive the authority from those who have it, and who can transmit it to them. It would therefore be a wise move, for those who arbitrarily undertake Church functions, to reconsider their ways and seek to acquire the authority from those who have such authority in the Orthodox Church. For they are the ones who are the successors of the Apostles according to the Lord's intention.



Listen! Be careful of your eyes and your ears. Let them not see and hear unseemly things; because all that you see and hear will come at the time of prayer, and will scatter your mind and hinder you from being united with God. Likewise in church: we go there to pray. If we are found in church and our mind runs elsewhere, there is no gain. It is like going to the doctor, and not listening to his advice.

Elder Ieronimos of Aigina (+1966)

“BAVAROCRACY” IN THE CHURCH OF GREECE

Excerpt taken from the book: “I Want to Drink all of Bosphorus” («Θέλω νὰ Πιῶ Ὅλο τὸν Βόσπορο») by Archmandrite Dositheos, 2nd edition, published by the Holy Monastery of Tatarna, Evrytania, p. 256-7.

“Bavarocracy” is a loose term alluding to the period of time that Hellas was governed by Bavarian families, following the 1821 Liberation Revolution against the Turks and after the assassination of Hellas’ first Greek Governor, Ioannis Kapodistrias. His assassination led the newly liberated nation into political chaos (and the subsequent appointment of the foreign King Otto as Greece’s ruler). Ioannis Kapodistrias was known for his strong Orthodox views, his asceticism, as well as his patriotism and love for his fellow man. The newly formed Greek Senate of 1830 twice voted a salary for its first Governor and Kapodistrias both times refused it, selecting to continue his service to his fellow citizens without any compensation whatsoever. His assassination took place in the steps of the Church of his beloved saint, St. Spyridon. He remains a true example for politicians of all ages and all nations.

† † †

Upon the founding of the neo-Hellenic State, Adamantios Korais’ Protestantizing “Enlighteners,” who had taken over the leadership of the land, had hastened to loot and close down monasteries, which have always been the heart of Orthodoxy and the true teachers of the pure Orthodox Faith. The results of their action are being realized in Greece to this day—their efforts have led the people of Hellas to a (continuing) ignorance or at least incomplete knowledge of their own Orthodox tradition, given that it was systemically replaced by imported Western and a plethora of heretical notions.

In the same year that Ioannis Kapodistrias was assassinated (1831), Korais, who was a product of western education, published his work “Hieratikon Synekdeimon” «Ἱερατικὸν Συνέκδημιον»—a text containing his proposals for the reformation of the Church according to Protestant Calvinism. His endeavor was to turn the Church into a “national institution” that would be State-controlled. In other words, one more public service. The “Koraists” regarded the excising of the Church of Hellas from the Ecumenical Patriarchate of New Rome/Constantinople an absolute necessity; this view was the result of their incorrect belief that the Hellenic Revolution had been fought not just against the Turks but also against the Neo-Romans (“Byzantines”), supposedly by the descendants of the ancient Hellenes.

These ideas of Korais were to be implemented later on by his colleagues, (one of them being Theocletos Farmakides) with the assistance of Maurer, who organized an ecclesiastic coup in collaboration with the Bavarians. Head of the Holy Synod had now become the heterodox (Papist) king, Otto, who not only presided over the Synod, but whom the Priests were also obliged to commemorate during services. On the basis of this new situation, the foreign and heterodox king appointed a five-member Holy Synod, in accordance with his own perceptions. This schism fortunately did not last many years; In 1850, following certain concessions by the Hellenic Church, the schism was finally healed.

But let us now read about what happened to the Church of Hellas, after 1833 and the prevalence of the “Koraists.” According to the book written by Archimandrite Dositheos:

... We are in the year 1833. The tiny State that extends as far as Melouna is counting its monasteries. A total of 593 were found. Far too many. They are no longer necessary (even though they were, not so long ago). Thus, by decree of the Bavarian Viceroy (i.e., Theocletos Farmakides) dated September 25th, of the same year, 412 of them have been abolished; that is, all those with less than six resident monks. The monks who lived in those monasteries had to be evicted forcefully and their property confiscated by the State.

By another decree of the vice-regency dated February 25th of the following year (1834), the number of nunneries was confined to three only, throughout the land. In each one, the number of nuns was not to surpass 40. If by chance that number of nuns was surpassed, “they shall be invited by the local bishop to resign from monastic living and return to the world. The bishop shall be commissioned by the Synod to notify them in its name that they can enforce this, without censure.”

Of course, one might say: Very well; that was a decree of the State. What did the Synod do? Did it react? How would it be expected to react, when the author of that decree and the encyclical were the one and the same person, the Koraist Theocletos Farmakides, Secretary General of the four-member Synod (Cyril of Corinth, Paisios of Boeotia, Zacharias of Thera and Sophronios of Attica)? Quite the opposite. It was exceedingly pleased. Listen now to the synodical autocephalous acclamations:

In Nafplion, May 5th, 1834:

“...thus, the monasteries having less than six monks were abolished and barely 80-90 have been preserved; that is, those with more than six monks... Most certainly no-one wants to be opposed to this most useful measure, when properly and impassively thinking of its immense results...”



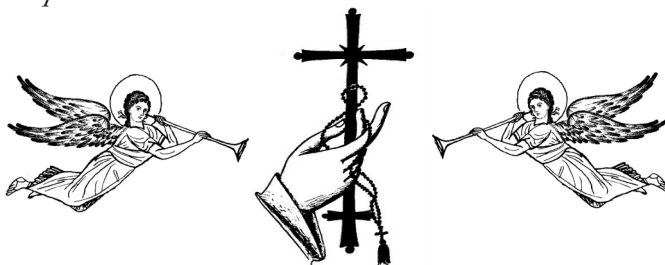
Ioannis Kapodistrias
The First Governor of Greece
(+1831)

What were those results?

Everything that the conquerors had shown respect to for entire centuries was demolished within two to three months. The damage to the Church and the Nation is incalculable. Sacred heirlooms, manuscripts, sacred vessels, sacred relics, were thrown into gullies, sold, or burned. For one purpose only: so that the evicted monks would not be able to return once again. It quickly became apparent that yesterday's champions are today's irreconcilable enemies...

This tragic picture is eloquently presented in his own unique expressive manner by the 1821 revolution hero, General Makryiannis ("Makryiannis Memoirs," Karavias Publications, p. 362):

"They totally destroyed the monasteries, and the poor monks, who had wasted themselves in the struggle, are now dying of starvation, on the streets, whereas those monasteries were the first bastions of our Revolution... And the poor monks sacrificed themselves, and most of them were killed in the battles. And the Bavarians, who thought them to be Capuchin monks of Europe, did not know that they were modest and virtuous people, who had acquired what they had with the toil of their hands, struggling and working for so many centuries; and so many poor lived together with them and could eat a piece of bread. And those accursed politicians of our homeland and those corrupt hierarchs... agreed with the Bavarese and spoiled and looted all the temples of the Monasteries..."



ADVICE TO PRIESTS

By Metropolitan Philaret (+1985).

Beloved servant of God, consider these words as you serve in His Holy Altar:

1. Having accepted the grace of ordination, remember the great gift and great mercy which the Lord has bestowed upon you--and what a responsibility lies upon you henceforth. Among his flock a priest is an apostle. "I belong not to myself, but to others," said the great pastor, St. John of Kronstadt.

2. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the angel of the Lord Almighty, says the Scripture (Mal 2:7). Orthodox pastor, attend to these words. You should be a messenger of the law of God and of the Gospel truth; your flock will seek this from you.

3. Fear, more than fire carelessness with regard to your holy pastoral work, and even more with regard to serving before the dread throne of the Lord of Glory. *Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully* (Jer 48:10), sternly warns the Holy Bible. Be a good example of the fear of God for those who serve with you. Exclude from serving in the altar anyone who does not have a properly reverent attitude.

4. Pray continually to the Lord for help and wisdom in directing the affairs of the parish. May the Lord grant you a spirit of chastity, humility of wisdom, patience and love... All of these virtues are necessary in conducting parish work. Respect the counsel of your elder and more experienced brothers, as well as the wise counsels of those laymen who are pious and dedicated to the Church. Grip firmly the wheel of your parish ship, but at the same time, before making final decisions using your pastoral authority, ask the advice of trustworthy individuals; in the Church, decision-making rests with those in spiritual authority—the priests, but matters are first submitted to the conciliar mind. The life and work of a parish must be penetrated by the spirit of 'sobornost,' (Ed. "spiritual community of many jointly living people") of conciliar unity.

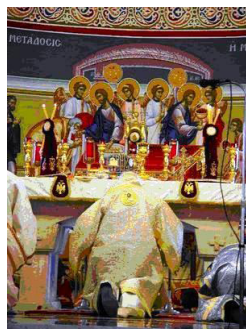
5. While holding the helm tightly in your hands, try to draw kind, pious and churchly people into active parish work, forming together with these co-workers a single, warmhearted, spiritual family. And do not forget the children. Try in every way possible to teach them, to instill in them a spirit of piety, a love for the Church, firmly and persistently demanding the same of their parents. May you be aided in this task by your God-given helpmate and companion in life: your matushka. Many times aggravations and misunderstandings in parishes have arisen when priest's wives have involved themselves in pastoral concerns and duties proper to their husbands; this should be avoided. On the other hand, there are many areas of parish work in which the priest's most valuable helper can be his Matushka—especially in matters of Christian education and the upbringing of children.

6. While laboring in the parish, do not cease to work upon your own soul. The one task should blend with the other. The holy Apostle Paul gave the following advice to his disciple St. Timothy: *Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine Take heed unto thyself, and unto doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.* (1 Tim 4:12-16).

May the Lord be your Helper in all things. Having twice received the grace of ordination—in the diaconate and in the priesthood—do not forget always to pray for those hierarchs who laid their hands upon you.

THE DAILY CYCLE OF ORTHODOX CHURCH SERVICES

From "The Law of God" by Archpriest Seraphim Slobodskoy (translated by Mrs. James Price).



The daily cycle of services are those services which are celebrated by the Holy Orthodox Church during the course of a single day. There are nine services in the full daily cycle: vespers, compline, nocturnes (midnight service), matins, first hour, third hour, sixth hour, ninth hour, and the Divine Liturgy or, in its place, Typica, otherwise called the

"Pro-Liturgy Service."

Following the example of Moses who, in describing God's creation of the world, began the day with evening, the Orthodox Church begins the daily cycle with the evening service of vespers.

1. **Vespers** is the service celebrated towards the end of the day at evening, in which we express our gratitude to God for the day which has passed.

2. **Compline** is a service composed of the reading of a series of prayers in which we ask the Lord God for forgiveness of sins and that He grant us during sleep rest of body and soul and preserve us from the wiles of the devil.

3. **Nocturnes**, or the **Midnight Service**, is the service appointed to be said at midnight in remembrance of the nighttime prayer of the Saviour in the Garden of Gethsemane. This service calls the faithful to be ready at all times for the day of Judgment which will come unexpectedly, like a *bridegroom in the night*, as the parable of the ten virgins relates.

4. **Matins** is celebrated in the morning before sunrise; in this service we thank God for the night just passed, and we ask of Him mercy for the approaching day

5. **First Hour** corresponds to the first three hours of our daytime, 6-9AM. (In ancient times, an "hour" referred to the length of a "watch" that lasted for three hours as we measure them today; each service of the daily cycle corresponds to one of these three hour divisions.) The First Hour prayers sanctify the already breaking day.

6. **Third Hour** corresponds to our period from 9-12 AM, It recalls the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles.

7. **Sixth Hour** corresponds to our period from 12-3 PM and reminds us of the Crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ,

8. **Ninth Hour** corresponds to our period from 3-6 PM and reminds us of the death on the Cross of our Lord.

In addition to these eight services which cover the eight three hour periods of the day, Christians celebrate every day the **Divine Liturgy**. This is the most central of the Divine Services. During the course of its celebration, the entire earthly

life of the Saviour is brought to mind, and the Mystery of Holy Communion is accomplished in fulfillment of Christ's command to break bread in memory of Him, a command He gave at the Last Supper. The Liturgy is celebrated in the morning before midday.

In ancient times, in monasteries and among hermits, all of these services were conducted separately at the time appointed for each. Later, for the sake of being more practical, they were combined into three groups: evening, morning and daytime. The evening services consist of Ninth Hour, Vespers and Compline; the morning services consist of Nocturnes, Matins and First Hour; the daytime services consist of Third and Sixth Hours and Liturgy or Typica.

On the eve of major feasts and Sundays, Vespers, Matins and First Hour are combined into what is called an All-night Vigil, so-called because among ancient Christians (and in some monasteries today) this service lasted all night.



We could take a cue from Orthodoxy, whose priests stand with their backs to their congregation, leading a liturgy that is neither clever nor impassioned, but simply beautiful, like stone smoothed by centuries of rhythmic tides. It's an austere ritual, in the sense of—there's nothing new here; it's sublime, in the sense of—creating a clearer view into Heaven.

The priest can be any priest. Who he is, what he looks like, how he speaks, and what he thinks matter little. He hasn't written the service that he officiates. It isn't about him or his prowess. He's an interchangeable functionary draped in brocaded robes, obscured by incense, and, as such, never points to himself, a flawed human, pointing ever and only to the Perfection of the Mysterious Divine.

That is the role of every priest or preacher—invisibility, while making God seen.

From a person who is not even Orthodox...

First Radio Parish Church of America
Portland, MN (May 3, 2010)



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

THE LOOTING OF RELIGIOUS ARTIFACTS BY TURKISH FORCES

By Julia Duin, *"The Washington Times," July 21, 2009.*

Religious artifacts on the divided island of Cyprus are in "great peril," according to a recently released U.S. Helsinki Commission document.

Thousands of Orthodox icons, manuscripts, frescoes and mosaics have been looted from churches, chapels and monasteries in northern Cyprus, ending up on international auction blocks, says the document, the result of a lengthy investigation by the Helsinki Commission and titled "Destruction of Cultural Property in the Northern Part of Cyprus and Violations of International Law."

A copy of the 50-page document was provided to The Washington Times in advance of a press briefing and panel discussion on Capitol Hill.

The panelists included Charalampos Chotzakoglou, professor of Byzantine art and archaeology at Hellenic Open University in Patras, Greece; German art historian Klaus Gallas, who is a specialist on the international smuggling of art artifacts; and Michael Jansen, author of "War and Cultural Heritage: Cyprus after the 1974 Turkish Invasion."

Most of the ruined property belongs to the Orthodox Church of Cyprus, one of the world's oldest national Orthodox churches, with the rest belonging to Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Maronite and Jewish groups.

Thirty-five years of occupation of Northern Cyprus by Turkish forces have ruined "a plethora of archeological and religious sites," says the report, which adds that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has been documenting the destruction since 1984.

According to the report:

- 500 Orthodox churches or chapels have been pillaged, demolished or vandalized.
- 133 churches, chapels and monasteries have been desecrated.
- 15,000 paintings have disappeared.
- 77 churches have been turned into mosques, 28 are being used by the Turkish military as hospitals or camps, and 13 have been turned into barns.

A staff member for the Helsinki Commission said a copy of the report had been sent to the Turkish Embassy in Washington, but an embassy spokesman said it had not been received. "It sounds like a one-sided presentation," said the embassy spokesman, who asked to remain unidentified because he was not authorized to comment on the record.

"There's no input from the Turkish side. There is no coincidence the report is coming out this week because it's the 35th anniversary of the intervention by Turkey. Turkey respects all cultural heritages," the spokesman said.

The report by the U.S. Helsinki Commission, which monitors compliance with agreements among members of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, also added that Cyprus, which exercises effective control over the southern two-thirds of the island, has spent about \$600,000 since 2000 to renovate 17 historic mosques.

According to the report, the 77 churches converted into mosques have texts from the Koran inscribed where icons and paintings used to be; the St. Anastasia monastery is now a hotel with a swimming pool and casino; and the Byzantine-era monastery of Antiphonetes has had its icons and murals removed and sold to art dealers.

Jerome Bowers, a Northern Illinois University associate history professor who recently returned from studying in Cyprus, said in an e-mail that while Greek Orthodox artifacts in Northern Cyprus have been damaged, the stolen goods have been smuggled out of Cyprus mostly through the southern part of the island.

"There can be no denying the fact that the destruction of religious cultural artifacts in the south has also taken place," he wrote. "In Paphos, for example, the Camii Cedit was not only destroyed but replaced with a parking lot, and the square surrounding the location is now called March 9th Square, named for the date of the mosque's destruction."

The Christian church has ancient roots in Cyprus. Visited in A.D. 45 by the apostle Paul along with his co-workers Barnabas and Mark (as recorded in Acts 13:4-12), it was ruled by Byzantine emperors for hundreds of years. It was during this time that the vast majority of churches were built in the region and decorated with brightly colored frescoes and tiled mosaics.

In 1571, the island fell under the control of the Ottoman Turks, and in 1878, the British took over. The native Cypriots are divided into two camps: 80 percent Greek speakers and 18 percent ethnic Turks, with the remaining 2 percent divided among Armenians, Maronites and Latin-rite Catholics.

According to the report, the Greek (military junta) government, with the help of Cypriot armed forces, forced out Archbishop Makarios, the first democratically elected president of the island, on July 15, 1974.

Turkey invaded five days later, taking over the northern 37 percent of Cyprus, ostensibly to protect Turkish-speaking inhabitants. Several years later, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was established, though no country in the world besides Turkey recognizes it. The Greek Cypriot-led Republic of Cyprus claims to be the sole legitimate government of the whole island, a claim every country in the world except Turkey accepts.

The report says there are 660,000 Greek Cypriots living on the island's southern part, 89,000 Turkish speakers in the north and 43,000 Turkish soldiers serving as an occupying force.

ON "SCIENTIFIC" THEOLOGIAN

By Constantine Cavarinos.



At my next noteworthy meeting with Kontoglou, which took place at his home in the evening of Sunday, April 20, 1958, our conversation was chiefly on contemporary Greek theologians and on Byzantine art in the West.

Kontoglou spoke of certain 'scientific' (epistemonēs) theologians, men who had studied theology in Europe and brought to the Greek universities a rather cerebral and

so-called "liberal" mode of theologizing. Theocletos Pharmakidis (1784-1862), he noted, was the first Greek theologian of this type. Of recent ones, he cited Demetrios Balanos.

Such theologians, he said, regard traditional Orthodox theology, which comes from the roots of Christianity and from the Greek Fathers, as "ossified," and they come as "renewers" of it. Actually, they lack real faith, lack interior, spiritual life. They view theology as a science, comparable to chemistry and physics, which employ discursive reason as their instrument and give rationalistic explanations.

In criticizing theologians of this type, he quoted a statement of St. Dionysios the Areopagite, that one cannot gain possession of the truths of Christianity in a purely intellectualistic manner, that these have to be experienced, lived. He also read the following passage from St. Symeon the New Theologian (11th century), the greatest of the mystics of Byzantium:

"He who thinks that because he has been disciplined in secular wisdom he knows everything will never succeed in beholding the mysteries of God, until he first wills to humble himself and become a "fool," divesting himself both of his pride and of the knowledge which he has acquired. For he who does this, and follows with unhesitating faith those who are wise in things divine, and is guided by them, comes together with them to the city of the living God. And led and illumined by the Holy Spirit he sees and is taught those things which no other man can behold and learn. And then he becomes one taught by God." (Kontoglou, Πηγή Ζωής, *Pege Zoes*, "Fountain of Life," 1951, p. 82).

In a book which was published four years after our meeting, he wrote about such theologians:

Today's theologians have become scientists, like the doctors, chemists and engineers, because by presenting themselves as such they will be honored by the world. And they go to Europe, the place of spiritual darkness, to receive a degree.

They stuff their heads with a multitude of ungrounded and vain philosophies, and come to our land to transmit their unbelief instead of the Faith.... They do not enter into the Heavenly Kingdom, and hinder others from entering, as our Lord has said. Their punishment is that they do not see any of the wondrous things that are seen by believers, and hence they lack contrition and are cold. They are separated from God and His Kingdom, because they love the glory of men, instead of the glory of God (Σημεῖον Μέγα, *Semeion Mega*, "A Great Sign," 1962, pp. 16-17).

In another book, Papa-Nicholas Planas, which was published three years later, again emphasizing the importance of faith and piety, he says:

"They endeavor today, with the plight of the Church, to find its causes, and hold that the answer is to be found in "scientific" theological education. But the evil is to be remedied only by education in piety (εὐσέβεια, *eusebeia*)... What will it benefit the Church if students go to (say) Geneva? They will return with Protestant principles. We are told by these same persons that our Church has remained behind a whole century. How good it would have been if the members of the Church today had the piety of those who lived a century ago! External [secular], scientific education is fine when it is joined to piety." (Papa-Nicholas Planas, Athens, 1965, p. 46).



The Lives of the Saints will console you and encourage you and make you bold and give you wings, and your torments will be changed into joy.

If you are in any sort of temptation, the Lives of the Saints will help you overcome it both now and forever. If you are in danger from the invisible enemies of salvation, the Lives of the Saints will arm you with the "whole armor of God" and you will crush them all now and forever and throughout your whole life. If you are in the midst of visible enemies and persecutors of the Church of Christ, the Lives of the Saints will give you the courage and strength of a confessor, and you will fearlessly confess the one true God and Lord in all worlds, Jesus Christ and you will boldly stand up for the truth of His Gospel unto death, unto every death, and you will feel stronger than all deaths, and much more so than all the visible enemies of Christ; and being tortured for Christ you will shout for joy, feeling with all your being that your life is in heaven, hidden with Christ in God, wholly above all deaths."

St. Justin Popovich (+1979)

ST. ANTHONY THE GREAT AND CONTEMPORARY ECUMENISM

By Protopresbyter Theodore Zissis, Professor of the Theological School of the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki.

To Associate is not Anachronistic Similar Inter-Faith and Inter-Christian Environment

In our last article titled "The meeting of Bartholomew and the Pope is far from the path of the Holy Fathers," we announced that we would continue the presentation of our assessments based on the timeless conscience of the Church, as expressed in the lives of the Saints and the writings of the Holy Fathers and Teachers. Especially when St. Spyridon, the wonderworker patron of Kerkyra, expelled the pope from his church with an impressive miracle, while today's hierarchs, invite him into their Orthodox churches, embrace him, cense him and wish him a long life.

The memory of St. Anthony in whose temple we have served for the last 13 full years (with the grace of God and the blessing of the saint), has given us the opportunity to again rejoice in his wonderful "Life," a model in the lives of all the later saints, as written by his disciple St. Athanasius the Great, the Archbishop of Alexandria, one of the great pillars of Orthodoxy.

The greatest part of the "Life" deals with the ascetic achievements of St. Anthony, on his struggles against the demons and his particular teachings, such as his great feat of becoming the founder of settlements in the desert, by filling the desert with monasteries and thus becoming the founder and leader of ascetic life. *He convinced many to choose the solitary life and so happened therefore that monasteries on the mountains and in the desert were populated by monks coming out on their own and enlisting in the heavenly city.*

He interrupted twice his lengthy absence from the world, in order to struggle for and contribute in the rescue of Orthodoxy, which as now, so was then, in peril from both external and more so from internal enemies. Christianity was and must never present in any conversations and negotiations "on equal terms" with the other religions; we thus consider it a blasphemy as asserted by today's so called Christian leaders at the inter-religious ecumenical meetings of the Anti-Christ. After all, let us comprehend that Orthodox Christianity constitutes the sole truth, the only way to salvation, the true light which replaced not the weaker lights but the darkness of fallacy and ignorance of God. *The people which sat in darkness saw a great light; and to them which sat in a region of the shadow of death, light sprung up.* (Mt 4:16).

Christ did not say I am one way, one truth, one light among other ways, other truths, other lights, but I am the only way, the only truth, the only light: *I am the way and the truth and*

the life; no one comes to the Father but by Me. (Jn 14:6). *I am the light of the world, he that follows Me shall not walk in the darkness but shall have the light of life.* (Jn 8:12).

This exclusivity of the Bible (which some today characterize as marginal and fundamentalist) is being asked by the ecumenists to co-exist in the multicultural model of the inter-religious relations and meetings, supposedly for "their love for others." They slander and dismiss anyone who consistently and with faithfulness proclaims it as the Gospel and life, for which the Holy Apostles and the Holy Martyrs paid dearly preferring to be tortured and shed their blood rather than compromise with the so called "truths."

Teachers of Inaction and Hypocrisy The All-Knowing and the Humble

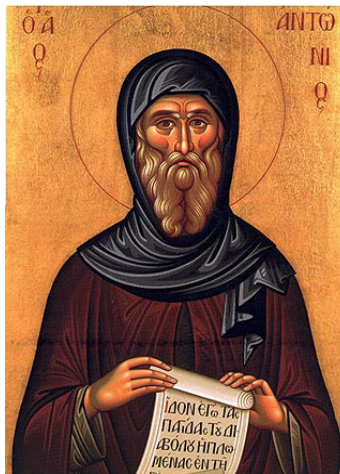
Before St. Constantine the Great, during the persecution of the Christians of Alexandria by Maximianus in 311, Anthony the Great at 61 years of age, left for a while the desert, his asceticism and prayer, and came to Alexandria, fearless and undaunted, intending with longing to bear witness and encourage those being led to martyrdom. He defiantly ignored the judge's orders for the monks to depart from the city and not be present at the courthouses. He appeared in front of the leader who was in a prominent seat at the courthouse, demonstrating the willingness of the Christians to fight and bear witness for their faith. "He stood fearless, showing us the Christian zeal; for he too wished for martyrdom as earlier told."

Of course God preserved him and he was not martyred, that he be more beneficial in life; he, however, did not confine himself to his cell in the desert but "would usually serve the confessors as one with them in the labour of their services."

When the Orthodox Faith is in danger, the first spiritual priority is for her defense, the struggle, the support of all those who battle, the willingness to shed blood and even die; all other spiritual duties are secondary. All others who act or advise against, simply cover up their excuses for their unwillingness and cowardice and become teachers and professors of inaction and hypocrisy.

Of course we are not going to present here how St. Anthony confronted the great and educated literary men and philosophers of idolatry with indisputable argumentation, himself being illiterate, leaving them speechless and astounded. Perhaps we shall do so another time, for idolatry and paganism again appeared, backed by powerful supporters. The Saint did not know everything the way they did, he did not possess worldly knowledge, but he knew the Bible and the teachings of the Saints and above all he was God-learned and God-inspired.

Faith is not an issue of great knowledge and learning but humble submission not to the prevailing knowledge but to



the truth of the Church, timeless and eternal. One must strip oneself of self-wisdom and display of self-knowledge and humbly become embodied in the spirit of Christ, of the Church, of the Saints and Church Fathers which opens the spiritual horizons; otherwise he will always wonder and second guess the certainty of Faith and self-knowledge of even the simple faithful and he will accuse them as all knowing and selfish, lacking humility. However, humility does not mean one has to accept the prevailing opinion but the knowledge of God and of the Saints because frequently many align with the lie and empower the lie with their majority. If the acceptance of the majority opinion, when it disagrees with the truth, constituted the acceptance criterion, then not even the Bible would have been deemed acceptable (since it was being supported by a handful of Apostles) nor would the Church had survived (in the flood of unfaithful and heretics through the ages).

The Position of St. Anthony against the Heretics A Prototype for Imitation for All Today

What we wish to do now is to present the way St. Anthony confronted the Arian heresy, which threatened the Church internally, being supported by the Emperor, leaders, patriarchs and bishops as happens in this day with the pan-heresies of Papism and Ecumenism. Let us first state that these modern-day heresies are far more dangerous because they undermine almost all the dogmas of the faith and transform the divine teaching of the Bible to a common human teaching; they withdraw the God-Man Christ, the Saints and the Fathers and replace them with the infallible pope of Rome and the spread of heresies of the World Council of the so-called Churches.

This presentation is very instructive even for those who pretend not to see the danger. It is of special value to all "serious" spiritual fathers who may lead astray or put in very difficult position their flock; their spiritual children often see better through the eyes of the Saints and end up doubting the worthiness of their spiritual guidance. Let us state unequivocally that the Saints are more trustworthy than any elder and spiritual guide who does not become angry at heresy and does not fight to expose or expel it.

So, Great Anthony, left the desert for the second time and came down to Alexandria. The Orthodox bishop and patriarch was the Great Athanasius, who was under constant persecution and a string of exiles; the Orthodox flock were under the heretical Arians, just as at the present day our faithful are under the tutelage of ecumenist and pro-ecumenist patriarchs and bishops. St. Anthony the Great, as we are taught by his "Life" was most reverent on items related to the Faith. He refused to have any dealings with the schismatic Meletians because from the beginning he was aware of their cunningness and apostasy.

But as with all other heretics, similarly with the Manicheans, he limited his interactions to only advice for them to return to the Truth and to become faithful Orthodox.

St Anthony believed and taught that friendship and keeping company with them was damaging and could end in the loss of one's soul. He detested the Arian heresy and admonished everybody to neither draw near them nor to accept their false faith. Once, when some fanatical Arians paid him a visit, having talked with them and understanding that they were unfaithful, he sent them away from the mountain where he led his asceticism, telling them their words were worse than the venom of snakes. We could say that this document sets the needed rules, with clarity, truthfully and without deception, as to how an Orthodox person conducts dialogues with the heretics and how we must govern our human and social interactions with them. At the same time, it shows us that in our days, all boundaries set by the Holy Fathers are being demolished by the ecumenists, as they embrace and kiss the heretics treating them as if they were pious and of the same faith; they do this without ever considering the need of keeping their distance but also not even daring to admonish them

so that they may one day return to Orthodoxy.

The ecumenical dialogues are being conducted on an "equal level." The ecumenist Orthodox hierarchs and theologians are leveling lies, heresies and deceptions with His Truth. When conversing on an "equal level," it means that you provide the possibility for lies to prevail over the Truth,

that you doubt the Truth and you seek to find It. However the dialogue of the Saints and of the Fathers is a dialogue of Christ with the Samaritan woman, of the Apostles with the Jews and Gentiles, of the Fathers with the heretics, an invitation and admonishment for their return to the truth, to be re-included in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church; this is the true union and peace. All the rest are false unions, false peace and false dialogues.

St. Athanasius book "Life" demonstrates the way to true union from the mouth of a great Saint and achieves the "all must be one" for which the ecumenists labour and attempt to accomplish it. We provide the text applicable to the subject matter verbatim: "In faith he is very admirable and devout. For he never communicated with the schismatic Melitians, seeing from the start their cunningness and apostasy; nor did he speak in a friendly manner with the Manicheans and other similar heretics, but only to admonish them to turn back to piety, leading and commissioning all their friendship and dialogue is harmful and risking loss of one's soul. He similarly despised the Arian heresy and ordered everyone to neither approach them nor their evil faith. Finally, when some of the Arians and

"When the Orthodox Faith is in danger, the first spiritual priority is for her defense, the struggle, the support of all those who battle, the willingness to shed blood and even die; all other spiritual duties are secondary. All others who act or advise against, simply cover up their excuses for their unwillingness and cowardice and become teachers and professors of inaction and hypocrisy."

Manicheans came to question him and realizing their impiety, he sent them away from the mountain, saying that their speech is worse than the poison of the snakes.”

The Dreadful Vision of St. Anthony on the Heretics Dumb Beasts around the Holy Altar

St. Anthony had a truly dreadful vision regarding the presence of the heretics inside Orthodox churches. This vision illustrates and explains graphically the reasons why the Holy Fathers forbid with Synodal Canons the entry of the heretics into consecrated places, their participation in services and liturgies, with common prayers and common worshipping.

The heretics not accepting the teachings of the Church, Apostles and Saints, are influenced by the demons and their father, the Devil, in the promotion of deluded viewpoints. That is why their teaching is “rather fruitless and absurd and their thinking is not correct, like that of dumb mules.”

St. Anthony was therefore shaken and frightened, when God allowed him to see in his vision the Arians surrounding the Holy Altar as mules, kicking and defiling it. Such was his sadness and distress, that he began to cry, as saddened and tearful as also many faithful, in seeing the heretic pope entering and defiling the church of St. George, at Fanar, the very Saint the Vatican abolished. We are certain that if the patriarchs, archbishops and bishops read and learnt of St. Anthony’s vision, of course assuming as Orthodox they continue to honour and follow the life and teaching of the Saints, they will cease the mutual liturgical interactions and visits, the weekly co-prayers, and the sending of representatives to the anniversary celebrations. For otherwise they too will be included as conspirators in St. Anthony’s vision.

According to the St. Athanasius narration of the “Life,” while St. Anthony was sitting, occupied with his handiwork, he went into a trance and was breathing heavily while seeing his vision. After some time he turned to the monks present; he continued breathing heavily and to shake. He fell to his knees to pray and remained kneeling for a considerable time.

When the Saint got up he was crying. Those present became very frightened and shocked; they then asked him to explain to them. As they insisted greatly and compelled him, he sighed again and said “My children it would be best for me to die before I see the things that will happen which I saw in my vision. The wrath of God will fall on the Church and She will be handed to people who are mindless beasts. I saw the Holy Altar of the church, at the main skete, surrounded on all sides by mules which were kicking and jumping up and down as is natural for such dumb animals. You saw and perceived that I was sighing earlier; I did so because I heard a voice saying, *My altar will be defiled.*

That is what the Elder saw. Exactly two years later the Arians attacked and robbed the churches, taking the sacred vessels by force and handed them over to idolaters to hold. They forced them to attend meetings and in their presence they did what-

ever they wished on the Holy Altar. Then we all understood, said St. Athanasius, that the kicking of the mules foretold to St. Anthony what the Arians do now as animals.

After the vision, the Elder felt the need to encourage and console those around him by saying: “Don’t be sad my children; for just as our Lord was outraged, so would He again heal all evil. Soon the Church will recover Her beauty and will shine. You will witness those who were exiled return, the pious faith will re-appear everywhere. Suffice that you do not let yourselves be defiled by the Arian heresy, as it is not the teaching of the Apostles but of the demons and their father, the Devil, irrational and fruitless just like the dumb mules.”

Epilogue

The wrath of God has taken over the Church for many decades. Papism and Ecumenism triumph. At that time, St. Athanasius and the other Holy Fathers understood the danger described in the vision of St. Anthony. We now witness the contamination of the churches and the holy altars by joint prayers and liturgies with the “irrational” heretics and we assist the contamination and praise it, by joining them in the “kicking of the Holy of Holies.”

If one notes the ecumenical joint liturgies and prayers, like the one in Canberra during the 7th General Council of the so called churches (with the frequent participation of homosexual priests who dare hold the Holy Chalice, as well as women bishops and priestesses) the view surpasses even the vision of St. Anthony: “The only hope for our church to regain Her beauty is given in the recommendation and advice of St. Anthony: “beware you do not contaminate yourselves with the Arians.” We must beware we do not contaminate ourselves by communing with Papism and Ecumenism, and the pro-papist and pro-ecumenist Orthodox. Because so far we have not done so dynamically and resolutely, God for years now, prolongs His wrath, and captivity of the Orthodox by the pan-heresy of ecumenism. How much longer will bishops, monks and the laity allow the mindless beasts, the heretics, to kick and contaminate the Sacred and Holies of Orthodoxy? As long as we remain inactive and come up with different pseudo-spiritual excuses, the abomination of desolation will continue to stand on Holy ground.



The Lord never allows those who come to Him unhesitatingly to fall completely. When He sees them faltering He helps them in their efforts, stretching a hand of power down to them and drawing them up to Himself. He works with them visibly and invisibly, consciously and unconsciously, until having climbed every step of the ladder, they draw near Him, wholly united with Him...

St. Symeon the New Theologian

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ST. XENIA THE MARTYR OF KALAMATA [COMMEMORATED ON MAY 3RD]

From a Greek Orthodox pamphlet on St. Xenia, translated for the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen by F. S.



St. Xenia is one of the lesser known yet great saints of the Orthodox Church. She was born in 291 A.D. of pious parents, Nikolaos and Despina, who lived in Italy at the time of persecutions. They were forced to leave Italy and settle on a farm in southern Greece, in the town of Kalamata in the Peloponnese. Xenia was an only child. She was a beautiful girl and preferred not to socialize a lot. She was well known for her kindness, simplicity and humility. Since her parents were poor she was not educated but learned to read the Holy Scriptures from

her mother. Xenia enjoyed attending Church and was very compassionate to the poor.

The district's Roman ruler, Domitianos, fell in love with her beauty and wanted Xenia as his wife. Upon seeing that she was not interested, he used witchcraft to convince her. However, the faithful Xenia was not harmed at all and continued strong in her love for Christ. Domitianos in turn ordered her martyrdom.

They first beat her body with sticks and broke her ribs, then they cut her breasts and burned the wounds. Locked up in a

dungeon that night, Christ appeared and healed her of all her wounds, comforting her in her martyrdom and strengthening her in faith and patience.

The sight of a healthy Xenia greatly infuriated the persecutors who became even more vindictive and hateful. They tried to force her to worship the idols; it was then that Xenia prayed and an earthquake shook and destroyed the pagan temple. Then they tied her to a horse, but the horse would not move and spoke in a human voice to the persecutors, rebuking them for the tortures they had put Xenia through. Finally, they beheaded her, cut out her heart and burned her body. Before her death she prayed for the forgiveness of her persecutors and accepted her martyrdom as the will of God for her salvation. St. Xenia was martyred in 318 A.D. at the age of 26 years old. There were many who believed in Christ as they were witnessing her martyrdom.

St. Xenia is well known for her many intercessions and miracles. Some of these miracles include a lady from Patra (healed of an unknown ailment), an epileptic child and a paralyzed woman. She is the protector of heart patients and children. She is also a great intercession for the dissolution of witchcraft and demonic powers.

The Church of Saint Xenia, was built somewhere in Kalamata—some think at the site of her martyrdom, others maintain that the Church was built at the site of her home. The Church was destroyed in 375 A.D. by a strong earthquake. The new Church of St. Xenia was built at the area of Paliabela, near the factory of Karelia in Kalamata, Greece.

St. Xenia intercede for all of us.

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]

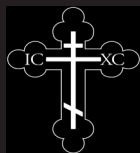
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- Ἡ Σημασία τοῦ Ἀντίδωρου στὴ Λειτουργικὴ μας Ζωὴ (σελ. 18)



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ACQUIRING TRUE SPIRITUAL PEACE OF THE HEART

Excerpts from “Unseen Warfare,” as edited by St. Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain and revised by St. Theophan the Recluse.

Your heart, beloved, is made by God for the sole purpose of loving Him alone and of serving as a dwelling for Him. So He calls to you to give Him your heart, saying *My son, give me thine heart*. (Prov 23:26). But since God is peace that surpasses all understanding, it is quite indispensable for the heart, which wishes to receive Him, to be peaceful and free of all turmoil. For *only in peace is His peace*, as David says. So strive above all things to establish and make firm the peaceful state of your heart. All your virtues, all actions and endeavors should be directed towards achieving this peace, and especially your valiant feats of struggling against the enemies of your salvation; as the great practitioner of silence, Arsenios, says: “Make it your whole care that your inner state should be in accordance with God, and you will vanquish your outer passion.”

Peace of heart is disturbed by passions; so if you do not allow passions to approach the heart, it will always remain at peace. In the unseen warfare, the warrior stands full: armed at the gates of the heart and repulses all those who attempt to enter and disturb it. While the heart is at peace, victory over the attackers is not difficult. Peace of heart is both the aim of spiritual warfare, and the most powerful means to achieve victory in it. So, when passionate turmoil steals into the heart, do not jump to attack the passion in an effort to overcome it, but descend speedily into your heart and, strive to

restore quiet there. As soon as the heart is quieted then the struggle is over.

Human life is nothing but unceasing warfare and endless temptation. Temptation provokes struggle, and so warfare ensues. Owing to this warfare you should always keep awake and do your utmost to guard your heart and watch over it, to keep it peaceful and quiet. When some disturbing movement arises in your soul, strive with zeal to stifle it and pacify the heart, lest this confusion makes you stray from the right path. For the human heart is like a weight on a clock or like a boat's rudder. If you make the weight lighter or heavier, this will immediately change the movement of all the wheels, and the hands will cease to show the correct time. If you move the rudder to the right or left, the course of the boat is at once altered, so that it no longer stays on its former course. In the same way, when the heart is thrown into turmoil, everything within us is brought into disorderly movement and our very mind loses the capacity of right thinking. This is why it is so necessary not to delay in quieting the heart as soon as it becomes troubled by something internal or external, whether in time of prayer or at any other time.

And you must realize that you will know how to pray rightly only when you have really mastered the task of guarding your inner peace. So direct your attention to this subject and try to find out how to achieve a state of affairs when every action is done in peace of heart, with pleasure and joy. I should say, in brief, that preserving peace of heart should be the constant endeavor of your whole life; you must never allow it to be cast into disorderly turmoil. Then, doing all your business tranquil in the shelter of this peace, as it is written: *My son go on with thy business in meekness* (tranquility) (Eccl 3:17) you will attain

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the bliss promised to the tranquil. *Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.*

To preserve inner peace:

(1) First of all keep your outer senses in order and flee all licentiousness in your external conduct; namely, neither look, speak gesticulate, walk nor do anything else with agitation, but always quietly and decorously. Accustom to behave with decorous quietness in your external movements and actions. You will easily and without labor acquire peace within yourself, in the heart; for, according to the testimony of the fathers, the inner man takes his tone from the outer man.

(2) Be disposed to love all men and to live in accord with everyone, as St. Paul instructs: *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.* (Rom 12:18).

(3) Keep your conscience unstained, so that it does not gnaw at you or reproach you, in anything, but is at peace in relation to God to yourself, to your neighbors, and to all external things. If your conscience is thus kept clean, it will produce, deepen and strengthen inner peace, as David says: *Great peace have they which love Thy law and nothing shall offend them.* (Pss 119:165).

(4) Accustom yourself to bear all unpleasantness and insults without perturbation. It is true that, before you acquire this habit, you will have to grieve and suffer much in your heart. But once this habit is acquired, your soul will find great comfort in the very troubles you meet with. If you are resolute, you will day by day learn to manage yourself better and better and will soon reach a state where you will know how to preserve the peace of your spirit in all storms, both inner and outer.

If at times you are unable to manage your heart and restore peace in it by driving away all stress and grief, have recourse

to prayer and be persistent, imitating our Lord and Saviour; He prayed three times in the garden of Gethsemane, to show you by His example that prayer should be your refuge in every stress and affliction of the heart, and that, no matter how faint-hearted and grieved you may be, you should not abandon it until you reach a state when your will is in complete accord with the will of God and, calmed by this, your heart is filled with courageous daring and is joyfully ready to meet, accept and bear the very thing it feared and wished to avoid; just as our Lord felt fear, sorrow and grief, but, regaining peace through prayer, said calmly: *Rise, let us be going; behold, he is at hand that doth betray Me.* (Mt 26:46).



Nothing is more abiding than the Church. She is your salvation. She is your refuge. She is more lofty than the heavens. She is more far-reaching than the earth. She never grows old and always stays in bloom. And so Scripture indicates her permanence and stability by calling her a virgin; her magnificence by calling her a queen; her closeness to God by calling her a daughter; her barrenness turned to fecundity by calling her *the mother of seven*. A thousand names try to spell out her nobility. Just as the Lord is called by many names—Father, Way, Life, Light, Arm, Propitiation, Foundation, Gate, Sinless One, Treasure, Lord, God, Son, Only-Begotten, Form of God, Image of God—since one name could not hope to describe the Omnipotent and many names give us some small insight into His nature, so the Church goes by many names.

St. John Chrysostom

AN EXAMPLE OF HOLY RIGHTEOUSNESS IN OUR DAYS: PAPA-DIMITRIS GAGASTATHIS

By Elder Philotheos Zervakos.

Fr. Dimitrios was born in the village of Platanos on August 1, 1902. His parents were very pious and raised him accordingly. In 1921, he was drafted into the army in Asia Minor. He also served in several places in Macedonia, Greece. He was discharged in 1924, and in 1928, he married Elizabeth Koutsimpiris from his village. The same year he was ordained reader by the Bishop of Trikki Polycarp. On Mary 24th, 1931, he was ordained deacon, and on the 26th of the same month he was ordained priest by the same bishop. From his marriage he had nine daughters

For forty-two whole consecutive years, he served as the parish priest of his village. Throughout his life, he was pious, just, simple, humble, merciful, industrious, and full of faith and love for God and for his neighbor, praying incessantly for the sake of the whole world. He tended his rational sheep as a good shepherd and became a teacher to everyone, instructing by his words, his letters and, above all, by his holy life. On October 1st, 1973, he resigned for reasons of health. He remained confined at home, living as a saint with incessant prayer, glorifying and thanking God for the trial of his illness. He delivered his holy soul to the hands of the living God on January 29th, 1975, in peace.

The ever memorable Fr. Dimitrios worked for the Holy Church of Christ with all his strength. We believe that the Good God, Whom he unselfishly loved and self-denyingly served, and Whose infinite mercy he constantly begged for, has already taken him in the joyous dwellings of Paradise, to rejoice eternally in the blessedness of His Kingdom, through the prayers of the Most Holy Theotokos, the Queen of all the Holy Archangels, his protectors, and of all the Saints.

Become Holy, for I Am Holy
(1Pet 1:16)

The All-governing God, the Maker and Creator of every creature, after creating first all of the invisible creatures, He then created the visible ones, and at last He created man in the image and likeness of Him, higher of all earthly creatures and a little lower than the Angels, as David the Prophet chants: *For you have made him a little lower than the angles, and have crowned him with glory and honor. You made him to have dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet.* (Pss 8:8-6).

He placed Adam in the Paradise of delight and ordered him: Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat. *But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.* (Gen 2:16-17). Adam disobeyed the commandment of God and was exiled

from the Paradise of delight. He was deprived of all sweet things of it, was sentenced to eternal death and, instead of the abode of Paradise, he was condemned to reside eternally in the lowest parts of the earth, in Hades, in “a place without light and consolation.”

But God, Who is by nature affectionate, all-merciful and all-compassionate, moved by His own uprightness, goodness and love for man, sent down His Only Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, *Who humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross.* (Phil 2:8). Through His humiliation, the obedience unto death on the Cross that He showed towards His Father Who is without beginning, and the pouring out of His Precious Blood, He paid the debt of the disobedience of forefather Adam. And following His death on the Cross, He descended into Hades and freed Adam along with all captives since the beginning of the ages from the bondage and corruption of Hades; and when He rose after three days, He resurrected Adam with Him and all of Adam's descendants. He resurrected all those who believed in Him and placed them back in Paradise, the first homeland, the ancient blessedness.

After His resurrection from the dead, our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to His eleven disciples and said to them: *He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that does not believe shall be condemned.* (Mk 16:16).

Through the mystery of Holy Baptism, those who believe in Christ put off the old man of sin and of disobedience, and put on the new Adam of obedience—that is, Christ. This is accomplished during the Baptismal service, at the point where the person baptized in the Name of the Holy Trinity—of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit—comes out of the holy pool, while the priest and the chanters chant: *All who have been baptized in Christ have put on Christ. Hallelujah.* Through Holy Baptism, the baptized receives the gift of God's adoption, receives the grace of the Holy Spirit, and becomes son of God by grace. He becomes holy, provided that he keeps the confession of faith and the promises he made at baptism—namely, that *he denounces Satan and all his works and all his worship and all his pomp*, and that he sides with Christ and *believes in Him as King and God.*

If after baptism one does not keep the confession of faith and the promises he made, he deserts Christ and joins the devil. Instead of God's child, he becomes a child of the devil, a perjurer, a traitor, a denier of his promises, and the grace of the Holy Spirit departs from him. But even that sinful, ungrateful, unthankful and treacherous man, that follower of Judas, as long as he repents sincerely and truly, like the prodigal son, like the harlot, like the tax collector and the thief, the All-good God receives back with open arms, dresses with the first robe, and counts him among his genuine children, as the Fathers teach. Saint Gregory the

Theologian states: "A drop of tears is equivalent to the bath of Baptism, and a painful cry in repentance brings back the grace of the Holy Spirit which had departed for a while." Similarly, Saint John Chrysostom, amazed at the extent of God's goodness and love for man, exclaims: "O, what magnitude of love for man! O, what an excess of goodness! God proclaims the sinner righteous once he confesses his sins and resolves to follow Him steadfastly."

Papa-Dimitrios Gagastathis became holy, a son of God and god by grace, because he kept with exactitude from the beginning till the end—till death—the confession of faith and the promises he made at Holy Baptism. Since his childhood he had faith in God, he loved Him and kept His commandments. He hated and detested the devil and the works of darkness, while working out the works of God and of light, that is, the virtues. His ardent and firm faith in the True God led him to the attainment of all virtues, as the God-bearing Maximos the Confessor says: "The one who believes becomes afraid of God, the one who is afraid of God becomes humble, the one who is humble becomes meek, the meek becomes pure, the pure becomes enlightened by the rays of the Holy Spirit, and the enlightened is accounted worthy to be present in the chamber of the Bridegroom Christ through love." The same father says: "Man, do not despise the love of God, because through it you will become a son of God, whereas, if you despise it, you will become a son of hell." Blessed Augustine says the following noteworthy words: "By nature, the lover becomes similar to the object of his love. That is, if you love God, you will become god, if you love flesh, you will become flesh, if you love the devil, you will become the devil..."

Ever-memorable papa-Dimitri loved God with all his soul and heart and so became a god by grace, a clean vessel and a worthy dwelling of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. *If a man loves me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our abode in him.* (Jn 14:23).

Of what a grace became worthy of those who truly love God! Knowing this well, blessed papa-Dimitri rushed to struggle for the acquisition of the true love, the real one, the one which is acquired not by words but by works, by keeping and observing God's commandments. *If you love me, keep my commandments. He that has my commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loves me.* (Jn 14:15, 21).

He visited with me twice, coming all the way from his village Platanos, Trikala. He left behind his parish, his family, his small flock, and although sick, he came to Paros for confession. When he didn't find me in the monastery, he disregarded his illness and the danger, and climbed up to the highest peak of Saint Elijah's mountain. Knowing that he had been sick and hospitalized, and that the doctors had pronounced that he did not have long to live, I told him: "Blessed Father Dimitrios, how did you venture to come

from so far away, being, moreover, sick?" He told me that he had come for confession to wash off and cleanse his soul. I told him: "So many spiritual doctors in Trikala and in all of Thessaly, very much higher than me the sinner who am unworthy not only of Heaven, but also of this temporal life, and you came to me, who cannot heal even my own self?" He told me: "I didn't come out of my own account; God brought me."

He made his confession with so much repentance, contrition of heart and humility that I have not seen in any other clergyman I have confessed. The joy which he received from confession was manifest on his face. At liturgy, in which he was the celebrant priest, he stood attentively like an angel, his eyes always looking down in awe.

He had a great love for God, for the Most Holy Theotokos before the icon of whom he used to stand and recite the Salutations, and for the Holy Archangels in the church of whom he used to serve regularly, doing the Divine Services and keeping vigils. He had a great love also for his small rational flock on behalf of which he offered bloodless sacrifices and supplications and which he took care of and was watchful lest the spiritual wolf snatched a sheep away. He taught continuously by words and counsels and, above all, by his good example, knowing that the priest, as a good shepherd, has a duty to lay down his life for the rational sheep, for the Holy Church, for the Faith and Homeland.

After the 2nd World War and the Italo-German occupation of Greece, a new, fierce, civil war was declared against our Holy Orthodox Church and our sweet homeland Greece by the haters of Christ, the haters of Greece, the impious and godless communists, who sought to make Greece a godless, communist state and sweep out the Orthodox faith. As fierce animals, as ravenous wolves, they fell upon our Holy Church and the faithful, slaughtering, killing, delivering to fire anyone who opposed their godless views. They showed more rage and fury against select clergymen, causing many to become martyrs and confessors.

Being aware that ever-memorable Father Dimitrios was an enemy of communism and a defender of the Faith, of the Homeland and of his flock, they fought him in various ways. He suffered many tribulations, dangers and intimidations by the unbelieving and impious communists, but he proved firm as an anvil and a diamond, and a most gallant athlete. By the most-wise provision of God, and through the help and protection of the Theotokos and of the Archangels whom he constantly invoked, he was miraculously delivered. Many times he returned to his flock and his family bearing the wounds of Christ in his body. Having been tried also by a very long and painful illness and having suffered magnificently like another Job, he gave thanks to God and departed in blessedness, in joy and gladness, for the eternal tents, the beloved dwellings

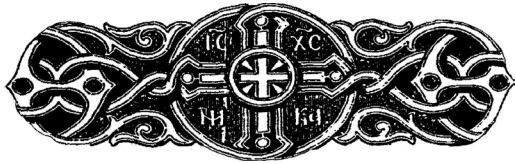
of Paradise, to find rest from his labors in the splendor of the saints.

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them. (Rev 14:13). David's words regarding the holy martyrs and confessors apply to ever-memorable papa-Dimitrios as well: *We went through fire and through water; but you brought us out into a resting place.* (Pss 66:12). The words of the *walker of Heaven* Apostle Paul apply also: *I have fought the good fight, I have finished my race, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all those who love his appearing.* (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

May the memory of ever-memorable Priest Dimitrios Gastathis, brother and co-celebrant, spiritual child of mine in the Lord, who arrived at a blessed ending, be eternal and worthy of praise.

Archimandrite Philotheos Zervakos

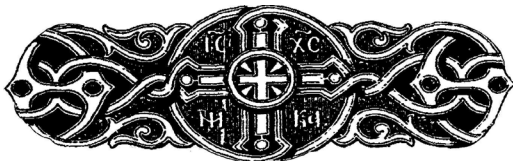
Abbot of the *Life-Giving Fountain* Monastery
Paros, Greece.



For if anger could not be resorted to, even when the occasion called for it, it would be useless and pointless to have it. But it cannot be pointless, since Providence implanted it in us to correct sinners, to stir up spiritual inertia and sloth, and to amuse the sleepy and indolent. The edge of anger has been given to our mind like an edge of a sword to use it when necessary. Therefore Paul often resorted to anger, and was angry though he loved more than those who spoke gently, doing all things to spread the Gospel as the opportunity presented itself. Gentleness is not essentially good, but only when the occasion calls for it, so that, if it is not in season, gentleness is unlawful and anger is contumacious (willfully obstinate).

My purpose is to instruct my hearers to use the emotions as occasion demands, as I have said already.

St. John Chrysostom, "In Praise of St. Paul"



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OF DEATH AND DYING

By Dr. George Kalousek.

Introduction: Orthodox literature is filled with references to death and dying. The Holy Fathers again and again stress the importance of the constant remembrance of death. The image of death appears frequently in the prayer of the Church. In the evening prayer of St. John Damascene, we are enjoined to look at our bed as at a coffin, not knowing whether or not we shall rise on the morrow. According to the values of today's society, all this may appear to be a rather morbid and even unhealthy fascination with death. After all, death has been all but eliminated from the American way of life, or rather, it has been so hidden and disguised that it has come to be regarded as an anomaly and not one of life's natural processes. How does this affect the way people react when they are faced with the reality of death? How can the dying and their close ones be helped towards an acceptance of this reality? Finally, what is the Orthodox perspective of death and dying, and how can we be better prepared to face death ourselves? The following article is based on a lecture given at this year's St. Herman Winter Pilgrimage in Redding, California, by Dr. George Kalousek, a physician and an Orthodox Christian, who addressed these and other questions on death and dying.

Created for Life

In discussing death, we must first remember that we were created for life. God created man in His image, immortal. Through man's free will, he fell away from God and was banished from Paradise, he became blind, sinful; called to partake of the divine nature, man became subject to death and decay. In His love for mankind, God sent His Only-begotten Son, that through His death on the Cross, the dominion of death would be broken and man would once again have the possibility of eternal life in communion with his Creator.

We would not be amiss were we to generalize in saying that a society's view of death and the after-life in many ways determines how it conducts its earthly affairs. In early Mesopotamian society, for example, it was believed that after death all mankind was consigned to a dark, fearsome underworld. It was natural, therefore, that their concern in this life was to seek pleasure, to "eat, drink and be merry." The ancient Egyptians, by contrast, understood that an individual's fate in the next world was dependent upon his behavior on earth. Value judgments, however, were determined by man himself with the result that instead of repenting, man was constantly trying to justify his actions. Looking further, we see that the Puritans, who were Calvinists and believed in the doctrine of predestination, led very strict moral lives bound by many outward laws and regulations. But because they were blind to their eternal destiny and helpless to change it, they were possessed with an intense fear of death and

feeling of uncertainty, and spent their lives vainly trying to “prove” their “chosenness.”

The Building of a Lie

It was impossible to live long with such unresolvable uncertainties. In reaction to this harsh and rather unhealthy fear of death, man fell even further from the Truth, reaching for comfort in rationalizations. Death became romanticized; beauty and death were considered poetic sisters. This view of death was reflected in the changing design of tombstones which no longer depicted skulls or scythes, but were graced by cherubs, vases, willows and butterflies. Even the lessons in McDuffy’s “4th Eclectic Reader” concentrated on themes of death, frequently of children and often characterized by a superficial sweetness. Death came to be thought of as a peaceful and beautiful deliverance. The more man came to rationalize away the fear of death, the more freedom he felt to lead a life of self-indulgence.

The 20th century has only seen this fantasy carried to its logical conclusion. When death is present at all, it is carefully camouflaged; embalming is the rule, coffins are called caskets—which are available in many styles; undertakers are called funeral directors; fake grass is carefully arranged around the burial site to cover the earth; funerals are being replaced by memorial services where not even the coffin is present; cremation is becoming more popular—the scattered ashes leave not so much as a headstone in remembrance of death’s awesome reality.

The foolish are afraid of death as the greatest of evils, but wise men seek it as a rest after their toils and as the end of evils.

[St. Ambrose of Milan]

Some time ago, “Time” magazine had an article on a funeral in a Roman Catholic church in which the priest was dressed in festive, mod vestments and a clown skipped around tying balloons to the coffin. There is no reason to be shocked; this is merely the reflection of our self-centered, pleasure-seeking, American life-style. The lack of seriousness which characterizes today’s society penetrates even unto death.

How does all this affect our attitude toward the dying? Alas, our society is so consumed with its passion for youth, physical fitness, and beauty, that even the proximity of death is uncomfortable and to be avoided. The aged and infirm are bothersome, inconvenient; they are moved out of their own environments and into nursing homes and hospitals where they are monitored by machines. Sometimes excessive sedation causes them to be socially non-functional. The dying patient, as an individual human being, can easily become unimportant, irrelevant and very lonely.

What can be done to help the dying? First, we must recognize that they are God’s creation; they possess immortal souls and they should be important to us. We should talk to them with honesty and compassion, avoiding platitudes and fak-

ery. Life has become very abnormal. We ourselves partake of this immature, self-indulgent, pleasure-seeking society. If we could make more of an effort to regain even a small degree of normalcy, of truth, to calm and soften our hearts, this would be of great help in trying to minister to the dying.

It is also important that the dying be reassured that family and physician are committed to working with them through the entire course of their ordeal. The dying need companionship and, if at all possible, familiar surroundings. To die at home is ideal.

When Faced With Death

There are certain phases which are commonly encountered in those facing death. When first confronted by the possibility of death, a patient often responds with denial: “It cannot be that bad...” They convince themselves that God or a famous doctor or new research will cure them. Serious discussion of their condition may be resisted. Conversation steers clear of the unpleasant reality and often centers on meaningless trivia—the weather, hospital food, TV programs, etc.

The family—and even the physician—will often support such denial, often because they themselves cannot accept it. At this stage one should try to discuss realistic plans for the future, decisions that need to be made. One must, however, be very sensitive and gentle. Speaking with the dying honestly, with patience and compassion is very important, especially at this initial stage. Unfortunately, many people persist in this state of denial until their very death, thus losing precious opportunities for loving closeness with their families as well as for spiritual growth.

A second phase is often characterized by anger: “Why did it have to happen to me?” “Why can so-and-so enjoy a good life and I have to die?” There is anger at having one’s self-centered fantasy world suddenly and unpleasantly disrupted. The dying person sometimes feels anger toward God; he feels cheated. God obviously does not love him; and he feels envy toward others.

This phase can also be shared by the family which can become very demanding on the doctors and health-care professionals involved. At this stage, the family may begin to feel resentment toward the dying; they become irritated by his demands, by the interference which the ordeal has caused in their lives. They begin rationalizing: “After all, we must lead our own lives;” And why can’t the doctors do anything?” At the same time they feel guilty for having such feelings. It is clear that anyone wishing to help cannot get caught up in this kind of negative interaction. One must respond not in kind, but with persistent and consistent love.

Another common reaction found among the dying is one of bargaining—making promises to God in exchange for certain concessions or a reprieve. Such petitions can be of value if accompanied by heartfelt repentance. And God answers those prayers which are unto salvation. This is illustrated by the Old Testament account of King Hezekiah.

If it is God's will, however, that death take its course, the patient becomes very weak, thin, and a sense of loss may set in—loss of physical identity, loss of identity as the breadwinner of the family; perhaps financial loss. This sense of loss is often accompanied by depression. The dying begin to grieve, preparing to meet their death.

At this stage one should allow them to do this and not make false reassurances. The dying must be allowed to communicate his feelings, and there should be someone willing to listen. Together with the acceptance of death often comes a review of one's life, a search for meaning, an occasion for repentance. It is a time for inward concentration and meaningful communication with family and friends. All those involved—patient, family, friends, health-care professionals—should have a certain synchronization, a oneness of mind. There is not peace if the dying person accepts their fate, while the family is still angry and the doctor feels that he still has to search for “cures.”

The way in which a person responds to death is very individual and largely dependent on his philosophy of life, on what he values. Someone who puts his trust in financial security or physical health will be very depressed if faced with a terminal illness. Imagine the depression of those who put their trust in science, or those who believe that happiness can only be found in this temporal world, that death is a closed door rather than the threshold of another world.

As Orthodox Christians we have no reason to be depressed at the thought of death. This is not to say that we should have no fear of death—this feeling is natural since death introduces us to the unknown. Furthermore, a certain fear of death is very healthy spiritually, as the Holy Fathers teach us, and should lead to repentance and inward vigilance. *In the Holy Scriptures we read: In all you do, remember the end of your life, and then you will never sin.* (Sir 7:36).

The fear of death comes not only from the advent of the unknown, but also in knowing that death is a point when all opportunity for repentance and struggle is over; the time of reckoning is at hand. Even the ancient desert father, St. Sisoës, as he lay dying, prayed to live longer, saying that he needed more time to repent; that truly, he did not know whether he had yet begun to repent. If these were the thoughts of a holy man, how much more should we sinners struggle to prepare ourselves to meet the Just Judge Who, sooner or later, awaits us all?

Preparing to Die

The time before death is very much like the time before Holy Communion. We prepare for this Sacrament by increasing our prayers, by inward concentration and soul-searching repentance, by removing ourselves as much as possible from the ways of the world. In all of this we are guided by the prayers of the Church through which we call to God to give us the sense to weep bitterly over our sins; we recognize our

hardheartedness, our lack of tears and our many passions; we acknowledge that we waste too much time thinking of our earthly welfare and that we are unworthy of heaven, of earth, and even of this transient life; we ask forgiveness of one another and try to make peace with our conscience. Over and over we hear the refrain: “Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me.”

When faced with the imminent possibility of death, a Christian is struck with a sense of urgency. He develops a sharper focus for what is of lasting value; he tries to make maximum use of the precious time left to him for repentance and amendment. Should we not live every day as though it were our last? The Holy Fathers consider the ability to do so a great virtue. We must remember that death comes not only to the old and infirm, but also to the young and robust. Death comes as a thief in the night.

If we view death soberly, with the understanding that at any time we may be called out of this world, we will be better able to fight our passions, to have a truer perspective on what is really important in life, and to conduct that intense struggle to change ourselves into the image of God—which is the focus of any Orthodox life. Thus, with God's grace, we will not be thrown into despair when our earthly sojourn comes to an end, but we will be able to depart this life in peace, anticipating with firm hope and faith that heavenly homeland for which we were created.

The words of St. Ignatius Brianchaninov stand as an excellent reminder of the Orthodox position on the matter:

O ye who have been banished from Paradise! It is not for enjoyments, not for festivity, not for playing that we find ourselves on earth, but in order that by faith, repentance, and the Cross, we might kill the death which has killed us and restore to ourselves the lost Paradise!



On one occasion, I was sitting with the Blessed Abbot Sergios from the Jordan Plain. While I was reading the Book of Proverbs, I came to the verse which says, *With much wood, fire increaseth; but where there is not a contentious man, strife ceaseth* (Prov 26:20), and I asked the Blessed Sergios to explain it to me. He said in reply: “Just as wood causes a fire to flare up and, if we do not throw enough of it on the fire, it goes out, so also does it happen with the passions; that is, there are certain causes which, if cut off, no longer activate the passions. For example, the causes of anger are giving and taking, wanting to do one's own will, taking delight in teaching and showing off to other people, and thinking oneself to be intelligent and wise.

From the Gerontikon

“ON THE EVE...”

A true story that was discovered within a ROCOR pamphlet (had been translated from the Russian Orthodox publication Nadezhda,” issue no. 9).

Brought by her parents to a populous city, in the apartment of her relatives a twelve year-old girl was dying. She was dying of cancer. Twice doctors had operated, but a lump suddenly appeared on the top of her head and before it was removed, it generated other lumps which quickly metastasized, spreading into the shoulder and the lungs.

Shorn of her hair and disfigured by the operations, the girl lay on the cot in the strange room, gazing out of the window at the falling snow. By turns the father and mother would lean over her, bringing her medicine or something to drink. She could scarcely eat anymore, nor could she speak normally and only whispered from time to time, “Don’t worry, Mama and Papa, I’ll get well.”

The father dashed from one clinic to another, and to various specialists. He knew his daughter’s condition was fatal, but nevertheless, a blind hope drove him to seek out those who were said to have found a cure for cancer, to herbologists, to para-psychiatrists. But no one could help his child.

When the last of these possibilities had been exhausted, he met a stranger to whom, in his despair, he poured out his grief. This man, a fifty-year-old luckless bum who had never outgrown his youth, took the father of the girl to an old school friend of his who is now writing these lines. Thus it was that out of the sea of humanity there appeared in my room a man utterly exhausted and distraught but who nevertheless had managed to retain his dignity. Could I help his daughter?

I knew that concerning what was of ultimate importance, I did indeed have the answer; but it was hard to tell him straight out, at once, very hard. At last I spoke. Through his grief, through the tears held back in the depths of his eyes, in disbelief tinged with fright, he answered, “My daughter—baptize her? What for! What good will it do?”

I am not a priest but an ordinary man, one who “labors and is heavy laden.” It was not long ago that I myself came to Christ, to His teachings. I knew that here was contained all truth, whatever was definitive, the final word. And moreover, I was certain that our Lord Jesus Christ lived among us, that He appeared to men.

And now a young girl was dying. Was it possible to conceal from her father—an unbeliever, a member of the Party—that the state after death of the soul of this girl, whom I didn’t even know, depended eternally on whether or not she was baptized? There was no time for long discussions, no time to explain that the best, most innocent children may suffer for the sins of their fathers, their ancestors. Each day was precious, perhaps even each hour. I said to him: “Go to a church, ask for a priest. And you must prepare the girl.”

My friend, having no children, sat at a loss for what to do, crushed by another’s grief. “Perhaps I could give my New Testament?” he asked.

“Yes,” I replied. “Since the girl is conscious, read to her chapter after chapter. Read without stopping.”

My friend led the girl’s father out into the dark winter evening to give him the very copy of the New Testament which I had given him as a gift half a year ago, hoping to save a lost, kind, sinful soul. In the morning, two days later, he phoned and informed me dejectedly:

“Nothing has come of it. The girl is unwilling and the parents are against it.”

“And how is the girl, in what condition?”

“They’re giving her oxygen. It’s very critical.”

“Were you there? Did you see her?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Do you know at least her name?”

“Galya,” he said.

I began praying for Galya. There was nothing else I could do. The day was coming to an end. I could think of nothing else but that a young girl unknown to me was dying, departing for eternity. I prayed for Galya, the un-baptized Galya. That evening just before nine o’clock, the phone rang. It was my friend.

“The father called me. They’ve agreed. Galya has agreed. Where can we find a priest?”

It was nearly nine. In the churches services were coming to an end. I dialed the number of a priest I knew who served some distance away, outside the city. More than likely he was not at home. He was home! By a rare combination of circumstances, he was home, having just arrived. His voice was tired but firm:

“Quick, come and fetch me. Where are we to go? Where’s that?”

I phoned back my friend and he rang the girl’s parents. It turned out that we had to drive to the outskirts, to a new part of the city, almost as far as the Ring. Outside the window the snow was flying into the light of the lamp post. A snow storm was upon us.

My friend arrived in a taxi and together we sped along through the center of the city. There was a growing awareness of the magnetic power of time, a power which now entered the chain of events, compacting causes, consequences—it had to be that after years of silence I would come together once more with my old school friend, that I would give him a New Testament; he had to meet the young girl’s father and bring him to me; and I had to know this priest and he—at this very hour—had to be at home!

There he was, standing alone on the sidewalk, dusted with snow. I flung open the door. Seating himself in the taxi, he turned to me and asked:

“Do you have a cross? Did you bring one with you?”

"No. No cross with me..."

He got out of the taxi, ran back into the house and was hidden from view. We waited feeling guilty. I had a cross, but I didn't think to take it. Finally he returned and we continued on our way. From our brief remarks the driver knew Who we were and the reason for our journey. He became stern. His face assumed a scoffing expression typical of taxi drivers. Still young, he was obviously of an age with our tired and silent batiushka.

We drove for a long time and had to search a long time for the right address, the right apartment. This seemed to be it. We rode up in the elevator. The door, it was unlocked, common in times of tragedy. A watchful silence prevailed. In this silence the mother appeared from the narrow corridor. Her tearless eyes conveyed an unexpected feeling of astonishment, to the point of numbness. The cause of this astonishment we discovered later, after the performance of the Sacrament.

It happened that about noon the father had a change of heart. He sat down beside his daughter and, opening the Gospels, began to speak to her something about baptism. The dying girl would have nothing to do with it.

"Go away from me. And don't come back. Call mama. I am a young Pioneer (Communist member), and I don't want to hear about any baptisms. Go away!"

The father left disheartened and called the mother. Before the latter had time to draw near the cot, she saw that her daughter was dying; her face became waxy, her breathing ceased and her eyes rolled back. Grasping the girl's head, the mother pressed her hands to her daughter's face in powerless agony—and suddenly, she felt that the eyebrows twitched, they moved." What is it, my child?!"

Galya's eyes looked ahead seriously. Her face became flushed.

"I was flying. From above I saw you, and papa, and everyone. And something else which I mustn't tell. Quick, call a priest! If you don't, when I get well I'll go myself to a church. Hurry, call him!"

But it was evening before they called my friend.

We entered the room where, in a cot by the window, lay the girl. One was immediately struck by the expression on her face. It was impossible to believe that the dying girl was twelve years old. Rather, it was as though all ages had come together in her. Suffused with a rare spiritual beauty, the large eyes peered from the face of a woman, a human being. Tall and thin, batiushka leaned over her in his vestments; he was greeted with a smile. It was as though this was not the first time they had met, as though she was no longer burdened by the weariness of death—such a smile.

Afraid of bursting into tears, I asked for the father. It turned out that he had gone for oxygen tanks. I tried to be of assistance and attached three burning candles to a basin

filled with water to be blessed. One kept falling over. All of us, including the girl's mother and my friend standing at a distance, were physically conscious of participating in a divine mystery; something then took place which was beyond the grasp of the mind, of reason. In the thick, sticky atmosphere were heard the trembling words of the prayers; the flames of the three candles flickered over the already blessed water.

The priest was tense, and so were we. Afterwards he told us that never had he seen anyone so consciously receptive of the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. Galya alone was calm. Her attentive eyes, all comprehending, appeared to see something which the rest of us did not.

It was done. On Galya's thin, child's breast hung a little cross. The priest prepared to give her Holy Communion, bringing to her lips a particle of Our Lord's Body on a small silver spoon. From behind the mother whispered, "She can't swallow anything." "Yes, I can," said Galya, "I can."

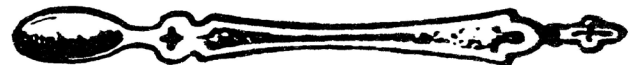
And she swallowed the particle and drank down some warm wine.

Batiushka—wholly filled with compassion, kindness, love—leaned over the sinless soul about to leave this world, and whispered, "Galya, pray for us."

"Of course," the girl replied firmly, "I know. For sure."

How did she know? What was shown to her in those moments when she was transported into the other world? It remained a mystery.

Galya died the following day, on January 12th, 1981. May her memory be eternal!...



Blessed are all who believe in God, in the manner in which the Lord Jesus Christ showed God to the world. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus Christ and you will receive the answer. God is as Jesus Christ is. This means that God is all-powerful, all-wise, all-gentle. His power cannot be resisted. His wisdom cannot be contradicted. All malice must submit to His gentleness. If you wish to be able to come running to God, if you desire wisdom, entrust yourself to God. If you desire the blessing of either wisdom or goodness or love, hold fast to God. Know and remember that only weakness, foolishness and malice rise up against God. But all rebellion against God is condemned in the end to defeat and destruction, while all that remains with God in the end is exalted and rejoices, living eternally. This is all shown by the person and destiny of the Lord Jesus Christ, and also through the destinies of His followers and His enemies. And therefore we say: *Blessed are all who believe in God in the manner in which the Lord Jesus Christ showed God to the world.*

St. Nikolaj Velimirovich (+1956)

PANAGIA OF TINOS

THE “TINOS” ICON OF THE MOTHER OF GOD

From a Greek Orthodox pamphlet.

This highly-venerated icon of the Annunciation was discovered in the ruins of the ancient church of St. John the Baptist on January 30, 1823. The icon is a beautiful portrayal of the Virgin Mary kneeling with her head bent in prayer. It is regarded as being older than the Byzantine period, and many scholars regard this icon to be the work of the Apostle and Evangelist Luke. It is assumed that this icon was so highly esteemed in the Byzantine era it was either hidden or lost around the time of the Moslem invasions.

An elderly man, Michael Polyzoos, had a dream shortly before the Feast of the Annunciation in 1821, in which the Mother of God appeared to him in shining white garments. She instructed him to dig in the field of Anthony Doxaras outside the city, where he would find her icon. She also told him to build a church on the site, since there had once been one there. The Queen of Heaven also promised to help him accomplish these tasks.

Upon awakening, he crossed himself and tried to go back to sleep, believing that his dream had been a temptation from the devil. Before falling asleep, Michael saw the Theotokos once again, and noticed that the room was flooded by a gentle white light. Her head was surrounded by divine light, and her face displayed ineffable grace and sweetness. Speaking to the old man she said, “Why are you afraid? Your fear comes from unbelief. Listen! I am Panagia (the all-holy one). I want you to dig in the field of Anthony Doxaras where my icon is buried. I ask you to do this as a favor, old man. You will build a church there and I will help you.” Then she disappeared.

The next morning, Michael went into the village and told the priest what had happened to him during the night. The priest also thought the dream was a temptation, so he urged Michael to come for Confession and Communion. The old man, however, was not convinced that his visions were mere dreams or demonic temptations. He told the inhabitants of the village of his experience. Some laughed at him, but only two believed his words.

These two men went with him to the field one night and dug in many places, but they found nothing. Then they dug in another place and found the remains of an old wall. Finding nothing but bricks, they had to give up their search in the morning so the Turks would not find out what they were doing.

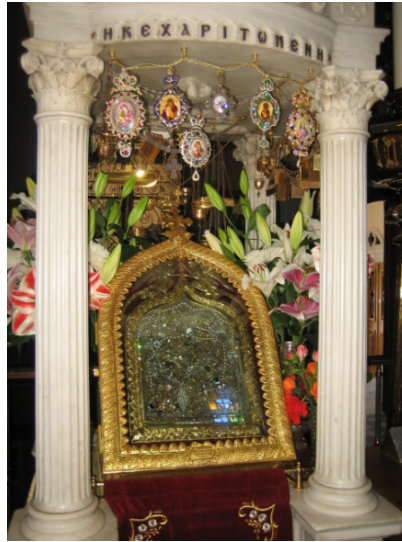
Anthony Doxaras, the owner of the field, found the bricks and tried to use them to build an oven. The mortar would not adhere to the bricks, so whenever they tried to build one section of the oven, it collapsed. The workers were convinced that God was showing them that the bricks from the ancient church were not to be used for an oven.

St. Pelagia (July 23), an eighty-year-old nun, had several dreams in June of 1822 in which the Most Holy Theotokos appeared to her. St. Pelagia was living in the women’s monastery of the Dormition on Mt. Kechrovounios, about an hour’s journey from the village. She had lived in the monastery from a young age, and was known for her great virtue and piety. The Theotokos appeared to her in a dream and ordered her to go to Stamatelos Kangades (a prominent man of the village), and tell him to uncover the church of St. John the Baptist in the field of Anthony Doxaras.

Terrified by the vision, Pelagia attributed the dream to her imagination, and she began to pray. She was afraid to tell anyone about her dream, but the following week, the Theotokos appeared to her again, reminding her of her instructions. Still, the nun remained silent and told no one of her vision. The Theotokos appeared a third time, this time with a severe manner. She chastised the nun for her unbelief, saying, “Go and do as I told you. Be obedient.”

St. Pelagia woke up in fear and trembling. As she opened her eyes, she saw the same mysterious Woman she had seen while asleep. With a great effort she asked, “Who are you, Lady? Why are you angry with me, and why do you order me to do these things?” The Woman raised her hand and said, *Proclaim, O earth, glad tidings of great joy.* (Megalyrnarion of the Ninth Ode of the Canon for Matins of the Annunciation).

Understanding at last, the aged nun joyfully exclaimed, *Praise, O heavens, the glory of God.* (The next line of the Megalyrnarion).



Panagia of Tinos Icon



The Church of Evangelistria

At once, she informed the Abbess of her visions, and she also told Stamatelos Kangades. Mr. Kangades, who had been designated by the Theotokos to carry out the excavation of the church, informed Bishop Gabriel of these events. The bishop had already heard of the dream of Michael Polyzoes and realized that the account of the nun Pelagia agreed with his vision. Bishop Gabriel wrote to all the churches on the island of Tinos, urging them to cooperate in finding the church and the icon.

Excavations began in September of 1822 under the supervision of Mr. Kangades. The foundations of the church of St. John, destroyed by Arabs in 1200, were uncovered. An old well was found near the church, but not the holy icon. The money ran out, and so the effort was abandoned.

Once again the Mother of God appeared to St. Pelagia, urging that the excavations continue. Bishop Gabriel sent out an appeal for donations to build a new church on the foundations of the old church of St. John the Baptist. The new church was built, and was dedicated to St John and to the Life-Giving Fountain.

On January 30th, 1823 workers were leveling the ground inside the church in preparation for laying a new stone floor. About noon one of the workers, Emmanuel Matsos, struck a piece of wood with his pickaxe, splitting it down the middle. He looked at one piece of the board and saw that it was burned on one side, while the other side showed traces of paint. As he brushed off the dirt with his hand, he saw that it was an icon. Joining the two pieces of wood together, he crossed himself and venerated the icon.

He called the other workers, who also came and venerated the icon. When the icon was cleaned, it was shown to be an icon of the Annunciation. The split was in the middle of the icon, between the Theotokos and the Archangel Gabriel. Neither figure was damaged, and this was regarded as a miracle.

That same day, the icon was given to Bishop Gabriel, who kissed it and cried out, "Great art Thou, O Lord, and wondrous are Thy works."

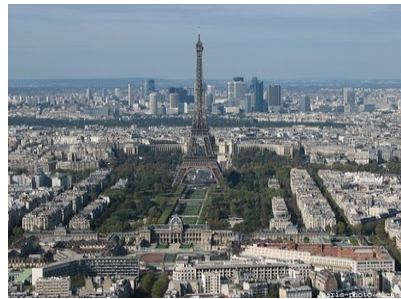
After the finding of the icon, the inhabitants of Tinos were filled with zeal to build a magnificent church in honor of the Theotokos. People offered their money and their own labor to help build the church of the Evangelistria (She who received the Good News).

The new church was completed in 1823, and was consecrated by Bishop Gabriel. St. Pelagia of Tinos fell asleep in the Lord on April 28th, 1834. Her Feast Day, however, is on July 23rd.

The Tinos Icon of the Most Holy Theotokos continues to be venerated as one of Greece's holiest treasures. Innumerable miracles of healing and deliverance from danger have not ceased since the time the icon was found. People from all over the world visit it each and every year.

RUSSIAN CATHEDRAL TO RISE NEXT TO EIFFEL TOWER!

Matthew Campbell in Paris, for UK Times, June 6, 2010.



RUSSIA has pulled off a spectacular coup by winning permission from President Nicolas Sarkozy to build an Orthodox Cathedral next to the Eiffel Tower.

According to sources, the Russian government has paid about £60 million (*Ed., approximately \$92 million*) for a site where it will build a gilded cathedral with "onion" domes like St Basil's in Red Square, Moscow.

The building will dramatically alter the fabled Paris skyline. France's agreement came only after intensive lobbying by Russian officials, including President Dimitry Medvedev, who told Sarkozy how important the cathedral was to him, and Vladimir Putin, the prime minister.

It would be the first Russian Orthodox cathedral built in France since the days of the Romanovs.

Moscow went to extraordinary lengths when the site, headquarters of the French weather service, went on sale last year. It employed a French lobbying firm to get across the message: the Kremlin would consider a sale to anyone else an "unfriendly act."

The building is expected to be in place by 2013.

It will no doubt highlight divisions in the orthodox flock. Many in France are descendants of white Russians who fled communism after the death of the last tsar and who are opposed to the patriarchy in Moscow because of its links to the Soviet-era KGB.

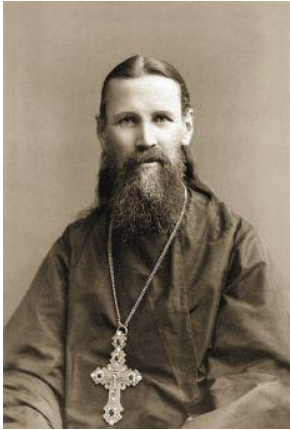


The Church is the gathering of the People, the Body of Christ, His Name, His Bride, which calls the peoples to penitence and prayer; purified by the water of Holy Baptism and washed by His precious Blood, adorned as a Bride and sealed with the anointing of the Holy Spirit... The Church is an earthly 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. Germanos, Patriarch of Constantinople

FEAR EVIL LIKE FIRE

By St. John of Kronstadt (+1908).



Fear evil like fire. Do not let it touch your heart even if it seems just or righteous. No matter what the circumstances, do not let it come into you. Evil is always evil. Sometimes evil presents itself as an endeavor to God's glory, or as something with good intentions towards your neighbor. Even in these cases, do not trust this feeling. It is a wrong labor and not filled with wisdom. Instead, work on chasing evil from

yourself. Evil, however innocent it looks, offends God's long-suffering love, which is His foremost glory.

Judas betrayed his Lord for 30 silver pieces under the guise of helping the poor. Keep in mind that the enemy continuously seeks your death and attacks more fiercely when you are not alert. His evil is endless. Do not let self-esteem and the love of material goods win you over.

When you feel anger against someone, believe with your whole heart that it is a result of the devil's work in your heart. Try to hate him and his deeds and it will leave you. Do not admit it as a part of yourself and do not justify it. I know this from experience. The devil hides himself behind our souls and we blindly think we are acting by ourselves. Then we defend the devil's work as something that is a part of us.

Sometimes we think that anger is a fair reaction to something bad. But the idea that a passion could ever be fair is a total and deadly lie. When someone is angry at you, remember that this evil feeling is not him. He is just fooled by the devil and is a suffering instrument in his hand. Pray that the enemy leaves him and that God opens his spiritual eyes, which have been darkened by the evil spirit. Pray to God for all people enslaved by passions because the enemy is acting in their hearts. Perhaps you hate your neighbor, despise him, do not want to talk to him peacefully and lovingly because he has been rude, arrogant, or disgusting in his speech or manners. You may despise him for being full of himself or proud or disrespectful. But you are to blame more than he is.

Physician, heal yourself! (Lk 4:23). So, teacher, teach yourself. This kind of anger is worse than any other evil. How could evil be chased out by another evil? How can you take a needle from the eye of another person while having a log in your own? Evil defects must be fixed with love, kindness, resignation, and patience. Admit yourself as the worst of all sinners, and believe it. Consider yourself the worst one, chase away any boldness, anger, impatience and fury. Then

you may start helping others. Be indulgent about defects of others, because if you see their faults all the time, there will be continuous enmity. *The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows.* (Pss 129:3). *For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.* (Mt 6:14). We can feel from time to time the most perfect love for God without loving each other. This is a strange thing, and only few care about it. But love for our neighbor will never come without our own effort.

A real Christian does not have any reason to be angry about anybody. Anger is the devil's deed. A Christian should have only love inside and since love does not boast, he shouldn't boast or have any bad thoughts towards others. For example, I must not think about another person that he is evil, proud etc; and I must not think that if I forgive his offense he would laugh at me or upset me again. We must not let evil hide in us under any pretense. Evil and anger usually have many different veils.

Do not yield to gloomy feelings in your heart but control and eradicate them with the power of faith and the light of the sane mind. These strengths will make you feel secure. *Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.* (Pss 25:20). Gloomy feelings usually develop deep in the heart. Someone who didn't learn how to control them will be gloomy, pensive most of the time, and it will be hard for him to deal with himself and other people. When he comes close to you, sustain yourself with inner strength, happiness and innocent jokes: and they will leave you soon. This is from experience.

Lord, give me strength to love everyone like myself and never to get angry or work for the devil. Give me strength to crucify my self-esteem, my pride, my greed, my skepticism and other passions. Let us have a name: a mutual love. Let us not worry about anything. Be the only God of our hearts, and let us desire nothing except You. Let us live always in unifying love and let us hate anything that separates us from each other and from love. So be it! So be it!

If God showed Himself to us and lives inside us as we in Him (according to His eternal word), would He not give us everything? Would He ever trick us or leave us? *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* (Rom 8:32). Now be comforted, my dear, and know nothing but love. *This is my command: Love one another.* (Jn 15:17).



The ark is the Church; only those who are in it will be saved.

St. Nectarius of Optina

Ἡ Μυροφόρος καὶ Ἰσαπόστολος Ἁγία Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνή

Τοῦ Ἀρχιμανδρίτου Νεκταρίου Ζιόμπολα.

Οἱ φιλακόλουθοι πιστοὶ γνωρίζουν ὅ,τι τὴν 22^{αν} Ἰουλίου τιμᾶται ἡ κορυφαία Μυροφόρος, Ἰσαπόστολος καὶ καλλιπάρθενος Ἁγία Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνή, ὃχι ὅμως γενικὰ ἀπὸ ὅλους τοὺς πιστοὺς.

Πρόσωπο τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης, ἡ Ἁγία Μαγδαληνή, τῆς ὁποίας ἡ ζωὴ συνδέεται ἅμεσα μὲ τὸν Σωτῆρα Χριστό, μὲ ἀποκορύφωμα τὴν παρουσία της στὴ Σταύρωση καὶ Ἀνάστασι, καὶ στὴν κήρυξή της σὲ πολλὰ σημεῖα. Εἶναι ὄντως μία μοναδικὴ ἱερὴ προσωπικότητα. Τόσο μεγάλη γιὰ ὅ,τι ἦταν καὶ γιὰ ὅ,τι ἔκανε, ὥστε χωρὶς αὐτὴ ὡς τόσο γενναία καὶ δυναμικὴ, ὡς ὀπλισμένη μὲ ἰσχυρὴ θέληση καὶ ψυχικὸ σθένος, ὡς ἔχουσα τὸ ἐσωτερικὸ κάλλος, ἀφοῦ ἐκοσμεῖτο μὲ ἄκρα θεοσέβεια γνώση ἀληθειῶν, σεμνοπρέπεια καὶ ἀγνότητα, ὡς σώφρων, χωρὶς λέγω, αὐτὴ ἴσως τὸ ὄνομα *Μυροφόροι γυναῖκες* νὰ μὴ ὑπῆρχε στὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη. Ὡς φαίνεται καὶ στὸ ὅ,τι *γυναῖκες... αἵτινες διηκόνουν αὐτῷ ἀπὸ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς* (Λουκ. η' 3), προεξάρχουσα εἶναι ἡ Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνή.

Ἀκολουθοῦν γι' αὐτὴν τὰ κείμενα τῶν Πατέρων, ὥστε ἐὰν μελετηθοῦν δεόντως ὅλα τὰ τῆς ζωῆς της, ἐκ τῶν πραγμάτων ὁδηγούμεθα νὰ δεχθούμε ὅ,τι στὰ γυναῖκεα Χριστιανικὰ πρόσωπα, μετὰ τὴν Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκο, στὰ δύο χιλιάδες χρόνια κατέχει τὴν δευτέρη θέση. Ἀκολουθοῦν οἱ Μεγαλομάρτυρες γυναῖκες.

Τὶ συμβαίνει ὅμως, ὥστε νὰ μὴ ἔχει περάσει στὴ συνείδηση τοῦ θρησκευόντος λαοῦ, μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα νὰ μὴ τιμᾶται δεόντως μὲ συμμετοχὴ ἐκκλησιαστικά—λειτουργικά ἡ ἱερὴ μνήμη της στὶς 22 Ἰουλίου καὶ νὰ περνᾷ ἀπαρατήρητη;

Ἐλάχιστοι γενικὰ Ἱεροὶ Ναοὶ λειτουργοῦν μὲ ἄκρως ἐλάχιστο ἐκκλησίασμα. Ἐὰν σ' αὐτὸ ὑπάρξει ἡ ἀντίρρηση ὅ,τι τόσο ἀκούγεται τὸ ὄνομά της τὴν Μεγάλῃ Ἑβδομάδα καὶ τὶς ἡμέρες τοῦ Πάσχα, ἡ ἀπάντηση εἶναι ὅ,τι τότε ἀκούγεται ἐκ τῶν πραγμάτων, ἀφοῦ συνδέεται ἅμεσα μὲ τὴ Σταύρωση - Ἀνάστασι. Εἶναι δὲ παραδεκτὸ ὅ,τι οἱ Ἅγιοι τιμῶνται τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς καθιερωμένης μνήμης των. Τὸ γιατί σ' αὐτὸ τὸ περιθώριο εἶναι θέμα μιᾶς ἐρεῦνης, εἶναι ἓνα ζητούμενο. Δὲν ἔχει δὲ καὶ πλήρη ἀκολουθία στὰ Μηναῖα, ὡς τῆς ἀρμόζει.

Καὶ φθάνουμε στὸ σήμερα, πού ἀπηγεῖ τὰ ἀνώτερα ὡς πρὸς τὴν πρέπουσα τιμῆς λειτουργικά. Γιὰ παράδειγμα: Ἀνοίγοντας τὸ ἐτήσιο ἡμερολόγιο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τὸ

Δίπτυχο γιὰ τὸν μῆνα Ἰούλιο, διαπιστώνουμε ὅ,τι οἱ τρεῖς κατ' ἐξοχὴν μεγαλομάρτυρες τοῦ μηνὸς αὐτοῦ εἶναι ἡ Ἁγία Κυριακή, ἡ Ἁγία Μαρίνα καὶ ἡ Ἁγία Παρασκευή, μεγάλη ἡ χάρις τους. Ἡ κάθε μία καταλαμβάνει ἀπὸ μία ἕως καὶ δύο σελίδες, τὸ πῶς δηλ. λειτουργικά θὰ ἐορτασθεῖ ἡ κάθε μία. Καὶ τοῦτο, διότι πέρασαν στὴ συνείδηση τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ ὅ,τι θαυματουργοῦν, ἐνῶ ἡ Ἰσαπόστολος Μαγδαληνὴ «πάμπτωχη» ἔχει 22 Ἰουλίου μόνο μία σειρὰ, ἀπλῶς ἀναφέρεται τὸ ὄνομά της!...

Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ ἐσωτερικὴ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ πλευρά, καὶ ἀπὸ μέρους τοῦ Χριστεπωνύμου πληρώματος.

Τοὺς τελευταίους καιροὺς ὡς γνωστόν, σκοτεινοὶ κύκλοι κυρίως τῆς Δύσεως εἶπαν καὶ ἔγραψαν πολλὰ συκοφαντικά σὲ βάρος της, ὥστε νὰ δυσφημισθεῖ ὅσο καμία ἄλλη ὡς δῆθεν ἠθικὰ ἔνοχη καὶ ἀμαρτωλὴ. Ἐπαληθεύει δὲ παρατήρηση τοῦ ἀειμνήστου Καθ. Κ. Δυοβουνιώτου ὅ,τι «ἡ δυσφημία καὶ ὅταν εἶναι ψευδής, δυσκόλως ἐξαλείφεται καὶ παρ' αὐτοῖς τοῖς Ἁγίοις».

Εἶναι τόσο γνωστὸ τὸ τί ἐγίνε τὸν τελευταῖο καιρὸ μὲ τὸ περιβόητο βιβλίον «Κώδικος Da Vinci» καὶ τὸ κινηματογραφικὸ ἔργο στὴ συνέχεια, ὥστε εἶναι ἄγνωστο πόσες ψυχὲς ζημιώθηκαν.

Τὸ νὰ τὴν λέγουν ἀπλῶς ἀμαρτωλή—ἔνοχη ἠθικῶς—ὡς ἄτομο, θὰ ἔλεγα ὅ,τι εἶναι τὸ ὀλιγώτερο καὶ προφανῶς προέρχεται καὶ ἀπὸ σύγχυση - ἄγνοια. Γνωστόν ὅ,τι καυχᾶται ἡ Ἐκκλησία, ὅταν ἄτομα ρυπαρὰ διὰ μετανοίας φθάνουν διὰ ἰσόβιας πλέον ἐν Χριστῷ ζωῆς στὴν ἀγιότητα τοῦ βίου. Τοῦτο ὅμως δὲν συμβαίνει στὴν Μυροφόρο Μαγδαληνή. Τὸ φοβερὸ καὶ πρωτάκουστο σ' ὅλο τὸ Χριστιανικὸ προηγούμενο εἶναι ὅ,τι ἐκστομίζουν βλάβσημα λόγια, βάζοντας

στὴ μέση τὸ φῶς τοῦ Κόσμου.

Τοῦτο εἶναι ὃχι ἀπλῶς ἀμαρτία καὶ κόλαση, ἀλλὰ «τρύπησαν» τὰ τάρταρα, ἐσχάτη ἡ κατὰπτωσις. Κύριος στόχος τῶν ἐχθρῶν τῆς Πίστεως ἦταν καὶ εἶναι τὸ Πρόσωπο τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἔτσι πλέον θίγουν τὴν ἠθικὴν του καὶ ταυτόχρονα τὴν Θεϊκὴν Ταυτότητά Του. Προκειμένου δὲ κατ' αὐτοὺς τὸ πλῆγμα νὰ εἶναι καίριο, σὲ ἐνορχηστρωμένη ἐπίθεση συνέδεσαν τὴν Ἰσαπόστολο Μαρίαν τὴν Μαγδαληνή. Προηγήθηκε «ὁ ἀγωνιζόμενος μηδενιστὴς καὶ ἀριστοτέχνης χαλαστής» Ν. Καζαντζάκης, ἀκολούθησε ὁ Σκορτσέζε καὶ τὸ κύριο κτύπημα τὸ ἔδωσε ὁ περιβόητος πλέον Dan Brown μὲ τὸ ὡς ἄνω βιβλίον καὶ τὸ κινηματογραφικὸ ἔργο.

Ἄγνωστη ἡ ζημιὰ πού ἐγίνε, μάλιστα σὲ *ἀσθενούντας τῇ πίστει*. (Ρωμ. ιδ' 1). Σὲ ἐρώτησι νέου σχετικὰ ἀνθρώπου μορφωμένου, πού εἶδε τὸ ἔργο, αὐτὸς ἀπάντησε: Ἐὰν



δὲν ἔχεις δυνατό πιστεῦω καὶ σχέση με τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, σὲ κλονίζει, λίγο πολὺ σὲ ἐπηρεάζει». Τόση λάσπη κατὰ τοῦ προσώπου της, σὲ ἀπόλυτο πλέον συνδυασμὸ μετὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποὺ αὐτὴ τὴ φορὰ φάνηκαν τόσο ἀδίστακτοι καὶ ἔθιζαν τὴν ἠθική του (ἡμαρτον Κύριε), καὶ ἔγραψαν «ὅ,τι εἶναι καιρὸς νὰ ἀποκατασταθεῖ ἡ ἱστορική ἀλήθεια ὅ,τι ὁ Χριστὸς ἦταν ἕνας χαρισματικὸς ἔστω ἄνθρωπος, ἀλλὰ ἀπλὸς θνητὸς ἄνθρωπος», θίγοντας καὶ τὴν Θεότητά Του.

Ἡ δολιότης, ἡ διαστροφή τῆς ἀληθείας, ὥστε σταδιακὰ νὰ ἀλλοιωθεῖ ἡ Πίστη, τὸ φρόνημα ὅ,τι ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἶναι ὁ Θεάνθρωπος Σωτήρας. Στόχος ἡ ἐκμηδένιση τοῦ προσώπου Του, ὥστε τὴν ἀκτινοβολία Του νὰ διαδεχθεῖ, ὅταν ἔλθει, ὁ ἄνομος Ἀντίχριστος, μέσῳ πλέον τῆς «Νέας Ἐποχῆς». Ὅντως ἡ συνωμοσία στὸ ἀποκορύφωμά της, ἀφοῦ τὸν Δημιουργὸ καὶ Σωτῆρα πασχίζουν νὰ παρουσιάσουν διὰ τῆς νοσηρᾶς φαντασίας τῶν ἐνοχο ἠθικά. Καὶ αὐτὰ καὶ ἄλλα ἀπὸ πλευρᾶς πολεμικῆς τῆς Πίστεως.

Ἀπὸ πλευρᾶς Ἐκκλησίας τώρα, κάθε χρόνο περνᾷ ἀπαράτηρη—ὡς ἐγινε λόγος— ἡ ἐορτὴ της. Ἐνῶ μὲ ὅσα σπλωτικά καὶ βλάσφημα προηγήθηκαν καὶ μὲ βάση ὅ,τι στὴν κοινὴ γνώμη κυριαρχεῖ ἡ ἄποψη (σύγχυση προφανῶς μετὰ τὴν ὁσία Μαρία τὴν Αἰγυπτία), ὅ,τι πρόκειται γιὰ πρῶτην ἁμαρτωλὴ γυναῖκα καὶ ποὺ τὰ τελευταῖα συμβάντα (μὲ βιβλίο - ἔργο) τὴν συνέδεσαν μὲ τὸ Πρόσωπο τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, θὰ ἔπρεπε ἐκ τῶν πραγμάτων ἡ Ἐκκλησία νὰ ἔχει ἐνεργοποιηθεῖ μὲ σκοπὸ νὰ τὴν παρουσιάσει ὡς στὴν οὐσία τὴν ἔχει, Παρθένο καὶ Ἰσαπόστολο.

Δυστυχῶς στὴ «λαίλαπα» αὐτὴ ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἐπίσημα ἀρκέστηκε στὸ γνωστὸ τετρασέλιδο «Πρὸς τὸ Λαὸ» πρὸ τριετίας περίπου. Μὲ αὐτὸ φάνηκε ὅ,τι ἔκανε τὸ καθήκον της ἡ Ἱερὰ Σύνοδος...

Καιρὸς νὰ πάρει ἐνεργὸ θέση ἡ Ἐκκλησία ὡς μία ἀπαρχὴ ἀποκαταστάσεως τὸ ποία εἶναι ἡ Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ, καυτηριάζοντας τὰ περὶ σχέσεώς της μετὰ τὸν Κύριον τῆς Δόξης. Ὡς πρὸς τὴν μνήμη της, νὰ καθιερωθεῖ πανηγυρικὰ ἀρχιερατικὸς ἑσπερινὸς καὶ ὁμοίως Θ. Λειτουργία στὴν Ἀθήνα πρωτίστως μὲ δύο στεντόρεια κηρύγματα καὶ φυσικὰ μετάδοση, ἀπὸ τὰ ραδιόφωνα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Τοῦτο μὲ ἀρχιερατικὴ Λειτουργία καὶ κατ' ἐπέκταση προγραμματισμένο στὶς ἐνορίες, ὥστε σὺν τῷ χρόνῳ νὰ κερδίζει ἔδαφος στὶς ψυχὰς καὶ νὰ δίδει ὑλικὸ ὑπερασπίσεως σὲ πιστοὺς.

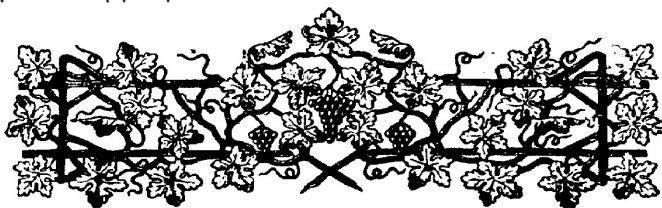
Ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν φαίνεται κανεὶς Συνοδικός, οὔτε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀρχιεπισκοπὴ, συνέλαβε μιὰ τέτοια λειτουργικὴ ἐκδήλωση, ποὺ ἀπόλυτα ἔχει τὴ θέσιν της ὡς μία ἀνταπάντησις σὲ ψυχὰς, ποὺ προφανῶς προβληματίστηκαν ἀπὸ τὴν τόση κατασυκοφάντησι ἀπὸ τὸ ἀθεϊστικὸ καὶ λοιπὸ ἐχθρικὸ κόσμον κατὰ τῆς Πίστεως. Ἐδῶ πλέον ὑποῦλα καὶ μεθοδευμένα ἔχουν ἐξαπολύσει ἐκστρατεία κατὰ τοῦ Προσώπου τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ὅ,τι ἄφησε καὶ ἀπογόνους (!!!) μὲ ἱστορικὸ προσκείμενο πρόσωπο τὴν καλλιπάρθενο Μαρία Μαγδαληνὴ, ποὺ γι' αὐτοὺς «δένει» καὶ θίγει

καίρια τὸν Θεάνθρωπον Κύριον. Ὅντως μὲ βάση τέτοιες ἀνήκουστες βλασφημίες, ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἔχασε ἔδαφος καὶ οἱ ἐχθροὶ ἀλωνίζουν. Ἔστω μετὰ τὴν «καταιγίδα», ποὺ ἦλθε ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτωλὴ Δύση καὶ ἄκρως φαίνεται εὐνοεῖται καὶ ἀπὸ ἡμετέρους μὲ κορυφαῖα ὠρισμένα ΜΜΕ.

Στὴν ἐπικεφαλίδᾳ τοῦ παρόντος ἀναφέρεται ἡ ἀσίγαστη «καταιγίδα» τοῦ Ντὰν Μπράουν. Τρανὴ ἀπόδειξις ὅ,τι στίς 7.12.2008 ὁ τηλεοπτικὸς σταθμὸς ΜΕΓΑ τόλμησε καὶ προέβει στὴν προβολὴ τοῦ κατὰ πτυστοῦ ἔργου «Κώδικας Da Vinci». Ἐπακολούθησαν μηνύσεις, ὀρίστηκε δίκη στίς 7.2.09, ποὺ ὁμως ἀναβλήθηκε...

Δὲν πέρασε πάντως ἡ προθεσμία γιὰ νὰ πάρει ἡ Μυροφόρος Μαγδαληνὴ τὴ θέσιν, ποὺ τῆς ἀνήκει στὸ λειτουργικὸ χωρὸ καὶ στὴ συνείδησι τοῦ Λαοῦ. Ταπεινὰ προτείνω, ἐπειδὴ στὰ Μηναιὰ 22 Ἰουλίου ἐν μέρει ὑπάρχει ἡ ἀκολουθία τῆς Ἀγίας νὰ τυπωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν «Ἀποστολικὴ Διακονία» κατὰ χιλιάδες ἡ ὅλη ἀκολουθία μὲ ἀνάλογο πρόλογο καὶ ἀρμόζον συναξάρι καὶ νὰ σταλεῖ στίς Ἱερὰς Μητροπόλεις μὲ σκοπὸ νὰ φθάσει στίς ἐνορίες. Παράλληλα τὸ ἐντυπο αὐτὸ νὰ προβληθεῖ ἀπὸ τὰ ραδιόφωνα, τὰ ὅποια θὰ πρέπει εὐκαίρως, ἀκαίρως νὰ ἀναφέρονται στὴν ὡς ἄνω πολεμικὴ κατὰ τῶν ἱερῶν Προσώπων. Ἐπιβεβλημένο καθήκον νὰ ἀρχίσει ἡ Ἐκκλησία νὰ κερδίζει τὸ χαμένο ἔδαφος ἀπὸ τὴ «λαίλαπα» αὐτὴ, ὅταν μὲ «δόλωμα» τὴν Ἀγία Μαγδαληνὴ ἐθίγῃ ὁ Ἰδρυτὴς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Νὰ τονισθεῖ δὲ ὅ,τι ἐκ μέρους τῆς πολεμικῆς αὐτῆς ἔπεται συνέχεια μὲ τὸ «ἱερὸ θηλυκόν», «τὸ χαμένο δισκοπότηρον» κ.λ.π..

Ἀσχολήθηκα τελευταῖα μὲ τὴν Ἱερὰ Μορφή, τὴν Ἀγία Μαγδαληνὴ. Θαύμασα γιὰ τὸ μεγαλεῖο καὶ τὴν προσφορά της καὶ ἔγραψα γιὰ τὸ πρόσωπό της πέραν τοῦ παρόντος, ὡς μοναδικῆς στὸ γυναικεῖο Χριστιανικὸν κόσμον. Νὰ τονισθεῖ ὅ,τι πτυχὲς τοῦ βίου της εἶναι τόσο ἄγνωστες, ὅπως ἡ παιδικὴ καὶ ἐφηβικὴ της ζωὴ, τὰ ἑπτὰ δαιμόνια καὶ τί σημαίνουν αὐτά. Κυρίως ἄγνωστη ἡ παρουσία της στὴ Σταύρωση ὡς τὸ κύριον στήριγμα τῆς τραγικῆς ἐκείνης στιγμῆς τῆς Παρθένου Μαρίας, καθὼς πρὸς τοῦτο ἀναφέρεται ἄκρως συγκινητικὰ ὁ Ἰωσήφ ὁ Βρυέννιος, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ μετέπειτα ἱεραποστολικὴ τῆς δράσις φαίνεται μοναδικὴ γιὰ γυναῖκα!



Ὅταν βρίσκεσαι σὲ ἀθυμία, νὰ προσεύχεσαι, ὅπως ὀρίζει ἡ Ἀγία Γραφή (βλ. Ψαλμ. 17:7, Ἰακ. 5:13). Καὶ νὰ προσεύχεσαι μὲ φόβο καὶ τρόμο, μὲ νῆψη καὶ ἐγρήγορση. Γιατί ἔτσι πρέπει νὰ προσευχόμεστε, κυρίως λόγω τῶν μοχθηρῶν καὶ κακούργων ἀοράτων ἐχθρῶν, ποὺ θέλουν νὰ μᾶς ἐμποδίσουν ἀπ' αὐτά.

Ἀββᾶς Εὐάγριος

Ὁ «Ἅγιος» τῶν Φυλακισμένων

Ἐχει Χαρίσει τὴν Ἐλευθερία σὲ Πάνω ἀπὸ 10.000 Κρατουμένους!

Τοῦ Μάνου Χαραλαμπίκη, ἀπὸ τὴν ἐφημερίδα «ΤΑ ΝΕΑ», 11 Ἰανουαρίου, 2008.



Επὶ 30 χρόνια ὁ π. Γερβάσιος Ραπτόπουλος ἐπισκέπτεται τὶς φυλακές. Καὶ μὲ χρήματα ποὺ προσφέρουν πιστοὶ (ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ ἴδιος) ἔχει καταφέρει νὰ ἀποφυλακιστοῦν 10.350 κρατούμενοι ποὺ δὲν εἶχαν τὴν οἰκονομικὴ δυνατότητα νὰ ἐξαγοράσουν τὶς ποινὲς τους. Μάλιστα. Σὲ 10.350 φυλακισμένους ἔχει χαρίσει τὴν ἐλευθερία ὁ «προστάτης ἅγιος» τῶν κρατουμένων, ὁ 77χρονος ἱερέας Γερβάσιος Ραπτόπουλος ἀπὸ τὴ Θεσσαλονίκη. Εἶναι

δηλαδή σὰν νὰ ἔχει ἀδειάσει 5 φυλακὲς Κορυδαλλοῦ!

2.500.000 Εὐρὼ γιὰ Ἀποφυλακίσεις

Ἐχει πληρώσει 2.500.000 εὐρὼ προκειμένου νὰ ἀποφυλακιστοῦν Ἕλληνες καὶ ξένοι ποὺ δὲν εἶχαν δυνατότητα νὰ ἐξαγοράσουν τὶς ποινὲς τους. Τρόφιμα, ροῦχα καὶ χρήματα προσφέρει στοὺς κρατουμένους ὁ «ἅγιος» τῶν φυλακισμένων π. Γερβάσιος. Στὴν ἄνω φωτογράφια κοινώνει στὶς φυλακὲς ἘλΚανάτερ τῆς Αἰγύπτου τὸν Κωνσταντῖνο Καστανιά, ποὺ ἀποφυλακίστηκε τελικὰ καὶ ἐπέστρεψε στὴν Ἑλλάδα τὸ 2004, ἔπειτα ἀπὸ 15 χρόνια κράτησης!

Ἐπὶ 30 χρόνια ὀργάνει τὶς φυλακὲς τῆς Ἑλλάδας καὶ τοῦ ἐξωτερικοῦ. Προσφέρει ροῦχα καὶ τρόφιμα. Καὶ τὸ σημαντικότερο: πληρώνει τὶς μικρὲς, ἐξαγοράσιμες ποινὲς ἄπορων φυλακισμένων, μὲ χρήματα ποὺ συγκεντρώνει γιὰ αὐτὸν τὸν σκοπὸ.

Ἀπὸ τὸ 1978 ἡ ἀδελφότητα ποὺ ἔχει ιδρύσει, ἡ «Ὅσια Ξένη - Διακονία Ἀποφυλακίσεως Ἀπόρων Κρατουμένων καὶ Φυγοποιῶν», ἔχει πληρώσει 2.500.000 εὐρὼ στὸ δημόσιο ταμεῖο προκειμένου νὰ ἀποφυλακιστοῦν Ἕλληνες καὶ ξένοι ποὺ δὲν εἶχαν τὴν οἰκονομικὴ δυνατότητα νὰ ἐξαγοράσουν τὶς ποινὲς τους. Προχθές, ἡ Διοικήσις τῆς Συνόδου τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος, ἀναγνωρίζοντας τὴν προσφορά του, ἀποφάσισε νὰ τοῦ προσφέρει 30.000 εὐρὼ γιὰ νὰ συνεχίσει τὸ ἔργο του. Σήμερα, ὑπολογίζονται σὲ 1.000 οἱ κρατούμενοι ποὺ ἐκτίουν ποινὲς οἱ ὁποῖες ἔχουν μετατραπῆ σὲ χρηματικὲς ἀλλὰ δὲν ἔχουν χρήματα νὰ τὶς πληρώσουν.

«Ἡ Ἀπραξία μὲ Κουράζει»

Παρὰ τὰ 77 τοῦ χρόνια, ὁ «ἅγιος» τῶν ἀπόρων κρατουμένων συνεχίζει νὰ ταξιδεύει ἐντὸς καὶ ἐκτὸς

Ἑλλάδος καὶ νὰ ἐπισκέπτεται φυλακισμένους. «Θέλω νὰ συνεχίσω. Ἡ ἀπραξία μὲ κουράζει», λέει στὰ «ΝΕΑ». Τὰ Χριστούγεννα ἐπισκέφτηκε τὶς φυλακὲς τῆς Ἀμφισσας καὶ τοῦ Μαλανδρίνου. «Σὲ λίγες ἡμέρες ἐτοιμαζόμαστε νὰ πᾶμε στὶς φυλακὲς τῆς Μόσχας». Εἶναι σημαντικό γιὰ τοὺς φυλακισμένους νὰ πᾶει ἓνας ἄγνωστος γιὰ νὰ τοὺς δώσει ροῦχα, φαγητό, εἶδη προσωπικῆς ὑγιεινῆς. Τοὺς προσφέρει μεγάλη χαρά», λέει. «Ὁ βαθύτερος στόχος μας εἶναι νὰ ἀγγίξουμε τὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ κρατουμένου ἔτσι ὥστε νὰ μετανοήσει. Ἄλλωστε, ὅπως ἔχει πεῖ ἓνας φιλόσοφος, ὁ μεγαλύτερος ἐγκληματίας μπορεῖ νὰ κρύβει μία σπιθα ἀνθρωπιᾶς. Καὶ ἐμεῖς μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη θέλουμε νὰ τὴν ἀνάψουμε».

Ἀπὸ τὶς δικαστικὲς φυλακὲς Κορυδαλλοῦ ἔχει ἀποφυλακίσει 1.609 κρατουμένους. Χίλιους ἀπὸ τὶς φυλακὲς Ἰωαννίνων, 886 ἀπὸ τὶς φυλακὲς Θεσσαλονίκης, 417 ἀπὸ τὶς φυλακὲς Ναυπλίου, ἐνῶ δεκάδες κρατούμενοι ἔχουν ἀφεθεῖ ἐλεύθεροι ἀπὸ ἀστυνομικὰ τμήματα καὶ τμήματα ἀσφαλείας. Καὶ συνεχίζει... «Τὰ φᾶξ ἔρχονται τὸ ἓνα μετὰ τὸ ἄλλο ἀπὸ τὶς φυλακὲς. Ἐπειτα ἀπὸ 30 χρόνια δράσης, οἱ ἄνθρωποι τῶν ὑπηρεσιῶν τῶν φυλακῶν μᾶς γνωρίζουν καὶ μᾶς ἐνημερώνουν ἀμέσως». Συνεχίζει: «Τὸν Ἀπρίλιο τοῦ 1999 πήγαμε στὶς φυλακὲς τῆς Μαδαγασκάρης. Δὲν ὑπῆρχε Ἕλληνας. Προσφέραμε στοὺς φυλακισμένους ἑλληνικὰ φαγητά», θυμᾶται. Ἐχει ἐπισκεφτεῖ φυλακισμένους στὴν Κύπρο, στὴν Ἀλβανία, στὸ Ἰσραήλ, στὴν Αἴγυπτο.

Στὶς φυλακὲς Ἐλ Κανάτερ τῆς Αἰγύπτου πῆγε τρεῖς φορεῖς γιὰ νὰ δεῖ ἀπὸ κοντὰ καὶ νὰ κοινωνήσει τοὺς Ἕλληνες ἰσοβίτες ἀπὸ τὸ motorship «Θανάσης». Ὁ ἓνας ἀπ' αὐτοὺς, ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος Καστανιάς, ποὺ γύρισε στὴν Ἑλλάδα τὸ 2004 ἔπειτα ἀπὸ 15 χρόνια φυλάκισης, εἶπε πρόσφατα σὲ ἐκδήλωση ἀφιερωμένη στὸν πατέρα Γερβάσιο: «Μόλις ἓνα γράμμα ποὺ ἔγραψα στὸν γέροντα, ἔφτασε γιὰ νὰ ἀλλάξει ἡ ζωὴ ἡ δική μου καὶ τῆς οἰκογένειάς μου. Ἀμέσως ὀργάνωσαν ἐξόρμηση στὴ φυλακὴ μὲ δέματα γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς φυλακισμένους».

Οἱ Πιστοὶ Ἐξαγοράζουν τὶς Ποινὲς

Ὁ Μαραθώνιος τοῦ ἱερέα στὶς φυλακὲς ἄρχισε τὸ 1978. «Ἦμουν τακτικὸς ἱεροκήρυκας τῆς Ἐκκλησίας στὶς Σέρρες καὶ ἐπισκεπτόμουν γηροκομεῖα, ὀρφανοτροφεῖα. Σκέφτηκα ὅμως ὅ,τι θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ ἐπισκεφτῶ μία φορὰ καὶ τὶς φυλακὲς. Ἦταν Μάρτιος, Κυριακὴ τῆς Ἀποκριᾶς, ὅταν ξεκινήσαμε 15 λεωφορεῖα γιὰ τὶς ἀγροτικὲς φυλακὲς τῆς Κασσάνδρας», θυμᾶται. Ἡ ἐπίσκεψη ἐπαναλήφθηκε τὴν ἐπόμενη χρονιά μὲ 80 λεωφορεῖα! Ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ καὶ πέρα οἱ ἐπισκέψεις του στοὺς φυλακισμένους ἔγιναν συχνότερες ἐνῶ ταυτόχρονα αὐξάνονταν καὶ οἱ ἀποφυλακίσεις μὲ τὰ χρήματα ποὺ συγκεντρώναν οἱ πιστοὶ γιὰ νὰ ἐξαγοραστοῦν οἱ ποινὲς τῶν ἀπόρων κρατουμένων.

Τὸ 1978 ἀποφυλακίστηκαν 7 κρατούμενοι. Τὸ 2007

Ὁ Δρόμος τῆς Ἐπιστροφῆς στὸν Πατέρα Περνάει ἀπὸ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία

Ι. Μονὴ Ἁγίου Αὐγουστίνου Φλωρίνης, περιοδικὸν «Χριστιανικὴ Σπίθα», Σεπτέμβριος 2007.

Οὐκ ἔστι προσωπολήπτης ὁ Θεός, ἀλλ' ἐν παντὶ ἔθνει ὁ φοβούμενος αὐτὸν καὶ ἐργαζόμενος δικαιοσύνην δεκτὸς αὐτῷ ἔστι.
(Πράξ. 10:34-35)

Παρ' ὅτι τὴν ἐποχὴ μας χαρακτηρίζει συνήθως ἡ ἀπομάκρυνση ἀπὸ κάθε ἀρχῆς, παράδοση, θρησκεία καὶ ἰδανικό, τίποτα ὥστόσο δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ σταθεῖ πὶὸ δυνατό ἀπὸ τὴν δίψα τοῦ ἐσταυρωμένου Ἰησοῦ μας γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία τῶν ἀθανάτων ψυχῶν.

Εἶναι ἀλήθεια ὅτι τὸν τελευταῖο καιρὸ ὅλοι ἀνησυχίσαμε μὲ τὶς ἐπικίνδυνες οἰκουμενιστικὲς κινήσεις τῶν ἐκκλησιαστικῶν ἀρχῶν μας. Λίγοι ὅμως γνωρίζουν γιὰ μία ἄλλη κίνηση, ἡ ὁποία ἔχει τραβήξει τὴν προσοχὴ τῶν πὶὸ φημισμένων ΜΜΕ τοῦ ἐξωτερικοῦ, ἐνῶ συγχρόνως ἔχει μείνει σχεδὸν ἄγνωστη στὴν χώρα μας.

Γράφει χαρακτηριστικὰ ὁ μακαριστὸς π. Σεραφεῖμ Rose (+1982) στὸ βιβλίο του «Ἡ θέσις τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Αὐγουστίνου στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία»: «Χάρι στὴν πρόνοια τοῦ Θεοῦ στοὺς καιροὺς μας, ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος Χριστιανισμὸς ἐπανερχεται στὴν Δύσι, ἡ ὁποία ἀπομακρύνθηκε ἀπ' αὐτὸν πρὶν περίπου 900 χρόνια. Αὐτὴ ἡ κίνησις..., γιὰ κάποιες δεκαετίες τώρα, ...ἐξελίσσεται καὶ ἔχει γίνει πλέον ἓνα κοινὸ φαινόμενο».

Γύρω ἀπ' αὐτὸ τὸ εὐλογημένο γεγονός ἔχει ἐκδοθεῖ μία σειρά βιβλίων, ἄλλων στὰ Ἀγγλικά καὶ ἄλλων σὲ μετάφραση στὰ Ἑλληνικά, ποὺ προσφέρουν μεγάλη οἰκοδομὴ καὶ στήριξη στίς ψυχές, στὸν καθημερινὸ πνευματικὸ ἀγώνα τους. Μὲ τὸ ἄρθρο τοῦτο θέλουμε νὰ δώσουμε στοὺς ἀγαπητοὺς ἀναγνώστες μας μία μικρὴ γεύση αὐτοῦ τοῦ τόσο θαυμαστοῦ φαινομένου, πρὸς πνευματικὴ ἐνίσχυση καὶ βοήθεια ὅλων μας.

Ἡ πρόωρη κοίμησης τοῦ ὁμολογητοῦ π. Σεραφεῖμ Rose στάθηκε ἓνα εὐεργετικὸ μέσο γιὰ τὴν προσέλευση τόσων προσήλυτων στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία. Γιατί μὲ τὴν κοίμησή του ἡ ἀχανὴς χώρα τῆς Ἀμερικῆς ἀπέκτησε ἓνα μεσίτη πρὸς τὸν ἴδιον τὸν Κύριο στοὺς οὐρανοὺς, νὰ πρεσβεύει γιὰ τὶς διψασμένες καὶ κουρασμένες ψυχές, νὰ βροῦν τὴν ἀλήθεια τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Τὰ γεγονότα γύρω ἀπὸ τὴν ὀδυνηρὴ ἀναζήτησι τῆς ἀλήθειας ἀπὸ τὸν π. Σεραφεῖμ Rose, ποὺ τὸν ὁδήγησε τελικὰ στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, ἐξιστοροῦνται στὸ βιβλίο «Πρ. Σεραφεῖμ Rose: Ἡ Ζωὴ καὶ τὰ Ἔργα του», τοῦ π. Δαμασκηνοῦ Christensen. Στὸ ἴδιο βιβλίο βρίσκουμε πολλὰ περιπτώσεις προσήλυτων, οἱ ὅποιοι, ἢ μὲ τὴν ἄμεση ἐπέμβαση τοῦ Κυρίου ἢ μὲ τὴν βοήθεια τοῦ ἴδιου τοῦ π. Σεραφεῖμ, βρῆκαν τὸ δρόμο τους πρὸς τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία. Ἰδοὺ μερικές.

Οἱ πατέρες τῆς σκῆτης τοῦ Ἁγίου Γερμανοῦ τῆς Ἀλάσκας, ποὺ ἱδρύσε ὁ π. Σεραφεῖμ, ἔδιναν μεγάλη ἔμφαση στὴν

τέλεση τῶν καθημερινῶν ἀκολουθιῶν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας καὶ στὴν ἐπικοινωνία μὲ τὴν ἱεραρχία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας (ἡ ὁποία τότε ἦταν μεστὴ ἀπὸ ἐκλεκτὰ πρόσωπα, πνευματικοὺς καρποὺς τῆς ἀγίας Ὀπτινα τῆς Ρωσίας). Γι' αὐτὸ προέτρεπαν τὰ πνευματικὰ τοὺς τέκνα, οἱ περισσότεροι ἐκ τῶν ὁποίων ἦταν προσήλυτοι, νὰ ἐκτελοῦν ὅσες ἀπ' αὐτὲς τὶς ἀκολουθίες μποροῦσαν στὸ σπίτι τους. Καί, ὡς μία καλὴ ἀρχή, τοὺς ἐνθάρρυναν νὰ διαβάζουν «χωρὶς παράληψη» καθημερινῶς τὴν ἀκολουθία τῆς Θ' (ἐνάτης) ὥρας. Σ' αὐτὴ τὴν προσπάθεια δόθηκε καὶ ἡ οἰκογένεια τοῦ κ. Alexey Young (πολύτεκνη οἰκογένεια, προσύλητοι ἀπὸ τὸν ρωμαιοκαθολικισμό), ἡ ὁποία εἶχε μετατρέψει τὸ γκαράζ τῆς αὐλῆς τους σ' ἓνα μικρὸ χῶρο προσευχῆς. Ἔτσι καθημερινὰ ἡ οἰκογένεια μαζευτόταν τὴν ἴδια ὥρα στὸ προσευχητάριό τους νὰ διαβάσουν τὴν Θ' ὥρα. Ὡστόσο αὐτὸ δὲν ἔμεινε ἀπαράτηρητο ἀπὸ μερικοὺς «περίεργους» γείτονές τους.

Μία μέρα μία γειτόνισσα τοὺς πλησίασε καὶ εἶπε: «Συγχαρῆστε με, συγγνώμη γιὰ τὴν ἐνόχληση, ἀλλὰ κάθε μέρα, καθὼς πλένω τὰ πιάτα, σὰς βλέπω νὰ μαζεύεστε βιαστικὰ μέσα στὸ γκαράζ σας. Καὶ ὅταν μετὰ ἀπὸ περίπου μισὴ ὥρα βγαίνετε ἀπ' ἐκεῖ, εἶσθε κάπως διαφορετικοί, φαίνεστε τόσο ἡρεμοὶ καὶ εἰρηνικοί. Καὶ μοῦ δημιουργήθηκε ἡ ἀπορία: Τὶ κάνετε ἐκεῖ μέσα;».

Ἀκολούθησε ἡ ἀπάντησις: «Ἐλα νὰ δῆς!».

Σύντομα αὐτὴ ἡ γυναίκα μαζί μὲ τὴν κόρη της—πρῶν πεντηκοστιανοὶ—συμμετεῖχαν στίς ἀκολουθίες τῆς οἰκογένειας Young. Ὅταν ἐπίσης ἡ σύζυγος ἐνὸς συναδέλφου τοῦ κ. Alexey ἔμαθε γι' αὐτὴ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη κοινότητα, ἤθελε κι αὐτὴ νὰ συμμετέχει στὴν καθημερινὴ ζωὴ τῆς προσευχῆς. Ἐν καιρῷ οἱ ἄνθρωποι αὐτοὶ ἐγίναν προσήλυτοι στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Πίστη, καὶ πολλοὶ ἀκολούθησαν ἀργότερα.

Αὐτὸ τὸ γκαράζ δὲν ἄργησε νὰ μετατραπῇ κατόπιν σὲ ἓνα ὠραῖο ἀγιογραφημένο παρεκκλήσι τῶν Ἁγίων Ἀδριανοῦ καὶ Ναταλίας, ὁποῦ συχνὰ οἱ πατέρες τῆς σκῆτης ἔρχονταν καὶ λειτουργοῦσαν οἰκοδομώντας τὴν συνεχῶς αὐξανόμενη Ὁρθόδοξη κοινότητά τους. Ὁ δὲ πόθος καὶ ἡ ἀνάγκη γιὰ τὴν τέλεση τῶν καθημερινῶν ἀκολουθιῶν αὐξήθηκε τόσο πολὺ, ὥστε μετὰ ἀπὸ χρόνια ὁ κ. Alexey Young νὰ χειροτονηθεῖ ἱερέας ἀπὸ τὸν ἐπίσκοπο τῆς Ρωσικῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς διασπορᾶς Μητρ. Νεκτάριο (πνευματικὸ τέκνο τοῦ στάρετς Νεκταρίου, ποὺ ἦταν ὁ τελευταῖος στάρετς τῆς Ὀπτινα). Ἡ μικρὴ κοινότητα ἐξελίχθει σὲ μία γνήσια ταπεινὴ Ὁρθόδοξη ἐνορία. Κι αὐτὸ σὲ ἓνα μικρὸ χωριὸ στὰ σύνορα τῆς Πολιτείας Καλιφόρνια τῆς Ἀμερικῆς.

Κάτι ἀνάλογο ἐγίνε ὅταν μία μέρα ὁ π. Γερμανός, ὁ συνασκητὴς τοῦ π. Σεραφεῖμ, ἐπισκέφθηκε ἓνα βιβλιοπωλεῖο γιὰ νὰ παρατηρήσει κατὰ πόσο τὰ βιβλία τῆς ἐκδόσεως τῆς σκῆτης τοὺς πωλοῦνται. Ἐκεῖ ποὺ ἔψαχνε στὸ τμῆμα τῶν βιβλίων φιλοσοφίας καὶ θρησκείας, συνέβη τὸ ἐξῆς γεγονός.

Ξαφνικά αισθάνθηκε (ό π. Γερμανός) κάποιον να τον άκουμπάει στον ώμο και να του λέει: «Θά μπορούσες να μου πεις ποιός είσαι;».

Γυρνώντας είδε ένα νέο, ό όποιος τον κοιτούσε επίμονα κάτω από ένα κρυμμένο από μαλλιά πρόσωπο. Ό π. Γερμανός χαμογέλασε και άπάντησε: «Είμαι ένας Όρθόδοξος μοναχός, και μάλιστα ιερέας!».

«Wow!», φώναξε ό νέος.

Αυτός ό νέος ήταν πάστορας μίας προτεσταντικής παρατάξεως που λεγόταν «Η Άνοιχτή Θύρα» και ως μέρος του λειτουργήματός του, έπαιζε σ' ένα χριστιανικό ροκ συγκρότημα. Η γνωριμία του με τους πατέρες, τó Μαναστήρι και την Όρθοδοξία άναπτύχθηκε και, ως κοινωνικός τύπος που ήταν, μίλησε για την Όρθοδοξία και σε άλλους. Έτσι τó 1980 βαπτίστηκε από τον ίδιο τον π. Σεραφείμ, μαζί με άλλους έπτά φίλους του, στην σκήτη του Άγίου Γερμανού της Άλάσκας.

Στην βαπτισή τους, Ντυμένοι στους λευκούς χιτώνες τους οί νεοφώτιστοι, άνδρες γυναίκες και παιδιά, κρατούσαν λαμπάδες και έψελναν ύμνους μαζί με τους συγκεντρωμένους προσκυνητές μέσα στην ήρεμη φύσι. Ένα πραγματικό μεγαλείο...

Άξιοθαύμαστη είναι επίσης ή περίπτωση ενός ύπαλλήλου τραπέζης. Κατά την ώρα της έργασίας του έπεσε στα χέρια του μια έπιταγή με τó όνομα της σκήτης. Αυτό και μόνο έφτασε να κίνηση τó ένδιαφέρον του να έπισκεφθεί την σκήτη και να την δει από κοντά. Μέσα σ' ένα χρόνο αυτός ήταν ένας νεοφώτιστος Όρθόδοξος Χριστιανός. Συνολικά, στα 5 χρόνια της ιεροσύνης του π. Σεραφείμ, αυτός και ό π. Γερμανός βάπτισαν πάνω από 100 ανθρώπους Όρθόδοξους.

Πρός τó τέλος της επίγειας ζωής του, ό π. Σεραφείμ είχε αρχίσει να λαμβάνει αντίτυπα από ένα περιοδικό που λεγόταν Son Flowers όπου τó εξέδιδε μία χριστιανική κοινότητα που λεγόταν «The Holy Order of Mans». Ήταν μία από τις έκατοντάδες ομάδες που είχαν ξεφυτρώσει στην δεκαετία του 1960, οί όποιες είχαν γνωστικιστικό και μυστικιστικό χαρακτήρα. Όμως αυτή ή συγκεκριμένη ομάδα είχε ένα χριστιανικό προσανατολισμό που ένδιεφερε τον π. Σεραφείμ.

Τό 1974 πεθαίνει ό ιδρυτής τους και ή ομάδα ξεκινάει μία αναζήτηση, που δέν διέφερε πολύ από την αναζήτηση που είχε διεξαγάγει πριν χρόνια ό π. Σεραφείμ. Ό διευθυντής τους, ό κ. Βικέντιος Rossi, ξαφνικά βρέθηκε υπεύθυνος για δυό χιλιάδες ψυχές, τó ένα τρίτο εκ των όποιων είχαν δώσει ισόβια ύπόσχεση για άκτημοσύνη και ύπακοή. Ένώ από την αρχή είχαν ως αίτια της ύπάρξεώς τους τó πρόσωπο

του Ίησου Χριστού και την Θ. Ευχαριστία ως κέντρο της λατρείας τους, κρατούσαν κάποιες αίρετικές ιδέες, όπως την μετεμψύωση και τις διδασκαλίες του γνωστικισμού. Μέχρι τó 1983 ό κ. Βικέντιος είχε ξεκαθαρίσει την ομάδα του απ' αυτές τις ιδέες (αυτό στάθηκε αίτια να φύγουν αρκετά μέλη), όμως και πάλι βρισκόταν χωρίς ένα στερεό θεμέλιο για την ομάδα του. «Άν θά υπάκουαν σε μία βασική χριστιανική διδασκαλία, ποιά διδασκαλία θά ήταν αυτή;».

Τά μέλη της ομάδας είχαν αφιερώσει την ζωή τους στην ύπηρεσία του Χριστού, εκτελώντας άποστολές στους άστεγους που βρίσκονταν στις πιό επικίνδυνες γειτονίες της Άμερικής, ταΐζοντας τους φτωχούς και ιδρύοντας στέγη καταφυγής για θλιμμένες οικογένειες. Φτάνοντας στο ναό τους στις 6 ώρα κάθε πρωί, ξεκινούσαν και τελείωναν την ήμέρα τους με προσευχή.

Ό κ. Βικέντιος δόθηκε στη μελέτη και σιγά-σιγά έστίασε την προσοχή του στην Όρθόδοξη Χριστιανοσύνη. Τά έργα του π. Σεραφείμ του έκαναν ιδιαίτερη έντύπωση και λυτήθηκε πολύ όταν έμαθε ό,τι ό π. Σεραφείμ είχε κοιμηθεί πριν από ένα χρόνο. Πέρασαν μέρες, έβδομάδες και δέν μπορούσε να βγάλει από τó νού του τον π. Σεραφείμ. «Ήταν σαν να με τραβούσε, σαν να με καλούσε ό π. Σεραφείμ, και δέν θά με άφηνε ήσυχο μέχρι που θά ανακάλυπτα την Όρθοδοξία ολοκληρωτικά». Προσευχόταν ό Θεός να φέρει την ομάδα του στην ζωντανή παράδοση της Όρθόδοξης Χριστιανοσύνης.

Όσο ό κ. Βικέντιος νουθετούσε την ομάδα του προς την Όρθοδοξία, τόσο τά μέλη φάνηκαν πολύ έπιδεκτικά προς αυτήν, και άρχισαν να θεωρούν την Όρθοδοξία ως την μόνη άληθινή και μυστηριακή Χριστιανοσύνη, την όποια ψάχνανε άνέλπιστα για τόσο καιρό.

Κατά την Διακαινήσιμο έβδομάδα του 1984, ένας από τους πάστορές τους, ό κ. Ναθαναήλ, έπισκέφθηκε την σκήτη του Άγίου Γερμανού. Ήταν γεμάτος από άνάμεικτα αισθήματα· γιατί ενώ αισθανόταν συνταραγμένος από την όλη όμορφία και τó βάθος της Όρθοδοξίας και ένιωθε ό,τι ή Όρθοδοξία ίκανοποιούσε την διψασμένη ψυχή του, αισθανόταν επίσης ό,τι έπιχειρούσε να άκουμπήσει κάτι που του παρέμενε πολύ άπόμακρο. Άπορούσε συγχρόνως πώς θά μπορούσε ή ομάδα του να εισέλθει ολοκληρωτικά στην Όρθόδοξη Έκκλησία.

Μπροστά στον τάφο του π. Σεραφείμ ζήτησε την βοήθειά του και να του φανέρωσε τι να κάνει απ' έδω και πέρα. Ή έμπονη προσευχή του, που έβγαине από μία καρδιά γεμάτη όδύνη, ξαφνικά έγινε ήρεμη και άκουσε νοερώς



π. Σεραφείμ Rose (+1982)

μία φωνή νὰ τοῦ λέει: «Διάβασε τὸ δέκατο κεφάλαιο τῶν Πράξεων».

Ὁ κ. Ναθαναήλ, πού ἦταν ἐντελῶς ἄπειρος σὲ τέτοιες ἐμπειρίες, θεώρησε ὅ,τι ἦταν ἀπλῶς ἡ φαντασία του. Ὅμως ἡ φωνή ἀκούστηκε ξανά, καὶ αὐτὴ τὴν φορὰ πὺξ ἐκαθάρη: «Διάβασε τὸ δέκατο κεφάλαιο τῶν Πράξεων».

Ἀργότερα, ὅταν ἀνέτρεξε σ' αὐτὸ τὸ κεφάλαιο, ἀνακάλυψε ὅ,τι τὸ κεφάλαιο αὐτὸ ἀναφερόταν στὸν ἐκατόνταρχο Κορνήλιο, στὸν ὁποῖο ὁ Θεὸς εἶχε πεῖ: *Αἰ προσευχαί σου καὶ αἰ ἐλεημοσύνη σου ἀνέβησαν εἰς μνημόσυνον ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ*. Τότε κατὰλαβε ὁ κ. Ναθαναήλ, ὅ,τι ὁ Θεὸς εἶχε ἀκούσει τὴν εἰλικρινὴ προσευχή τους καὶ ὅ,τι τοὺς εἶχε δεχθεῖ λόγῳ τῆς ἐλεημοσύνης τους καὶ τῶν καλῶν τους ἔργων, σὰν τὸν Κορνήλιο, καὶ τώρα τοὺς ὁδηγοῦσε στὴν πληρότητα τῶν δωρεῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἡ ὁποία βρίσκεται μόνο στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία.

Σήμερα ἐκατοντάδες μέλη ἀπὸ τὴν ὁμάδα αὐτὴ ἔχουν βαπτισθεῖ στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ συνεχίζουν μὲ τὸν ἴδιο ζῆλο τὰ εὐεργετικά τους ἔργα, τώρα ὅμως μὲ μία Ὁρθόδοξη ἀναφορά. Εἰκοσιτέσσερις ἀπ' αὐτοὺς ἔχουν ἀκολουθήσει τὸ δρόμο τοῦ μοναχισμοῦ καὶ τριάντα χειροτονήθηκαν ἱερεῖς καὶ ὑπηρετοῦν σὲ διάφορες Ὁρθόδοξες ἐνορίες, ἐνῶ ἄλλοι ἐτοιμάζονται νὰ λάβουν τὸ χάρισμα τῆς ἱεροσύνης.

Αὐτὲς εἶναι ἐλάχιστες ἀπὸ τίς χαριτωμένες περιπτώσεις τῶν ἐπεμβάσεων τοῦ Θεοῦ στὴ ζωὴ αὐτῶν πού ψάχνουν τὴν ἀλήθεια, οἱ ὁποῖες βρίσκονται στὸ βιβλίῳ τοῦ π. Σεραφεῖμ.

Ὅσο περνοῦν τὰ χρόνια οἱ περιπτώσεις τῶν προσήλυτων πληθαίνουν, μέχρι πού σήμερα ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία ἔχει ἀγγίξει καὶ τὴν ζωὴ τῶν πὺξ γνωστῶν προτεσταντῶν τῆς Ἀμερικῆς.



Ἔχω καταλάβει ὅ,τι ἡ ὑπακοὴ πολὺ βοηθάει. Καὶ λίγο μυαλὸ νὰ ἔχει κανεῖς, ἂν κάνει ὑπακοή, γίνεται φιλόσοφος. Εἴτε ἐξυπνος εἴτε κουτός, εἴτε ὑγιὲς εἴτε ἄρρωστος πνευματικά ἢ σωματικά εἶναι κανεῖς καὶ βασανίζεται ἀπὸ λογισμούς, ἂν κάνει ὑπακοή, ἐλευθερώνεται. Λύτρωση εἶναι ἡ ὑπακοή. Ὁ μεγαλύτερος ἐγωῖσθης εἶναι αὐτός πού ἀκολουθεῖ τοὺς λογισμούς του καὶ δὲν ρωτᾷ κανέναν· αὐτοκαταστρέφεται. Μπορεῖ κάποιος νὰ εἶναι ἐξυπνος ἀλλὰ ἂν ἔχει θέλημα, αὐτοπεποίθηση καὶ φιλαυτία, βασανίζεται συνέχεια. Μπερδεύεται ἄσχημα καὶ τοῦ δημιουργοῦνται προβλήματα. Γιὰ νὰ βρεῖ τὸν δρόμο του, πρέπει νὰ ἀνοίξει τὴν καρδιά του σὲ κάποιον πνευματικὸ καὶ νὰ ζητήσει ταπεινὰ τὴν βοήθειά του. Μερικοὶ ὅμως ἀντὶ νὰ πᾶνε στὸν πνευματικὸ πᾶνε στὸν ψυχίατρο...

Γέρων Παῖσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης (+1994)

Ἡ Σημασία τοῦ Ἀντίδωρου στὴ Λειτουργική μας Ζωή

Τοῦ πρωτ. Θεμιστοκλέους Στ. Χριστοδούλου, ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴν ἐφημερίδα «Εφημέριος», Μάιος 2007.



Ἐπειδὴ κατὰ καιροὺς, ὅλοι ὅσοι εἴμαστε μὲ τὴ χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ ποιμένες τοῦ λογικοῦ ποιμνίου, πολλὰ καὶ διάφορα διαπιστώνουμε σχετικὰ μὲ τὴ χρῆση καὶ τὴ σημασία τοῦ ἀντίδωρου, ἐπιθυμῶ νὰ χαράξω λίγες γραμμὲς μὲ βάση τὴν Ἱερὰ Παράδοσή μας.

Καταρχὴν τὸ ἀντίδωρο εἶναι εὐλογημένος ἄρτος. Κι αὐτὸ γιατί κατὰ τὴν ὥρα πού γίνεται ἡ ἀκολουθία τῆς προσκομιδῆς προσφέρονται ἄρτοι, (πρόσφορα), συνήθως 3 ἢ 5, γιὰ νὰ ἐξαχθοῦν οἱ «μερίδες». Αὐτὲς δὲ οἱ μερίδες εἶναι ὡς ἐξῆς: πρῶτα ὁ ἁμνὸς πού συμβολίζει τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Κυρίου μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, δεῦτερον ἡ τριγωνικὴ μερίδα τῆς Θεοτόκου, τρίτον οἱ μερίδες τῶν 9 ταγμάτων, δηλαδὴ πάντων καὶ πασῶν τῶν ἁγίων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, τέταρτον ἡ μερίδα τοῦ οἰκείου μας ἐπισκόπου (Ἀρχιεπισκόπου ἢ Μητροπολίτου γιὰ τὰ ἐν Ἑλλάδι δεδομένα) καὶ τέλος μερίδες τῶν ζώντων καὶ κεκοιμημένων, τῆς θριαμβεύουσας καὶ τῆς στρατευόμενης Ἐκκλησίας.

Τὰ ὑπόλοιπα τῶν ἄρτων αὐτῶν (δηλ. τῶν προσφορῶν) χρησιμοποιοῦνται γιὰ τὸ ἀντίδωρον. Καὶ φυσικὰ τὸ μέγεθος τῶν ἀντίδωρων δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι ἰδιαίτερα μεγάλο καὶ ἱκανῶς χορταστικὸ, ἀλλὰ τέτοιο πού νὰ ἐπαρκεῖ ὥστε νὰ διανέμεται σὲ ὅσους δὲν μετέλαβαν τῶν ἀχράντων Μυστηρίων· εἶναι γιὰ αὐτοὺς οἱ ὁποῖοι σύμφωνα μὲ τὸν ἅγιον Συμεὼν Θεσσαλονίκης *οἱ πάντες ἐκείνου* (ἐνν. τοῦ Σώματος καὶ Αἵματος Χριστοῦ, δηλ. τοῦ Δώρου) *ἱκανοὶ μετασχεῖν τοῦτο δίδεται* (δηλ. τὸ ἀντίδωρον) *ἀντ' ἐκείνου* (P.G. 155, 301 D), πού εἶναι καὶ τὸ Κύριον «Δῶρον» τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ἡ μετοχή, ὅμως, στὸν ἁγιασμὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔρχεται σὲ κάθε ἄνθρωπο διὰ τῶν αἰσθητῶν.

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος μὲ ἄλλα λόγια ἀνάγεται στὰ θεϊκὰ διὰ τῶν αἰσθητῶν. Γιὰ τὸν λόγο αὐτὸ καὶ τὸ ἀντίδωρο πού εἶναι μετοχὴ ἁγιασμοῦ Θεοῦ γίνεται δι' αὐτοῦ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ ἄρτου. Σχετικὰ ὁ ἅγιος Συμεὼν Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Θεσσαλονίκης θὰ πεῖ: *Ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ δι' αἰσθητῶν τίνων ὡς σῶμα περικειμένους τὸν ἁγιασμὸν ἔδει λαβεῖν, διὰ τοῦ ἀντίδωρου γίνεται*. (P.G. 155, 745 D).

Ὡστόσο ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας καίτοι μπορεῖ ἀνάξιοι οἱ πιστοὶ νὰ μὴν λαμβάνουν τὸ «Δῶρο», δὲν θέλει κανεῖς νὰ φύγει ἀπ' αὐτὴν χωρὶς νὰ δώσει κάτι στὸν καθένα. Αὐτὸ τὸ κάτι εἶναι τὸ ἀντίδωρο. Εἶναι θὰ λέγαμε μία πράξη ἀγάπης καὶ φιλανθρωπίας γιὰ τοὺς ἀνάξιους τῆς μετοχῆς. Καὶ μπορεῖ μὲν τὸ ἀντίδωρο νὰ μὴν εἶναι τὸ ἴδιο Σῶμα Χριστοῦ, ἀλλὰ σφραγίσθηκε μὲ τὴ λόγχη καὶ δέχθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν

λειτουργούντα και προσκομίζοντα κληρικό τὰ ἅγια λόγια.

Σχετικῶς ὁ ἅγιος Συμεὼν Θεσσαλονίκης ἀναφέρει: *Ἐπεὶ καὶ ἡγιασμένος ἐστὶ καὶ οὗτος ἄρτος, σφραγιζόμενος τῇ τῇ λόγχῃ, καὶ ἱερὰ δεχόμενος ῥήματα.* (P.G. 155, 304 A). Ὁ Μέγας Ἀγιασμός ἔρχεται στὸν πιστὸ μὲ τὴ μετοχὴ στὰ Ἀχραντα Μυστήρια. Ὅμως, ἓνας ἔστω καὶ μικρὸς ἁγιασμός ἔρχεται καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ Ἀντίδωρο. Πρόκειται περὶ *δωρεᾶς θείας πάροχον*. (P.G. 155, 304 A). Γιὰ τὸ λόγο αὐτὸ ἐμεῖς οἱ ποιμένες πρέπει νὰ μάθουμε τοὺς πιστοὺς μας ὅ,τι τὸ ἀντίδωρο δὲν εἶναι γιὰ «πρωινὴ δόση» τύπου τροφῆς-γεύματος χορταστικοῦ(!), ἀλλὰ μετοχὴ εὐλογίας καὶ ἁγιασμοῦ. Κι ἓνα ψίχουλο νὰ μεταλάβει ὁ πιστὸς ἀπὸ τὸ ἀντίδωρο, ἀγιάζεται. Ἀκοῦμε ἀκόμη ὅ,τι οἱ πιστοὶ μας ζητοῦν πολλὰ ἀντίδωρα γιὰ ὁλόκληρη τὴν ἐβδομάδα. Καλὴ κι εὐλαβικὴ ἡ συνήθεια. Ὅμως τὸ ἀντίδωρον εἶναι ἀντὶ τῆς μετοχῆς τῶν Ἀχραντῶν Μυστηρίων στὴ συγκεκριμένη ἡμέρα, χρόνο καὶ τόπο τελέσεως τῆς Θείας Εὐχαριστίας. Μαζὶ μὲ τὸν Ἐκκλησιασμό ἔρχεται ἡ τὸ Δῶρο ἢ τὸ Ἀντίδωρον. Ἐκτὸς τοῦ Ἐκκλησιασμοῦ ποιά ἡ θέση του;

Ἀκόμη συνηθίζεται πολλοὶ κληρικοὶ ἐξ αἰτίας παλαιότερων συνηθειῶν ἀπὸ προκατόχους κληρικοὺς νὰ μοιράζουν «ὕψωματα». Τὸ ὕψωμα κατ' ἀκρίβειαν τῆς λέξεως εἶναι, ὅ,τι ὑψώνεται ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄρτους στὴν Ἀγία Πρόθεση καὶ προσκομίζεται. Ὅμως κάθε εὐλαβὴς πιστὴ κυρία ἢ κύριος ποὺ παρασκευάζει μὲ ζῆλο καὶ ζέουσα εὐσέβεια τὸ πρόσφορο, ζητᾷ ἀπὸ τὸ δικό της πρόσφορο ὕψωμα. Τότε συμβαίνουν δυὸ τινά. Ἡ ἀπὸ τὸ συγκεκριμένο πρόσφορο ἐξάγεται ἡ προσκομιδὴ, κάτι ἀπὸ τὰ προαναφερθέντα, ἢ ὑψώνονται ὅλα τὰ πρόσφορα στὴν Πρόθεση καὶ ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐξάγονται αὐτὰ τὰ ἰδιαίτερα(!) ἀντίδωρα τὰ λεγόμενα «ὕψωματα» καὶ μάλιστα τυλιγμένα σὲ χαρτὶ ἢ ἀσημόχαρτο.

Φυσικὰ αὐτὴ ἡ συνήθεια, ὅπως καὶ πολλὲς ἄλλες τῆς λατρευτικῆς μας ζωῆς δὲν ξεκόβονται μὲ τὴ μέθοδο «τῆς μαχαίρας». Ἀλλωστε καὶ σ' αὐτὴν τὴν πράξη τῆς ποιμαίνουσας Ἐκκλησίας κρύβεται κάτι πρὸ βαθύ. Αὐτὸ εἶναι ἡ εὐλαβικὴ ἐνασχόληση τῶν πιστῶν μας μὲ τὰ ἅγια πράγματα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας. Δικαιολογώντας αὐτὴ τὴν εὐλαβικὴ διανομὴ τοῦ «ὕψωματος», ὁ ποιμένας δημιουργεῖ ἄμιλλα πνευματικοῦ χαρακτήρα στοὺς πιστοὺς του, τοὺς μαθαίνει τὸ ἱερὸ ἐργόχειρο τῆς προετοιμασίας τοῦ προσφόρου καὶ τοὺς ὀδηγεῖ βῆμα-βῆμα στὴν πνευματικὴ ζωὴ. Καὶ γιὰ νὰ μὴν εἶναι ἀσυνεπὴς στὸ ὅ,τι μόνο ἀπὸ τὰ προσκομιζόμενα τὰ 3 ἢ 5 πρόσφορα ἐξάγονται τὰ ὕψωματα, ἃς προσκομίζει ὅλα τὰ προσφερόμενα πρόσφορα, ἰδιαίτερος τὰ ζυμωτὰ (τὰ φτιαγμένα μὲ τὸ χέρι στὰ σπίτια, τὰ ἐπονομαζόμενα καὶ σπιτικά) καὶ ἃς ἐξάγει πολλὰ ὕψωματα ὅσο καὶ ὅλα τὰ προσφερόμενα τῶν πιστῶν.

Ἀκόμη ὑπάρχει ἡ εὐλαβικὴ συνήθεια μερικῶν πιστῶν μας νὰ ζητοῦν τὸ ὕψωμα τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας τῆς Μεγάλης Πέμπτης γιὰ εὐλογία γιὰ ὅλο τὸ χρόνο. Αὐτὸ φαίνεται ὅ,τι ἔχει ἐπιδράσει ἀπὸ τὴν ἐξαγωγή τοῦ ἀμνοῦ τῆς Μεγάλης Πέμπτης γιὰ τὴ Θ. Κοινωνία τῶν ἀσθενῶν.

Κι αὐτὴ ἡ συνήθεια ἐντάσσεται στὴν ἀπλοϊκὴ εὐλάβεια ποὺ προσπαθεῖ μέσα ἀπὸ τέτοιου εἶδους συνήθειες νὰ ἀγιάζεται. Πρέπει ὅμως νὰ σημειώσω ἐν προκειμένῳ ὅ,τι τέτοιου εἶδους «ἐπιφανειακὲς» εὐλάβειες πόσο εὐκολα διαδίδονται μεταξὺ τῶν πιστῶν μας καὶ πὼς ἄλλα σπουδαῖα καὶ οὐσιαστικότερα θέματα ποὺ ἄπτονται τῆς πνευματικῆς μας ζωῆς μένουν ἀνενεργά, ὅπως ἡ σωστὴ συμμετοχὴ στὰ Ἱερὰ Μυστήρια καὶ ἀκολουθίες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, ἡ καθαρὴ ἐξομολόγηση, κ.ἄ..

Τέλος, ἐπιθυμῶ νὰ σημειώσω τὴν μετ' εὐλάβειας βρῶση τοῦ ἀντιδώρου ποὺ δείχνει καὶ τὸν προσωπικό, κατ' ἐπίγνωση σεβασμό, τοῦ ἐσθιοντος «μετὰ φόβου Θεοῦ». Γιατί, τέλος πάντων, δὲν εἶναι ὁ φόβος (=σεβασμός) μόνο γιὰ τὰ ἄχραντα Μυστήρια ποὺ πρέπει νὰ θεωρεῖται καὶ εἶναι ἐκ τοῦ ὧν οὐκ ἄνευ ἀπαραίτητος, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ ἄλλα, ὅπως τὸ ἀντίδωρο, τὸ περίσσευμα τοῦ λαδιοῦ τοῦ Εὐχελαίου, τὸ καμμένο φυτίλακι τοῦ κανδηλιοῦ μας, τὸ ἀποκέρι, ἢ μετάληψη τοῦ μικροῦ, πόσο μᾶλλον καὶ τοῦ μεγάλου Ἀγιασμοῦ, τὰ ἀπονέρια τῆς Βαπτίσεως καὶ τόσα ἄλλα...



Ὁ καθένας ἀπὸ τοὺς δουλωμένους στὴν ἁμαρτία καὶ τὰ πάθη, ὅταν ἐλέγχονται ἀπὸ τὴ συνείδησή τους, ἐπειδὴ αἰσθάνονται βάρος καὶ δυσφορία, μοιάζουν πρῶτα νὰ τὴν κλειδώνουν, ὅπως ὁ Ἡρώδης φυλάκισε τὸν Ἰωάννη, μὴν θέλοντας νὰ τὴν ἀκοῦν. Ὅταν δὲ ἐξαρτηθοῦν τελείως ἀπὸ τὴν Ἡρωδιάδα ποὺ παράνομα συγκατοικεῖ μὲ αὐτούς, δηλαδὴ τὴν ἁμαρτωλὴ θέληση, τότε διαγράφουν καὶ τὸν ἔμφυτο λόγο τῆς θείας χάρις, τὴν συνείδησή τους δηλαδὴ, καταργώντας τὴν τελείως, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπιστοῦν καὶ ἀντιτίθενται στὴν Θεόπνευστο Γραφή, ἀσυνείδητοι πρὸς τὰ πάντα καὶ πολέμοι τοῦ λόγου τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὅπως ὁ Ἡρώδης στὸν Ἰωάννη.

Ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ ἀντιτιθέμενοι στὴν ἀλήθεια τῆς εὐσεβείας τὰ ἴδια πάσχουν ἢ ἀκόμα καλύτερα, πράττουν τὰ ἴδια. Διότι ὅταν ἐλέγχονται ἀπὸ τὰ προφητικά καὶ ἀποστολικά καὶ πατερικά λόγια ποὺ προτείνονται ἀπὸ μᾶς, πρῶτα τὰ κλειδαμπαρώνουν μέσα στὰ βιβλία, λέγοντας «ἀφῆστε τα νὰ βρίσκονται ἐκεῖ καὶ ἃς μὴν τὰ χρησιμοποιοῦ κανεὶς καὶ ἃς μὴν τὰ προβάλλει κανεὶς» μὴν ἀκούγοντας οὔτε τὸν Κύριο ποὺ λέει «ἐρευνᾶτε τίς Γραφές καὶ σ' αὐτές θὰ βρεῖτε τὴν αἰώνια ζωὴ». «Ἐπειτα κατευθυνόμενοι πρὸς μεγαλύτερη κακία ἀπὸ τὴν Ἡρωδιάδα, δηλαδὴ τὴν ἀντίχριστη πίστη τους, τὰ τοποθετοῦν σὰν κατεσφαγμένα σὲ πιάτο καταργώντας τα διὰ τῶν δικῶν τους συγγραμμάτων, μὲ σκοπὸ τὴν χαιρεκακία καὶ τὴν ψυχικὴ βλάβη αὐτῶν ποὺ συμφωνοῦν μὲ αὐτούς.

Ἀπὸ τὴν Μ' ὁμιλία τοῦ Ἀγ. Γρηγορίου Παλαμᾶ (στὸν βίο τοῦ Ἀγ. Ἰωάννη τοῦ Προδρόμου)

Ἡ Ταπείνωση Ἐνὸς Ἀββᾶ

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον «Ἀββᾶ Κασσιανοῦ, Συνομιλίες μετὰ τοὺς Πατέρες τῆς Ἐρήμου», τόμος Α΄, ἔκδ. «Ετοιμασία», σελ. 184-186.

Ὁ Ἀββᾶς Πινούφριος ἦταν ἱερομόναχος καὶ Ἠγούμενος ἑνὸς μεγάλου Μοναστηριοῦ ποὺ βρισκόταν κοντὰ στὴν Πανεφώ, μιὰ πόλη τῆς Αἰγύπτου. Οἱ ἀρετὲς καὶ τὰ θαύματα ποὺ ἐπιτελοῦσε ὁ Ἀββᾶς Πινούφριος τὸν εἶχαν κάνει ὀνομαστὸ σὲ ὁλόκληρη τὴ γύρω περιοχὴ. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὸν τιμοῦσαν τόσο πολὺ, ὥστε ὁ Ἀββᾶς Πινούφριος ἔφθασε νὰ πιστεύει ὅτι, μετὰ τὴν δόξα καὶ τοὺς ἐπαίνους ποὺ δεχόταν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, εἶχε ἤδη εἰσπράξει τοὺς καρποὺς τῶν κόπων του. Ὁ φόβος λοιπὸν μήπως ἡ μάταιη καὶ ἀνώφελη τιμὴ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ποὺ τοῦ ἦταν ἰδιαίτερα δυσάρεστη καὶ ἐνοχλητική, τοῦ στεροῦσε τοὺς καρποὺς τῆς αἰώνιας ζωῆς, τὸν ἔκανε νὰ φύγει κρυφὰ ἀπὸ τὸ Μοναστήρι του καὶ νὰ καταφύγει στὴν πιὸ ἀπόμακρη περιοχὴ, ὅπου ἀσκοῦνταν οἱ Ταβεννησιῶτες μοναχοί.

Ὁ Ἀββᾶς Πινούφριος δὲν ἀναζήτησε βέβαια τὴν ἀπομόνωση τῆς ἐρήμου καὶ τὴν ἡσυχία γιὰ νὰ ζήσει σύμφωνα μετὰ τὸ θέλημά του, καθὼς βλέπουμε νὰ κάνουν πολλὰ φορὲς μετὰ ἀλαζονικὴ ἔπαρση κάποιοι ἀδόκιμοι μοναχοί, οἱ ὁποῖοι φεύγουν γιατί δὲν θέλουν πιά νὰ ὑπομένουν τὸν κόπο τῆς ὑπακοῆς μέσα στὸ Κοινόβιο. Ὁ Ἀββᾶς Πινούφριος διάλεξε καὶ πάλι τὸ ζυγὸ τῆς κοινοβιακῆς ζωῆς καὶ ἐγκαταβίωσε σ' αὐτὸ τὸ φημισμένο Μοναστήρι τῶν Ταβεννησιωτῶν. Φόρεσε μάλιστα καὶ ροῦχα κοσμικοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀπὸ φόβο μήπως τὸν προδώσει ἡ ἐνδυσμᾶσία τοῦ μοναχοῦ, καὶ μετὰ κτύπησε τὴν πόρτα τοῦ Μοναστηριοῦ.

Οἱ πατέρες ἐκεῖ τὸν ἄφησαν, ὅπως συνήθιζαν, πολλὰς ἡμέρες νὰ περιμένει. Ἐκεῖνος ἔκλαιγε καὶ ἔβαζε μετάνοια σὲ ὅλους, ὑπομένοντας κάθε περιφρονητικὸ λόγο ποὺ ἐκστόμιζαν ἐναντίον του, γιατί ἤθελαν νὰ δοκιμάσουν τὴ γνησιότητα τῆς ἐπιθυμίας ποὺ εἶχε γιὰ νὰ μείνει στὸ Μοναστήρι: «Ὁ λόγος ποὺ σὲ κάνει νὰ θέλεις τὴν καλογερικὴ τώρα στὰ γεράματά σου», τοῦ ἔλεγαν, «δὲν εἶναι ὁ ζῆλος σου γιὰ τὴ μοναχικὴ ζωὴ, ἀλλὰ ἡ ἀνάγκη νὰ βρεῖς γηροκομεῖο καὶ διατροφή». Τελικὰ ὅμως, μετὰ ἀπὸ μερικὲς ἡμέρες, τὸν δέχθηκαν.

Ἐπὶ τῆς ἐκεί ἑνός νεαρὸς ἀδελφὸς στὸν ὁποῖο εἶχαν ἀναθέσει τὸ διακόνημα τοῦ κηπουροῦ. Σ' αὐτὸν παρέδωσαν τὸν Ἀββᾶ Πινούφριο γιὰ βοηθό του. Ὁ Ἀββᾶς Πινούφριος ἐκτελοῦσε ὅλα ὅσα τὸν πρόσταζε ὁ προϊστάμενός του καὶ ὅσα ἐπίσης ἀπαιτοῦσε τὸ διακόνημά του μετὰ ἁγία ταπείνωση, ποὺ προκαλοῦσε σ' ὅλους τὸ θαυμασμό. Ἐπιπλέον, ἐπωφελεῖτο καὶ ἀπὸ τὴ νύχτα, γιὰ νὰ ἐκτελέσει κρυφὰ ὀρισμένες ἀναγκαῖες ἐργασίες, τίς ὁποῖες ἀπέφευγαν νὰ κάνουν οἱ ἄλλοι μοναχοί, ἐπειδὴ τίς βαριοῦνταν ἢ τίς σιχαίνονταν. Βλέποντας τὸ πρῶι οἱ ἀδελφοί ὅ,τι εἶχε ἤδη γίνῃ μιὰ δουλειὰ τόσο πολὺ χρήσιμη, ἔμεναν κατάπληκτοι καὶ ἀποροῦσαν γιὰ τὸ ποιὸς ἄραγε τὴν εἶχε κάνει.

Τρία χρόνια περίπου κύλισαν μέσα σ' αὐτὸ τὸ μόχθο καὶ σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ταπεινὴ ὑποταγὴ, τὴν ὁποία ὁ Ἀββᾶς Πινούφριος εἶχε τόσο ποθήσει. Συνέβη τότε νὰ ἔλθει τυχαῖα στὴ Μονὴ ἑνας ξένος ἀδελφὸς ποὺ γνώριζε τὸν Ἀββᾶ Πινούφριο καὶ ποὺ εἶχε φύγει κι αὐτὸς ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια περιοχὴ τῆς Αἰγύπτου, ἀπ' ὅπου προερχόταν καὶ ὁ Ἀββᾶς. Αὐτὸς λοιπὸν ὁ μοναχὸς τὸν ἀναγνώρισε ἀμέσως χωρὶς κόπο, ἀλλὰ τὰ ροῦχα ποὺ φοροῦσε καὶ τὸ τόσο ταπεινὸ διακόνημά του, τὸν ἔκαναν νὰ διστάζει γιὰ κάποιο διάστημα νὰ τὸν πλησιάσει. Ὅταν ὅμως κάποια ἡμέρα τὸν παρατήρησε καλὰ στὸ πρόσωπο, ὅλες οἱ ἀμφιβολίες του διαλύθηκαν καὶ ἔπεσε ἀμέσως στὰ πόδια του.

Στὴν ἀρχὴ τὸ γεγονὸς αὐτὸ προκάλεσε σ' ὅλη τὴν ἀδελφότητα κατάπληξη, ἡ ὁποία στὴ συνέχεια μετατράπηκε σὲ πόνο, ὅταν ὁ ξένος ἀδελφὸς ἀνήγγειλε τὸ ὄνομα ἐκείνου, στὸν ὁποῖο αὐτὸς μετὰ τόση εὐλάβεια εἶχε βάλει μετάνοια καὶ τοῦ ὁποίου ἡ φήμη τῆς ἀγιότητος τὸν εἶχε κάνει γνωστὸ καὶ στὰ δικά τους μέρη. Οἱ μοναχοὶ ἦταν ἀπαρηγόρητοι ποὺ εἶχαν ἀναθέσει τόσο εὐτελεῖς ἐργασίες σ' ἕναν ἄνθρωπο τέτοιας ἀξίας καὶ ὁ ὁποῖος ἦταν ἐπιπλέον τιμημένος μετὰ τὸ ἀξίωμα τῆς ἱερωσύνης. Πάρ' ὅλα αὐτά, ὁ Ἀββᾶς Πινούφριος ἔχυνε ἄφθονα δάκρυα καὶ ἀπέδιδε στὸ φθόνον τοῦ διαβόλου τὴν ἀτυχὴ συγκυρία, ποὺ τὸν ἔκανε νὰ προδοθεῖ καὶ ἔτσι νὰ φανερωθεῖ ποιὸς πραγματικὰ ἦταν.

Οἱ ἀδελφοί, περιτειχίζοντάς τον σὰν τιμητικὴ φρουρά, τὸν συνόδευσαν πίσω στὸ Μοναστήρι του. Ἀλλὰ κι ἐκεῖ ἔμεινε καὶ πάλι γιὰ πολὺ λίγο. Ἐνοχλημένος γιὰ μιὰ ἀκόμα φορὰ ἀπὸ τίς τιμὲς ποὺ τοῦ ἀπέδιδαν γιὰ τὸ ἀξίωμα ποὺ εἶχε καὶ γιὰ τὴ θέσιν τοῦ Ἠγουμένου ποὺ τοῦ ξαναἔδωσαν, ἔφυγε κρυφὰ καὶ πέρασε στὴν Παλαιστίνη, ποὺ εἶναι ἐπαρχία τῆς Συρίας. Ἐκεῖ ἔγινε δεκτός, ὡς δόκιμος καὶ ἀρχάριος, στὸ Μοναστήρι ποὺ ἐμεῖς ἤμασταν.

Μετὰ ἀπὸ τὴν κατάταξή του στὶς τάξεις τῶν δοκίμων, ὁ Ἠγούμενος ἔδωσε ἐντολὴ νὰ μείνει μαζί μας, στὸ κελὶ μας. Ἀλλὰ οὔτε καὶ ἐκεῖ οἱ ἀρετὲς του καὶ ἡ ἀξία τοῦ μύορεσαν νὰ μείνουν γιὰ πολὺ κρυφές. Ἀφοῦ ἀποκαλύφθηκε ἡ ταυτότητά του μετὰ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο, ὅπως παλαιότερα, ὁδηγήθηκε γιὰ μιὰ ἀκόμη φορὰ στὸ Μοναστήρι του, μετὰ τίς πιὸ μεγάλες ἐκδηλώσεις σεβασμοῦ καὶ τιμῆς. Ἐτσι ἀναγκάστηκε τελικὰ νὰ δεχθεῖ νὰ παραμείνει στὴ θέσιν τοῦ Ἠγουμένου ποὺ εἶχε...



Ὅποιος εἶναι μέλος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας δὲν φοβάται τὸ δεῦτερο θάνατο, δὲν ὑπάρχει θάνατος γιὰ ὅποιον εἶναι μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία μας εἶναι τέλεια, δὲν ἔχει οὐδεμίαν ἀτέλεια.

Γέρων Πορφύριος ὁ Καυσοκαλυβίτης (+1991)

THE FEAST OF THE DORMITION OF THE THEOTOKOS

From an Orthodox pamphlet of the OCA.



This is the last great feast in the Church calendar year, commonly referred to as our Second Pascha, and is preceded by a two-week fast.

The glorious lot of the ever-blessed Virgin in the work of God's salvation of the world made all Her life wonderful and exemplary. After the Crucifixion of Christ, the Mother of God was taken to live in the house of Her

adopted son, the Apostle John. Tradition notes that even after the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, the Mother of God remained in Jerusalem, visiting those places where the Saviour of the world preached, suffered and died. She did not want to leave the country that was dear and holy to Her.

When king Herod Agrippa began to persecute the Church, both the pagans and the Jews, indignant of the respect that the Mother of God was receiving from the Christians, wanted to kill Her. It was during this time that She traveled with Apostle John to Ephesus. Church tradition has this also as the time of Her visit to Cyprus to Bishop Lazarus, who had been raised from the dead after four days, and to Mount Athos. When the persecution ended, the Mother of God returned to Apostle John's house at Zion in Jerusalem.

Once, when She went to the Mount of Olives to pray, Archangel Gabriel appeared and spoke of Her approaching departure from this world. Upon returning home, She told Apostle John all that the Archangel had said to Her and started preparing Herself for Her final day on earth. Friends and relatives gathered, and eleven of the apostles were miraculously transported from various parts of the world to Her deathbed. They were all amazed to see each other there. When Apostle John explained that the Mother of God would soon be departing this world, they understood why God had brought them together and became sad. But She comforted them, saying: "Do not cry and darken My happiness with your sadness. I am going to My Son and your God, and you will bury My body and return each to your work."

As the time of Her death neared, the room shone with a divine light, the roof disappeared, and a wondrous sight appeared before all: the Lord Jesus Christ descended from heaven surrounded by many angels. All looked upon this wondrous

sight with awe and reverence, and when they approached Her bed, the holy body of the Mother of God shone radiantly, and a fragrance of incense pervaded the room.

The apostles carried the body of the Mother of God through the city to Gethsemane, to be buried at Her request in the tomb of Her family and Joseph. They buried Her body, closed the tomb with a stone and remained there at the site in prayer for three days. On the third day Apostle Thomas arrived and was very saddened that he did not find the Mother of God alive. To make him feel better, the other apostles rolled away the stone to let him pay his respects to the body. But on entering the tomb, they found that the body was not there — only the winding sheet. They returned home to partake of a communal meal at which they always left a place for the Resurrected Lord.

After the meal, they raised the bread left for Christ aloft and exclaimed: "Lord, Jesus Christ, help us." And they heard a choir of angels, and when they looked up they saw the Holy Virgin surrounded by angels. She greeted them, saying: "Rejoice, for I am with you through all the days." Then the apostles were filled with joy, and instead of using the usual words, they exclaimed: "Most holy Mother of God, help us." And now they understood and believed that upon the third day after Her dormition, the Mother of God had been resurrected.

Thus, the dormition of the Mother of God is not a sad event, but a joyous one. Her death is but a short sleep, after which follows Her resurrection and ascension to heaven. From the very beginning, the Church saw in the Mother of God the One who would pray for all of mankind. She is the haven of all the mothers in the world. She teaches us how to live in total faithfulness to the will of God. She, who kept in Her heart the divine words, is an example of faithfulness, love and service.



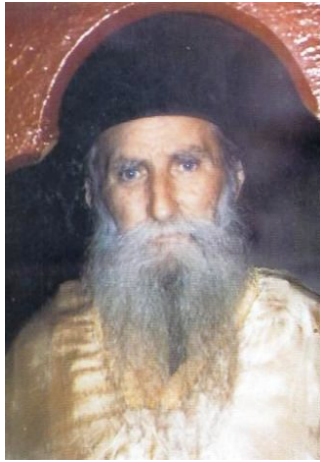
Compel yourselves in the Jesus prayer; this will become everything for you—food and drink and clothing and light and consolation and spiritual life. This prayer becomes everything for him who possesses it. Without it, the emptiness of the soul cannot be satisfied. Do you want to love Christ? Long for the prayer and embrace humility, and then you will realize that the kingdom of God is within us.

Do not let evil thoughts rule over you; drive them out immediately with the prayer. Oh, this prayer—what miracles it performs! Cry out the prayer, and your guardian angel will send you spiritual fragrance! The angels greatly rejoice when a person prays with the prayer of our sweetest Jesus. May Jesus be the delight of your soul.

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

PAPA-DIMITRIS GAGASTATHIS AND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ARCHANGELS

Compiled from "Papa-Dimitri Gagastathis, the man of God (1902-1975)."



To read the autobiography of the Blessed Papa-Dimitri Gagastathis (1902-1975) is to read about the special relationship he had with his heavenly protectors, the Archangels Michael and Gabriel. There are many instances in his life in which they intervened to save his life and guide him along the correct path of God's will. Though he was a married priest with nine daughters, he was an angel in the flesh for his pure

and simple faith, and for this reason his relationship with his heavenly protectors was extraordinarily close that every time he boldly called upon them they immediately responded. Below are a few examples from Papa-Dimitri's autobiography to show how the Archangels once delivered him from error:

On February 22nd, 1943, [pro-communist] guerrilla forces came to the village with many patriotic slogans. In the beginning they looked like saints, just in order to win everyone over. In time, though, they were proven to be *wolves in sheep's clothing*. I was fooled as well and followed them. We provided them with food, clothing, etc. However, from the very first moment I started supporting them, the church of the Archangels would not receive me. Even when I was in there, I felt a pressure to leave quickly, as though somebody was chasing me out. I realized that I had fallen in sin and that I was being chastised for it and I beseeched the Archangels to relieve me.

While I was serving one Sunday, before Doxology, a thought crossed my mind that the Church was being threatened by communism and that I should get sacrificed for Her, according to the Holy Gospel: *I lay down my soul for the sheep*. (Jn 10:11). I made a resolution to preach against communism. After I finished Divine Liturgy, I went to the Archangels and asked them to assist me in the great struggle that was about to start. Immediately the fear left me...

That night, I saw in my sleep two radiant Greek Army officers, who brought me several loaves of bread and said: "Don't be afraid! We are on your side. Nothing will happen to you. Here, take these loaves, because you've got a long way to go—an arduous, hard, and inevitable way. That is for sure the way of victory, but it'll take time. In every danger, we'll be with you. This is the real way of God!"

From then on I resolved to proclaim steadfastly that the communists were the enemies of the Church, Country, and Family. Me, to deny my Christ? Never! They called me in three times for interrogation. They wanted to make me change my mind and keep quiet, just as other priests in our district had done; but I stood firm and prayed to the Archangels to help me with my duty. I didn't sign the declaration they wanted. "I'll die on my duty," I said.

On another occasion the Archangel Michael came to the aid of Papa-Dimitri and rescued him from danger:

On October 20, 1945, Sunday morning, just after I rang the bell, guerrilla troops encircled the village. A nationalist squad had camped in our village, and they wanted to destroy us all. I had just entered the church. On hearing all the commotion, I crossed myself, asked St. Nicholas' help, and ran out quickly. They fired at me with their rifles, but no bullet touched me. I headed towards another village where the nationalist army was. After a short while, eleven horsemen overtook me and drew close enough to start firing their guns at me. **The bullets pierced the cassock, but not me...** They encircled me at about fifty meters and shouted: "Where are you gonna go bearded devil, eh?" (They cursed at me meanly). I lifted up my hands to heaven and cried from the depths of my soul: "Archangel Michael, I'm in danger, save me!" And behold, O great wonder: **Archangel Michael appeared like lightning!** He threw their chief down from his horse, cutting the bands of the saddle with his sword. The chief broke his spinal cord, while the other ten were frozen on the spot. One of them finally told me: "Forgive us, my pastor, go on your way! You've got high protectors!" I replied with: "Thank you." I forgave them and prayed to God to enlighten them so they might repent and become good men. "Always speak the truth," I told them, "and may God be your help."

Papa-Dimitri also records how a demon possessed woman was healed by the power of the Holy Archangels:

In August, 1958, the following happened to a young woman from Platanos. Since her childhood, she had fallen into many carnal sins. Two months ago, she started co-habiting with a fifty-four year old man. The Righteous Judge, though, waited for her repentance. On August 6th, she got possessed by unclean spirits. They beat her a lot and she screamed wildly. She could not see, hear, or recognize anyone. She was in another world.

On August 8th, her relatives called me to read a prayer over her. She gave no response. Then they asked for an icon of the Most Great Archangels to be brought to her. When the icon arrived, a radiant young man with a sword appeared to her—as she herself confessed later—and told her: "Don't be afraid, I'll deliver you from all this. But you have to repent and no longer do what you have been doing thus far. I will protect you, but you must proclaim that the Church has a

living religion for everyone to see and repent.” And immediately—O great wonder!—she became well.

The woman repented indeed and related to everyone what she saw and suffered. She kept saying: “Believe in God and in all His Saints. Believe especially in the grace of the Most Great Archangels—they have great power and can accomplish everything!” When I went to read a prayer over her on another occasion, she came forward to kiss my hand and thank the Archangels for their protection.

These are just a few of many such manifestations of the special bond Papa-Dimitri had with his heavenly protectors. May we follow his example and seek such a close relationship with the Archangels and all the Saints, whom we can boldly call upon and they can also come to our aid in the same special way.



DO NOT JUDGE AND YOU WILL NOT BE JUDGED

From “Athonite Fathers and Athonite Matters”

There was once a layman who went to the Skete of Kavsokalyvia to become a monk. The fathers of the skete, however, wouldn’t accept him, because apart from being idle and negligent, he was mischievous and always causing trouble. Since he felt at ease in the skete, he asked the fathers to allow him to remain there as a layman and do a little work. So, he spent his life in idleness and neglect until the hour of his death, when he finally took to his bed awaiting his death. The fathers stood by him and were continuously at his side.

One day, the man who was about to die was seized by ecstasy and started making signs. The fathers were wondering what was happening! When he came to himself again, he described an awesome event to them:

“I saw the archangel Michael with a piece of paper in his hands, with all my sins on it, and he told me, ‘You see? You did all that, so get ready to go to Hell.’

Then I said to him, ‘Just have a look. Among all those sins, does it mention the sin of judging others?’

The archangel looked and said to me, ‘No it doesn’t.’ ‘In that case,’ I told him, ‘it is not right for me to go to Hell, according to what the Lord said: *do not judge and you will not be judged.*’ (Lk 6:37, Mt 7:1)

Then the archangel Michael tore up the paper with my sins on it. And so, fathers, I will go to Paradise. When you told me that I wouldn’t do for a monk in the skete and I was working as a layman and going to church on feast days, I heard the words of the Gospel, ‘Do not judge and you will not be judged’ and I said to myself, ‘Wretched man, at least you can put that into practice.’ And in this way, I was saved without any other effort.” As soon as he had said these words, he commended his soul to the Archangel Michael.

WARNING: DO NOT PRY INTO GOD’S JUDGMENTS!

From the “Gerontikon of Mount Athos.”

Submit yourself to the will of God and do not pry too closely into God’s judgments, for you can lose your mind. The judgments of God are innumerable and unfathomable.

A monk in the wilderness, imagining that he had attained perfection, prayed to God that He would reveal to him His various judgments in the lives of men. God put the thought in his mind to go to a distant place to inquire of a spiritual elder concerning this.

However, while the monk was on his way, an angel of God in the form of an ordinary man joined him, saying that he too wanted to go to that elder. Thus traveling together, they came upon the house of a God-fearing man, who treated them well, giving them to eat from a silver platter. When they had eaten, the angel took the platter and threw it into the sea. The monk found this both amazing and unjust, but he remained silent.

The second day they came upon the house of another hospitable man who cordially received and treated them as kinsmen. Before leaving, that man brought out his only son for the travelers to bless. The angel of God then took the child by the throat and strangled him.

The monk was greatly angered and asked the angel who he was, and why he had committed such misdeeds. The angel meekly replied to him: “The first man was pleasing to God in all things and had nothing in his house that was attained by injustice except that silver platter. By God’s judgment, I threw that stolen platter away, so that the man would be righteous before God in all things. The other man was pleasing to God and had nothing in his house that would bring down the wrath of God except his son, who—had he matured—would have become a great criminal and a demonic vessel. Therefore, by God’s judgment, I strangled that child in time to save his soul, for the sake of his father’s goodness, and to save the father from many miseries. Behold, such are the mysteries and the unfathomable judgments of God. And you, elder, should return to your cell and not strive vainly by inquiring into that which is in the authority of the One God.”



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.

REASONS WHY OUR INTENTIONS FOR A HOLY LIFE DO NOT PRODUCE RESULTS

From "The Conversations of Metropolitan Gregory of Novgorod," translated from the monthly periodical of St. Panteleimon's Monastery on Mt. Athos, January 1899, pp. 15-19.

The first and foremost reason why our intention to correct ourselves and lead a holy life remains without result lies in the fact that our intention is often too vague and indefinite.

A certain sinner, for example, says to himself: "It's high time for me to stop sinning, time to mend my ways! I repent! I'll stop sinning!" The intention is quite indefinite. And because of this, although it might be sincere, it is unreliable and may not achieve the desired correction.

He who has a sincere desire to amend himself must first of all determine exactly what it is that must be corrected. He must determine what his greatest sin is and what means he must use against it, and what dangers he must avoid so as not to fall into it again, since it has become a habit, a part of his life. All this thought and self-examination must come first and only then should a resolve be made, and that resolve should be specific as, for example: "Enough is enough! With God's help I am no longer going to fall into such-and-such a sin; I'm going to break this bad habit; I'm no longer going to associate with those particular people who encourage me in this habit; I'm going to break off that unhealthy relationship; I'm going to use such-and-such means against this sin; I'm going to arm myself and muster all my forces against it when it begins again to tempt me."

The same thing must also be said about the resolution to lead a righteous life. By no means is it enough to content oneself simply by stating the following resolve: "From this time forth I'm going to lead a God-pleasing life." Such a resolution is not definite enough, and although it may have come from the heart, it is doubtful whether it will have any effect.

He who desires to abandon a life of sin and live a righteous life must first of all examine which obligations he has most difficulty in fulfilling and does not like to fulfill; what exactly hinders their fulfillment; what he must do, what means he must employ to fulfill them more readily. Having done this, he must make a specific resolve, as for example: "Now, with God's help I will try hard to fulfill this obligation which until now I have done so poorly; I will apply myself to using such-and-such means towards its fulfillment. For example, when someone offends me I will be more patient; I won't start using insulting and shameful language, or better yet, I won't answer back at all; in such-and-such company I'll be more careful in what I say; at such-and-such times I'll try

to pray fervently, something I have not done up to now., and so on."

In general, the more definite one's intention to change one's sinful life and live righteously, the more it will suit the particular circumstances, the state of one's soul, one's relationship with others, etc., and the more hope there is of its bringing it into reality. When something is so definite one can more easily direct one's thoughts and one's strength to one subject and thus, of course, more easily achieve the desired goal.

Another reason why our good intentions fail, is because we do not hold firmly enough to our resolve. Scarcely two or three days pass by after our having made our resolution and we, in our normal daily routine of life amidst our worldly cares and pursuits, have already forgotten our intention, although at the time it was made with proper firmness of purpose. For this reason, if we truly wish our good intention to be realized, then each of us, every morning after our morning prayers, must immediately bring to mind and renew our resolution, saying in our hearts: "I promised God to turn away from this particular sin; I really wanted to fulfill this obligation; I must keep my promise!" Having renewed in this way our good intention, we must diligently pray to God that He would grant us the necessary strength to carry it out.

Likewise, our intention must be renewed in this way throughout the course of the day. And when evening comes, we should never go to sleep without having first examined our hearts to see how we have spent the day: did we keep our promise to God? And if it happens that we went against our resolve, against our promise, then we must immediately ask God's forgiveness, and once again renew our resolve and carefully watch over ourselves. This is the way in which those people act who are concerned for the salvation of their souls, and in this way they attain salvation!

The third reason we fail in our intention to lead a better life, is our excessive fear of the difficulties connected with such an undertaking. A holy life is not attained without work, without sufferings and difficulties; it often takes a prolonged and fierce battle. We must withdraw from occasions to sin, of which there are so many. We must sacrifice various enjoyments which are so pleasant, abandon many worldly pursuits which make life interesting, and endure many unpleasant things which because of our self-love are often so difficult to bear.

For example, let us suppose that we resolved to withdraw from our natural inclination to become angry. In order to turn away from anger we must quietly endure a lot of what is to us almost unbearable, and to which our usual response would have been a stream of crude words; sometimes we must not justify ourselves even when we are in the right; often we must be silent when we feel the urge to speak; often

we must give in to others even when the occasion does not demand it; we must often bear the offenses of others and not reveal our irritation; often force ourselves to patiently endure when we are slandered or laughed at like fools and cowards. All this we must endure if we truly desire to realize our intention to withdraw from anger.

Amidst all the difficulties of keeping oneself from anger or any other sin which manifests itself as particularly great, our soul often falls into despondency and all our strength seems to evaporate. In such cases we must immediately bring to mind various sacred truths and experiences which are able to restore our former spirit, our former strength, and give us hope of abandoning the sin from which we decided to turn away. Thus we must remember that no matter how weak a man is, with God's help he can do and endure all things if only he truly desires and uses it; this is accomplished through the strength that is granted by God.

We must remember the millions of righteous ones, who have gone before us and their self-denial, patience and endurance which they left as an example for us and for the whole world. We must remember that, above all, God desires our correction, and because of this, knowing our weakness and our needs, He will unfailingly come to our aid if only we turn to Him with fervent prayer and make use of the means and the power which He has given to us.

We must remember that the difficulties which invariably accompany any important undertaking are intimidating only to the lazy and faint-hearted; that only the first steps along the path of correction are unpleasant and difficult; that the farther one goes along such a path the easier and less painful it becomes; that any victory which we gain over our enemy makes us much stronger and better able to endure any further onslaughts. We must more often remind ourselves of the feeling of peace and satisfaction we shall experience when in the last days and hours of our life we look back at our past, at the difficulties we have heroically overcome, at the many sufferings borne with Christian patience, at the countless temptations conquered by our love for God, at all the noble deeds which we performed in secret before God's eyes alone, at all the favors which we showed our fellow man, at the faithfulness with which we fulfilled our obligations, often forcing ourselves to the utmost to do this.

Finally, we must more often remind ourselves that for all this we will be rewarded by so much in the life of the age to come that all the difficulties which we overcome here in this life, all the sufferings which we endure in this age for the sake of a righteous life, will appear to us much smaller; in fact, they will appear insignificant, in comparison with the heavenly rewards.

O, Almighty God! Now we count each minute of trial and suffering and we rarely consider the blessed eternity which delights the souls of Thy righteous and faithful servants.

Brother! In your striving towards a God-pleasing life, when you weigh your earthly difficulties and grief, place more often on the scale this eternity! It will outweigh all your trials, all the pleasures of worldly pursuits, pleasures and enjoyments.

The fourth reason that our resolution to lead a better life often fails, lies in the fact that we want immediately to become saints. Many people, when they once feel an aversion to their sinful behavior, make a firm resolve to change their ways and place a good beginning towards this reform; but because this doesn't happen as quickly as they would like, and whether by habit or rashness they often fall into their old sins, they lose heart and come to the conclusion that it's impossible for them to change their ways.

Brother! Sister! People don't become saints overnight. Our old man does not easily yield to being transformed into the new man. A big tree is not felled by a single stroke of the ax. So it is with each evil passion which is so firmly rooted in us. The way to perfection or to spiritual maturity is almost always unnoticeable, just as are so many things in nature.

A spiritual man passes through various stages of growth, just like the physical man. Much time is spent in childhood before reaching the fullness and strength of manhood. There is a long period of weakness, and only then does one become stronger and stronger, until finally one becomes a man. Only at this age is one capable of doing what is proper to a man. Likewise, a ripened ear of corn is at first only a seed, then a small blade of grass, then a stalk, and finally an ear of corn; but even this ear is not ripe all at once, but grows, then flowers, then it tassels and only then does it become ripe. The same is true of a righteous, life! Even the best man in the world does not suddenly become a saint. His perfection for the most part develops slowly and only little by little. *Good earth which accepts into itself a good seed brings forth fruit, says the Lord, in patience.* (Lk 8:15).

To fall, of course, is not good, and it were better not to; but he who falls and then quickly gets up, becomes wiser and more careful, renews his good intention, fervently prays to God for new strength to attain a righteous life. Falls are not such a hindrance for such a man on the path to perfection. At the time of his fall, *when he falleth, he shall find a stay*, i.e., strength (Sir 3:31) and like the Apostle Paul, strikes ahead towards the mark of the prize of the high calling, *forgetting those things which are behind* (Phil 3:13).

The above, then, are some of the reasons why our good intentions to turn away from sin and lead a better life are often unfulfilled. Let us avoid these pitfalls; let us try to make our resolution as definite as possible; let us remember more often and continually to renew our decision, and let us not become faint-hearted if we do not at once reach perfection, but let us courageously surmount the difficulties we meet along the way in firm hope of God's help.

SPIRITUAL GROWTH ADVICE

By Metropolitan Philaret (+1985).



From the Editor: Metropolitan Philaret of blessed memory delivered countless sermons and wrote many encyclicals for the edification of the faithful throughout his life. As a young hieromonk in China, he wrote a series of essays for his students. Several decades later, those were compiled into a book by one his faithful assistants, Fr. Nikita Chekiroff. The essays below are selected from a translation of the original book and stand as

a clear exemplification of the Metropolitan's great concern for his flock's spiritual growth.

Mutual Love

Man's primary responsibility in relation to God is love for Him. This love was commanded in the Old Testament where it was said: *Love the Lord, thy God, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.* (Deut 6:5). In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ said that *this is the first and greatest commandment.*

The Saviour united a second commandment to this primary commandment of God's Law, which is to love our brother as ourselves. He said that this commandment *resembles* the first. The Holy Church, basing itself upon these words of the Lord, always established the following order in the moral responsibilities of man: the responsibility of man towards himself stands lowest of all. Man should sacrifice self-love for the sake of love towards God and his brother. Love for one's brother occupies a middle position. It rules over man's love for himself but in its turn submits to the highest love which is the love of man for God Whom he must love above all.

There are those who would say that strong love for God hinders and disturbs man's love for his neighbor. Following this opinion, man must think and care most of all about his responsibilities towards his neighbors, and thereby he will fulfill his obligations in relation to God. People thinking and speaking from this point of view do not see the value of the hermitical life which they consider to be egocentric. A hermit, in their opinion, is a man occupied exclusively with himself and his own salvation and does not think about others at all.

According to the teaching of the Apostle of love, St. John the Theologian, love towards one's neighbor is an indicator of love for God. *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?* No Christian would deny that in being charitable towards our brother, we

serve God by fulfilling His commandment of love. Even less reason is there to think that love for one's neighbor could suffer through "excessive" love for God.

God is love. (1 Jn 18:16). By loving God, we transfer ourselves into a higher spiritual atmosphere—an atmosphere of love and a new *breath of life*. The heart of a Christian, filled with such divine love, sends love everywhere, turns its rays of Christian love upon everyone. In this way, contrary to the opinion cited above, man's love for God not only does not hinder his love for his neighbor, but quite the contrary, it confirms and deepens it.

A wonderful explanation of the bond between love for God and love for neighbor is given by Abba Dorotheos, a desert ascetic and Holy Father of the Orthodox Church. It is illustrated in the following manner: "The center of the circle is God, and the points on the circumference are people. The radii connect them with God, and the arcs connect them with each other. As people move towards the center, towards God, they come closer to one another, just as the distance between the radii grows shorter as they approach the center. Man can come closer to God and others only through love. It follows that in loving God, man will certainly also love his neighbor. The same diagram shows that in drawing close to his neighbor, man naturally draws closer to God. Thus, there are these two kinds of Christian love which are indissolubly and intimately tied to each other."

In the history of Christian ascetics, we constantly read of men and women ablaze with love for God, who left the world with its temptations. They did this by the command of the Apostle of Love who said: *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* (1 Jn 2:15). It is wrong to think that they renounced love for people in the world. No, they themselves repeatedly indicated that they did not run away from people but from the sin spilling over the world, from the temptations of a sinful worldly life. They love their brothers who remained in the world immeasurably more than those living in the world who participated in its sins. We must not forget that the seclusion of these ascetics was always filled with prayer, and that Christian prayer is not only for oneself but also for others.

From the life of St. Pachomios the Great, born in the city of Alexandria, we have the following incident. While in the desert, he learned that his homeland was plagued by famine and epidemics. The saint spent three days in tears and did not eat even that meager food he usually allowed himself. His disciples pleaded with him to fortify himself by partaking of some food, but St. Pachomios replied: "How can I eat when my brothers do not have bread!" What a sign of co-suffering love. How far from his example are even the best of us!

The love of a Christian for God is not only the height of his moral ascension, but also the foundation of his spiritual

being. Without love there can be no spiritual life, no virtue, and all spiritual struggles are useless. The highest service of Christian love, the service of priesthood, can only exist in one who loves Christ. Not without reason did the Saviour, in summoning Apostle Peter to preach, ask him, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?* (Jn 21:15). Christianity is a religion of love: *By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another*, said the Lord. Here, the discussion is not only about mutual Christian love of people for each other, but even more, about filial love and a child's devotion to Him, Whom the Holy Gospel constantly calls *Our Heavenly Father*. That is why the basis of a genuinely Christian life in man is a heart not only having faith in God but also a child's devotion to Him, penetrated by a sincere attraction to Him as towards a loving and dearly beloved Father.

A Christian's Responsibility to Acquire Knowledge of God

As Christians, our first and basic obligation to God is to love Him. Man, however, will not and cannot love those whom he does not know. It follows that we must therefore know God. Sadly, this responsibility is one of the least observed today. It was different in earlier times when there was a marked interest in theological questions, and the thirst for religious knowledge deeply seized Christian souls. St. Gregory the Theologian testifies that, in his time, even tradeswomen at the market, instead of selling their wares preferred to argue about the consubstantiality and seeming substantiality of the Son of God. Now, many intellectuals, even among those writing and speaking about various purely religious topics, are positively afraid of any kind of theology. They consider all its questions and clarifications as rather scholastic and far removed from life.

From here stems the dreadful religious ignorance of so many of us in not knowing the basic truths of our faith. A majority of educated Russians are able to enumerate without a mistake all the rulers of the House of Romanoff, the principal Russian writers, etc. It is considered shameful for an intelligent person not to know this. But ask them to name the most important dogmas of the Christian faith or the names of Christ's twelve Apostles (who did immeasurably more for man than any tsar or writer), in nine out of ten cases the results will be sad indeed. What is worse, ignorance in this area is not still considered shameful, and people admit to it with a light heart.

One cannot deny that it is of utmost importance for each Christian to know the basic content of his faith and its fundamental truths, about the dogma of the Trinity, Divine Love, the Incarnation, the redemptive death and resurrection of the Saviour, about the future fate of the world and of man, etc. These questions are neither alien nor wearisome for man, but full of life and significance, insofar as the very meaning and destiny of his life are decided by them.

All these questions, of course, connect to one: does God exist and Who is He? These questions are of exceptional importance even for people with little faith. But for true believers, to know God is to know what He means for us and, furthermore, to know what His will is in regard to us. This knowledge is the basic, most important and most valuable there is. Christian life itself is determined first of all precisely by the knowledge of God. The Lord Himself, while praying to His Father before His suffering, said that *this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only True God and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent*. (Jn 18:3).



The Incorrupt Relics of Metropolitan Philaret

From all this we see that our immediate Christian obligation is to know God. The way to this knowledge, in addition to spiritual reading, is by means of reflection upon God, purposefully bringing into one's consciousness and then dwelling upon an image of God, His highest characteristics, the work of our salvation, our eternal future, etc. Such thoughts about God were cherished by our righ-

teous forebearers in the Faith, but for many, very many of us, they are unfortunately altogether unfamiliar.

The knowledge of God spoken of here is, of course, not a purely intellectual knowledge received through the faculty of memory. Christianity is life; it rests upon the experience of the heart and is therefore received by different people in different ways. The more a Christian shapes his personal life to accord with the truths and commandments of his faith, a task admitting great internal struggle, the deeper he assimilates Christianity. And on the contrary, if a man relates to his faith dryly, only outwardly and formally, and is not directed in his personal life by the calls from Christ's Holy Gospel, then he does not accept Christianity into his soul and heart, and the deep content of the truths of the Christian faith remain alien to him.

Developing the Will

The moral character and moral value of man's personality depends most of all on the direction and strength of the will. Of course, everyone understands that for a Christian it is

necessary to have: first, a strong and decisive will, and second, a will which is firmly directed toward the good of his neighbor; toward the side of good and not evil.

How is one to develop a strong will? The answer is simple: above all through the exercise of the will. To do this, as with bodily exercise, it is necessary to begin slowly, little by little. However, having begun to exercise one's will in anything (e.g. in a constant struggle with one's sinful habits or whims) this work on oneself must never cease. Moreover, a Christian who wishes to strengthen his will, his character, must from the very beginning avoid all dissipation, disorder and inconsistency of behavior. Otherwise, he will be a person without character, unreliable, a reed shaking in the wind, as we read in Holy Scripture.

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

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

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

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

From what source can man's will draw suitable principles of guidance? For an unbelieving person, an answer to this is extremely difficult and essentially impossible. Are they to be drawn from science? In the first place, science is interested primarily in questions of knowledge and not morals, and secondly, it does not contain anything solid and constant in principles because it is constantly chang-

ing. Are they to be drawn from philosophy? Philosophy teaches about the relativity of its truths and does not claim to their unconditional authority. Are they to be drawn from practical life? Even less. This life itself is in need of positive principles which can remove from it unruly and unprincipled conditions.

But while the answer to the present question is so difficult for unbelievers, for a believing Christian the answer is very simple and very clear. The source of good principles is God's will, and this is revealed to us in the Saviour's teaching, in His Holy Gospel. It alone has an unconditional, steadfast authority in this regard; and it alone teaches us self-sacrifice and Christian freedom, Christian equality and brotherhood (a concept stolen by those outside the Faith). The Lord Himself said of true Christians, *Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father.* (Mt 7:21).

On Reading the Gospel

Let us remember, brethren, the lessons of Holy Scripture, because the Scripture is the book of life. Unfortunately, in many homes it is left on a shelf collecting dust, and some homes do not even possess a copy. For the Christian the Gospel should be close to him at all times. You know that in many cases a scientist or scholar is immediately recognizable. If, for example, he takes a book pertaining to his specialty, you can see as he turns the pages that he feels at home; he orients himself at once, finds what he is searching for, and all this is familiar to him. A Christian should have the same relationship with the Gospels. When he takes into his hands this book of life, it should be apparent that he has a close acquaintance with it, and that it is dear to him. The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, in the last days of His earthly life, forewarned that at the Last Judgment man would be judged by the word which He spoke: *He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.* (Jn 12:48). If at the Last Judgment, when the Lord brings to account all that a man did in his lifetime, both good and bad, it appears that the man had little acquaintance with the Gospel, that he didn't open it, didn't read it, the conversation with him will be very short; i.e., he will be quickly judged. Let us remember this, brethren.

What a wondrous book we have in the holy Gospel. Whoever has the ability to read it properly never tires of reading it. St. John of Kronstadt, Bishop Theophan the Recluse and many others knew the Gospel by heart, and still continued to read it. St. Theophan said that the Gospel of Christ is endlessly deep; the more you read it, the more it remains unread. This holy book is offered to each and every one of us. Let us not be lazy and shamefully indifferent, but with God's help let us begin to apply ourselves to the daily reading of God's word—the holy Gospel.

Modesty

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

The Saviour pointed to this with the following words: *Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.* (Mt 5:27-28).

This law of the psycho-political nature of man is well-known to contemporary perverters, who are consciously striving to corrupt our youth. We remember how in Russia those who prepared the Revolution, and then the communists, began the “spiritual weakening” of our nation by imbuing the youth with shamelessness and depravity. Special circles were organized for this, which spread contempt for the ordinary laws of morality. Such propagation of “free morals” which surrounds us is even greater, frequently being spread even among school age children.

In our days, as in pre-revolutionary times in Russia, this propagation has the definite goal of corrupting contemporary society. This is an old method. History is filled with examples of nations which perished from the spread of depravity. The Lord turned Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes. Babylon fell. The Roman Empire perished. The free West is being subjected to this same corruption... and will likely realize the same results...

What do we see in the life which surrounds us? Indecency and shamelessness in clothing; shameless kissing and embracing on the streets and in public places; shameless advertisements, filthy pornographic literature, and so much more... All of this dissoluteness and perversion pours into life in an immense wave. Truly, there is no less shamelessness now, if not more, than in pagan times when the holy apostles and their successors had to exhort Christians with special zeal in the observance of modesty.

Man's nature is such that in the sins of the flesh, the active role belongs on the one hand to the male sex, while on the other, the temptation comes from women. Because of this, Christian cultures everywhere established customs which helped the preservation of good morals, as well as modest dress for women, so that the exposure of the latter should not evoke sinful thoughts and tempting inclinations in anyone. The more elevated the spiritual culture, the more modest was the dress of the women.

Modesty in dress is our first line of defense. It must guard the purity of women and keep men from the temptation of sinful

desires. Meanwhile, the evocation of precisely these feelings ... characterizes contemporary fashion. What was peculiar before to fallen women who, in plying their base trade, dressed provocatively with the goal of evoking sensuality in men, is now becoming the mode and norm for young women who are often unconscious of the meaning and consequences of this fashion which enslaves them...

We know that the fight against sin which surrounds us on all sides is not an easy matter. The path of salvation is made narrower in proportion to the intensification in the world of evil and apostasy. But the ancient pagan world which surrounded the handful of the first Christians was no less corrupt. These latter, however, did not accede to the temptations of the pagan modes, even as some now do not accede to contemporary temptations.

The Holy Apostle Paul, in his epistle to the Philippians, wrote that they shone as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation: *That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.* (Phil 2:15). A lofty spiritual disposition and irreproachably clean, strictly chaste life—these were the characteristic traits of the Philippian Christians, for which the Apostle Paul praised them.

We live in latter times; nineteen centuries separate us from those days in which the Apostle Paul wrote his epistles. But now, just as the Christians of the first centuries, we are encircled by an environment full of shamelessness and perversion. May the high and holy example of the ancient Christians teach us to be as steadfast and firm in the observance of the laws of Christian morals, and not accede to the temptations which surround us.

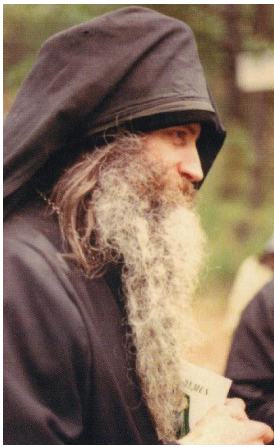


Just as the farmer wears himself by merely plowing, digging and sowing the seed on the ground, but it grows and produces fruit *early and late* (Jas 5:7) by God's gift, so it is in reality, as you will discover, in spiritual matters. It belongs to us to engage in every activity and with much toil and weariness to sow the seeds of virtue, but by God's gift and mercy alone the rain of His loving-kindness and grace falls and causes the unfruitful soil of our hearts to bear fruit. When *the grain of the Word* falls on our souls it receives the moisture of God's goodness; it germinates, grows, and becomes *a great tree* (Mt 13:31-32), that is, it attains to mature manhood, to 'the measure of the stature of *the fullness of Christ*. (Eph 4:13).

St. Symeon the New Theologian
"The Discourses"

SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE [EPH 4:15]

By Fr. Seraphim Rose (+1982).



What a sad and confused time it is in which we live! Those who are striving to be faithful to the true Christianity handed down to our latter times from our Lord Jesus Christ and His Apostles—the true Orthodox Christianity—cannot help but notice the many ways in which Christians today are falling away. They are abandoning the norms and safeguards of true Christianity which the Church has placed

for our protection against the seductive temptations of this world which lies in evil.

Christians are called to be *the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.* (Mt 5:13). This process of Christians losing the savor of Christianity naturally results in what St. Paul calls the “apostasy”—the “falling away” from Christ—that is one of the chief signs of the nearness of Antichrist: *Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.* (2Thes 2:3).

We must therefore be aware of our calling as Orthodox Christians. We must know that we belong to the one Church which Christ established on earth; that through it alone we obtain the grace which we must have to work out our salvation in *fear and trembling* (Phil 2:12); that nothing else is more precious in our lives, and that we must sacrifice everything else in order to remain in the grace of Christ in His Holy Church; that we can offer nothing better to our fellow men than that they *come and see* (Jn 1:46) the life in Christ which is offered in His Church. Especially in our times, when the Church exists in the world like an island in the midst of apostasy and unbelief, each Orthodox Christian is called to be a missionary of the true Faith.

But what kind of missionary? It is possible today to be so preoccupied with the apostasy surrounding one that one becomes simply a boaster in his own righteousness: *I am not as other men are.... I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.* (Lk 18:11-12). This is the phariseism which our Lord condemns. People who are thirsting for the life and truth of Christianity cannot help but reject such phariseism. True Christianity has no room for such vain boasting, nor for merely negative condemnation of the errors of others. If we

wish to lead men to the living water of Christ's grace, and indeed if we wish to save our own souls, *our righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees* (Mt 5:20)—it must be of a different kind entirely: not a dry “correctness” in which we take pride, but a living reflection of the life of grace which Christ has bestowed on us.

We shall be known as the *disciples of Christ if we have love.* (Jn 13:35). This is the chief distinguishing mark of the Christian, as a disciple of the *God Who is Love.* (1 Jn 4:8)

We must speak the truth to those who thirst—for, we must tell men confused by the myriad of opinions and sects that claim the name of Christian that there is a true Christianity, handed down in an unbroken line from Christ and His Apostles to our times. But we must do this in such a loving and positive way that those who listen to our words will hear the message of the heart which Holy Orthodoxy conveys.

Speaking the truth in love is a part of our maturing in Christ, *that we May grow up into Him in all things and come unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.* (Eph 4:15, 13). It is our faith which *worketh by love* (Gal 5:6) that is the test of our Christianity and at the same time is our witness to that remnant of the last humanity that thirsts for this kind of Christianity.



What a grand creature is man – what a wonderful creation of God, created after His own image! If even in a fallen state he is capable of accomplishing the many wonderful works which he has produced and still produces, as we constantly see, both in history and in the present time, then of what might he not be capable in a state of holiness and perfection! But that which in him is above all deserving of attention, wonder, reverence and the most heartfelt gratitude is that he may be likened to his Creator—God; that he is predestined to immortality, to eternal bliss in God, and with God; that he will some day shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of his heavenly Father.

St. John of Kronstadt, from “My Life in Christ”



We ask those of our readers who wish to receive our publication via e-mail (*in the form of a pdf file, of approximately 1.5-2.5 Mb size*) to let us know. It allows us to make available printed issues of “Orthodox Heritage” to more of our fellow Orthodox who are unable to financially support our effort.

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DESPAIR VS. REPENTANCE

Source: "Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky: The Man Behind the Philokalia,"
by Schema-monk Metrophanes.

The following excerpt is taken from a letter written by St. Paisius Velichkovsky to Schema-Abbess Martha Protasieva, when the latter was going through a difficult spiritual struggle.

† † †

I write to your worthiness and beg and counsel you not to grieve overmuch or despair concerning the former trial and infirmity of your soul, but, with undoubting hope in God's mercy, to place before God a true beginning of true repentance for the past infirmities, and to repent with your whole heart and soul and entreat forgiveness of His goodness; and He, being a God Who is good and loves mankind, rejoicing in your true repentance, as He has forgiven all sinners who have repented, will forgive you also all your transgressions, without any doubt.

It also comes to my mind, O Honorable Lady, that Christ the Saviour, our true God, when He wished to entrust the world to His chief disciples and Apostles Peter and Paul, so that they might preach in it His Gospel and by their preaching might instruct those who believed in Him in the true knowledge of God and the keeping of His command-



ments, and so that they might be merciful to sinners and the more easily forgive the transgressions of those who repent—by His Divine and unattainable decrees allowed that Peter should renounce Him three times and Paul should persecute and devastate His Church. And after Peter's true repentance and Paul's miraculous coming to believe in Christ, both of these Holy Apostles, inasmuch as they had known in themselves the weakness of human nature, were therefore most merciful, in

the likeness of Christ the Lord, to those who transgressed and truly repented; and as they bore the burden of everyone on themselves, so also they inspired all to this, saying: *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.* (Gal 6:2).

Was it not somewhat in this fashion that Christ the Saviour, by His unsearchable decrees, allowed the above-mentioned trials and infirmities of soul to come upon you also, so that having beheld the more completely for a long time, as in a mirror, the infirmity of your soul and the weakness of human nature, you might learn to bear the infirmities of the weak and might be more inclined to have mercy on them in the spirit of meekness. Therefore, repenting before God, glorify His unfathomable Providence, which most marvelously ordains the salvation of those who fear Him and repent.

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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SHE WHO GUSHETH FORTH MYRRH, WHO HEALETH HEARTS

From various sources.

From the Editor: One of the holiest items of the Orthodox Church in Russia, the myrrh-streaming icon of the Mother of God "The Softening of Evil Hearts" has been visiting and touring the United States—recently the western states. Faithful in America, in places such as St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery in Arizona, were blessed to venerate one of the most precious treasures of our Faith. "Orthodox Heritage" considers it prudent to present some information on this miraculous icon so that our readers become aware of the holy icon's history as well as some of the many miraculous events associated with this icon and our Most Holy Mother.

† † †

In the town of Bachurino, near Moscow, a chapel has been built in honor of the wonderworking icon of the Mother of God, *The Softening of Evil Hearts*. This small chapel belongs to the parish of the Archangel Michael in the town of Letovo where Archpriest Dimitry Kuvirtalov is the senior priest.

The myrrh-gushing icon is not antique, but contemporary; it was made by the craftsmen at the "Sofrino" factory which makes church merchandise. The swords piercing the Virgin Mary's heart depicted on the icon represent the sorrows She experienced at the crucifixion of Her Son, according to the words of

the prophet Symeon the God-receiver, *a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also...* (Lk 2:35). These swords also represent our own sins with which we grieve the Mother of Our Lord.

The icon began to gush myrrh in the apartment of a pious woman in 1998, after it had been placed on the relics of the blessed Matrona of Moscow, during her glorification on the 2nd of May. It has been streaming myrrh continually since then. The myrrh-gushing icon of the Mother of God, *The Softening of Evil Hearts*, reacts to circumstances and problems brought before Her and to happenings in the world. At times it gushes myrrh abundantly, at other times very little or not at all.

At the threshold of tragic events, the icon bleeds. In 1999, before the terroristic explosions of several apartment buildings in Moscow, in which hundreds of people perished, the Theotokos' face on the icon changed, dark circles appeared under Her eyes, and the apartment began to smell of incense. Then on August 12, 2000, the day of the 'Kursk'

submarine wreck with dozens of crew members on board, tiny bleeding wounds appeared on the icon of the Theotokos. In September of 2001, the icon gave off the smell of blood prior to the attack on the Twin Towers, in New York City. A medical analysis of the blood showed that it is human blood of the "o" (1st) type.

The icon meets worshipers in various ways: it heals some, it helps some, while others cannot even come near it. The



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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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possessed break themselves away with inhuman force and cannot come close to the holy icon, but their resistance weakens every time they visit Her. At the dependency of Optina Monastery in Yasenevo (Moscow), where the image often visits on Sundays, one woman always asks to be forcibly led to venerate the icon.

The icon of the Mother of God chooses Her course Herself; on more than one occasion, they simply could not drive Her to the destination. As they say, “We got lost in three pine trees.” They would forget the road to places where they had been many times before — “the icon won’t go!”

Hundreds of faithful come to pray before this icon, asking Her to soften the hearts of enemies and to ease the sufferings of relatives and acquaintances, and many receive comfort.

The icon of the Mother of God, “The Softening of Evil Hearts” has already been to many places, giving the opportunity to feel the presence of God’s grace to parishioners in many cities in Russia, Belarus, the Ukraine, Georgia, Germany, the USA, Australia, Greece, Cyprus, and Slovakia.

† † †

A Conversation with Sergei Fomin, keeper of the Icon October 26th, 2009

(Between Tatyana Veselkina and Sergei Fomin)

The icon of the Mother of God, *The Softening of Evil Hearts*, has arrived in the USA from Russia. Having become revered in Russia, today this icon is traveling across America. This “ordinary” lithograph, that began to gush myrrh in 1998, has “transformed,” and now many who have seen it cannot tell that it is a lithograph and not an icon that was created long ago. Sergei Leonidovich Fomin, the husband of Margarita (the lady in whose apartment the icon began to gush myrrh), accompanies the icon in Her travels. He relates that he came

to the USA at the invitation of the abbot of the Holy Trinity Monastery in Jordanville, Archimandrite Luke. Fr. Luke had seen the icon during the session of the Local Council in January of this year (2009 Ed.), at which the new Patriarch of All Russia was chosen. The icon gushed myrrh especially abundantly during those days. Then Fr. Luke served in a Moleben (service of intercession, or service of supplication, Ed.) before the icon, and the new patriarch gave his blessing to bring the myrrh-gushing icon to churches and monasteries in the USA.

A serviceman by profession, Sergei Fomin related that he has been accompanying the icon on trips to cities in Russia and abroad for eight years already.

Q: *Please tell us some of the holy icon’s history.*

SF: At first the holy icon was at our home, Akathists were read there, prayers were said... But with time the icon began to gain publicity and it began to be invited to churches in Moscow. It was already becoming difficult to receive people in our home. People who had received help by praying before this icon—some had children born to them, some received healing from illnesses or help at work—donated money, and it became possible for us to build a chapel in honor of this icon, the chapel of *The Softening of Evil Hearts*. Now the chapel has turned into a church, although a small one, with an iconostasis and belfry. Liturgies and Molebens are served in our church in the town of Bachurino, which is five kilometers from Moscow.

This is not the only church in honor of this icon, *The Softening of Evil Hearts*, that has been built over these years. Churches are also being built in places where we have been with this icon. One of them, in Cyprus, not far away from Larnakos, will soon be consecrated. Churches in honor of this

icon have been built in two prisons. One is in the women's section for underage girls in the Ryazan region, where the juvenile criminals serve their sentences for especially heavy crimes, including murder. Our benefactors undertook to build a church there. The girls also helped a lot; they even dug the trench for the foundation under the church building and wrote a song about the icon *The Softener of Evil Hearts*. In Yaroslavl, a chapel in honor of this icon has been built in the men's section. In Altai, in the city of Barnaul, they built a chapel in an orphanage.

The Mother of God travels to prisons, nursing homes, hospitals. Even in Germany we were in several prisons and in a jail. We try to be with it wherever there are Orthodox Russians, Serbs, Romanians. Everywhere, people pray and receive comfort.

Q: *What cities and countries, besides the ones already mentioned, has the icon been to?*

SF: Several times each in Saint Petersburg, Saransk, Cheboksary, Bryansk, Tula, around Yaroslavl and Nizhegorod, in Sevastopol, South-Sakhalinsk, Kostroma, and also in many other cities and villages – it's impossible to tell them all. We have been in Georgia with this icon, a year ago in Greece - on Mount Athos. We are received very warmly in Czechoslovakia, where we always go in May. There, not only the Orthodox come to pray before this icon, but Catholics as well. Cases of healings occur there also: the unbaptized are baptized, Catholics accept the Orthodox faith. And, of course, we also go to our former republics – the Ukraine, Belorussia, Moldavia. Everywhere the icon is received with joy and hope.

Q: *Where in America has the icon already been and where else will it go?*

SF: We were met in the Cathedral of the Sign, of the Archpriests' Synod, in New York, in the neighboring St. Nicholas Cathedral of the Moscow Patriarchate, the Church of the New Martyrs and Confessors of Russia in Brooklyn, St. Seraphim's Church in Sea-Cliff, the Church of the Protection in the city of Nyack, in the church of the venerable Seraphim of Sarov in the 'New Diveyevo' monastery and the home of the elderly attached to it, and St. Nicholas Church in the city of Stratford (state of Connecticut). Everywhere Akathists and Molebens were served; multitudes of people came to the icon to venerate the holy icon and to ask for healing from bodily illnesses, for help in sorrows and afflictions of life, for the softening of their own hearts and those of their neighbors, for help and support for their spirits and souls. We are also

going to go to Boston, Washington, Jordanville, Los Angeles, Arizona, and Chicago.

Q: *Tell us, please, about the especially memorable occurrences of grace-filled help received after prayers before the icon, that you have witnessed.*

SF: There are very many couples, who, according to medical results, can not have children, and after they prayed before this icon, they had children.

Usually people tell of occurrences of help and healings when we come to a city or church for the second time. I remember how in Yalta a paralyzed youth was brought to this icon, and in the same evening he could already walk by himself. But he could not yet speak. And when we came there for the second time, his grandmother asked for at least

a drop of myrrh, and said that if she puts a drop on the boy's tongue, maybe he will speak. And this is indeed what happened.

A similar incident occurred in Barnaul. On the feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God, they brought a four-year-old girl, who had been paralyzed from her birth. After she was helped to venerate the icon, the next day she began trying to walk, for the first time in her life. When we came to Barnaul a year later, her mother donated a golden chain and cross to the Mother of God as a sign of her gratitude.

Before our departure for America the following incident was conveyed to us. A one-and-a-half-year-old girl got herpes of the mouth. The physician to whom her mother turned diagnosed it incorrectly and prescribed the wrong treatment. The girl started to choke. On the advice of her friend, the mother asked for some myrrh and poured the myrrh into the girl's mouth. That day, for the first time in many months, the girl calmly fell asleep. In the morning her whole mouth was clean; only little sores were left, and they quickly began to heal. People describe all these occurrences in detail, and we cannot remain without tears when we read about the grace-filled help of the Mother of God.

We are also told about help in many different life situations. In Yaroslavl, a young woman would frequent the 'New Generation' sect and denied Orthodoxy. On the first day when we had brought the icon to the Tolga women's monastery, her mother came to the icon and prayed, so that she could also bring her daughter to the icon. That same evening they came together, venerated the icon, and in the morning the daughter asked the mother to have her baptized, she left the sect and began to study and grow in



the faith. Her relationship with her mother has improved as well.

In Chelyabinsk, a Moleben before the icon was served in the district administration building. Also during this trip, the mayor of the city of Chelyabinsk was baptized.

Q: *Have you personally experienced the help of the Mother of God yourself after prayers before Her icon?*

SF: A clear occurrence of help, when I was praying very fervently to the Mother of God, occurred on the Sakhalin Peninsula. We go there every January. It is a ten-hour flight. The morning after our arrival, we woke up early and there was a blizzard. All the drivers refused to drive through the hills and passes. To make matters worse, when I walked out of the house, I fell, twisted my ankle and could not walk. We were to drive to a church in the neighboring city of Alexandrovsk.

My companions lifted me up and sat me down in the cross-country vehicle and we drove to the church. The Batushka (priest, Ed.) who was accompanying us said in passing that, if one of the politicians had come, he would have been driven with the best vehicle, yet the Mother of God does not disdain to ride in a cross-country truck...

While we drove, I was very worried that I would not be able to ride any further with the icon, and I prayed for the pain in my foot to go away. In the city they drove me to the hospital. My foot had become swollen and was one big bruise. The doctor bandaged it, and by that evening I could comfortably walk, and the next morning I could even run. When I returned to Moscow, my foot ached a little, but very soon everything healed.

I will convey one more example of faith in and protection by the Mother of God. My good friend, the former commander of the special "Alpha" subdivision of the federal service of security of the Russian Federation, always anointed his soldiers with oil from the icon whenever they would leave to serve in "hot spots," to free hostages, or other special operations, and not a single bullet touched any of them.

Q: Sergei, where will the icon go in the near future?

SF: First of all, we now have our own church. And people come there specifically for the icon of the Mother of God and they are not fond of letting Her go out of the church for long. But the icon is already known, loved and awaited, and it comes not only to large cathedrals, but also to distant villages, to village priests and their few parishioners, where no holy thing has ever been brought.

Our next trips are to France and Belgium. We will also try to take the icon for the festivities of the consecration of the church in Cyprus.

† † †

While Sergei and I were conversing, the crowd kept growing, and the Akathist was served in the overfilled church.

Russians abroad are, in comparison to the faithful people in Russia, more reserved, more collected, and, in my opinion,

less emotional. In silence and with great reverence, people came to the holy icon, prayed lengthily and reverently kissed the little icons, copies of the prototype, that are being passed out as a gift. They stayed in close proximity to *The Softening of Evil Hearts* as long as they could, inhaling the unearthly aroma that the holy icon gives forth.

† † †

A Prayer to the Theotokos before Her Icon "The Softening of Evil Hearts"

O Long-suffering Mother of God, highest among all the daughters of the earth according to Thy purity and the multitude of sufferings, which Thou didst endure on earth! Accept our heavy sighs and protect us under the shelter of Thy mercy. For we know no other refuge and warm mediation, other than Thee. But, as Thou hast boldness before the One born of Thee, help and save us by Thy prayers, that we may reach the Heavenly Kingdom without hindrance, where, together with all the saints, we may sing praises to God, One in Trinity, always, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Troparion, Tone 5

Soften our evil hearts, O Theotokos, and quench the snares of those who hate us, and release any anguish of our souls. Beholding Thy image, we come to compunction from Thy suffering and mercy towards us, and we kiss Thy wounds; and we are aghast at our arrows, piercing Thee. Permit us not, O compassionate Mother, to perish in our hard-heartedness and from the hard-heartedness of our neighbors, for Thou art truly the softening of evil hearts.



If God had not called us to follow His holy way of self-knowledge and to be aware of our previous sinful life, and if divine illumination were absent, we never would have seen the way of light and of truth. He has called us all—some from childhood, others in middle age, others in old age. Being good, He took all of us as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, in order to make us participants in His divine kingdom. He loathed nothing—neither sore nor wound nor sickness nor the deformity of our souls' spiritual features. But as a father He received us, as a mother He suckled us, and as an unmercenary physician He healed and clothed us in the first garment of sonship, of grace, overlooking the great debt of the sins of each one of us.

Therefore, we owe Him infinite love and adoration. May love abide in the heart, as a living fountain gushing forth torrents of water, streams of divine eros. Not as the Israel of old—only honoring with their lips, while their heart was far from Christ—but as living fire saying, "Come to the Father."

Elder Ephraim

From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

CONSTANTINOPLE'S MORAL OVERSIGHT...

By Andrew F. Estocin. Andrew F. Estocin is a lifelong Orthodox Christian who resides in Boston, MA. This article was first published in Touchstone Magazine, March/April 1999.

***From the Editor:** Even though the subject article was written well over a decade ago, the Mother Church's and the GOA hierarchy's continued loud absence in the debate against the evil act of abortion remains as one of the greatest dogmatic and moral scandals for the Orthodox faithful world-wide. We applaud those Orthodox hierarchs and clergy who, against the (apparently "politically correct") stand of the Church's governance, have and continue to this day to speak against this greatest evil of our days. May our Lord and Savior rid this great Nation and His entire creation of the legalized murderous practice of abortion and defend His most innocent and most vulnerable human creations, as they grow in their mothers' womb.*

† † †

“**B**ut among them all [the Greek Orthodox Christians in America], as Ecumenical Patriarch, we desire to single out one man who sums up your love for the Mother Church, for Orthodox culture, for the highest Christian ideals, Senator Paul Sarbanes. We express our fatherly pride in this accomplished son of the Mother Church; for his unwavering pursuit of righteousness and truth in both his public service to the Church and to the people of the United States of America. Well done, good and faithful servant!”

In such terms was Senator Paul Sarbanes of Maryland greeted by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew during his visit to Baltimore on October 24, 1997.

As an Orthodox Christian who looks to the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople with considerable filial love, this writer finds it more than slightly disconcerting to read such adulation directed toward one of the most fervent proponents of abortion rights in the entire US Senate. The Patriarch takes “fatherly pride” in a man whose voting record on abortion evinces a profound antagonism towards human life? To the spiritual leader of a church that regards abortion as infanticide Senator Sarbanes represents “the highest Christian ideals”? Can this really be?

It is precisely as an Orthodox Christian that I pose these questions. Already sharing the shame of a nation that has murdered 36 million unborn human beings since Roe v. Wade, must we Orthodox Christians also be thus embarrassed by such an accolade from the successor of St. Andrew

the Apostle to one of the men responsible for the ongoing atrocity? The voting record of Senator Sarbanes, after all, with respect to the rights of the unborn, represents a sustained bashing of every Christian and humane instinct. Just what was in the mind of the Ecumenical Patriarch when he spoke, in public and on record, such manifest falsehoods?

A Useful Paradigm

The career of Senator Paul Sarbanes serves as a useful paradigm of a very serious moral and pastoral problem confronting the ministry of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the United States right now.

Paul Sarbanes is a US senator from Maryland. As an Orthodox churchman he has taken a highly visible role in the work of International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) and served as a key public figure in gaining the Congressional Gold Medal for Patriarch Bartholomew. He is also a past recipient of the Order of St. Andrew's Patriarch Athenagoras Award for his defense of human rights and is now honored by the Orthodox Church as an Archon of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Why is this last point significant? From the official website

of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, we learn the following information about the rank of Archon and what is expected of a man who holds that rank: “It is the sworn oath of the Archon to defend and promote the Greek Orthodox faith and tradition. His special concern and inter-

Abortion constitutes the absolute greatest violation of humanity's God-granted right to life. For the Orthodox faithful, let the words of one of our Church's holiest fathers, St. Basil the Great, be a reminder to all those who are tempted to think otherwise: *The woman who purposely destroys her unborn child is guilty of murder. The hair-splitting difference between formed and unformed makes no difference to us.*

est is to serve as a bulwark to protect and promote the Holy Patriarchate and its mission... This honor, extended by the Church, carries with it grave responsibilities, deep commitments, and sincere dedication. Consequently, it is of utmost importance that this honor of obligation be bestowed upon individuals of proven Orthodox Christian character, who conform faithfully to the teachings of Christ, and the doctrines, canons, worship, discipline, and encyclicals of the Church.”

This is what is expected of an Archon of the ecumenical patriarchate. But what do we have in Senator Sarbanes? The facts speak for themselves:

On May 20, 1997, and again on September 18, 1998, he was (along with Senator Olympia Snowe of Maine, another Orthodox Christian) among the minority of senators who voted against a ban on partial-birth abortion.

On September 4, 1997, he lent his support to legislation permitting medical experiments on intentionally aborted children as “fetal tissue research.” (The slippery ethical slope created by such legislation leaves open the possibility, perhaps even the likelihood, that children will be conceived solely for the purpose of medical experimentation.)

His voting record (as published by Project Vote-Smart) has received a 100 percent approval rating from the pro-abortion organizations Planned Parenthood USA and Zero Population Growth.

The Pastoral Problem

There seems to be a larger problem here, however. From the perspective of proper moral direction, one may argue the case that Orthodox Christians in America who fall under the pastoral care of the Ecumenical Patriarch are not being very well shepherded right now, and perhaps the Patriarch's lamentable greeting to Senator Sarbanes should be taken as only a more egregious symptom of a more serious illness.

I suggest that it is time for Orthodox Christians in America to begin questioning the pastoral leadership of the Ecumenical Patriarchate with respect to its stewardship of Orthodox Christian Tradition in America. Put simply: the Ecumenical Patriarchate has severely neglected, and continues to neglect, pro-life and other pivotal social issues in its American ministry.

This neglect is readily noticeable if one compares the relative silence of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America on pro-life issues with the active involvement of other Orthodox hierarchies in this country.

Consider, for example, the amicus curiae brief (refer to the last part of this article, Ed.) filed on February 21, 1989, on behalf of Orthodox Christians in America in the famous Webster case before the Supreme Court (also printed in Touchstone, Spring 1992, pp 15-20). This was arguably the strongest and clearest statement on the evil of abortion to come from Orthodox auspices in America.

Yet Bishop (now Metropolitan) Maximos of Pittsburgh was the only Greek Orthodox bishop among the many signers of that document, in contrast to the unanimous signatures of the ranking hierarchs from the Russian (OCA, ROCOR), Antiochian, Serbian, Ukrainian, and Romanian jurisdictions.

A full half of the Orthodox in America belong to the Greek Orthodox archdiocese, whose spiritual leaders were—with the exception of one bishop—completely silent on that solemn occasion.

That was a decade ago. The situation is worse today, especially since the elevation of Patriarch Bartholomew to the see of Constantinople. The new patriarch, it seems, prefers the more popular and politically correct moral concerns, like environmental awareness. Only rarely does he speak out on issues such as abortion, euthanasia, and the role of the family in civil society. For this reason his voice is muted of the sorts of prophetic tones that aid in the formation of consciences.

If this is the case with Patriarch Bartholomew, what shall we say of his chief representative in the United States, the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of America? Does anyone remember the latter's ever giving the slightest clear directive with regard to any major moral or social issue of the day? Last year's an-

niversary of Roe v. Wade came and went, without one word of notice from either man.

If the Ecumenical Patriarch's American flock is demoralized right now—and newspaper reports around the country show that it is—how could we expect otherwise when moral apathy on the part of some spiritual leaders has compromised the integrity of Orthodox Christianity's voice in America's public square?

A Numbing Moral Silence

Have both the Patriarch of Constantinople and the Greek archbishop of America become, to use the words of David Gerletner, "individuals who dine at Macbeth's house while pretending not to see Banquo's ghost"? When the Archbishop of America reminded the faithful during his pastoral visits to Greece that to be "fully respectful of our personhood, we must respect and honor the personhood of each and every other human being," how was it possible to take him seriously, when he remains silent on abortion and on the tragedy of documented participation in America's abortion culture by Senator Sarbanes, one of the most prominent members of his flock?

Given the numbing moral silence from Constantinople and the latter's representative in this country, it may indeed be time for all Orthodox Christians in America to unite their voices in addressing our growing moral crisis. It is time for Orthodox Christians to stand up to men like Paul Sarbanes and his legislative agenda and to recognize that the Patriarchate's public and official recognition of him seriously distorts the message of the gospel in this country.

† † †

AMICUS BRIEF TO THE SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

BY THE HOLY ORTHODOX CHURCH

WEBSTER VS. PLANNED PARENTHOOD – 1988

Interest of Amicus Curiae*

The Holy Orthodox Church was founded by Jesus Christ and the Apostles, and bears witness to that continuous and unbroken faith. The precepts of the Orthodox Christian faith mandate the protection of innocent human life, especially that of unborn children. The Church regards abortion as murder, and as such, takes a very active role in opposing legalized abortion. That the issue of abortion has both a moral and a legal dimension to it, is indisputable. However, this cannot in any way be equated to an assertion that the two aspects are disparate, or unrelated. Rather, the two have historically been intertwined; it must be recognized that laws have traditionally been positive expressions of moral norms.

The Framers of the Constitution discerned a divine presence not only in daily living, but as reflected in the Constitution itself. "It is impossible for any man of pious reflection not to perceive in it a finger of that Almighty hand which has been so frequently and signally extended to our relief in the

critical stages of the revolutionary.” That is, a law must of its very nature have a moral component to it, which cannot be divorced from the law itself.

Legal precepts, particularly those of constitutional proportions, simply cannot be judged in a vacuum. This notion not only predates the Constitution; it is at the very heart of our civilization. The foundations of our morality can be found in the dawn and early morning light of the Judeo-Christian tradition, of which the Orthodox Church is a unique custodian. From its inception nearly two thousand years ago, it has never deviated from its condemnation of abortion, based on numerous scriptural references and the teaching of the Holy Fathers of the Church. The Church regards the Roe v. Wade decision as a gruesome turn on the road of judicial activism, having resulted in a holocaust which has claimed at least twenty million innocent lives.

Summary of Argument

In this case, the Holy Orthodox Church seeks to restore to our nation’s law the highest principle which a civilized society can espouse—the recognition that all human life is sacred.

In *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973), the Supreme Court relied heavily upon its presentation of historic Christianity’s teaching and practices. The assertions made in *Roe* were erroneous, and have no foundation in the church’s traditions. Rather than being ambivalent, or even condoning abortion, as suggested by the *Roe* Court’s opinion, historic Christianity has always condemned abortion as murder, without regard for any distinctions as to fetal development or viability.

The *Roe* Court also blurred the factual question of when life begins with the distinct legal question of what constitutional value attends to that life. The resulting confusion has tied the hands of legislators, and elevated abortion to the status of a near-absolute right. Unless this Court takes judicial notice, the factual question of when life begins is properly a subject for legislative findings. The strictly legal question of a life’s constitutional value is the clear issue before this Court, as the State of Missouri has made an appropriate factual determination.

Science and history both mandate a conclusion that human life and constitutional personhood are coextensive, and any other result is without foundation in American jurisprudence. Consequently, the Holy Orthodox Church urges this Court to overrule *Roe v. Wade*, and accord full constitutional protection to all human life beginning at conception.

† † †

(*)AMICUS CURIAE is literally translated as “friend of the court.” A person with strong interest in or views on the subject matter of an action, but not a party to the action, may petition the court for permission to file a brief, ostensibly on behalf of a party but actually to suggest a rationale consistent with its own views. Such amicus curiae briefs are commonly filed in appeals concerning matters of a broad public interest.

RUSSIAN BUSINESSMAN SEEKS “ORTHODOX TRANSFIGURATION OF RUSSIA”

By Thaddeus M. Baklinski, from LifeSiteNews.com.



The head of a large dairy company near Moscow has informed his 6,000 workers that company policy will require all employees to closely follow the teachings and precepts of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Vasily Boiko-Veliki, director of Russkoe Moloko (Russian Milk), told Ekho Moskvyy radio that the company was established to promote the Orthodox revival of Russia, and the rules were meant “to prevent future sins by employees.”

“We have about 6,000 employees, most of whom are Orthodox, and I expect them to be faithful and to repent,” Boiko-Veliki said.

Answering the question if he employs only Orthodox believers, Boiko-Veliki said, “There is no limitation, but baptized people mostly come, whose goals in life coincide with ours, the Orthodox transfiguration of Russia.”

The new rules require all Orthodox Christian employees who are civilly married or living together to be married in Russian Orthodox Church ceremonies by October 14, the feast of the Protection (Pokrov) of the Mother of God, or face the possibility of dismissal. Newly-hired Orthodox employees who had been married in civil ceremonies would be given three months to have a religious wedding.

Boiko-Veliki explained that those who are not baptized do not have to marry in the church, but all employees will be able to take an educational course on basic Orthodox culture.

The new rules also state that anyone procuring or counseling for abortion would face dismissal from work.

“Abortion is the murder of someone. We do not want to work with murderers,” Boiko-Veliki told Ekho Moskvyy.

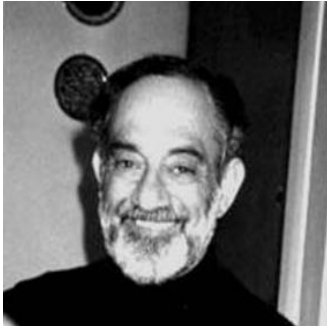
Vladimir Vigilyansky, head of the Russian Orthodox Church’s Patriarchal press service, told the media that the Patriarchate was critical of Boiko-Veliki’s methods of spiritual transfiguration at a private company, but noted that the church in Russia has undergone a marked revival since the collapse of Communism.

The Russian businessman commented on the prolonged heat wave and resultant forest fires that are plaguing the western part of the country, and said that a return to the practices of the faith, such as sacramental marriages, could improve things.

“This summer of abnormal heat and drought is a judgment upon Russia’s godless ways,” Boiko-Veliki told Gazeta.ru. “Our prayers are probably too weak and there is no repentance in our hearts...”

OUR LIFE IN CHRIST

By Protopresbyter John Romanides (+2001), translated from the French by James L. Kelley. "La Vie dans Christ" originally appeared in SYNAXE, no. 21 (p. 26-28) and no. 22 (p. 23-26).



The sacred task that faces Orthodoxy today, and in particular its youth, who are often lost in the liberalism of past generations, is the rediscovery of the Paschal victory in the daily life of the Church. The common faith and worship of the Apostles and the Fathers remains essentially unchanged in our liturgical and canonical books, but in practice, in the spirit of clergy and faithful, there is great confusion, no doubt due to a lack of spiritual understanding of the very nature of the work of Christ in the Church. Thus, many people who claim to be Orthodox and who sincerely want to be, conceive of the life of the Church according to vague personal sentiments and not according to the spirit of the Apostles and Fathers of the Church. What is lacking is a living acceptance (*acceptation vivante*) that presupposes the sacramental life of the Church.

This lack of understanding explains to a large extent the weaknesses of the Church in the Western world and, in particular, characterizes its attitude toward various schisms and heresies. Those who cannot understand that *the Spirit itself bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God* (Rom 8:16) cannot preach the truth, but must ask themselves the question: Are not they themselves outside the Truth and, therefore, dead members of the Church?

Presuppositions of Sacramental Life

In contrast to most Western religions that generally accept death as a normal phenomenon, or even regard it as a result of a legal decision of God to punish the sinner, the Patristic Tradition of the [Christian] East takes very seriously the fact that *death is intrinsically linked to sin* (1 Cor 15:56) and that it is *under the power of the Devil* (Heb 2:14). The Fathers of the [Christian] East rejected the idea that God is the author of death, that the world is "normal" in its current condition, and that man can live a "normal" life solely based on following natural laws that are assumed to govern the universe.

The Orthodox conception of the universe is incompatible with a static system of natural moral laws. The world is, on the contrary, seen as a field of action and struggle of living persons. A living and personal God is the originator of creation in its entirety. His omnipresence does not exclude, however, other wills, themselves established by Him even with the power to dismiss the will of their Creator. Thus, the Devil

is not only able to exist, but also to aspire to the destruction of works of God. He does this by trying to lure the creation toward the nothingness from which it was formed.

Death, which is a *return to nothingness* (St. Athanasius, *Incarnatio Verbi*, 4-5), constitutes the very essence of *demonic power in creation* (Rom 8:19-22). The resurrection of Christ in the very reality of *His flesh and his bones* (Lk 24:39) not only serves as proof of the "abnormal" character of death, but also designates it as the true *enemy* (1 Cor. 15:26). But if death is an abnormal phenomenon, there can be nothing resembling a "moral law" inherent in the universe. The Bible, at least, does not know of one (Rom 8:19-22). Otherwise, the Lord Jesus Christ gave himself in vain *for our sins so that we might uproot this present evil age*.

The destiny of man has been perfection since his origin, and is the same today: *to become perfect, as God is perfect*. (Eph 5:1, 4:13). The achievement of this perfection was rendered impossible by the *coming of death into the world* (Rom 5:12), for *the sting of death is sin*. (1 Cor 15:56). Once submitted to the power of death, man can only concern himself with the sufficiency of the *flesh* (Rom 7:14-25). His instinct for self-preservation saturates his everyday life and often leads him to be *unfair* to others for personal gain (1 Thes 4:6). A man subjected to the *fear of death* (Heb 2:15) cannot live the life of love of the Creator and be an *imitator of God* (Eph 5:1). Death and the instinct for self-preservation are at the root of sin that separates man from unity in love, life, and divine truth.

According to St. Cyril of Alexandria, death is the enemy that prevents man from loving God and neighbor without anxiety or concern for his own security and his own comfort. For fear of becoming valueless and meaningless, man seeks to demonstrate to himself and to others that he is really worth something. He is then obliged to make himself appear, at least from a certain point of view, superior to others. *He loves those who flatter him and hates those who insult him*. An insult profoundly affects a man who is afraid of becoming insignificant! Whoever the world sees as a "natural man" almost always lives a life of half-lies and of disappointments. He cannot love his friends who give him a sense of security, while his instinct for self-preservation, both moral and physical, causes him to *hate his enemies* (Mt 5:46-48; Lk 6:32-36).

Death is the source of individualism: it has the power to enslave the free will of man completely to the *body of death* (Rom 7:18). It is death which, by reducing mankind to self-centeredness and egotism, blinds men to the truth. And the truth is rejected by many, because it is too difficult to accept. Man always prefers to accept a truth that satisfies his personal desires. Mankind seeks security and happiness rather than the *sufferance of a love* that is a self-offering (Phil 1:27-29). The natural man seeks a sentimental religion of security in moral precepts and simple rules that generate feelings of comfort,

but require no effort at self-denial in *death with Christ to the elements of the world*. (Col 2:20).

The Apostles and Fathers do not transmit to us a faith accomplished in “feelings of piety or comfort.” Instead, on every page they raise a cry of victory over death and corruption. *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* (1 Cor 15:55-57).

The victory of Christ over the devil has destroyed the power of death that *separated man* from God and neighbor (Eph. 2:13-22). This victory over death and corruption has been accomplished in the flesh of Christ, as well as among the just ones *who have died before* (1 Pet 3:19). *Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life.* (Paschal Hymn). The Kingdom of God is already established, both beyond the grave and on this side of it (Eph 2:19). The gates of hell *cannot prevail over* the Body of Christ (Mt 16:18). The power of death cannot seize the kingdom of life. Each day the Devil and his kingdom moves a little closer to their final *defeat* (1 Cor 15:26), which is assured in the Body of Christ.

Sacramental Participation in the Victory of the Cross

Participation in the *victory of the Cross* is not only a hope for the future, but a present reality (Eph 2:13-22). It is given to those who are *baptized* (Rom 6:3-4) and grafted into the *Body of Christ* (Jn 15:1-8). There is nevertheless no magical *guarantee* of salvation and of continued participation in the life of Christ (Rom 9:19-20).

Christ came to destroy the power of disunity, uniting those who believe in him in his own Body. The external sign of the Church is *unity of love* (Jn 17:23), while the center and the source of this unity is the Eucharist: *For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.* (1 Cor 10:17). Baptism and Confirmation grafts us to the Body of Christ, while the Eucharist keeps us alive in Christ and united with each other by the inhabitation of the *Holy Spirit in our body*. (1 Cor 6:19-20).

Faith is insufficient for salvation. The catechumens who were already “believers” had to stay vigilant before receiving baptism in rejecting anything that the world sees as “normal life” in the corrupt body of sin and death; they had to be resurrected in the unity of the Spirit, that is to say, to be united with other members of a local community in Christ and the communal life of love. Orthodoxy knows nothing of a sentimental love for humanity. It is with concrete individuals that we must be united to live in Christ. The only way that leads to the love of Christ is that of a real love for others. *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* (Mt 25:40).

Love in the Body of Christ does not consist in vague abstractions expressing the need to serve ideologies or human causes. Love, according to the image of Christ, consists in being crucified to the world and is the liberation of the self from all vague ideas in order to live in the complexity of communal life, seeking to love Christ in the body of brethren who have a very real existence.

It is easy to talk about love and goodness, but it is very difficult to enter into sincere and intimate relationships with people of diverse origins. It is, however, the death and resurrection in Christ that has established a community of saints who think not of themselves, nor of their own opinions, but continually express their love for Christ and other men, seeking to humble themselves as Christ was humiliated. What was not possible under the law of death has become possible through unity in the Spirit of life.

How We May Achieve the Victory of the Cross

Throughout its history, the Church has had to fight sin and corruption within its own members, and often within its clergy. However, in every epoch She knew how to implement the appropriate means, as She always remained able to recognize the enemy. The Church exists in the truth not because all its members are without sin, but because the sacramental life is always present in Her and against Her the Devil is defenseless. *When you often assemble in one place (epi to auto), the power of Satan is destroyed.* (St. Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Ephesians, 13).

Whenever members of a community gather to celebrate the Eucharist and are in the condition to exchange the kiss of peace to commune together in the Body and Blood of Christ, the devil is defeated. However, when a member of the Body of Christ communes unworthily, he eats and drinks damnation: *For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.* (1 Cor 11:29). When a Christian does not commune at all with the Body and Blood of Christ in every Eucharist, he is *spiritually dead* (Jn 6:53).

The Church has categorically refused to endorse the practice whereby a large number of Christians attend the Eucharist, while a few commune. Guidance, participation in prayer and communion are inseparable (7th Apostolic Canon; St. John Chrysostom, 3rd Homily On Ephesians). *Let no one be deceived: if somebody is outside the sanctuary, he is deprived of the Bread of God... he who does not gather together with the Church has shown his pride and has condemned himself.* (St. Ignatius of Antioch, Eph. 5).

The Biblical and Patristic tradition is unanimous on one point: The one who is a living member of the Body of Christ is one who is dead to the power of death and who lives in the renewal of the Spirit of life. For this very reason, those who denied Christ during persecution, even after hours of torture, were considered excommunicated. Once a Christian

died with Christ in baptism, he was expected to be ready to die anytime in the name of Christ. *But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.* (Mt 10:33).

The 10th Canon of the First Ecumenical Council does not merely prohibit the ordination of anyone who has denied Christ during the persecution, but declares the automatic invalidation of any such ordination, even if it took place in ignorance of the ordainer. All who have performed such an ordination are themselves deprived of the priesthood. What serious breakers of the vows of baptism are those who are too lazy to go to church. The approval that our clergy today gives our sacramental practice is even more unacceptable! If the Christian was excommunicated for having denied Christ after hours of physical torture, those who week after week excommunicate themselves are all the more condemnable.

The character and methods of the Devil have not changed. He has remained similar to himself, as Paul described, capable of *transforming into an angel of light.* (2 Cor 11:15). The power of death in the world remains the same. The means of salvation, the death of baptism and the life of the Eucharist, have thus remained the same (at least in the liturgical books of the Church). The canons of the Church were never changed. We always read the same Scriptures approved by the Fathers. How then can we explain our modern weaknesses? They have never been so evident.

There can be only one answer to this question. The members of the Church are not fighting evil in the spirit of the Bible. Too many Christians employ the Church for their own interests and interpret the doctrine of Christ according to their own feelings. The essential task of the Orthodox youth today must be to return to the truth of the Apostles and the Fathers and to not walk according to the laws of the prince of darkness and the elements of this world. It is for this reason that Christ died. To deny this is to deny his Cross and the blood of martyrs. Before criticizing the "inflexibility" of patristic doctrine, the modern Orthodox must return to the presuppositions of life in Christ in Scripture and be careful not to pervert the doctrine of Christ.



In general, avoid anything that incites even a bit your old man, if you wish to keep your mental and physical health. You should know that every trauma caused out of carelessness in the world, either minor or major, will cause you to lag. Then, an experienced spiritual doctor will be needed to look after you and, of course, all of these changes will cause you to suffer.

Blessed Elder Paisios the Athonite

THE PUNISHMENT OF GOD

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich, from his "Prologue."

God does not punish sinners because it gives Him gratification to destroy men. If that gave Him gratification, He would not have created man out of nothing. He punishes man out of more important constructive reasons, of which two are most apparent to us: First, that by punishment He corrects him and leads him on the true path of salvation; second, to frighten others from sinning.

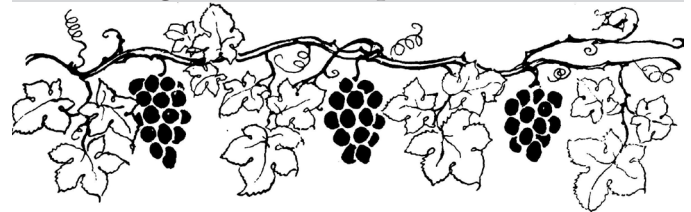
St. Isaac also thinks this when he says, "The just wise man is similar to God, for he punishes man, not to reproach him for his sin but either to correct man or to instill fear in others."

One recalcitrant young man, who ridiculed God and his parents, suddenly went insane. The entire city in which this young man lived saw, in this, the punishment of God and were terrified with the fear of God. The young man was held bound and isolated for three years. His mother wept bitterly and prayed to God for her son. One year, during the Feast of Pentecost, the mother brought her insane son to the monastery of St. Basil in Ostrog. After prayers, the insane youth was cured and became himself again. After that, he became an exemplary person and a true Christian.



Born into this world, we are bound to it by the strong bonds of kinship. We love the world. Within its bounds we fashion our eternity. But we suffer in it—it cramps the love commanded of us. We cannot fail to love it but this does not mean walking its fallen ways. We cannot help loving the world but when our attraction to it triumphs over our love for God, we must find the strength in ourselves to act like Abraham—*take the fire in our hand, and a knife*, and offer in sacrifice *all that we hold dear for the sake of the victory of Divine love in us.*

Righteous Elder Sophrony of Essex (+1993)



Please be advised that, in the event of a move, it is necessary to provide us with your new address at your earliest convenience. The Post Office does not forward bulk mail nor do they send it back to us. Our issues are simply discarded in their trash!

AN ORTHODOX WARRIOR HAS FALLEN ASLEEP IN THE LORD

BISHOP AVGoustINOS KANTIOTIS: APRIL 20TH, 1907 – AUGUST 28TH, 2010

By the staff of "Orthodox Heritage."



On Saturday, August 28th 2010, on the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos per the Old Calendar followed on the Holy Mountain, at 05:00 a.m., the saintly bishop and great Orthodox warrior, His Eminence Metropolitan Avgoustinos Kantiotis of Florina fell asleep in the Lord. He left his earthly home and is now among angels and saints in Paradise. He was 104 years young...

He had been ill for a long time and in the hospital since suffering a stroke on August 2nd. He had been improving but on August 27th, a severe kidney malfunction presented his elderly body with a severe set back which he was unable to overcome. Illnesses were nothing new for bishop Avgoustinos; since his 50's, he had numerous "close calls," yet time after time he was healed, often miraculously, until our Lord called him into His Kingdom on August 28th.

Metropolitan Avgoustinos Kantiotis was born in Paros on April 20th, 1907. He graduated from the Theological School of Athens in 1929. In 1935 he was ordained a deacon and in 1942 became a presbyter. He had served as Chancellor of the Metropolis of Aitolia, a military priest, and a preacher in Athens. He issued dozens of periodicals, founded boarding schools, was the founder of "O Stavros" theological brotherhood, and was most noted as a fiery preacher throughout Greece. On June 25th, 1967 he was enthroned as Metropolitan of Florina. On January 14th, 2000 he retired.

Bishop Avgoustinos was a defender of traditional Greek Orthodox beliefs. He was a writer of spiritual literature and was credited for being a major force in the spiritual renewal of Greece, and the establishment of traditional Orthodox theology. He preached countless sermons, which have been recorded and distributed worldwide. For many years he was at the forefront of the anti-ecumenism movement which he believed contradicted the basic principles of Greek Orthodoxy. The Elder was known for his conservative activism and ideals. The Metropolitan published over 80 books in Greek, of which

over 25 have appeared in English, and other languages, and was known as a classic writer in the English speaking world of Orthodox Christianity.

A couple of events leading to his earthly departure are worth noting:

Just a few hours just before he fell asleep, a group of parents came with their young children to kiss the hand and receive the elderly bishop's blessing. Among them were a couple of twin siblings, approximately five years old. They reverently kissed the hand of the hierarch and as they were leaving, one of them turns to his mother and says:

- Mother, he appears so very young!

One of the priests present at the hierarch's side, Fr. Ierotheos, heard the young boy and replied:

- Yes, he is young indeed... He is 104 years young!

The young boy remained at the door, staring at the bishop and saying:

- Indeed, he is not old at all; he is so very young.

His sibling, with eyes wide and a smile in the face added:

- And he is so very beautiful!...

What is it that the innocent eyes of these very young children saw that we, the older sinful adults could not see? It is apparent, however, that the saintly nature of this hierarch was not hidden from the innocent eyes of the twin boys.

The attending doctor and surgeon, Dr. Evgenios Bairamithis, was at Bishop Avgoustinos' bedside all night long, just before his falling asleep. Around midnight, he was intensely staring at the peaceful face of the Elder that was showing neither signs of any type of pain or alteration, nor difficulty for the prevalence of pulmonary insufficiency of the last 24 hours and with admiration exclaimed:

- Look at the Elder's face! It has a beautiful rose color and it looks so

very peaceful! If this is not miracle, then what is it?

It should be noted that the concurrent presence of a severe kidney malfunction and pulmonary insufficiency leads to the natural discoloring and darkening (close to a dark blue color) to the faces of "normal" persons. In the case of the saintly bishop however, this did not occur; it was simply not God's will for this discoloration to occur...

Let sadness NOT prevail among the faithful for the Elder's departure. Let us remind ourselves that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is alive and His saints never die. The elderly Orthodox warrior, Bishop Avgoustinos, is now part of the Church Triumphant where his intercessions on behalf of the fighting flock will surely be received with greater candor by God; he shall remain on their side, a partner for the battle in His Name, to the end of time!



In one of his homilies, he espoused:

“One day, I will no longer be here with you, not in this body. Where will I be? You need not worry and instead remember what I am about to tell you: know that wherever I go, wherever I am, if and when I see that our Holy Orthodoxy is in danger, I will create a revolution and I will strike the alarm for all to hear. I will not leave the Church of Christ neither in the hands of the atheists nor in the hands of the Masons and the ecumenists.”

It would be good that the ecumenist bishops show some respect towards the holy Elder and stay away from Florina—they can “celebrate” his departure in their own back yard. We are certain that the holy bishop would wish to do away with the presence of ecumenists in his funeral...

The faithful flock must remain strong and do away with its sadness for the falling asleep of bishop Avgoustinos; the faithless and heretical crowd would be well served to avoid any celebration for our loss, thinking that the holy Elder's voice has been silenced forever.

His Eminence exists within the countless spiritual material that he has left behind; it is all a powerful intellectual arsenal, that on a moment's notice and in every worthy battle the Elder will re-appear with his spiritual inheritance to disturb their plans, destroy their evil intent and protect our Lord's flock. The enemies of Orthodoxy need know that the 104 year-old hierarch is far from being silenced. He will always be present in the front lines of any warfare with the heretics and the ecumenists but with one exception: their arrows of misinformation, gossip, and ill intent can no longer harm him...

May Metropolitan Avgoustinos' memory be eternal and may we have his blessing!



Pray and then speak. That's what to do with your children. If you are constantly lecturing them, you'll become tiresome and when they grow up they'll feel a kind of oppression. Prefer prayer and speak to them through prayer. Speak to God and God will speak to their hearts. That is, you shouldn't give guidance to your children with a voice that they hear with their ears. You may do this too, but above all you should speak to God about your children. Say, “Lord Jesus Christ, give Your light to my children. I entrust them to You. You gave them to me, but I am weak and unable to guide them, so, please, illuminate them.” And God will speak to them and they will say to themselves, “Oh dear, I shouldn't have upset Mummy by doing that!” And with the grace of God this will come from their heart.

Elder Porphyrios (+1991)

PRAYER WITH PAIN OF HEART

By Elder Paisios the Athonite, from the book by Athanasios Rakovalis, “Talks with Father Paisios.”

First of all, Elder Paisios tells us that, for love to blossom in the heart, we must pray with pain of heart. Once he was asked:

- We pray, Elder, and our thoughts go here and there. Why?

- Because it is prayer without pain! To pray with the heart, we must hurt. Just as when we hit our hand or some other part of our body, our nous is gathered to the point we are hurting, so also for the mind to gather in the heart, the heart must hurt.

The Elder was then asked:

- How can we preserve ourselves in this state when we don't have some problem, some pain?

- We should make the other's pain our own! We must love the other, must hurt for him, so that we can pray for him. We must come out little by little from our own self and begin to love, to hurt for other people as well, for our family first then for the large family of Adam, of God.

At another time, on a similar question, the Elder said:

- The more one hurts, the more divine consolation one receives, because otherwise it is not possible to stand the pain... God especially consoles those who hurt for others.

To his spiritual children the Elder wrote the following: “To some people your love will be expressed with joy and to others it will be expressed with your pain. You will consider everyone your brother or your sister, for we are all children of Eve (of the large family of Adam, of God). Then, in your prayer you will say: ‘My God, help those first who are in greater need, whether they are alive or reposed brothers in the Lord.’ At that point, you will share your heart with the whole world and you will have nothing but immense love, which is Christ.”



Every man will be saved in proportion to his volition and the struggle he wages. Observe the commandments of God. Dig deeply in yourself. A certain youth went to [the city] to study, to become wise, but was unable. Returning [to his village], he saw—by the wayside, close to a village—a woman drawing water from a well. He approached and saw that the rope—with time—had carved into the stone lip. He thought, “why can I not become wise?” And he made the decision to return and continue his efforts. So you likewise: have a strong will, be patient and be persistent in your struggle, and you will be saved.

Elder Ieronymos (+1966)

Ὁ Ἀντίχριστος καὶ τὸ Χρῖσμα

Τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Ναυπάκτου καὶ Ἀγίου Βλασίου κ. Ἱεροθέου, περιοδ. «Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Παρέμβαση» Ναυπάκτου, ἀριθ. 122, Ἰούνιος 2006, σελ. 1 καὶ 8.

Κατὰ καιροὺς γίνεται λόγος γιὰ τὴν ἔλευση τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου καὶ τὸ τί θὰ δημιουργήσῃ στοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ τὸν κόσμον, καὶ μάλιστα προσδιορίζεται καὶ ἰδιαίτερο χρονικὸ διάστημα ποὺ θὰ ἐμφανισθῇ. Πολλοὶ μᾶς ἐρωτοῦν γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ θέμα αὐτό, ἀλλὰ οἱ ἀπαντήσεις εὐρίσκονται στὴν Ἀγία Γραφή καὶ ἰδιαίτερος στίς ἐπιστολὲς τοῦ Εὐαγγελιστοῦ Ἰωάννου, τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου καὶ στὴν Ἀποκάλυψη τοῦ Ἰωάννου καὶ σὲ ὅλη τὴν ποιμαντικὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας.

Στὴν συνέχεια, ἀπλῶς μερικὲς νύξεις θὰ ἤθελα νὰ κάνω κυρίως γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ πῶς ἀντιμετωπίζεται αὕτη ἡ κατάστασις.

[1]. Ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἰωάννης στὴν Α΄ Καθολικὴ του ἐπιστολὴ κάνει λόγο γιὰ τὴν ἔλευση τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου, καθὼς ἐπίσης καὶ τὴν ἐνέργεια τῶν ἀντιχρίστων καὶ μάλιστα γράφει στοὺς Χριστιανοὺς ὅτι ἐπίκειται αὕτη ἡ ὥρα. Συγκεκριμένα γράφει: **Παιδιά, ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστί, καὶ καθὼς ἠκούσατε ὅτι ὁ ἀντίχριστος ἔρχεται, καὶ νῦν ἀντίχριστοι πολλοὶ γεγόνασιν ὅθεν γινώσκομεν ὅτι ἐσχάτη ὥρα ἐστίν.** (Α΄ Ἰωάν. 2:18).

Κατὰ τὴν ἐρμηνεία τοῦ ἁγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου ποὺ χρησιμοποιοῖ κείμενα ἐκκλησιαστικῶν συγγραφέων, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸν Ἀντίχριστο ποὺ θὰ ἐμφανισθῇ πρὸς τὸ τέλος τοῦ κόσμου καὶ πλησίον τῆς Δευτέρας Παρουσίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὑπάρχουν καὶ πολλοὶ ἀντίχριστοι, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἤδη ἐνεργοῦν τὸ ἔργο τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου καὶ στὴν ἐποχὴ του καὶ σὲ κάθε ἐποχὴ καὶ «εἶναι πρόδρομοι καὶ προκήρυκες τοῦ καθ' αὐτὸ καὶ κυρίως ὄντως κεκαλουμένου Ἀντιχρίστου».

Ὅπως πρὸ τῆς ἐλεύσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὑπῆρχαν Προφῆτες, ἔτσι καὶ πρὸ τῆς ἐλεύσεως τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου θὰ ἐμφανισθοῦν οἱ πρόδρομοί του, οἱ ψευδοπροφῆτες. Ἔτσι, κατὰ ἐρμηνεία πολλῶν, ἀντίχριστοι ὀνομάζονται «οἱ δυσσεβεῖς αἰρεσιάρχαι», οἱ ὁποῖοι κρατοῦν καὶ ὑπερασπίζονται «τὰ τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου μιὰρὰ δόγματα».

Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ λόγος γιὰ τὸν ὁποῖο ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἰωάννης στὸν ἐπόμενο στίχο γράφει: **Ἐξ ἡμῶν**

ἐξῆλθον, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἦσαν ἐξ ἡμῶν εἰ γὰρ ἦσαν ἐξ ἡμῶν μεμενῆκεισαν ἂν μεθ' ἡμῶν ἀλλ' ἵνα φανερωθῶσιν ὅτι οὐκ εἰσὶ πάντες ἐξ ἡμῶν. (Α΄ Ἰωάν. 2:19). Πρόκειται γιὰ τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς ἐκείνους ποὺ εἶχαν μάθει τὴν ἀποκαλυπτικὴ ἀλήθεια καὶ τὴν ἀγγελικὴ πολιτεία, ἀλλὰ ἐπειδὴ ἦταν δουλωμένοι στίς σαρκικὲς ἡδονές, δὲν μπόρεσαν νὰ καταλάβουν «τῶν οὐρανίων ἀγαθῶν τὴν μεγαλοπρέπεια καὶ τὴν ὠραιότητα τοῦ νοητοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὴν μακαριότητα, καὶ ὄντως ἄρρητον ἀγαλλίασιν τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος», κατὰ τὸν ἅγιο Νικόδημο τὸν Ἀγιορεῖτη. Ὅποτε ἐπέστρεψαν στὴν ζωὴ τῆς ἀποστασίας «καὶ δὲν ἠθέλησαν νὰ γένουν ἐρασταὶ ἀληθινοὶ τῆς καθαρᾶς ἐν Χριστῷ πολιτείας».



Ἐπομένως, πρὸ τῆς ἐλεύσεως τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου ἐμφανίζονται οἱ πρόδρομοι τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου, οἱ ποικίλης μορφῆς αἰρετικοί, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ Χριστιανοὶ ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ, ἀντὶ νὰ ζοῦν τὴν Πολιτεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ μετὰ τὴν καθαρότητα τῆς καρδιάς καὶ τὴν ἀληθινὴ πίστι τοῦ νοῦς, ζοῦν μετὰ τὰ πάθη καὶ τὶς ἀδυναμίες, χωρὶς ἐσωτερικὴ προσευχὴ καὶ ἀληθινὴ πίστι στὸν Θεό.

[2]. Ὅμως, ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἰωάννης δὲν ἀρκεῖται στὸ νὰ ὁμιλῇ περὶ τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου καὶ τῶν προδρόμων του, ἀλλὰ κάνει λόγο γιὰ τὸ πῶς ἀντιμετωπίζονται ὁ Ἀντίχριστος καὶ οἱ πρόδρομοί του. Γι' αὐτό, ἀμέσως μετὰ τοὺς προηγουμένους στίχους γράφει: **Καὶ ὑμεῖς χρῖσμα ἔχετε ἀπὸ τοῦ**

ἁγίου, καὶ οἴδατε πάντα. (Α΄ Ἰωάν. 2:20). Δηλαδή, οἱ Χριστιανοὶ ἔχουν λάβει τὸ χρῖσμα ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ γνωρίζουν νὰ ξεχωρίζουν τὶς ἐνέργειες τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου καὶ τῶν ἀντιχρίστων ἀπὸ τὶς ἐνέργειες τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Δὲν πρόκειται περὶ ἀναγνώσεως βιβλίων, ἀλλὰ περὶ τοῦ χρίσματος, τὸ ὁποῖο ὑπάρχει στὴν καρδιά καὶ διδάσκει.

Καὶ πάλι ὁ ἅγιος Νικόδημος ὁ Ἀγιορεῖτης, ἐρμηνεύοντας τί εἶναι αὐτὸ τὸ χρῖσμα, γράφει: «Ἦγουν ἐλάβετε τὴν χάριν καὶ ἐνέργειαν τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος εἰς τὰς καρδίας σας ἀπὸ τὸν ἅγιον τῶν ἁγίων Δεσπότην Χριστόν». Καὶ πιὸ πάνω, ἀναφερόμενος πῶς κάποιος λαμβάνει τὸ χρῖσμα τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος, γράφει: «Τὴν χάριν δὲ καὶ ἐνέργειαν τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος λαμβάνουν οἱ χριστιανοὶ διὰ τοῦ ἁγίου βαπτίσματος, καὶ μάλιστα διὰ τοῦ χρίσματος τοῦ ἁγίου μύρου καὶ ἴσως διὰ τοῦτο χρῖσμα καὶ σφραγὶς ὀνομάζεται ἢ χάρις τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ὁμωνύμως ἀπὸ τὸ

χρῖσμα καὶ τὴν σφραγίδα τοῦ ἁγίου Μύρου· ὅθεν καὶ ὅταν αὐτὸ χρίεται εἰς τοὺς χριστιανοὺς παρὰ τοῦ ἱερέως, ἐπιλέγονται τὰ λόγια ταῦτα “σφραγὶς δωρεᾶς Πνεύματος ἁγίου».

Τὸ χρῖσμα τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος εἶναι ἡ σφραγίδα τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος ποὺ γίνεται κατὰ τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χρίσματος, τοῦ ἁγίου Μύρου, κατὰ τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς Βαπτίσεώς μας.

Στὴν συνέχεια, στὸ ἴδιο κεφάλαιο, ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἰωάννης ἀναφέρεται καὶ πάλι στὸ ὅτι τὸ ἅγιο Χρῖσμα, τὸ ὁποῖο ἔχει λάβει ὁ Χριστιανὸς κατὰ τὸ ἅγιο Βάπτισμα, τοῦ διδάσκει νὰ διακρίνῃ περὶ τῆς ἀληθείας καὶ τοῦ ψεύδους. Γράφει: **Καὶ ὑμεῖς, τὸ χρῖσμα ὃ ἐλάβετε ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ, ἐν ὑμῖν μένει, καὶ οὐ χρειαν ἔχετε ἵνα τις διδάσκη ὑμᾶς, ἀλλ’ ὥς τὸ αὐτὸ χρῖσμα διδάσκει ὑμᾶς περὶ πάντων, καὶ ἀληθὲς ἐστὶ καὶ οὐκ ἐστὶ ψεῦδος, καὶ καθὼς ἐδίδαξεν ὑμᾶς μενεῖτε ἐν αὐτῷ.** (Α’ Ἰωάν. 2:27).

Κατὰ τὴν ἐρμηνεία τοῦ ἁγίου Νικοδήμου ποὺ χρησιμοποιεῖ κείμενα Πατέρων καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικῶν συγγραφέων, τὸ χρῖσμα τὸ ὁποῖο ἔχει λάβει ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ἡ Χάρις τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος ποὺ ἐνοικεῖ στὶς καρδιές τῶν Χριστιανῶν καὶ μὲ τὸν λόγο τοῦ Εὐαγγελιστοῦ Ἰωάννου παρακινοῦνται οἱ Χριστιανοὶ «νὰ μένουν ἀναλλοίωτοι καὶ ἀμετάτρεπτοι πάντοτε ἐν τῇ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος γνησίᾳ ἀγάπῃ καὶ πίστει». Καί, κατὰ τὴν συνήθεια τοῦ ἁγίου Νικοδήμου, γράφει: «πῶς καὶ μὲ τί τρόπον» μένει ἀναλλοίωτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὡς πρὸς τὴν δωρεὰν τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος; Αὐτὸ γίνεται μὲ τὸ νὰ παραμένῃ ὁ ἄνθρωπος σταθερὸς στὰ δόγματα τῆς Θεολογίας καὶ τῆς Ἑνσάρκου Οἰκονομίας, ὅχι μόνο λογικά, ἀλλὰ ὑπαρξιακά.

Ἐπομένως, ὅσοι μιλοῦν περὶ τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου καὶ τῶν προδρόμων του, θὰ πρέπει νὰ ἀναφέρονται σὲ ὅλα τὰ χωρία τοῦ Εὐαγγελιστοῦ Ἰωάννου καὶ νὰ προσδιορίζουν κυρίως τί λέγει ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἰωάννης γιὰ τὸν τρόπο ἀντιμετωπίσεως τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου καὶ τῶν προδρόμων του. Οἱ Χριστιανοὶ γνωρίζουν τοὺς ἀληθινούς προφήτας ἀπὸ τοὺς ψευδοπροφήτες καὶ τὸν Χριστὸ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἀντίχριστο μόνον μὲ τὴν ἐνεργοποίηση τοῦ Χρίσματος, τὸ ὁποῖο ἔχουν λάβει ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ ἐνεργεῖται μέσα στὴν καρδιά τους.

[3]. Γιὰ τὸ χρῖσμα τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, τὸ ὁποῖο λέγεται καὶ σφραγίδα, κάνει λόγο καὶ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος. Συγκεκριμένα, στὴν ἐπιστολή του πρὸς τοὺς Κορινθίους, γράφει: **Ὁ δὲ βεβαίων ἡμᾶς σὺν ὑμῖν εἰς Χριστὸν καὶ χρίσας ἡμᾶς Θεός, ὁ καὶ σφραγισάμενος ἡμᾶς καὶ δοὺς τὸν ἄρραβῶνα τοῦ Πνεύματος ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν.** (Β’ Κορινθ. 1:21-22). Ἐδῶ σαφέστατα φαίνεται, ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι Ἐκεῖνος, ὁ ὁποῖος δίδει τὴν βεβαίωση στοὺς Χριστιανούς. Αὐτὸς εἶναι Ἐκεῖνος ποὺ μᾶς χρίει. Ἡ χρίσις ταυτίζεται μὲ τὴν σφράγιση, καὶ

αὐτὸ γίνεται ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό, ὁ ὁποῖος δίδει στὶς καρδιές μας τὸν ἄρραβῶνα τοῦ Πνεύματος.

Ἐὰν κανεὶς μελετήσῃ καὶ ἄλλα παράλληλα χωρία τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου γιὰ τὸ τί σημαίνει ἄρραβῶνας τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, τὸ τί σημαίνει νὰ ψάλλῃ κανεὶς ὕμνους καὶ ὠδὲς πνευματικῆς στὴν καρδιά του, τότε θὰ καταλάβῃ ὅτι αὐτὸ τὸ χρῖσμα - σφραγίδα εἶναι ἡ νοερὰ - καρδιακὴ προσευχή, ποὺ εἶναι ἔκφραση τῆς ἀγάπης ποὺ αἰσθάνεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος πρὸς τὸν Θεό. Στὸν ἄνθρωπο ἐκείνον ποὺ ἔχει δεχθῇ τὴν σφραγίδα τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ἔχει γραφῇ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Σ’ αὐτὸ τὸ θέμα ἀναφέρεται ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἰωάννης στὴν Ἀποκάλυψή του. **Καὶ εἶδον ἄλλον ἄγγελον ἀναβαίνοντα ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς ἡλίου, ἔχοντα σφραγίδα Θεοῦ ζῶντος, καὶ ἔκραξε φωνῇ μεγάλη τοῖς τέσσαρσιν ἁγγέλοις, οἷς ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἀδικῆσαι τὴν γῆν καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν, λέγων μὴ ἀδικήσητε τὴν γῆν μήτε τὴν θάλασσαν μήτε τὰ δένδρα, ἄχρις οὗ σφραγίσωμεν τοὺς δούλους τοῦ Θεοῦ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν. Καὶ ἤκουσα τὸν ἀριθμὸν τῶν ἐσφραγισμένων ἑκατὸν τεσσαράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες ἐσφραγισμένοι ἐκ πάσης φυλῆς υἱῶν Ἰσραὴλ.** (Ἀποκ. 7:2-4). Ἐδῶ φαίνεται σαφέστατα, ὅτι ὁ Ἄγγελος ποὺ εἶχε «σφραγίδα Θεοῦ ζῶντος», ἐσφράγισε τοὺς δούλους τοῦ Θεοῦ στὰ μέτωπά τους.

Παράλληλο χωρίο ἀνευρίσκεται καὶ σὲ ἄλλα κεφάλαια τῆς Ἀποκαλύψεως **Καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ τὸ ἄρνιον ἐστηκὸς ἐπὶ τὸ ὄρος Σιών, καὶ μετ’ αὐτοῦ ἑκατὸν τεσσαράκοντα τέσσαρες χιλιάδες, ἔχουσαι τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ γεγραμμένον ἐπὶ τῶν μετώπων αὐτῶν.** (Ἀποκ. 14:1). Δηλαδή, οἱ σεσωσμένοι ποὺ στέκονται μὲ τὸ Ἄρνιο—τὸν Χριστό, εἶχαν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τοῦ Πατρὸς Του γεγραμμένο στὰ μέτωπά τους. Καὶ ὅπως λέγει στὴν συνέχεια τὸ κείμενο, αὐτοὶ ἔψαλαν «ὦδὴν καινὴν» ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ Θεοῦ, τῆς ὁποίας τὸ περιεχόμενο μόνον αὐτοὶ γνώριζαν.

Ἐπομένως, ἡ σφράγιση τῶν Χριστιανῶν μὲ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τοῦ Πατρὸς Του συνδέεται μὲ τὴν «ὦδὴν καινὴν», δηλαδή τὴν νοερὰ προσευχή, τὴν ὁποία ἀγνοοῦν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν ἐμπειρία αὐτῆς τῆς καταστάσεως.

[4]. Ὅλα αὐτὰ σημαίνουν, ὅτι μὲ τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ ἁγίου Χρίσματος, τὸ ὁποῖο συνδέεται μὲ τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ ἁγίου Βαπτίσματος, λάβαμε τὴν δωρεὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος μέσα στὴν καρδιά, διὰ τῆς σφραγίσεως τῶν μελῶν τοῦ σώματός μας, ὅταν ὁ ἱερεὺς ἔλεγε: **Σφραγὶς δωρεᾶς Πνεύματος Ἁγίου ἀμήν.**

Αὐτὸ τὸ χρῖσμα στὴν καρδιά ἐνεργεῖ ὡς φωτισμὸς νοός, ὡς ἔμπνευση, ὡς ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν Θεό, ὡς προσευχή, ὡς ἐλπίδα τῆς αἰωνίου ζωῆς, ὡς ἄρραβῶνας τοῦ Πνεύματος.

Ἡ ὁμολογία τῶν Μαρτύρων καὶ τὸ μαρτύριο ποὺ ἀκολουθεῖ εἶναι ἐνεργοποίηση τοῦ ἁγίου Χρίσματος, διὰ τοῦ ὁποίου ὁρᾷ τὸν Θεό, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ τὸ μαρτύριο τῶν Ἀγίων δὲν εἶναι ὑπόθεση λογικῆς ἐπεξεργασίας, συναισθηματικῆς ἐξάψεως καὶ θυμικῆς ἐνεργείας, ἀλλὰ καρπὸς θεοπτίας—θεώσεως.

Ὅμως, ὅταν διαπράττουμε κάποια ἁμαρτία, τότε τὸ χρίσμα ποὺ βρίσκεται στὸ βάθος τῆς καρδιάς ἐνεργοποιεῖται διὰ τῆς μετανοίας. Δηλαδή, ἡ μετάνοια ποὺ ἐκδηλώνεται ὡς διάθεση ἀλλαγῆς βίου, ὡς ἀγάπη πρὸς τὸν Θεὸ καὶ ὡς προσευχή, εἶναι ἐνεργοποίηση τῆς Χάριτος τοῦ ἁγίου Χρίσματος. Ἐπίσης, αὐτὸ τὸ χρίσμα ἐνεργοποιεῖται μὲ τὴν νοερά - καρδιακὴ προσευχή, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ «καινὴ ψῆδῃ», τὴν ὁποία ψάλλουν οἱ ἀναγεννημένοι ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος.

Ὅταν ὅμως ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀρνῆται τὸν Χριστό, ἐγκαταλείπει τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία καὶ ἀποδέχεται ἄλλες ὁμολογίες - αἱρέσεις καὶ θρησκείες, τότε χάνει αὐτὴν τὴν δωρεά· καὶ γιὰ νὰ ἐπανέλθῃ στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία πρέπει νὰ λάβῃ πάλι τὸ χρίσμα τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος μὲ τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χρίσματος.

Ἐπομένως, οἱ Ποιμένες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας δὲν πρέπει νὰ ὁμιλοῦν μόνον γιὰ τὸν Ἀντίχριστο καὶ τοὺς προδρόμους του, ἀλλὰ κυρίως καὶ πρὸ παντὸς θὰ πρέπει νὰ βοηθοῦν τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς νὰ ζοῦν κατὰ τέτοιον τρόπο, ὥστε νὰ ἐνεργοποιητῇ ἡ Χάρη τοῦ Βαπτίσματος καὶ τοῦ Χρίσματος, μὲ τὴν διαφύλαξη τῶν ἐντολῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῶν δογμάτων, τὴν ὁρθόδοξη βίωσή τους, τὴν μετάνοια καὶ τὴν ἐσωτερικὴ νοερά - καρδιακὴ προσευχή, διότι ἔτσι θὰ μπορέσουν νὰ ξεχωρίσουν τὶς ἐνέργειες τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀπὸ τὶς ἐνέργειες τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου.

Διαφορετικά, θὰ συγχέουν τὶς ἄκτιστες μὲ τὶς κτιστὲς ἐνέργειες καὶ τὸ χειρότερο θὰ θεωροῦν ὅτι οἱ ἐνέργειες τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου εἶναι ἐνέργειες τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἢ ἀντιστρόφως. Αὕτῃ ἡ διάκρισι συνιστᾷ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ποιμαντική. Καὶ ἡ οὐσία τῆς εἶναι ἡ λεγομένη Ἑσυχαστικὴ Παράδοση.

Ὅσοι ἀξιωθοῦν νὰ χρισθῇ ἡ καρδιά τους ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα, ἤτοι νὰ γραφῇ στὴν καρδιά τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Ἀρνίου τῆς Ἀποκαλύψεως καὶ τοῦ Πατρὸς Αὐτοῦ, θὰ ἀποφύγουν τὴν σφράγιση τους ἀπὸ τὸ θηρίον τῆς Ἀποκαλύψεως καὶ τὸν πατέρα του, καθὼς ἐπίσης θὰ ἀποφύγουν καὶ τοὺς προδρόμους του.

Αὕτῃ εἶναι ἡ οὐσία τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ποιμαντικῆς ποὺ συνδέεται μὲ τὴν Ἑσυχαστικὴ Παράδοση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. **Γι' αὐτὸ ἔχει πολὺ μεγάλη σημασία ἡ διατήρηση τοῦ ὁρθοδόξου Μοναχισμοῦ. Κάθε ἀλλοίωση τοῦ Ἑσυχαστικοῦ Πνεύματος τοῦ ὁρθοδόξου Μοναχισμοῦ διευκολύνει τοὺς προδρόμους τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου νὰ κάνουν πολὺ καλὰ τὴ δουλειά τους καὶ νὰ πλανοῦν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους.**

Περὶ Ἀγάπης

Ἅγιος Μάξιμος ὁ Ὁμολογητής.

Ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Θεό, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ μὴ ἀγαπήσῃ καὶ κάθε ἄνθρωπο σὰν τὸν ἑαυτό του, ἂν καὶ γιὰ ὁποιοὺς δὲν ἔχουν ἀκόμη ἀποκτήσει τὴν ψυχικὴ καθαρότητα ἀποβάλλοντας τὰ πάθη, αἰσθάνεται κάποια δυσκολία. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὅταν μάθῃ πὼς αὐτοὶ διωρθώθηκαν, χαίρει μὲ χαρὰ ποὺ οὔτε λέγεται, οὔτε μετρίεται.

Ἐκεῖνος ποὺ εἰλικρινὰ ἀπαρνήθηκε τὰ πράγματα τοῦ κόσμου αὐτοῦ, καὶ ποὺ χωρὶς ὑποκρισία διακονεῖ τὸν πλησίον του μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη, αὐτὸς γρήγορα ἐλευθερώνεται ἀπὸ κάθε πάθος καὶ γίνεται μέτοχος τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς γνώσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ὅταν σοῦ συμβῇ νὰ σὲ βροῖσῃ κανεὶς ἢ νὰ σὲ ταπεινώσῃ, τότε πρόσεχε μήπως οἱ λογισμοὶ τοῦ θυμοῦ, ἀφοῦ σὲ ἀπομακρύνουν ἀπὸ τὴ χώρα τῆς ἀγάπης, σὲ μεταφέρουν στὴ χώρα τοῦ μίσους.

Ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Θεό, οὔτε λυπεῖ κανένα, οὔτε ὁ ἴδιος λυπεῖται γιὰ πρόσκαιρα πράγματα. Μιὰ δε λύπη αἰσθάνεται ὁ ἴδιος, καὶ στοὺς ἄλλους δείχνει νὰ αἰσθανθοῦν. Τὴν λύπη ποὺ ὀδηγεῖ στὴ σωτηρία, ἐκεῖνη ἀκριβῶς ποὺ καὶ ὁ θεῖος Παῦλος αἰσθάνθηκε καὶ ἔκαμε καὶ τοὺς Κορινθίους νὰ τὴν αἰσθανθοῦν. (Β' Κορινθ. στ', 8-11).

Ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἀγαπᾷ τὸν Θεό, ζῇ στὴ γῇ αὐτὴ ζωὴ ἀγγελικὴ, μὲ τὸ νὰ νηστεύῃ καὶ νὰ ἀγρυπνῇ, νὰ ψάλλῃ καὶ νὰ προσεύχεται καὶ γενικὰ νὰ σκέπτεται πάντα τὸ καλὸ γιὰ κάθε ἄνθρωπο.

Ἀφοῦ ἡ ἀληθινὴ ἀγάπη δὲν σκέπτεται οὔτε κάνει κάτι κακὸ γιὰ τὸν πλησίον, τότε ἐκεῖνος ποὺ φθονεῖ τὸν ἀδελφό του καὶ λυπεῖται γιὰ τὴν πρόοδό του, καὶ μὲ εἰρωνεῖες προσπαθεῖ νὰ μειώσῃ τὸ καλὸ του ὄνομα, ἢ μὲ τίποτε ἄλλη κακοήθεια ἐπιζητεῖ τὸ κακὸ του, πὼς εἶναι δυνατὸ νὰ μὴ ἀποξενωθῇ ἀπ' τὴν ἀγάπη καὶ νὰ καταστήσῃ τὸν ἑαυτὸ του ἔνοχο τῆς αἰωνίας Κρίσεως;

Μὴ ἀνοίγῃς τ' αὐτιά σου γιὰ ν' ἀκούσῃς ὅσα ἡ γλῶσσα τοῦ κατηγόρου τῶν ἄλλων ἐκστομίσει, οὔτε πάλι ν' ἀφήνῃς τὴν γλῶσσα σου νὰ λέῃ λόγια σὲ ἄνθρωπο φιλοκατήγορο, καὶ νὰ εὐχαριστεῖται λέγοντας καὶ ἀκούοντας κατηγορίες ἐναντίον τοῦ πλησίον σου, γιὰ νὰ μὴ χάσῃς τὴν θεία ἀγάπη καὶ ἀποξενωθῇς ἀπ' τὴν αἰώνια ζωὴ.

Αὐτὸν ποὺ ἔρχεται καὶ σοῦ λέει κατηγορίες ἐναντίον ἄλλων, κλείσε του τὸ στόμα καὶ μὴ τοῦ ἐπιτρέψῃς νὰ συνεχίζῃ, γιὰ νὰ μὴ θεωρηθῇς συνυπεύθυνος μαζί του καὶ ἁμαρτήσης ἔτσι διπλὴν ἁμαρτία, δηλ. καὶ τὸν ἑαυτό σου συνηθίσῃς στὸ κακὸ καὶ ὀλέθριο πάθος, καὶ ἐκεῖνον ἀφήσῃς νὰ φλυαρῇ κατὰ τοῦ πλησίον του χωρὶς νὰ τὸν σταματήσῃς.

Ψευδοπροφητεία Πεντηκοστιανών

Τοῦ Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου π. Βασιλείου Α. Γεωργοπούλου,
Εφημερ. «Ορθόδοξος Τύπος», ἀριθ. 1635/17.3.2006, σελ. 4.

Στὸ πλῆθος τῶν χριστιανικῶν αἱρέσεων, ποὺ δροῦν τόσο στὴν πατρίδα μας, ὅσο καὶ παγκοσμίως, ἀνήκουν καὶ οἱ αὐτοαποκαλούμενοι ὡς Πεντηκοστιανοί.

Μὲ τὸν ὄρο Πεντηκοστιανοὶ ὀνομάζονται διεθνῶς, μαζὶ μὲ πλῆθος ἐπιμέρους ροσδιορισμῶν, ἑκατοντάδες ἀκραῖες ὁμάδες τοῦ προτεσταντικοῦ χώρου, πολλές ἐκ τῶν ὁποίων εἶναι καὶ ἀντιτριαδικές. Βασικὰ γνωρίσματα τοῦ ἐν λόγω αἰρετικοῦ κινήματος εἶναι ἡ ὑποτιθέμενη γλωσσολαλία, οἱ δῆθεν θεραπιεῖς ἀσθενῶν, οἱ προφητεῖες, κ.ἄ. Αὐτὰ τὰ γνωρίσματα, σύμφωνα μὲ τὶς κακοδοξίες τους, εἶναι ἐκδηλώσεις τοῦ «Βαπτίσματος μὲ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα».

Βασικὴ πτυχή, ὅμως, τῆς πεντηκοστιανῆς πλάνης εἶναι καὶ τὸ «χάρισμα» τῆς προφητείας, τὸ ὁποῖο ἔχει κατεξοχὴν ἐσχατολογικὸ προσανατολισμό.

Ὁ ἐσχατολογικὸς προσανατολισμὸς τῶν πεντηκοστιανῶν «προφητειῶν» εἶναι ἅμμεσα συνδεδεμένος μὲ ἓνα ἀκόμα ἐκβιαστικὸ ψυχολογικὸ γεγονὸς· αὐτὸ εἶναι ἡ ἐπιστροφή τοῦ Χριστοῦ μιὰ ἀκόμα φορὰ πρὶν τὴν Δευτέρα Παρουσία Του, γιὰ τὴν «ἄρπαγὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας» στοὺς οὐρανοὺς πρὶν τὴν ἔλευση τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου, σύμφωνα μὲ μιὰ ἄλλη πλανεμένη δοξασία τους. Ὡς ἐκκλησία, βεβαίως, ἐννοοῦν τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς τους.

Σχετικὰ μὲ τὴν πεντηκοστιανὴ διδασκαλία τῆς ἔλευσης τοῦ Χριστοῦ γιὰ τὴν «ἄρπαγὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας», ἔχει ὑπάρξει ἓνας ἀριθμὸς ψευδοπροφητειῶν ἀπὸ Πεντηκοστιανούς. Καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ γεγονὸς ἐπιβεβαιώνει τὴν πραγματικότητα, ὅτι τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ὁποῖο λαμβάνουν καὶ εἶναι ἡ πηγὴ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεών τους, εἶναι ὄχι τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα, ἀλλὰ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης.

Ἀπὸ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν περιπτώσεων, θὰ ἀναφέρουμε τρία χαρακτηριστικὰ παραδείγματα, δύο ἀπὸ τὴν Ἑλλάδα καὶ ἓνα ἀπὸ τὶς Η.Π.Α.

[α]. Ὁ ἰδρυτὴς τῆς Ἑλευθέρας Ἀποστολικῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Πεντηκοστῆς, ἰσχυρίζονταν τὸ 1982, ὅτι τὰ δέκα κέρατα τοῦ θηρίου τῆς Ἀποκάλυψης (Ἀποκ. 13:1), ἦταν τὰ δέκα κράτη τῆς τότε Ε.Ο.Κ., ποὺ ποτὲ δὲν θὰ γίνουν περισσότερα. Μάλιστα, ἔλεγε ὅτι θὰ διοικήσουν τὸν κόσμον μὲ ἡγέτη τὸν Ἀντίχριστο, ποὺ εἶναι Ἕλληνας, γι' αὐτὸ ἡ ἄρπαγὴ ἰσχυρίζονταν, θὰ γίνῃ στὶς μέρες μας (Βλ. Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου Ἀντωνίου Ἀλεβιζόπουλου, Ἑγχειρίδιο Αἱρέσεων καὶ Παραχριστιανικῶν Ὁμάδων, 19912, σσ. 218-219).

Θὰ ἀφήσουμε τὴν ἐν λόγω ψευδοπροφητεία ἀσχολίαστη, ὑπενθυμίζοντας μόνον, ὅτι τὰ μέλη τῆς Εὐρωπαϊκῆς Ἑνώσεως ἔγιναν εἰκοσιπέντε [ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἰανουαρίου 2007, εἴκοσι ἑπτὰ].

[β]. Ἀπὸ τὶς πλέον, ὅμως, χαρακτηριστικὲς ψευδοπροφητεῖες Ἑλλήνων Πεντηκοστιανῶν, ἦταν οἱ ἰσχυρισμοὶ τους στὴν ἐφημερίδα τους τὸν «Χριστιανισμό» τὴν 1-1-1991, ὅτι μέσα στὴ δεκαετία τοῦ 1990 ἐπρόκειτο νὰ συμβοῦν τρία πολὺ μεγάλα γεγονότα. Πρῶτον, θὰ γίνῃ ἡ ἄρπαγὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας στοὺς οὐρανοὺς. Δεύτερον, θὰ ἔλθῃ ὁ Ἀντίχριστος καὶ θὰ βασανίσει ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν γίνῃ Πεντηκοστιανοὶ καὶ δὲν ἔχουν γλωσσολαλήσει, καθὼς δὲν θὰ λάβουν μέρος στὴν ἄρπαγὴ. Καὶ τρίτον, θὰ γίνῃ ὁ τρίτος παγκόσμιος πόλεμος.

Φυσικὰ τίποτα δὲν πραγματοποιήθηκε ἀπὸ τὰ προφητευόμενα, ἐπιβεβαιώνοντας ἔτσι τὸν λόγο τοῦ Κυρίου, ὅτι οἱ ψευδοπροφῆτες θὰ ἀποκαλύπτονται ἀπὸ τοὺς καρπούς τους (Ματθ. 7:15-20).

[γ]. Ἀπὸ τοὺς ξένους Πεντηκοστιανούς, ἡ πλέον κλασσικὴ περίπτωση πεντηκοστιανοῦ ψευδοπροφήτη εἶναι τοῦ Ἀμερικανοῦ E. Whisenant. Τὸ βιβλίο του μὲ τίτλο «Ὀγδόντα-ὀκτὼ λόγοι γιὰ τοὺς ὁποίους ἡ Ἄρπαγὴ θὰ γίνῃ τὸ 1988» (Eighty-eight Reasons Why the Rapture will be 1988, Little Rock, 1988), πούλησε στὶς Η.Π.Α. πάνω ἀπὸ 4 ἑκατομμύρια ἀντίτυπα. Ὅταν φυσικὰ διαψεύστηκε, μὲ κωμικὲς δικαιολογίες γιὰ τὴν ἀποτυχία του, ἐξέδωσε ἓνα νέο βιβλίο μὲ τίτλο «Ἡ τελευταία κραυγὴ. Ἀναφορὰ στὴν Ἄρπαγὴ τοῦ 1989», πουλώντας ἐπιπλέον κάποιες χιλιάδες ἀντίτυπα.

Βεβαίως, οἱ Πεντηκοστιανοὶ ποὺ τὸν πίστευσαν, ἀναμένουν ἀκόμα τὴν ἐπιστροφή τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τὴν ἄρπαγὴ τους ἀπὸ τὸ Χριστό.

Ἐν προκειμένῳ, πρέπει νὰ ἐπισημάνουμε, ὅτι οἱ ἰσχυρισμοὶ τῶν Πεντηκοστιανῶν γιὰ σύγχρονο χάρισμα προφητείας ποὺ ὑπάρχει, δῆθεν, στὶς ὁμάδες τους, δὲν γίνονται ἀποδεκτοὶ οὔτε ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους Προτεστάντες, ὅπως φυσικὰ δὲν γίνονται ἀποδεκτὲς καὶ ἄλλες κακόδοξες ἀντιλήψεις τους. (Βλ. Freikirchenhandbuch, Hrsg. Vereinigung Evangelischer Freikirchen, 2004, σσ. 149-150).

Νομίζουμε, ὅτι μὲ τὰ ὅσα ἀναφέραμε, γίνεται ἀντιληπτὸ, πὼς στὸ χῶρο τῶν λεγομένων Πεντηκοστιανῶν δὲν ἐπιδημεῖ τὸ Πανάγιο Πνεῦμα, ἀλλὰ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς πλάνης. Ἦδη ἀπὸ τὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη (Δευτ. 18:22. Ἱερ. 23:7-9), ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν Καινὴ (Ματθ. 7:15-20. Λουκ. 6:43-44. Πέτρ. 2:1, Α' Ἰωάν. 4:1), ὁ Θεὸς μᾶς προειδοποιεῖ, ὅτι γνώρισμα τῶν ψευδοπροφητῶν εἶναι καὶ ἡ μὴ πραγματοποίηση-ἐπαλήθευση τῶν λόγων τους.

Γιὰ ὅσους, ὅμως, παρασύρθηκαν καὶ πίστευσαν τὶς κακοδοξίες καὶ τὶς ψευδοπροφητεῖες τῶν Πεντηκοστιανῶν, χαρακτηριστικοὶ εἶναι ἐν προκειμένῳ οἱ λόγοι τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου Ποντικοῦ: **Λόγοι αἰρετικῶν ἄγγελοι θανάτου, καὶ ὁ δεχόμενος αὐτοὺς ἀπολεῖ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ψυχὴν.**

Γάμος και Παρθενία: Δύο Όψεις τῆς «Ἐν Χριστῷ» Ζωῆς

Τοῦ κ. Μιχαήλ Ε. Μιχαηλίδη, Θεολόγου.

Τὸ θέμα τοῦ γάμου καὶ τῆς παρθενίας συζητεῖται καὶ ἀπασχολεῖ τοὺς χριστιανοὺς διαχρονικά. Βέβαια, δὲν ἀμφισβητεῖται οὔτε ἡ ἱερότητα τοῦ γάμου, ἀλλ' οὔτε τῆς παρθενίας.

Ἡ διδασκαλία τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς—καὶ προπάντων τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης—εἶναι σαφής. Ὁ μὲν Κύριος εὐλόγησε τὸν γάμο μὲ τὴν παρουσία Του στὸ γάμο τῆς Κανὰ καὶ μὲ τὴ θαυματουργικὴ μεταβολὴ τοῦ νεροῦ σὲ κρασί, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅταν ἐπανέλαβε τὸ λόγο τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης: **Ἔνεκεν τούτου καταλείψει ἄνθρωπος τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν μητέρα καὶ κολληθήσεται τῇ γυναικὶ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν.** (Ματθ. 19:5). Γιὰ δὲ τὴν ἐκλογὴν, ἀνάμεσα στὸ γάμο καὶ τὴν παρθενία, κήρυξε τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου λέγοντας: **Ὁ δυνάμενος χωρεῖν χωρεῖτω**, ἀφοῦ προηγουμένως μίλησε γιὰ τὶς τρεῖς περιπτώσεις εὐνουχισμοῦ, δηλαδή, μεταφορικά, γιὰ τὴν παρθενία, λέγοντας ὅτι, οἱ πρῶτοι γεννήθηκαν εὐ νοῦχοι, οἱ δεῦτεροι εὐνουχίστηκαν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, καὶ οἱ τρίτοι **εὐνούχισαν ἑαυτοὺς διὰ τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν.** (Ματθ. 19:12).

Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ θεῖος Παῦλος, τὸ στόμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, κήρυξε τὴν ἱερότητα καὶ τὸ θεσμὸ τοῦ γάμου καὶ τῆς παρθενίας, στὶς θεόπνευστες ἐπιστολές του, ἀλλ' εἰδικότερα στὴν Α΄ πρὸς Κορινθίους ἐπιστολὴ του, ὅπου, μάλιστα, ἐκφράζει τὴν ὑπεροχὴ τῆς παρθενίας σὲ σχέση μὲ τὸν γάμο: **Ὁ ἄγαμος μεριμνᾷ τὰ τοῦ Κυρίου, πῶς ἀρέσει τῷ Κυρίῳ, ἀλλὰ καὶ «ὁ μὴ ἐγκαμίζων κρείσσον ποιεῖ.** (Α΄ Κορ. 7:32, 38).

Ἡ παρθενία θεωρεῖται ἀνώτερη, ἀξιολογικὰ, ὄχι στὴν ἱερότητα, ἀλλὰ στὴν κατάκτηση τῆς ἐλευθερίας της. Ὅτι, «πολλῶν ἰδρώτων καὶ μεγάλης ἡ παρθενία δεῖται τῆς ἀγωνίας», διδάσκει ὁ ἱερός Χρυσόστομος. Ἡ παρθενία εἶναι ἀγώνας, προσπάθεια, ἀνηφορία, ἀγωνία, πάλη, ἀθλημα. Οἱ ἅγιοι Πατέρες τὴ χαρακτηρίζουν ὡς «εἶδος μαρτυρίου».

Αὐτὸ ποὺ εἰπώθηκε, **δός αἷμα καὶ λάβε Πνεῦμα**, ἐφαρμόζεται ἴσως, στὸν πῖδὸ μεγάλο βαθμὸ, στὸ ἀθλημα καὶ τὴν ἀρετὴ τῆς παρθενίας.

Ὅ,τι συμβαίνει μὲ τοὺς ἀθλητές, οἱ ὅποιοι δὲν ἔχουν ὅλοι τὴν ἴδια ρώμη, οὔτε τὶς ἴδιες νίκες καὶ τὰ ἴδια ἔπαθλα, αὐτὸ συμβαίνει καὶ μὲ τὸ ἀθλημα τῆς ἐγκράτειας καὶ τῆς ἀγνότητος. Ἡ ἰσόβια μάχη τῆς παρθενίας, εἶναι πολὺ πῖδὸ σφοδρὴ ἀπὸ τὴν ἑγγαμὴ ζωὴ. Στὴν ἀληθινὴ παρθενία, τῆς νίκης τὰ στεφάνια εἶναι χιλιάκριβα καὶ λαμπροστόλιστα.

«Ἐρως ἔρωτι νικᾶται», λέγει ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης τῆς Κλίμακος. Ὁ σαρκικός καὶ γήινος ἔρωτας νικᾶται μὲ ἰσχυρότερο ἔρωτα· τὸν ἔρωτα τοῦ Οὐράνιου Νυμφίου, τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ὅταν ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἶχε πεῖ, **ὁ δυνάμενος χωρεῖν χωρεῖτω**, ἐννοοῦσε τὴν παραίτηση ἀπὸ τὴ γενετήσια ζωὴ—μὲ τὴν ἐλεύθερη βούληση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου—, ἡ ὁποία γίνεται γιὰ τὴ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τῆ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν. Ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι αὐτός, ποὺ ἀγαπᾷ πραγματικά, κι Ἐκεῖνος, ποὺ μπορεῖ ν' ἀγαπηθεῖ ὀλοκληρωτικά.

Ὁ γάμος, ὡστόσο, δὲν ἀντιστρατεύεται τὴν παρθενία, ἀλλ' οὔτε στέκεται ἐμπόδιο στὸν ἔρωτα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Θὰ ἔτανε αἵρεση μιὰ τέτοια ἀντίληψη. **Γάμος πατὴρ ἀγίων, ἀγνεία δὲ λατρεία**, διακηρύσσει ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος. Ἅγιος ὁ γάμος, ἱερὴ καὶ ἡ παρθενία. «Κατ' οἶκον ἐκκλησίαν» ὁ γάμος, θυσιαστήριον καὶ ἡ παρθενία. Κλήση Θεοῦ ὁ γάμος, κλήση Θεοῦ καὶ ἡ παρθενία.

Ὁ θεόπνευστος Ψαλμωδὸς προσκαλεῖ ὅλους—μέσα κι ἔξω ἀπ' τὸ γάμο—νὰ δοξολογήσουν καὶ ὑμνήσουν τὸν Κύριο: **Αἰνεῖτε τὸν Κύριον νεανίσκοι καὶ παρθένοι, πρεσβύτεροι μετὰ νεωτέρων.** Σὲ τούτῃ τὴν παναρμόνια καὶ μελωδικὴ δοξολογία τοῦ Θεοῦ, λαμβάνουν μέρος ὅλες οἱ ἡλικίες, χωρὶς νὰ τίς ξεχωρίζει ὁ γάμος ἢ ἡ παρθενία.

Ἀνάμεσα στὶς μυριάδες τῶν μαρτύρων, δὲν εἶναι λίγοι—ἐπώνυμοι καὶ ἀνώνυμοι—ποὺ ἀνῆκαν στὸ στρατὸ τῶν παρθένων. καὶ παρθένοι καὶ ἑγγαμοί, ὅλοι ἀθλοφόροι. Ὅλοι νικητές. Ὅλοι στεφανηφόροι. Ὅλοι στὴ θυσία καὶ ὅλοι «πιστοὶ ἄχρι θανάτου». **Φοῖνικες ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν αὐτῶν.** (Αποκ. 7:9). Ὅλοι μὲ κλάδους φοινίκων στὰ χέρια, ποὺ συμβολίζουν τὴ νίκη καὶ τὸ θρίαμβο.

Πλάϊ στὶς ἀγνές παρθενικὲς ψυχές τῆς Βαρβάρας, τῆς Παρασκευῆς, τῆς Ἀγνῆς, τοῦ Πλάτωνα, τοῦ Γεωργίου, τοῦ Δημητρίου, τοῦ Πολυκάρπου, τοῦ Σεβαστιανοῦ... τ' ἅγια ἀντρογόνα τοῦ Χρυσάνθου καὶ τῆς Δαρείας, τοῦ Τιμοθέου καὶ τῆς Μαύρας, τοῦ Ἀδριανοῦ καὶ τῆς Ναταλίας, τοῦ Γαλακτίωνα καὶ τῆς Ἐπιστήμης, τοῦ Κλαυδίου καὶ τῆς Ἰλαρίας... κ.ἄ.

Ὁ συγγραφέας τῆς πρὸς Διόγνητον ἐπιστολῆς γράφει καὶ αὐτὰ τὰ σημαντικά: «Χριστιανοὶ γαμοῦσιν (παντρεῦνται) ὡς πάντες, τεκνογονοῦσιν... ἐν σαρκὶ τυγχάνουσιν, ἀλλ' οὐ κατὰ σάρκα ζῶσι. Ἐν κόσμῳ οἰκοῦσιν, οὐκ εἰσὶ δὲ ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου». Ἡ «ἐν Χριστῷ» ζωὴ βιοῦται καὶ κατορθώνεται καὶ μὲ τὸ γάμο καὶ μὲ τὴν παρθενία. «Ὁ χριστιανικός γάμος καὶ ἡ ἀγαμία εἶναι ἀκατανόητα, μόνις ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς παύσει νὰ ἀποτελεῖ τὴν οὐσίαν, τὸ νόμον καὶ τὴν πραγματικότητά μας», παρατηρεῖ ὁ Romano Guardini.

Ὅπως ἓνα οἰκοδόμημα θεμελιώνεται καὶ χτίζεται μὲ τὸ δικό του τρόπο καὶ τὰ δικά του ἀρχιτεκτονικὰ σχέδια, ἔτσι καὶ ἡ «ἐν Χριστῷ» ζωὴ, διαθέτει τοὺς

δικούς της τρόπους στην οικόδομή της χριστιανικής και πνευματικής «ἐν Χριστῷ» ζωῆς. Ἡ ἐκλογή τοῦ τρόπου ἀνήκει στὸν ἄνθρωπο. Ἀρκεῖ νὰ οἰκοδομεῖ με πίστη, με ἀγάπη, με προσευχή καὶ με ὁλοκληρωτικὴ ἀφοσίωση στὸν Κύριο Ἰησοῦ Χριστό.

Ὅ,τι χτίζεται καὶ θεμελιώνεται στὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστό, εἶναι πάντοτε εὐλογημένο καὶ ἅγιο!



Ὁ Ἀνεκτίμητος Θησαυρὸς

Τῆς Ἀλεξάνδρας Στεφανοπούλου, ἐφημερ. «Ἑστία» 13 Ὀκτωβρίου, 2006, σελ. 1.

Κάθε φορὰ ποὺ γίνεται λόγος ἀπὸ τὴν παρούσα στήλη γιὰ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα, πολλοὶ ἀναγνώστες εἶναι ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ μᾶς παροτρύνουν νὰ ἐπιμένουμε σὲ αὐτὸ τὸ θέμα, ποὺ πρέπει νὰ ἀξιολογεῖται με τὴν ἀρμόζουσα σοβαρότητα ἀπὸ τὶς Κυβερνήσεις τῆς χώρας. Τὸ παρήγορο γιὰ τὴν ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα εἶναι ὅτι, ἂν στὸν τόπο ποὺ γεννήθηκε δὲν τῆς δίνουν ἐνδεχομένως τὴν πρέπουσα σημασία, στὰ ξένα χαίρει μιὰς ὅλως ἰδιαίτερης ἐκτιμῆσεως.

Στὸ Πανεπιστήμιο Ἰοβάν τῆς Καλιφόρνιας σοφοὶ ἐπιστήμονες, με ἐπὶ κεφαλῆς τὴν Ἑλληνίστρια καθηγήτρια τῆς γλωσσολογίας κυρία Μὰκ Ντόναλντ καὶ τοὺς καθηγητὲς ἠλεκτρονικῆς Μπροῦνερ καὶ Πάκαρντ, ἔχουν ἀναλάβει τὴν ἀποθησαύριση τοῦ πλούτου τῶν ἰδιοτήτων τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς γλῶσσας. Τὰ μέχρι τώρα στοιχεῖα αὐτῆς τῆς ἔρευνας τῶν Ἀμερικανῶν ἐπιστημόνων εἶναι τόσο ἐντυπωσιακά, ποὺ πραγματικὰ θὰ μπορούσε νὰ πεῖ κανεὶς, ὅτι κόβουν τὴν ἀνάσα!

Στὸν ἠλεκτρονικὸ ὑπολογιστὴ «Ἴβυκο» ἔχουν ἀποθησαυρισθῇ 6 ἑκατομμύρια λέξεις καὶ 78 ἑκατομμύρια λεκτικοὶ τύποι τῆς γλῶσσας μας! Γιὰ νὰ κατανοήσουμε τὴ σημασία ποὺ ἔχουν αὐτοὶ οἱ ἀριθμοί, ἀναφέρουμε ὅτι ἡ ἀγγλικὴ γλῶσσα ἔχει συνολικὰ μόνο 490.000 λέξεις καὶ 300.000 τεχνικοὺς ὅρους. Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα δηλαδὴ εἶναι 100 φορὲς πλουσιώτερη ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγγλική!

Σύμφωνα με τοὺς ὑπολογισμοὺς τοῦ καθηγητοῦ Μπροῦνερ, οἱ ἑλληνικοὶ λεκτικοὶ τύποι θὰ φθάσουν τὰ 90 ἑκατομμύρια, ἔναντι 1 μόλις ἑκατομμυρίου τῶν λατινικῶν! «Σὲ ὅποιον ἀπορεῖ, γιατί διατίθενται τόσα ἑκατομμύρια γιὰ τὴν ἀποθησαύριση τῶν λέξεων τῆς ἑλληνικῆς γλῶσσας, ἀπαντοῦμε, ὅτι πρόκειται γιὰ τὴν γλῶσσα τῶν προγόνων μας καὶ ἡ ἐπαφή μας με αὐτοὺς θὰ βελτιώσῃ τὸν πολιτισμὸ μας», δηλώνει ὁ κ. Μπροῦνερ.

Ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ Ἰσπανοὶ εὐρωβουλευτές, ποὺ ζήτησαν νὰ καθιερωθῇ σὰν ἐπίσημη γλῶσσα τῆς Εὐρωπαϊκῆς Ἑνώσεως ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ, εἶχαν δηλώσει, ὅτι «τὸ νὰ μιλάη κανεὶς γιὰ τὴν Εὐρωπαϊκὴ Ἑνωση χωρὶς τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ, εἶναι, σὰν νὰ μιλάη σὲ ἓνα τυφλὸ γιὰ χρώματα».

Ἰδιαίτερος χρήσιμα γιὰ τὴν ἔκφραση τῶν ἐπιτευγμάτων καὶ τῶν λειτουργιῶν τῆς σύγχρονης ἐπιστήμης θεωροῦνται τὰ προσφύματα τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς γλῶσσας, ὅπως εἶναι τὸ τηλέ-, τὸ ἀντί-, τὸ μέγα-, τὸ μικρό-, τὸ σύν-, τὸ σκοπῶ-, τὸ -ισμός, τὸ μάκρο- καὶ ἄλλα παρόμοια, ποὺ παρέχουν τὴν μὴ ὀριακὴ χρησιμοποίησή τους ἀπὸ τὶς ἐξελισσόμενες νέες ἐπιστήμες τῆς πληροφορικῆς, τῆς ἠλεκτρονικῆς ἢ τῆς κυβερνητικῆς. Οὐδεμία ἄλλη γλῶσσα στὸν κόσμος προσφέρει αὐτὲς τὶς μοναδικὲς δυνατότητες.

Οἱ ξένοι, λοιπόν, μᾶς ἔχουν περὶ πολλοῦ — ὄχι ἀκριβῶς ἐμᾶς δηλαδὴ, ἀλλὰ τὴν γλῶσσα τῶν προγόνων μας! Ἐμεῖς, ποὺ εἴμαστε οἱ νόμιμοι κληρονόμοι καὶ ἰδιοκτῆτες τοῦ θησαυροῦ, κακοποιοῦμε τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα χωρὶς αἰδῶ. Ὑπουργοὶ μιλοῦν γιὰ «ὑπερεσίες» · καθηγητὲς Ἀνωτάτων Σχολῶν χρησιμοποιοῦν Ἑνεστώτα Προστακτικῆς με συλλαβικὴ αὔξηση Ἀορίστου Ὁριστικῆς, ὅπως στὸν τύπο «ὑπέγραψε» · δημοσιογράφοι ἐκπαραθυρώνουν τὸ σίγμα ἀπὸ τριτόκλιτες λέξεις καὶ εἰσάγεται ἡ «διεθνὴ κατακραυγή» καὶ ἄλλα σχετικὰ ἀπαράδεκτα καὶ ἀνατριχιαστικά!

Τώρα, με τὴν εὐκαιρία τῶν ἐκλογῶν [Ὀκτώβριος 2006], θὰ ἔχουμε τὴν εὐκαιρία, νὰ δοῦμε γιὰ ἄλλη μιὰ φορὰ τὴν ἀλλαγὴ τοῦ φύλου ποὺ ὑπέστη ἡ ψῆφος καὶ ἀπὸ θηλυκὴ ἔγινε ἀρσενικὴ [ὁ ψῆφος]!



Ὅχι, ὁ Θεὸς δὲν καταδικάζει, ὁ ἄνθρωπος διαλέγει. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος πάει στὴν αἰωνιότητα με τὶς ἁμαρτίες του. Ἄν ἦσουν πόρνος ἢ μέθυσος ἢ δὲν εἶχες ἀγάπη ἔτσι θὰ πᾶς πέρα. Ἐδῶ στὴ γῆ μπορεῖς νὰ ἱκανοποιήσεις τὰ πάθη σου, καὶ φόνο μπορεῖς νὰ κάνεις γιὰ νὰ ἱκανοποιηθεῖς. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος παραμένει με ὅποιαδήποτε ἁμαρτωλὴ ροπὴ καὶ στὸν ἄλλο κόσμο. Μόνο ποὺ δὲν μπορεῖ πιά νὰ τὴν ἱκανοποιήσει.

Γιὰ τὸν ἁμαρτωλὸ αὐτὰ εἶναι τὰ βάσανα τῆς κόλασης. Δὲν εἶναι τιμωρία. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος βασανίζεται ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια τὴν ἐπιλογή του. Ὁ Θεὸς δὲν μᾶς προσφέρει τὴν κόλαση. Ὁ Θεὸς μᾶς λέγει **Δεῦτε κληρονομήσατε τὴ Βασιλεία τῶν Οὐρανῶν**. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος φέρει τὴν ἴδια τὴν κόλαση. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὅτι τὴν κόλαση καὶ τὸν Παράδεισό μας τὰ ἐτοιμάζουμε ἐδῶ...

Τοῦ π. Πετρονίου

Ἑγούμενου τῆς Σκήτης Τίμ. Προδρόμου Ἁγίου Ὁρους

Οἱ «Μικρές» Ἐντολές

Ὁμιλία τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Φλωρίνης π. Ἀγνουστίνου Καντιώτου (+2010) στὸν ἱερό ναό του Ἀγ. Γεωργίου Ν. Ψυχικοῦ, Ἀθῆναι 15 Ἰουλίου, 1962.

**Ὅς ἐὰν οὖν λύση μίαν τῶν ἐντολῶν τούτων
τῶν ἐλαχίστων καὶ διδάξη οὕτω τοὺς
ἀνθρώπους, ἐλάχιστος κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ
βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν.**

[Ματθ. 5:19]

Πολλές φορές, ἀγαπητοί μου, ἐρωτῶ τὸν ἑαυτό μου, ἐρωτῶ τοὺς ἄλλους, καὶ τώρα ἐρωτῶ κ' ἐσᾶς· εἵμαστε Χριστιανοί; Περίεργο, θὰ πῆτε· δόξα τῷ Θεῷ ὅλοι βγήκαμε ἀπὸ τὴν κολυμβήθρα τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας· πῶς μᾶς κάνουν τέτοιο ἐρώτημα; Δυστυχῶς, ἀγαπητοί μου, μὲ τὰ χεῖλη εἵμαστε Χριστιανοί. Ὅπως λέει ὁ προφήτης Ἠσαΐας, **ὁ λαὸς αὐτὸς μὲ λατρεύει μὲ τὰ χεῖλη, ἀλλὰ ἡ καρδιά του εἶνε μακριὰ ἀπὸ μένα.** (Ἠσ. 29:13, Ματθ. 15:8, Μάρκ. 7:6).

Ἀφορμὴ νὰ κάνω τὸ ἐρώτημα αὐτὸ μοῦ δίνει ἡ σημερινὴ εὐαγγελικὴ περικοπὴ, ἡ ὁποία διαβάζεται εἰς μνήμην τῶν ἁγίων πατέρων τῶν ἔξι Οἰκουμενικῶν Συνόδων. Ἡ περικοπὴ αὕτὴ εἶνε ἕνας πνευματικὸς καθρέφτης, καὶ μᾶς καλεῖ ὅλους νὰ ἐξετάσουμε βαθειὰ τὸν ἑαυτό μας, ἂν εἵμαστε πράγματι Χριστιανοί. Καὶ θὰ εἵμαστε, ἐὰν τηροῦμε τὶς ἐντολές τοῦ Κυρίου.

Ἐάν, ἀγαπητοί μου, πῆτε σὲ ἕναν ἀπὸ τοὺς πολλοὺς ποὺ θεωροῦνται Χριστιανοί ὅτι εἶνε ἁμαρτωλὸς καὶ πρέπει νὰ ἐξομολογηθῇ, θὰ τὸ ἀρνηθῇ. Στοὺς ἑκατὸ χριστιανοὺς ζήτημα ἂν ἕνας ἔχῃ ἐξομολογηθῇ. Καὶ ἐδῶ στὴν ἐκκλησίᾳ ὑπάρχουν ὠρισμένοι ποὺ κάνουν ὅλα τὰ ἄλλα, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἔχουν ἐξομολογηθῇ ποτέ στὴ ζωὴ τους· τὰ μαλλιά τους ἄσπρισαν, πλησιάζουν στὸν τάφο, καὶ κινδυνεύουν νὰ φύγουν ἀνεξομολόγητοι. Ἐάν λοιπὸν πῆτε σὲ ἕναν ἀπ' αὐτοὺς ὅτι εἶνε ἀνάγκη νὰ ἐξομολογηθῇ γιατί εἶνε ἁμαρτωλός, θὰ σᾶς πῇ· Ἐγὼ ἁμαρτωλός; Ἐγὼ εἶμαι ὁ καλύτερος Χριστιανός. Δὲν ἔκανα κανένα κακό· δὲ σκοτώσα, δὲν πῆγα σὲ δικαστήριον, δὲ μπῆκα στὸ σπῖτι τοῦ ἄλλου νὰ ἀτιμάσω τὴ γυναῖκα του, δὲν ἔκλεψα, δέν....

Ἀλλὰ μ' αὐτὰ τὰ «δὲν» κανεῖς δὲν σώζεται· δὲν εἶνε τόσο εὐκόλο νὰ πάρῃ εἰσιτήριο γιὰ τὸν παράδεισον. Ἡ πύλη εἶνε **στενὴ** καὶ ἡ ὁδὸς ποὺ ὀδηγεῖ ἐκεῖ **τεθλιμμένη** (Ματθ. 7:14), ἀνηφορικὸς Γολγοθᾶς. Χρειάζεται μεγάλη προσπάθεια, ἀγώνας ἰσόβιος, πόλεμος στῆθος μὲ στῆθος.

Ὁ Κύριος εἶπε· **Ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν βιάζεται, καὶ βιασται ἀρπάζουσιν αὐτήν.** (ἔ.ἀ. 11,12).

Λένε αὐτοί, ὅτι δὲν ἔκαναν κακό, ὅτι ἐτήρησαν τὶς ἐντολές, αὐτὲς τὶς μεγάλες ἐντολές. Ἀλλ' ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὶς ἐντολές ποὺ καυχῶνται ὅτι ἐτήρησαν, αὐτὲς ποὺ ἀπαγορεύουν τὸ φόνο τὴ μοιχείαν τὴν ψευδορκίαν κ.τ.λ., ὑπάρχουν καὶ ἄλλες ἐντολές στὸ Εὐαγγέλιον. Ὁ κόσμος τὶς θεωρεῖ μικρές. Καὶ ὁ Κύριος σήμερον στὸ εὐαγγέλιον, ἀπὸ ταπεινῶσι καὶ μὴ θέλοντας νὰ ἐκφρασθῇ ἐπιτακτικὰ, τὶς ὀνομάζει **ἐλάχιστες**. Ἐν τούτοις ἡ τήρησίς τους εἶνε ἀπαραίτητη γιὰ τὴν σωτηρίαν. Ὅποιος, λέει, παραβῇ μία ἀπὸ αὐτὲς τὶς ταπεινὰς ἐντολές μου, ποὺ ὁ κόσμος περιφρονεῖ καὶ τὶς θεωρεῖ ἀσήμαντες, **ἐλάχιστος κληθήσεται ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν.** (ἔ.ἀ. 5,19), δὲν θὰ δηλαδὴ πρόσσωπο Θεοῦ.

Τὶς μεγάλες ἐντολές, τὶς χοντρές, τὶς ξερούμε. Ποιὲς εἶνε οἱ «μικρές» ἐντολές, ποὺ δυστυχῶς τὶς παραβαίνουμε κ' ἐν τούτοις νομίζουμε ὅτι εἵμαστε Χριστιανοί καὶ θὰ σωθοῦμε;

Ἄχ, ἀδελφοί μου! Ἄν μᾶς φώτιζε ὁ Θεὸς νὰ καταλάβουμε τί λόγο θὰ δώσουμε, θὰ φροντίζαμε νὰ τηροῦμε καὶ τὶς «μικρές» ἐντολές.

Ποιὲς εἶν' αὐτές; Ἐνα ἄστεϊο ποὺ λέμε καὶ γελάμε ἀλλὰ κάνει τὸν ἄλλο καὶ πικραίνεται. Ἐνα ψεματάκι ἀπ' αὐτὰ ποὺ λέμε καθημερινῶς καὶ τὰ θεωροῦμε ἀλατοπίπερον τῆς ζωῆς. Μία χειρονομία ποὺ κάνουμε, ἀθῶα δῆθεν, ποὺ δίνει ὅμως ἀφορμὴ στὸν ἄλλο νὰ σκανδαλισθῇ. Ἐνας τρόπος συμπεριφορᾶς ἀνάρμοστος, ἕνας λόγος ἄπρεπος. Ἀκόμα περισσότερο, μιὰ σκέψις ποὺ περνᾷ ἀνεξέλεγκτα ἀπ' τὸ μυαλό μας· σκέψις ὑπερήφανη, σκέψις κακίας, σκέψις κατακρίσεως, σκέψις ζήλειας, σκέψις πονηρῆς, σκέψις ἀπιστίας, σκέψις ἀπελπισίας.

Ἀπ' τοὺς λογισμοὺς ἀρχίζει τὸ κακό. Γι' αὐτὸ τέτοιον λογισμὸν, τέτοιες σκέψεις εἶνε ἁμαρτία. Στὸν κῆπο δὲν ἀφήνουμε νὰ μπῇ ἡ ὄρνιθα τῆς γειτονιάς, μὴ μᾶς κἀνὴ ζημιὰ· ἀφήνουμε ὅμως τὰ ὄρνεα τῶν κακῶν σκέψεων μέσα στὸ μυαλό μας νὰ ῥημάζουν ἀδιάκοπα τὰ λουλούδια τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ὅλα αὐτὰ θεωροῦνται μικρά. Εἶνε ὅμως ἁμαρτήματα, ἀφοῦ τ' ἀπαγορεύει ὁ νόμος τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀνοῖξτε τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον στὴν Ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄρους ὁμιλία (Ματθ. κεφ. 5^ο κ.έ.). Λέει ἐκεῖ ὁ Χριστός, ὅτι ἔνοχος δὲν εἶνε μόνον αὐτὸς ποὺ διαπράττει φόνο ἀλλὰ κι αὐτὸς ποὺ ὀργίζεται ἀδίκως κατὰ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ του· ὄχι μόνον



ὅποιος διαπράττει μοιχεία ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅποιος ῥίχνει βλέμμα ἀμαρτωλὸ καὶ ἐπιθυμεῖ τὴν ξένη γυναῖκα· ὄχι μόνο ὅποιος καταπατεῖ τὸν ὄρκο του ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸς ποὺ ὀρκίζεται ἔστω καὶ ἀληθινά· ὄχι μόνο ὅποιος ἐκδικεῖται τὸν ἐχθρό του ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅποιος δὲν τὸν ἀγαπᾷ καὶ δὲν τὸν συγχωρεῖ. Μᾶς λέει δηλαδὴ ὁ Κύριος, ὅτι ὁ Χριστιανός, πρὶν περάσει τὸ κατώφλι τῆς ἐκκλησίας πρέπει ν' ἀφήνῃ ἔξω τὸ μῖσος, νὰ ἔχη συγχώρησι, ἀγάπη, καρδιὰ πλατεῖα σὰν τὴ θάλασσα καὶ σὰν τὸν οὐρανὸ· διαφορετικὰ, χίλια κερὰ ν' ἀνάβῃ, δὲν δικαιώνεται.

Αὐτὰ λοιπὸν τὰ «μικρὰ» τ' ἀπαγορεύει ὁ Κύριος. Καὶ πόσο δίκιο ἔχει! Διότι εἶνε γεγονός ὅτι ἀπὸ τὰ μικρὰ ἀρχίζουν τὰ μεγάλα. Ἀναφέρω δύο παραδείγματα καὶ μερικὲς εἰκόνες.

Ἔχετε ἀκούσει γιὰ τὸν βασιλέα Δαυίδ. Ἦταν ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Θεοῦ μὲ εὐγενῆ αἰσθήματα καὶ ἔγραψε τὰ ἀθάνατα τραγούδια τοὺς Ψαλμοὺς. Καὶ ὅμως ἔπεσε σὲ δύο μεγάλα ἀμαρτήματα, φόνο καὶ μοιχεία, γιὰ τὰ ὁποῖα μετανόησε. Πῶς ἔγιναν αὐτὰ τὰ ἀμαρτήματα; Ἀφορμὴ ἦταν ἓνα βλέμμα· ἀπὸ αὐτὸ ἄναψε ὅλη αὐτὴ ἡ πυρκαϊὰ ποὺ τὸν ἔκαψε. Ἀπὸ τὴν ταράτσα τοῦ ἀνακτόρου τοῦ εἶδε γυμνὴ μιὰ γυναῖκα ποὺ ἔκανε τὸ λουτρό της, κ' ἐκείνο τὸ βλέμμα ἄναψε τὴ φωτιά. Τὴν ἐπιθύμησε, σχεδίασε τὸ φόνο τοῦ συζύγου της, κ' ἔτσι τὴν πῆρε.

Ὡσεὶς γυναῖκες ποὺ σᾶς παρασύρει τὸ ῥέυμα τῆς μόδας, ἂν σκεπτόσασταν τί κακὸ κάνετε στὸν ἑαυτὸ σας καὶ στοὺς ἄλλους ποὺ τοὺς σκανδαλίζετε! Ἐσὺ ποὺ βγαίνεις γυμνὴ στὸ δρόμο, προτιμότερο νὰ ἔπαιρνες ἓνα μαγκάλι κάρβουνα ἀναμμένο καὶ νὰ τὰ πετᾷς δεξιά καὶ ἀριστερά, νὰ καοῦν δέντρα καὶ σπίτια, παρὰ αὐτὸ ποὺ κάνεις. Μὲ τὴ γύμνια ἀνάβεις φωτιές, προκαλεῖς ἀνθρώπους ν' ἀμαρτάνουν.

Ἐνα ἄλλο παράδειγμα, ποὺ πρέπει νὰ μᾶς φοβίζει, εἶνε ὁ Ἰούδας. Ἀγάπησε καὶ ἀκολούθησε τὸ Χριστό, ἔγινε ἀπόστολος, καὶ θὰ ἦταν μέχρι σήμερα στὴ θέσι αὐτῇ. Δὲν πρόσεξε ὅμως τὰ «μικρὰ». Ἄρχισε νὰ παίρνῃ ἀπὸ τὸ κοινὸ ταμεῖο κάτι μικροποσά, γλυκάθηκε ἔτσι στὴν κλοπὴ, καὶ σιγὰ – σιγὰ ἡ ψυχὴ του πιάστηκε στὸ δίχτυ τῆς φιλαργυρίας. Καὶ γιὰ νὰ κερδίσῃ χρυσό, ἐπώλησε τὸν Χριστό. Ἄρχισε ἀπὸ τὰ μικρὰ, γιὰ νὰ φτάσῃ στὸ τεράστιο ἀμάρτημα ποὺ λέγεται προδοσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Γι' αὐτὸ κ' ἐμεῖς ἂς προσέξουμε πολὺ. Τώρα τὸ καλοκαίρι φτάνει μιὰ σπύθα, ἓνα τσιγάρο, γιὰ νὰ καῖ ὁλόκληρο δάσος. Δὲν εἶνε πολὺς καιρὸς ποὺ κάποιο ἀεροπλάνο στὴν Ἀμερικὴ ἔπεσε καὶ σκοτώθηκαν δεκάδες ἄνθρωποι καὶ ἡ ἑταιρεία ἐρευνήσε καὶ βρῆκε, ὅτι τὸ δυστύχημα προήλθε – ἀπὸ ποῦ; ἀπὸ μιὰ μικρὴ βίδα ποὺ ἦταν χαλασμένη. Ἀπὸ ἓνα τσιγάρο καίγεται ἓνα δάσος, ἀπὸ μιὰ βίδα καταστρέφεται ὁλόκληρο

ἀεροπλάνο, κὶ ἀπὸ ἓνα σάπιο σανίδι μπορεῖ νὰ πνιγῇ ἓνα ὁλόκληρο καράβι. Ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν ὑγεία μας πολλὲς φορὲς ἓνα σπυράκι, ἂν δὲν τὸ προσέξῃς, ἐξελίσσεται σὲ καρκίνο καὶ πεθαίνεις.

Νὰ πῶς ἀπὸ τὰ μικρὰ φτάνουμε στὰ μεγάλα. Ἔτσι εἶνε καὶ μέσα στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο οἱ «μικρὲς» ἐντολές ποὺ τίς περιφρονοῦμε. Ἐνα βλέμμα, μιὰ χειρονομία, μιὰ ἄτακτη σκέψι κ.λπ., εἶνε σὰν τὸ σπόρο. Ἀπὸ ἓνα μικρὸ σπόρο βγαίνει ἓνα πλατάνι· κὶ ἀπὸ μιὰ κακὴ σκέψι μπορεῖ νὰ προέλθουν τὰ μεγαλύτερα ἐγκλήματα.

Ἄς πάρουμε, ἀγαπητοί μου, κόσκινο καὶ νὰ κοσκινίσουμε τὸ νοῦ μας ἀπὸ πονηρὲς σκέψεις, τίς αἰσθήσεις μας ἀπὸ ἀκάθαρτα μηνύματα, τὴ φαντασία μας ἀπὸ βλαβερὲς εἰκόνες, τὴν καρδιά μας ἀπὸ αἰσχυρὲς ἐπιθυμίες, τὴ γλῶσσα μας ἀπὸ φαρμακερὲς λέξεις. Ἄς προσέχουμε ὄχι μόνο τίς μεγάλες ἐντολές ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὲς ποὺ θεωροῦνται μικρὲς. Ἄς προσέχουμε τὴ ζωὴ μας σὲ ὅλα.

Νὰ προσπαθήσουμε νὰ μιμηθοῦμε τοὺς ἁγίους μας, καὶ σήμερα τοὺς ἁγίους πατέρας ποὺ ἐορτάζουμε. Αὐτοὶ ἐφήρμοσαν ὅλο τὸν ἠθικὸ νόμο, τίς μεγάλες καὶ τίς «μικρὲς» ἐντολές. Τήρησαν τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ μέχρι θανάτου. Τὸ μαχαίρι τοὺς ἔβαλαν στὸ λαμὸ, καὶ δὲν ἀρνήθηκαν τὸ Χριστό. Μπροστὰ μας εἶνε τὰ παραδείγματά τους. Ἄς τοὺς ἀκολουθήσουμε. Ἄς πῇ ὁ καθένας μας Προτιμότερο νὰ πεθάνω, παρὰ νὰ παραβῶ μιὰ ὁποιαδήποτε ἐντολὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἴτε μικρὴ εἴτε μεγάλη.

Κὶ ὅταν ὁ Θεὸς μᾶς δώσῃ ἱερὸ ἐνθουσιασμὸ νὰ τηροῦμε ὅλες τίς ἐντολές του, τότε θὰ γίνουμε ἄξιοι γιὰ τὴ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν, δι' εὐχῶν τῶν ἁγίων πατέρων, τῶν ὁποίων τὴ μνήμη ἐπιτελοῦμε σήμερα.



Εξέτασε τὰ μέσα ὅπου μεταχειρίζεσαι γιὰ νὰ δυναμωθεῖς στὴν πίστη:

[α] Ἡ προσευχή, διὰ μέσῳ τῆς ὁποίας πρέπει νὰ ζητᾷς ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ ἓνα χάρισμα τόσο ὑψηλὸ τῆς πίστεως, καθὼς τὸ ζητοῦσαν οἱ Ἀπόστολοι ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο “πρόσθετε ἡμῖν πίστιν”,

[β] Νὰ ἐπιμεληθεῖς νὰ μελετᾷς συχνὰ τὴν ὑπεροχὴ τῆς πίστεως τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἀπὸ ὅλες τίς ἄλλες θρησκείες,

[γ] Νὰ κρατᾷς τὴν πίστη μὲ ἀπλότητα σὰν νήπιο καὶ ὄχι μὲ γνώση καὶ περιέργεια· καθὼς λέει ὁ ἅγιος Ἰσαάκ· ἐπειδὴ στὴ μέν τὴν ἀπλότητα ἡ πίστις ἀκολουθεῖ, στὴν δὲ περιέργεια καὶ λεπτολογία ἀκολουθεῖ ἡ οἴηση καὶ ἡ ἀπιστία· τὸ δὲ μέσο γιὰ νὰ δυναμωθεῖ καὶ νὰ ζωοποιηθεῖ ἡ πίστις εἶναι τὰ καλὰ ἔργα.

Ἁγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἁγιορείτου

NEW HIEROMARTYR PRIEST JOHN KARASTAMATIS OF SANTA CRUZ

Source: The Orthodox Word, no. 122 / 1985 (courtesy of the monastics of the St. Herman of Alaska Monastery, Platina, CA).

Fr. John Karastamatis was born in 1937 in the Greek village of Apoika, on the island of Andros. As a boy on the island of Andros, John witnessed many miracles with which God blessed the pious villagers, and thus he was made aware of the closeness of God to the lives of those who seek Him. The heavenly saints, especially the local ones, also manifested their closeness and the power of their intercessory prayer by appearing to and helping the people. John nourished his young soul by learning of the lives of these saints and martyrs, whose unquenchable desire to be faithful to Christ in the face of deprivation, torment and physical death inspired him to also be a servant of God. Although he did not attend any theological school, he wanted to put his faith into practice by someday becoming a priest.

In 1957, at the age of twenty, John came to the United States. Five years later he married a young Greek woman, Athanasia Matsellis, and soon became the father of two children, Maria and Photios. The cities of the United States were in sharp contrast to the village of his birth, but his acute awareness of the nearness of God and the other world, given him in childhood, never left him. He now found himself in the midst of those who not only did not want to be close to God, but who actively fled from Him.

Still he hoped in God, knowing that the freedom of Christ can be found even in the most stifling and evil surroundings.

With the support and encouragement of Fr. George Bogdanos, a Greek priest who recognized in him the integrity and zeal of a true pastor, Fr. John was ordained to the diaconate in 1971. Since both his love for the Church and the love of the churchgoers for him was so apparent, he was made a priest only a few weeks later by Bishop Meletios Christianopolis of San Francisco. He first served the Greek Orthodox community in Anchorage, Alaska, the land of newly-canonized St. Herman, who became thus his guardian angel for the rest of his life. He was later assigned to the St. George parish in Vancouver, Canada, and then to All Saints parish in Anaheim, Pennsylvania. He then moved to Santa Cruz, California, which had been named by the Spanish missionaries after the Holy Cross of the Lord. There he labored with enthusiasm to provide a haven of Orthodox

Christianity for the faithful in the area, who had long been without a nearby church.

Because the community in Santa Cruz was too small to immediately acquire its own Orthodox church, Fr. John began to serve the Divine Liturgy in the nearby town of Aptos, in the chapel of a Poor Clare convent. The nuns would have their services very early on Sunday morning, leaving the church free for Fr. John and his parishioners to use afterwards. The parishioners were at first hesitant: they would come to Liturgy late, and would all sit at the very back of the chapel, as if they were spectators and not participants. Fr. John knew that he had much work to do. He was sometimes disappointed at the lack of active interest among his flock. His was a burning faith, and lukewarmness had always been foreign



to his soul. His task, he knew, was to ignite this fire within each of his parishioners, so that they themselves would struggle for the kingdom of heaven, the one thing needful, and not sit in the background and expect their priest to do their work for them. He could not demand too much at once, but had to be a gentle and loving pastor, condescending to the weaknesses of his flock so as not to overwhelm them and cause them to abandon the Orthodox faith altogether. The gap between shepherd and sheep had to be bridged gradually and carefully, and Fr. John had to spark the kinder in the hearts of his flock without scorching them with the consuming fire within him.

Sometimes Fr. John would speak forceful words of rebuke to awaken his people from their spiritual sleep, but mostly he would inspire them by his quiet and unobtrusive example. They began to see how hard he struggled and were moved to help him fulfill his godly dreams. His fervency and zeal, his unequivocal belief in the other world, was something that they did not fully understand, and yet that they inwardly—and in some cases unconsciously—longed for. Having come to love him deeply, they were grateful that God had sent a harvester to their field.

By giving his parishioners new aspirations, Fr. John instilled in them the desire to start their own church. They collected and saved money and eventually found the perfect building for their church: a former funeral home in Santa Cruz, across from the public library and in the best park of town for missionary activity. Fr. John did much of the interior work himself, fashioning a beautiful white iconostasis and a large domed apse behind and above the altar. When completed, the newly-consecrated church became a refuge from the noisy bustle of the world, an island of holiness in the middle of downtown Santa Cruz. The church was dedicated to the Holy Prophet Elias.

With their new and beautiful church, the parishioners, comprised of over 75 families, now had a sense of accomplishment. They felt that they had come a long way from the days when they had little choice but to use a chapel which was outside of town. Now they could branch out into other activities.

Fr. John by no means wanted his Orthodox community to be a closed one, and he rejoiced to discover any fervent young souls which came to him in search of the fullness of Christianity. Santa Cruz has been a gathering place not only of the darker and meaner elements of society, but also of idealistic young people who have desired something more meaningful than the American values of materialism and competition. By the time Fr. John started his church in Santa Cruz, a small but significant "Orthodox Christian movement" had already begun at the university there. This was primarily the result of the missionary work of Hieromonk Anastassy. Through him, many Santa Cruz university students embraced the Orthodox faith and dedicated their lives to serving Christ. In 1981, Fr. Seraphim Rose, at the request of the Orthodox students there, gave two lectures at the university and further inspired young souls to enter what he called "the saving enclosure of the Church." The fellowship of Orthodox students turned also to Fr. John and his church in order to receive spiritual nourishment and to participate in the divine services, which lifted them above the worldliness of university life. Fr. John always greeted them with a radiant smile and warm love, seeing in their young faces the freshness and enthusiasm that would keep Orthodoxy alive for future generations. After these students graduated, Fr. John brought other young people to the Orthodox faith, giving them all that they needed for their growth in the faith and being to them a loving father who was concerned for their spiritual welfare.

Since the Prophet Elias Church was in the middle of town, people would often come from off the streets to ask questions and attend the services. Fr. John kept an "open-door policy," making himself and his church available to anyone with a pastoral need. The people of Santa Cruz came to know him as being kind, trusting, full of love and open. He had great compassion for the poor, and was helpful to all who came to him, disregarding their religion or whether or not they were taking advantage of him. It was not uncommon for him to be awakened at odd hours of the night by needy people knocking at his back door. No one would be refused, but would always be given alms for a meal. In the most outcast and downtrodden of individuals, and perhaps especially in them, Fr. John saw the image of Christ. With

deep-felt Christian love, he once wrote these words about the simple people who, although rejected by the world, are faithful to Christ and follow the voice of their hearts: "We see them lonely within the crowd, or following the life of a hermit as they become symbols of truth and beacon lights of Christianity, praying for peace and brotherly love on earth."

Orthodox Christianity was not just something "for Greeks," but rather was universal. His love for God induced him to earnestly desire to bring forth fruits for Him, as a son strives to please his father, and this made him a zealous missionary to all peoples. He had services in public parks, where the townspeople would stop to attend something, which, although foreign to them, they found to be divinely beautiful. Hearing Fr. John, with his full and resonant voice, chanting the ancient Byzantine melodies along with his cantor, would unexpectedly catch a vague and half-remembered glimpse of that sacred realm which their souls knew but their minds

had never been exposed to. In such a way was Fr. John able to introduce the riches of Orthodoxy to the spiritually impoverished American people.

While Fr. John's fervent pastoral work served to convert many non-Greek people, his first job was, of course, to "convert" many of his own people—those who were baptized Orthodox but whose commitment to Christ meant, at most, only an external commitment to church attendance and activities. By his own faith he demonstrated to them that Orthodoxy is

not merely a ritual, a system of dogmas or a behavior pattern, but is instead a transforming power, which is tapped by conscious spiritual struggle.

The good works of Fr. John were too numerous and his outreach too extensive not to evoke malicious actions from the haters of God. The visibility of Fr. John and his church in the middle of Santa Cruz made them more accessible not only to those in need of help, but also to those who wished to destroy all that is holy. A few months before Fr. John's death, the church was desecrated by unknown occultists, who painted "666" and the five-pointed satanic star on the front entrance. When the desecration was discovered, Fr. John reconsecrated the church. Later he received anonymous threats, but was undaunted by them.

It was through Fr. John that the Most Holy Mother of God bestowed a miraculous blessing on the Prophet Elias Church. This occurred after Fr. John brought some bulbs of the "lily of the Panagia" back from his native island of Andros, where he visited with his family. The lily of the "Panagia" (or the "Most Holy") is so named because of the tradition, often depicted in icons, concerning the Archangel Gabriel present-



ing the Mother of God with this species of lily at the time of the Annunciation. In the monastery on Andros which Fr. John visited, stems from these lilies, being many years old, sometimes bud miraculously at the time of the Feast of the Dormition.

Fr. John instructed his son Photios to plant the lily bulbs in pots and to water them only with holy water, which Photios did. After the lilies had grown from the bulbs in May of 1983, Fr. John cut one of the flowers and placed it by the icon of the Mother of God, which leaned against the iconostasis of his church. The flower did not wilt for three or four weeks, although it had been cut and removed from both water and earth. When it finally dropped its petals (the first one having fallen on a radiant day when one of Fr. John's converts from the university was baptized), Fr. John told his wife not to vacuum up any of them, but to save them and place them by the icon where the flower stem was still leaning. And then, within three weeks, some fresh sprouts appeared on the stem!

The stem continued to produce new stems for many months, until the winter of 1983-4. Fr. John interpreted the miracle as an image of life coming out of death through the Resurrection.

On the night of Saturday, May 5/18, 1985, the eve of Righteous Job the Much-suffering, Fr. John was in the church building preparing a sermon for the following morning. His wife was at that time in Los Angeles visiting her daughter, who had just given birth to her first child. Shortly before midnight, one or more assailants entered the church. Evidently they had been watching Fr. John, for they came at a time when he was alone, when both his wife and 17 year-old son were gone.

They attacked Fr. John in his church office, stabbing him with a knife. During the struggle Fr. John was severely beaten, and then was finally killed by a heavy blow on his head. His son, who had dined with him earlier that evening, arrived at 1:30 a.m. at the church where the family lived. Outside the office he discovered the body of his murdered father, and on the walls—the blood of a martyr.

This time the church was not desecrated. In their investigation, the police reported no signs of vandalism or theft, nor were they able to locate any possible suspects. In the absence of a more plausible reason for the crime, it is most likely that the killing, like the church desecration a few months prior to it, was done at the hands of those who hated Fr. John for his holy work, of those who are the enemies of God and rebel against Him because they serve the first rebel, Satan. But whether Fr. John was killed for overtly satanic purposes or for other, irrational reasons, he had without doubt a martyric death, giving his life for Christ and dying in the very church in which he had diligently served Him. His face and fingers were so mutilated that the coffin had to be closed during the funeral services.

"His life inspired and enlightened and cheered us!" wrote one of his spiritual children. "His death has served to confirm in a most direct way the realities of not only our Orthodox faith, but of the bizarre and truly anti-Christian ways of our times."

Holy New Martyr Priest John of Santa Cruz, pray to God for us!

Troparion – Tone 1

Having cultivated the fruit of God's knowledge by thy labors, thou hast plucked out the root of godlessness and proclaimed in our land the true faith. Anointed with grace thou hast tended the flock entrusted thee, and in shedding thy blood thou waterest the seeds of Christ's true faith in our land, O New Martyr John of Santa Cruz. Glory to Him Who hath granted thee strength; glory to Him Who hath crowned thee; glory to Him Who granteth healing for all through thee.



IF PALAMAS IS A SAINT, THEN LET HIM DROWN US

Once in Thera (Santorini), on the day of the commemoration of St. Gregory Palamas, which was the Second Sunday of the Great Fast, some Latins were sailing on a certain boat for recreation. They placed their children on a separate boat, who then began to clap their hands saying: "Anathema to Palamas! If Palamas is a Saint, then let him drown us."

With such things were the little Franks blaspheming, and O the strange wonder, my brethren! O the Saintliness and the boldness before God of divine Gregory! At the same time as they were uttering their blasphemies, without a single disturbance of the waters, and in calm weather, the boat sunk together with all those who were in it. This happened for the blasphemy they uttered, saying: "If he is a Saint, let him drown us." And while the bodies of the blasphemers sunk in the ocean, their profane souls sunk into the eternal fires of hell, confirming the sainthood of divine Gregory.

**His All Holiness Nektarios
Patriarch of Jerusalem (1660-1669)**



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

THE FORGOTTEN 1955 TURKISH POGROM AGAINST THE GREEK ORTHODOX POPULATION OF CONSTANTINOPLE

By Kostas Vertzayias.

From the Editor: A pogrom is a form of violent riot, a mob attack, either approved or condoned by government or military authorities, directed against a particular group, whether ethnic, religious, or other, and characterized by killings and destruction of their homes, businesses, religious centres, and property.

† † †

The events of September, 1955 or “Septemvriana” as they are known to the ethnic Greek inhabitants of Constantinople, describe the pogrom that took place in that city fifty years ago on September 6-7, 1955. On that horrific night, at least as intense as the Kristallnacht of 1938 in NAZI Germany, a Turkish Government orchestrated a pogrom set out to physically destroy everything Greek in Constantinople. Wave after wave of frenzied mobs systematically destroyed 4,500 Greek homes, 3,500 shops and businesses, 90 churches and monasteries, 36 schools and 3 cemeteries.

Two priests were burnt alive, 14 other Greeks killed, hundreds of Greek women raped and many thousands of Greeks beaten. The dead were not spared—corpses were disinterred and knifed and others defecated upon. The graves of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchs were defiled.

The churches, in particular, suffered massive destruction, 70 being utterly destroyed and irreplaceable relics of enormous value reduced to rubble. However, the destruction of churches could not alone satisfy the fanaticized and frenzied mobs.

The American Ambassador spoke about “the disgusting and beastly manner in which religious sanctuaries were desecrated.” The desecration involved defecation on the altars, urination in the communion cups, the piercing and removing of the eyes of Christ from all icons, placing of priests’ sacred clothes on donkeys and the use of looted metallic church implements on garbage collectors. The World Council of Churches at that time estimated the damage to churches alone exceeded \$150 million dollars (this is equivalent to approximately \$1.3 trillion 2010 dollars)! It

should be noted that the Turkish authorities transported large groups of people in trains and military vehicles from Anatolia (eastern Turkey) to Constantinople.

The attacks by the mob began at 5:50 p.m. on September 6th and ended at around 2 am on September 7th with the imposition of martial law. However, during these 8 hours of frenzy, the Turkish police assisted and guided the mobs in their relentless path of destruction in a very well organized pogrom.

The 100,000 rioters came well equipped with lists of Greek addresses to target, scattered through 45 square kilometers. According to Spiros Vryonis, who has recently published the definitive work on the subject, “The Mechanism of Catastrophe,” there were three systematic waves of destroyers:

The **first** wave destroyed metal doors and barriers to all churches, house and businesses. They smashed all obstacles to entry. The **second** wave commenced pilfering and the pillaging. They came with trucks so as to systematically loot and carry off their booty. But the basic job of the second wave was to begin the destruction of the houses, the apartments, the churches, the

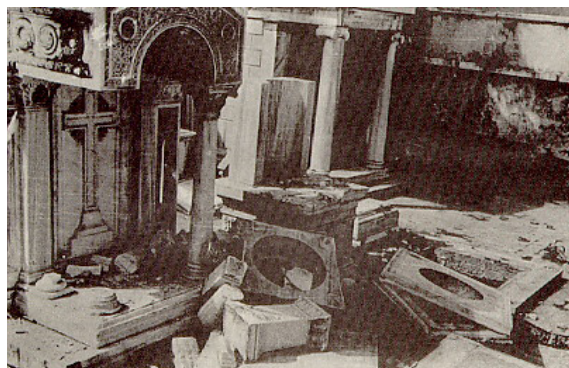
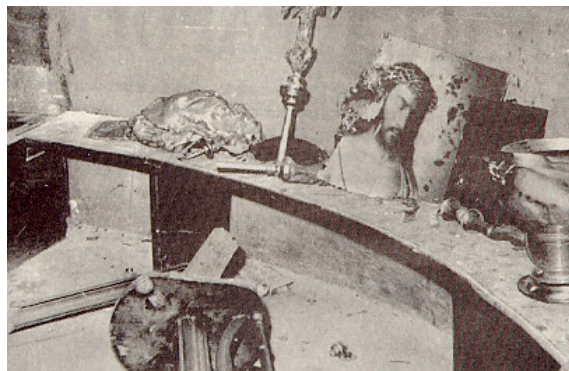
stores and then to move on, just as the first wave moved on very quickly. The **third** came some time later to finish off the marauding.

The pilfering or destruction of Greek businesses was so great that it produced a food shortage in Constantinople. The price of eggs rose 6 times and as most bakeries were utterly destroyed, people had to wait in line for a piece of bread. The Greek population had nothing to eat and nowhere to sleep. (Houses were looted, and then destroyed by pouring gasoline).

Vryonis notes that the 100,000 rioters (students, labor unionists, and peasants) came well equipped with pickaxes, shovels, wooden timbers to serve as battering rams, acetylene torches, gasoline, dynamite and large trucks full of stones.

How could a spontaneous eruption occur when security people, secret police, municipal police, and the armed services were everywhere?

This was Turkey’s final solution just about 500 years after the conquest of the city that had been Byzantium’s capital for 1,100 years. The Ottoman empire had been a multinational one until its defeat in World War I. The Young Turks, however, developed a fervent nationalism of “Turkey for the Turks” and its implementation began with the Armenian and Pontian



genocides in 1915. After the Greek defeat in the Greco-Turkish War of 1919-1922, the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) provided for a massive exchange of populations between Greece and Turkey. The Greeks of Constantinople, Imbros and Tenedos (two islands near the Dardanelles) and the Moslems on the Greek side of the border with Turkey in Thrace were excepted from this exchange.

According to Turkish statistics, in 1924 the Greek population of Constantinople amounted to 279,788 and there was a Greek population of 8,200 on the islands of Imbros and Tenedos. Imbros, in fact, had no Turkish inhabitants at all. The Moslems of Western Thrace (not ethnically homogeneous being made up of Turks, Pomaks [Bulgarian speaking Thracians] and Gypsies) numbered 86,793 persons.

The Greek population today in Constantinople numbers a mere 2,000, in Imbros 250 and in Tenedos 50 whilst the Moslem population in Greece numbers 150,000. Both populations were to be protected by stringent conditions in the Treaty of Lausanne. Greece respected and obeyed the Treaty and as a result the Moslems have increased in numbers and the Greek state maintains their mosques and schools.

What has Turkey done? From day one it has passed laws in blatant disregard of the Treaty of Lausanne, orchestrated the 1955 pogrom (which led to the massive emigration of ethnic Greeks from Turkey) and is now systematically confiscating the property owned by the Ecumenical Patriarchate—the last vestige of 1,700 years presence of the seat of the Greek Orthodox Church.

Let us enumerate the continuing persecution since the dreadful massacre of Greeks in 1922-1923:

- In 1927, by Turkish law 1151, the Greek schools on Imbros and Tenedos were abolished. In 1964, the Greek inhabitants of Imbros were notified that they must “voluntarily” sell their land to the Turkish State otherwise it would be expropriated. The authorities then set up an open prison on the island forcing the majority of the Greek inhabitants to emigrate. In 1967, an Imbros special court ordered the Greeks to return to the Turkish State the pittance they had received for the confiscation of their land.

- In 1934, Law 2596 forbade Greek clergymen to wear clerical attire outside the Church.

- In 1937, Moslem deputy directors were appointed to the Greek schools. Since then regulations have been adopted prohibiting any reference to modern Greek history or culture

and the removal of all notes in the Greek language from the schools. No funds whatsoever are provided in the Turkish budget for minority education.

- In 1941, whilst Greece was fighting Nazism, Turkey (a dubious neutral—in actuality a supporter of the Nazis) mobilized all Greeks between 18 and 45 years of age and deported them to special labor (slavery) camps from which most of them never returned.

- In 1942, the “Varlik Vergisi” law imposed a wealth tax on property. The provisions of the law were enforced with exceptional zeal only against the non-Moslem minorities at confiscatory rates. Greeks were taxed at 156 percent of annual income and Moslem Turks at 4.96 percent. The Varlik effectively deprived the community of its wealth with massive numbers of property and businesses being transferred to Moslem hands.

- In 1949 all Greek religious, charitable and community foundations were stripped of their autonomy and placed under the supervision of the General Directorate for Religious Property (Vakuf).

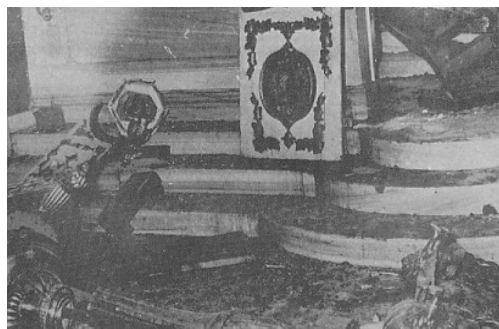
- In 1963, the Turkish Council of State determined that non-Moslem foundations could not acquire real estate in excess of that belonging to them in 1926.

- In 1964, the Turkish authorities closed the Patriarchal printing house and forbade the further printing of the two church religious journals. By secret decision (6/3801) taken by the Turkish Ministerial Council on 2/11/64, all real property belonging to Greeks was attached and Greeks were barred from legal transactions involving the transfer of property.

- In the same year the operation of the Greek Orphanage at Pringipos was prohibited and the building forcibly taken over by the Turkish Authorities, literally throwing 117 boys and 46 girls in the street. The building is now the subject of litigation between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Turkish State.

- Also in the same year, 15,000 Greeks were deported on a few hours notice with all their possessions confiscated except one suitcase of clothing. (The film “A Touch of Spice” covers this event).

- In 1967, law 903/67 imposed an inspection tax of 5% on the income of minority foundations. This law also prohibited the establishment of new minority foundations and the repair or restoration of real estate belonging to minority foundations.



- In 1970, the Ministry of Education prohibited prayers in minority schools. In the same year, a new property tax of 6% was imposed on the real estate of minority foundations.

- In 1971, the Theological School of Halki (Orthodoxy's most eminent seminary) was closed, thereby depriving the Patriarchate of the ability to educate its clergy and future successors to the Patriarchal Throne. Despite calls from the US, EU and Australia Turkey refuses to re-open the Theological School.

- In 1983, Christian religious and charitable property was excepted from law 2912/83. This law cancelled old lease agreements and permitted property owners to charge rents at current market values. By preventing Christians from benefiting from this law, the Turkish Authorities ensured their financial strangulation.

There has not been a year in which a Greek Orthodox Church has not been expropriated or demolished to build new roads or a cemetery not desecrated or a church damaged or burned or a school closed or demolished or property expropriated without compensation; or when compensation has been ordered, the funds were subsequently "blocked." Not one Greek has been employed in the public service in the last 60 years!

It is apparent from this review that there has been a systematic policy on the part of Turkey to eliminate every trace of the Greek and Christian (the Armenians and other Christians are also subject to the discriminatory laws) presence from Turkey—to complete what the Young Turks and Kemal conceptualized—a Turkey for the Turks only. Not one Christian (whether Greek or Armenian) is to remain, not one Christian Church is to operate (they will still be opened for the tourist revenue), no property of any kind will remain in Christian hands. Despite pressure from the EU, Turkey is in the final throes of confiscating Christian property and completing its master plan.

Seen in the above context, the *Septemvriana* did not erupt so suddenly and violently just in order to destroy the Greek Orthodox community in Constantinople, but to rather continue the implementation of a well-orchestrated genocidal plan. The Greek Cypriots' campaign against Britain in 1955 was used to turn the Turkish public against the Greeks of Constantinople and thus to eliminate them forever. Cyprus was thus merely the ostensible cause; the events in Cyprus provided the pretext to fanaticize the mobs. It was the excuse that Turkey was waiting for just as the coup in 1974 was the excuse Turkey needed to invade Cyprus to implement its long awaited plan.

At the trial of Prime Minister Menderes in 1960, it was revealed that he and Foreign Minister Fatin Rustu planned and mapped out the program of terror. Fifty-five years later we remember with great sadness the heinous events of September 6-7 1955 which has led to the near extinction of the

Greek presence in Constantinople. No words can convey the reign of terror that the Greeks lived through.

The *Septemvriana* are yet another black page in Turkish history, along with the genocides against the Armenians, Pontians and Assyrians for which Turkey has never been held accountable. Sadly, Turkey's complete disregard of international law and contempt for universally accepted human values has been condoned by the West for geopolitical reasons...

Even sadder, the situation in Cyprus is worse now than in 1955. However, the great irony may be that Cyprus could be the sting in the scorpion's tail for Turkey. Exactly 55 years after the *Septemvriana* it may be Cyprus that will block Turkey's road to Europe—divine retribution or nemesis?



In the final analysis of all these things, our God and Lord, due to His strong love for His creation, has done all that we have come to know. And this is the key: strong great love, burning love.

The Greek word is pathos. He gave His Son to a death on the cross. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* (Jn 3:16) This was not because God could not save us in a different way, but because this was the way that God found to show and teach us His immense love.

Our mind cannot grasp this! He touched us; He drew near to us through the death of His Son to show us how much He loves us! He loves us exceedingly and if He had something even more precious than this, He would have given it to us. All this was accomplished so our human race could find its way back to Him, to draw near to Him. And because of His great love, He did not wish to bind our freedom. Even though He could do this, He chooses to let us come to Him in the spirit of love.

All these things my friends express the mystery behind those things that "must" take place. With this solution the love of God is made obvious. At the same time, the freedom of the individual is preserved!

God is truly Wonderful! These two elements, freedom and love, espoused and working together in the life of the faithful individual will give birth to holiness. This is the holiness that we need to enter the Kingdom of God.

Elder Athanasios Mitilinaios (+2006)

**From the 100 homilies on the book of *Revelation*,
translated by Constantine Zalalas**

PAPISM IS TOPPLING GENUINE CHRISTIANITY

By His Eminence Metropolitan Avgoustinos Kantiotis (+2010)—written in 1956 when he was a young Archimandrite in Athens, Greece.



Without reservation we say that Papism is a toppling of the fundamental laws of the Church, of genuine Christianity. And behold why.

According to Scriptures, the God-man Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ, is the root, head, and foundation upon which the entire Christian edifice is supported. He is

the Alpha and the Omega of our faith, of our hope and of our love. He is the Leader. The voice of the Father heard twice from heaven, at the Jordan river and on Mount Tabor, established Him as eternal Leader in the Church: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." (Mt 3:17; 17:5). The faith in Christ, the active faith, which is exhibited through absolute obedience to his commandments, even the least of them, is a fundamental law of the Church. Without this faith, the Church cannot be conceived.

Moreover, a fundamental law in the Church, which the God-man Lord established, is: as often and whenever among the faithful there appear serious disagreements concerning things of the faith, things that need to be done, worship matters—these differences are not solved by only one member of the Church, however official his position, holiness and wisdom might be; but these matters are solved by the collective whole, by the Church, coming together and convening in holy Spirit (Mt 18:17). It is in accordance with this manner that the argument concerning circumcision, which shook up the apostolic Church, was solved. At that time, both Peter and Paul and the rest of the holy Apostles and Disciples spoke and developed their views on the subject; but when the decision was made, all subjected themselves to the voice of the Church (Acts 15:6-29). Not one of them set his own authority above the authority of the Church. The infallible criterion in the Church, even when the chiefs of the Apostles were living, was the Synod (Council).

But both of these fundamental laws, which pertain to the administration of the Church, have been overturned by Papism. In that "church," the leader is the pope. In that "church," the pope possesses infallibility. In that "church," the pope is everything. Being driven by the demon of Luciferian pride, the pope usurped all the authorities, set his throne above the clouds, opened his mouth and, as another

Nebuchadnezzar, said: Nations and peoples, do you see me? Fall down and worship, pay homage to me. "By divine right" I am above lay people, monastics, deacons, priests, bishops, metropolitans, archbishops, patriarchs, regional and even those ecumenical Synods. When I am found on my seat and speak, I speak in Holy Spirit and my decisions are infallible. I am the one and only, unique referee of Christ upon the earth. The soldiers who are faithful to me preach to the whole world the motto:

Just as one God exists, one sun for the day, one moon for the night, in like manner God gave to that "church" only one leader, the pope. But not only ecclesiastical, but also political leaders are obligated to obey me in all things. The two swords in the Gospel (Lk 22:38) symbolize the spiritual and worldly authority, and I must hold and use these two swords. Every authority comes from me. Woe unto the one who set himself against my volitions...

The pope, being clad with such ideas, established in the world a tyranny, a tyranny in the name of the Crucified One, Whom he would say that he and only he would "represent" upon the earth. And this tyranny ended up being unbearable, especially when upon the papal throne there sat individuals who had no internal relation with the Christian faith and life. Popes, thieves and robbers, making unrestrained use of power, brought huge corruption to the flocks of the West. The people murmured. The godly would sigh. Courageous preachers of the divine word, who dared to protest against the anti-Christian lives and conduct of the popes, were apprehended and burnt alive, as the famous Jerome Savonarola (1452-1498), whose statue adorns today one of the squares of Florentia.

Rome, with the corrupt and unfaithful popes, who abolished every evangelical virtue, would appear already in the eyes of the peoples of the West as the whore of the seas, as the new Babylon. Finally the volcano of the wrath of the peoples erupted. In 1520 a revolution was preached and the strong struggle against the papists began. At the head of the struggle was Martin Luther, concerning whom Thomas Carlyle writes, that Luther took the ax of truth and with the surge of a hero attacked and crushed the idol of Papism. The struggle lasted many decades. The civil war was raging. Blossoming cities were transformed into smoking ruins. The blood ran like a river. And the cause, the most serious of all, of that big disaster, which struck Europe, was the foolish, the anti-Christian ambition of the pope, so that all might fall down and embrace the edge of his foot and recognize him as the only leader of the Church upon the earth.

The popes, if they had even an ounce of real godliness or true piety, would be ashamed in projecting such foolish and anti-Christian ambitions, and, the worst of all, struggling for the enforcement of them upon the totality of Christianity. He who studies the history of this period

oftentimes remembers St. John Chrysostom, who, lamenting on account of the bad situations of the ecclesiastical divisions would preach that the chiefest cause of them is the controlling spirit, the spirit of desiring to subject others under your authority, *philarchia*. His words from 11th homily on his commentary on the epistle to the Ephesians, stand as the loud voice proclaiming the truth, His Truth, for all generations of Christians to observe and abide by:

Nothing is capable of dividing the Church thusly as the controlling-spirit, nothing thus kindles the wrath of God as the dividing of the Church.



God has many names, my brethren. The principal name of God is Love... We should first love God because He gave us such a large earth to live in, so many thousands of people. And He gave us plants, trees, fountains, rivers, oceans, fish, birds, night and day, sky, stars, sun and moon,...

But let us examine this love. Is this love perhaps faithful? Is it complete or does it lack anything? We must understand it for ourselves. You, my fellow Christian, have a son, and I honor you and say to you that your child is good, but then I beat and despise him, I take his bread and eat it. What would you say about this? Is this love? It would seem to me that you would eagerly tell me that this type of a response does not constitute love, in any shape or form.

My brethren, just as we love our God, we must also love our brother, because it is truly natural to love him and unnatural, against our God-implanted nature, to not do so. We must love our brother because we have one faith, one baptism; we receive the [same] holy Sacraments; we hope to enjoy the same Paradise; we have one head, our Christ. My brethren, love has two characteristics, two qualities: one strengthens man toward the good and the other weakens him for the bad.

I have bread to eat and I have [enough] to drink, but you don't. Love tells me: "Don't eat it alone and don't drink alone, but give also to your brother." I open my mouth to condemn you, to lie to you, but love deadens my mouth and I am silent. I stretch out my hand to take something of yours, but love won't allow me.

Do you see, my brethren, what gifts love has?

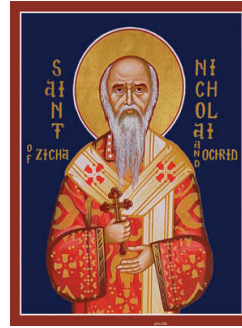
St. Kosmas Aitolos

ABOUT THE PEACE OF THE SIMPLE AND THE PROSPERITY OF THE FOOLS

St. Nikolai, Bishop of Ochrid and Zicha.

For the turning away of the simple shall slay them and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

(Prov 1:32)



Does peace kill? Yes, godless peace kills. Does prosperity destroy? Yes, prosperity without God and contrary to the laws of God can destroy. Simple are they who seek such a peace and they who run after such prosperity are fools. For, in essence, they do not seek peace but rather the sword and are not running after prosperity but rather after destruction.

What is the peace of the simple and what is the prosperity of fools? The peace of the simple is physical peace and the prosperity of fools is physical feasting. King Herod wanted such a peace and he was consumed by worms. Jezebel wanted such a prosperity and dogs consumed her.

By what name would we call a man who, in deciding to build a house, thinks that he will place the roof in the air first and afterward erect walls and then lay the foundation of the house? We would call him a simpleton and a fool. Much the same are all those who are attempting to establish peace in the world without interior peace and to establish exterior prosperity for men without interior prosperity.

The Christian Faith is the only one which builds from the foundation and the foundation is Christ, a firm and indestructible rock. Thus, the Christian Faith for the peace and prosperity of men builds on Christ. An internal, blessed and joyful peace is built on Christ the Lord and on this peace, external peace is built.

So also is true and lasting prosperity. It is still better to say that true peace and true prosperity is like a well-built house and external peace and prosperity are like the external adornments of the house. However, if the adornments fall, the house will stand but if the house is destroyed, will the adornments then hang in the air?

O my brethren, the Christian teaching is the only reasonable teaching about peace and prosperity. All else is madness and foolishness. For, how could the servants build a mansion on the estate of the Master without permission of the Master and without His help?

O Lord, the source of eternal true peace and true prosperity, save us from the peace of the simple and the prosperity of fools.

To Thee be glory and thanks always. Amen.

ON HALLOWEEN

By His Eminence Kyrill of San Francisco, Archbishop of San Francisco and Western America (ROCOR).

It is that time of the year when the secular society in which we live is preparing for the festival of Halloween. Many do not know its spiritual roots and history and why it contradicts the teachings of the Church.

The feast of Halloween began in pre-Christian times among the Celtic peoples of Great Britain, Ireland and northern France. These pagan peoples believed that life was born from death. Therefore, they celebrated the beginning of the “new year” in the fall (on the eve of October 31 and into the day of November 1) when, as they believed, the season of cold, darkness, decay and death began. A certain deity whom they called Samhain was believed by the Celts to be the Prince of Death and it was he whom they honored at their New Year’s festival.

From an Orthodox Christian point of view, we can see many diabolical beliefs and practices associated with this feast which have endured to this time. On the eve of the New Year’s festival, the Druids, who were the priests of the Celtic cult, instructed their people to extinguish all hearth fires and lights. On the evening of the festival, a huge bonfire built from oak branches (oak was regarded by the Celts as sacred) was ignited. Upon this fire sacrifices were burned as an offering in order to appease and cajole Samhain, the Prince of Death.

It was also believed that Samhain, being pleased by the offerings, allowed the souls of the dead to return to their homes for a festal visit on this day. It is from this belief that the practice of wandering about in the dark dressed up in costumes imitating ghosts, witches, hobgoblins, fairies, etc. grew up. The living entered into fellowship and communion with the dead by what was, and still is, a ritual act of imitation, through costume and the activity of wandering around in the dark of night, even as the souls of the dead were believed to wander.

The dialogue of trick or treat is also an integral part of this system of beliefs and practices. It was believed that the souls of the dead who had entered into the world of darkness, decay and death, and therefore into total communion with and submission to Samhain, bore the affliction of great hunger on their festal visit. Out of this grew the practice of begging, which was a further ritual enactment and imitation of what the Celts believed to be the activities of the souls of the dead on their festal visit. Associated with this is the still further implication that if the souls of the dead and their imitators were not appeased with “treats,” i.e., offerings, then the wrath and anger of Samhain would be unleashed through a system of “tricks,” i.e. curses.

Such is the true meaning of this pagan feast. It is then evident that, for an Orthodox Christian, participation at any level is impossible and idolatrous, resulting in a genuine be-

trayal of God and Church. If we participate in the ritual activity of imitating the dead and wandering in the dark asking for treats or offering them to children, we then have willfully sought fellowship with the dead, whose Lord is not Samhain, but rather Satan. It is to Satan then that these treats are offered, not to children.

There are other practices associated with Halloween from which we must stay away, such as sorcery, fortune telling, divination, games of chance, witchcraft and the carving of an ugly face upon a pumpkin and then placing a lit candle within the infamous Jack O’ Lantern. The pumpkin (in older days other vegetables were used) was carved by the Celts in imitation of the dead and used to convey the new light (from the sacred oak fire) to the home where the lantern was left burning through the night. This “holy lantern” is no other than an imitation of the truly holy votive light (lampatha) offered before an icon of Christ and the saints. Even the use and display of the Jack O’ Lantern involves participation in this “death” festival honoring Satan.

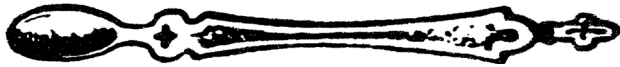
The Holy Fathers of the first millennium (a time when the Church was one and strictly Orthodox) counteracted this Celtic pagan feast by introducing the Feast of All Saints. It is from this that the term Halloween developed. The word Halloween has its roots in the Old English of All Hallow E’en, i.e., the Eve commemorating all those who were hallowed (sanctified), i.e., Halloween. Unfortunately, either due to lack of knowledge or understanding, the Celtic pagan feast being celebrated on the same day as the Christian feast of All Saints (in western Christianity) came to be known as Halloween.

The people who remained pagan and therefore anti-Christian reacted to the Church’s attempt to supplant their festival by celebrating this evening with increased fervor. Many of these practices involved desecration and mockery of the Church’s reverence for Holy Relics. Holy things, such as crosses and the Reserved Sacrament, were stolen and used in perverse and sacrilegious ways. The practice of begging became a system of persecution designed to harass Christians who were, by their beliefs, unable to participate by making offerings to those who served the Lord of Death.

One can see in contemporary Western society that the Western Church’s attempt to supplant this pagan festival with a Christian feast failed. How then did something that is so obviously contradictory to the Holy Orthodox faith gain such acceptance among Christian people? The answer is spiritual apathy and listlessness which are the spiritual roots of atheism and turning away from God. Today’s society urges one that Halloween and other such festivities, notwithstanding their apparent pagan and idolatrous origin, are nonetheless harmless and of no consequence. Upon closer consideration these pagan festivals are the source for destroying any kind of spiritual foundation and lead to disbelief and outright atheism.

Halloween undermines the very basis of the Church which was founded on the blood of martyrs who had refused, by giving up their lives, to partake in any form of idolatry. Our Mother Church must take a firm stand in counteracting any such (pagan) events. Christ taught us that God is the judge in all our actions and beliefs and that we are either for God or against God. There is no neutral or middle of the road approach.

Today we witness a revival of satanist cults; we hear of satanic services conducted on Halloween night. Children are kidnapped by satanists for their ritualistic sacrifices. Orthodox clergy are ritualistically killed as has happened more than once in California. Everywhere Satan reaches out to ensnare as many innocent people as possible. The newsstands are filled with material on spiritualism, supernatural phenomena, séances, prophesies and all sorts of demonically inspired works. These works all serve Satan, for they are not the fruit of the Holy Spirit, but the fruit of the spirit of this world.



Be heedful of your thoughts. Oppose them. They do not easily leave a person. They come over and over again, and war against him. But you, strive to chase them away. There comes an evil thought, and it tells you to do something. You counter saying, "No, I will not do it." The thought insists: you also insist. See to it that you have strength to chase it away. If you don't do what the thought tells you, it's not a sin. Sin is the act, not the assault of the thought.

There is need of care, because many times the thoughts are elicited by us ourselves, by our passions. On most occasions, if you don't give cause, the thought does not come by itself. For example, if you look at something with evil intent, or just with curiosity, that which you saw will come at night—and especially at times of prayer—to torment you. The fault lies in our passions, which we allow, and do not war against them.

Since we do not endeavor to avoid the causes [of the passions], then it can't be otherwise: the war will come. But even then, we should not be negligent; but we should fight. Of course, in such cases, the warfare will be harder; there will be need of a more intense struggle to overcome our thoughts. For this reason, it is better to avoid the causes of the passions.

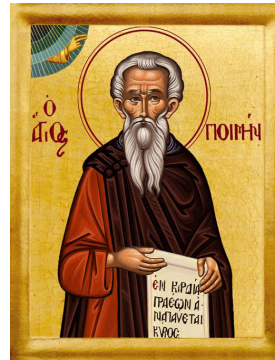
There is need of great care. If you are not careful, or if you allow the thoughts to take root, the tempter will leave you in tatters. Take refuge immediately in prayer. Prayer is the greatest weapon. Make the sign of the Cross and say, *Most Holy Theotokos save us*, or *O Cross of Christ, save us by thy might*. If you call upon God and the Panaghia, and pray with humility, you will be quickly delivered from evil thoughts.

Take heed continuously, secure yourself, in order to escape this war of thoughts. If your mind is found continuously in spiritual things, if you give a spiritual significance to whatever you see or hear, then the enemy will not be able to find any way by which to enter, and will depart.

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

ON SCRIPTURE AND PASSIONS

Source: The Ancient Fathers of the Desert.



A brother once went out on a pilgrimage from the monastery of Abba Poimen, and came to a hermit, who lived in love towards all and received many visitors. The brother told the hermit stories of Abba Poimen. And when he heard of Poimen's strength of character, he longed to see him.

The brother returned to Egypt. And after some little time, the hermit rose and went from his country to Egypt to see the brother who had visited him: for he had told him where he lived. When the brother saw the hermit, he was astonished, and very glad. The hermit said to him, "Of your charity towards me, take me to Abba Poimen." And the brother rose up and showed him the way to the old man.

And the brother told Abba Poimen this about the hermit, "A great man of much charity, and particular honor in his own province, has come here wanting to see you." So the old man received him kindly. And after they had exchanged greetings, they sat down.

But the hermit began to talk of the Holy Scripture, and of the things of the spirit and of heaven. But Abba Poimen turned his face away, and answered nothing. When the hermit saw that he would not speak with him, he was distressed and went out. And he said to the brother who had brought him there, "My journey was useless. I went to the old man and he does not deign to speak to me."

The brother went to Abba Poimen, and said, "Abba, it was to talk with you that this great man came here, a man of much honor in his own land. Why did you not speak to him?" The old man answered, "He is from above, and speaks of the things of heaven. I am from below, and speak of the things of the earth. If he had spoken with me on the soul's passions, I would willingly have replied to him. But if he speaks of the things of the spirit, I know nothing about them."

So the brother went out and told the hermit, "The reason is that the old man does not easily discuss Scripture. But if anyone talks to him about the soul's passions, he answers."

Then the hermit was stricken with penitence, and went to the old man and said, "What shall I do, Abba? My passions rule me." And the old man gazed at him with gladness and said, "Now you are welcome. You have only to ask and I will speak with understanding."

And the hermit was much strengthened by their discourse, and said, "Truly, this is the way of love." And he thanked God that he had been able to see so holy a man, and returned to his own country."

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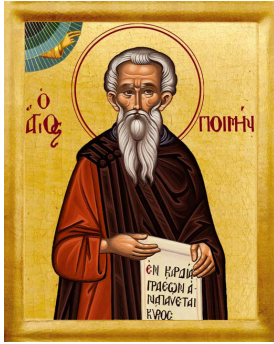
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GOD'S USE OF UNBELIEVERS TO PUNISH BELIEVERS

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, My servant.
[Jer 25:9]



not know the True God and who does not adhere to the law of God?

Truly, the true servant of God is he who knows the True God and who keeps the law of God; however, when he, to whom God has given the knowledge about Himself and His law, perverts knowing into unknowing and law into lawlessness, then God takes as His servant that ignorant one so as to punish the apostates. For an apostate from God is worse than a pagan, and an apostate from the law of God is lower than an idolater by birth.

Therefore, when Israel, as the ancient Church of God, alienated itself from God and the law of God, God chose Nebuchadnezzar for His servant to punish Israel, the Apostate.

Therefore, when the Christian peoples in Asia and Africa through numerous heresies alienated themselves from God, God took as His servant the Arabs to punish Christians in order to bring them to their senses.

And when the Christian peoples of the Orthodox Balkan nations (Serbia, Greece, etc.) alienated themselves from God and God's law, God invited the Turks as His servants to punish the apostates that by punishment to bring them to their senses.

Whenever the faithful alienate themselves from God, God weaves a whip from the unbelievers to bring the believers to their senses. And, as the faithful consciously and willingly turn away from God, so the unbelievers unconsciously and unwillingly become servants of God; the whip of God.

But God takes the unbelievers only temporarily in His service against the believers. For the land of Nebuchadnezzar, the same Lord says, He will visit it for its lawlessness and *make it perpetual desolations* (Jer 25:12), then will a servant against a servant be found? For God did not take the Babylonians for a servant because of their goodness and faith, rather because of Israel's wickedness and unbelief.

O Righteous Lord, help us by Your Spirit Most-high, to always adhere to You, the One, True God and Your divine and saving law.

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 GREAT MYSTERY OF LOVING-KINDNESS

A Sermon by St. John of Kronstadt on the Nativity of Christ.

And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

(1 Tim 3:16)

It is on this day that, throughout the entire inhabited world, the Holy Church brings to our remembrance and observes that most majestic and sublime of mysteries: the Incarnation of God the Word from a Most-pure virgin through an outpouring of, and an overshadowing by, God's Holy Spirit.

Wondrous, inexpressible, and awesome is this mystery, both for the exalted and all-contemplating celestial minds of those who dwell in the heavens: the ranks of the angels, and for the minds of men, enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Imagine: the unoriginate God from Whom everything received the commencement of its existence (the Angels, and the human race, and the entire world, both visible and invisible) takes a beginning in His humanity. He Whom the heavens cannot contain, is contained in a virginal womb. God becomes an infant, and is borne upon the arms of a Mother. He Who nourishes every breath, is nourished by paps.

The science of astronomy has learned and affirms that, in the order of creation, our earth is but a barely-noticeable point; that millions of planets

around our own fill up the vastnesses of space. And, lo! This single point, this barely-noticeable globe of God's creation, being inhabited by men, has been accounted worthy of the inexpressible honour of bearing upon itself God-in-the-Flesh, the God-Man. He is the God-Man Who did deign to dwell amongst men, to teach erring mankind the knowledge of God, to work innumerable miracles of good, to preach repentance and complete forgiveness of sins; to suffer and to die as a holy Sacrifice for the sins of the world, to be resurrected through the power of Divinity from amongst the dead (having vanquished death, which is natural to all men) and to make a gift of resurrection to the entire human race.

Not a single one of the visible worlds, save the earth, has been deemed worthy of this greatest of all honors; for it was only upon the earth that Jesus Christ, the only-begotten of the

heavenly Father, had a Virgin-Mother, and He alone was Her Son by way of humanity. Why was the earth given such preference? Why was it only on earth that God appeared in the flesh? This is a great Divine mystery, a mystery of immeasurable loving-kindness and of God's condescension to perishing mankind.

Thus, God did appear in the flesh. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, O earth; rejoice and celebrate, ye earth-born. The Creator Himself did come to you, in order to create you anew; to restore you, who were corrupted by transgressions. To you did He come the almighty Physician Himself, pow-



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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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erful to treat all the inveterate afflictions of sin, in order that He might heal all the passions of the soul and all the infirmities of the body, which He truly did do, as we know from the Gospel and from the history of the Church.

Thus, greet Him joyfully, with pure minds and hearts, with bodies chaste and restrained by fasting and abstinence, which the Holy Church has thoughtfully instituted prior to this great feast in order to prepare us worthily to meet the heavenly King, Who comes to us in order to abide in us.

He came to us with the mercy and good will of His heavenly Father, and from us He demands mercy toward our neighbors; He is the righteous King, and He demands of us all righteousness; for He, too, as a man, fulfilled all righteousness (*for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness*, Mt 3:15), showing us an example and providing us with grace and the strength to carry it out. He Himself did suffer for us, having borne the cross; and He taught us to deny ourselves, our sins and our passions, and to follow after Him, doing what is holy out of reverence for God (*let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*, 2 Cor 7:1).

He came to heal our souls, ailing from sin, and commanded all to repent; let us ever, then, be earnestly contrite, correcting ourselves and striving toward holiness and perfection. The holy Angels, at the Nativity of the God-man, did declare peace unto the world; and unto men—the good will of the Heavenly Father. Let us then, ourselves, have within us a peaceful conscience, and let us be at peace with everyone, if possible. *Be at peace and be holy with all*, sayeth the apostle, *for without this shall none see the Lord*. (Heb 12:14).

Amen.

TO US A CHILD IS BORN

Again the darkness is past; again Light is made; again Egypt is punished with darkness; again Israel is enlightened by a pillar. The people that sat in the darkness of ignorance, let it see the Great Light of full knowledge. Old things are passed away, behold all things are become new. The letter gives way; the Spirit comes to the front. The shadows flee away; the Truth comes in upon them. Melchizedek is concluded. He that was without Mother becomes without Father (without Mother of His former state, without Father of His second). The laws of nature are upset; the world above must be filled. Christ commands it, let us not set ourselves against Him. O clap your hands together all you people, because to us a Child is born, and a Son given to us, Whose Government is upon His shoulder (for with it the Cross is raised up), and His Name is called The Angel of the Great Counsel of the Father.

St. Gregory the Theologian

Angels and archangels, who are the King's great officials, are gazing steadfastly upon you at the time of your prayer to see what petition you will make of their Master; and they are astonished and exultant whenever they behold one who is made of earth forsake his dunghill and ask for what is heavenly.

St. Isaac of Nineveh (the Syrian)

Without detriment therefore to the properties of either substance which then came together in one person, majesty took on humility, strength weakness, eternity mortality; and for the paying off of the debt, belonging to our condition, inviolable nature was united with possible nature, and true God and true man were combined to form one Lord.

Pope St. Leo the Great

PATRIARCH PAVLE: ONE YEAR FROM HIS REPOSE (+2009)

By Yuri Maksimov.

I have never personally seen Patriarch Pavle, although I have heard about him for a long time. I first visited Serbia in fall 2006. I very much wanted to see His Holiness, especially because, from what I knew, he was normally accessible. It was not that I expected to have an audience, but I hoped simply to look with my own eyes at a holy man of our time and receive his blessing, and this alone would be a joy. But this did not happen. In the fall of 2006 his health worsened, and in my later visits it grew still worse. I was clearly unworthy of seeing His Holiness, Patriarch Pavle.

While in Serbia I heard many remarkable stories about him from trustworthy people, which I would like to share. His Holiness, Patriarch Pavle, was a unique phenomenon for our times; as such, it would be pointless to make him the measure for other patriarchs, just as it would be, for example, to make St. Philaret the Merciful or St. Alexei the Man of God the measure for the majority of contemporary laypeople. Everyone has his own standard and his own kind of *podvig* (ascetic struggle, *Ed.*). It seems to me that one should simply rejoice that in our lifetime such a person was part of the Orthodox Church.

It is well known that the Serbian Patriarch, even when taking up his high-ranking position, continued his ascetic spiritual struggles and strove to live modestly—although for him this was all quite natural, without any deliberate affectation. He went around town by foot or took regular public transportation, among the throngs of people, was not acquisitive, and ate as little as the ancient desert fathers—simply because that was the way he was.

Mrs. Jana Todorovic told me a story concerning her sister. Once, she was at a reception at the Patriarch's office for some official reason. Discussing business, she happened to look at the Patriarch's feet and was shocked at the sight of his shoes; they were old, had been torn and then repaired. The woman thought: "How shameful for us Serbs, that our Patriarch has to go around in torn shoes; couldn't someone give him some new shoes?" The Patriarch said joyfully: "Look at what good shoes I have! I found them near the garbage cans when I went to the patriarchate. Someone had thrown them away, but they are real leather. I cleaned them and polished them a little bit and, look, they can still serve me for a long time!"

Another story is connected with these same shoes. A certain woman came to the patriarchate with the request to speak with the Patriarch concerning an urgent matter; she needed to speak with him personally. This request was unusual and she was not immediately admitted, but the visitor's persistence bore fruit, and an audience took place. Seeing the Patriarch, the woman said with great excitement that during the previous night, she had dreamed of the Theotokos, who told her to take money to the Patriarch so that he could buy himself new shoes. Saying this, the visitor took out an envelope full of money. Patriarch Pavle, not taking the envelope, responded affectionately: "At what time did you lay down to sleep?" The woman, surprised, asked: "Well... around eleven." "You know, I lay down a little later, around four in the morning," the Patriarch responded, "and I also dreamed of the Theotokos, who asked me to tell you to take the money and give it to those who really need it." Needless to say, he did not take the money...

Once, approaching the patriarchate, His Holiness noticed many cars near the entrance and became interested in whose they were. He was told that these cars belonged to the bishops. To this the Patriarch replied with a smile: "If they, who know the Savior's commandment about un-acquisitiveness, have such cars, just imagine what kind of cars they would have if this commandment did not exist!"

Once the Patriarch was flying somewhere on a visit. While they were flying over the sea, the airplane went into a zone of turbulence and began to shake. A young bishop who was sitting next to the Patriarch asked what he would think if the airplane were to fall. His Holiness, Pavle, replied calmly:

"With regard to myself personally, I would take this as an act of justice: I've eaten so many fish in my life that it would be no surprise if they were to eat me now."

We are citing here a passage from a conversation between Nikolai Kokukhin and Deacon Neboisha Topolic:

"By God's mercy we have such a spiritual pastor as His Holiness, Patriarch Pavle... He leads an ascetic life and is a living example of an evangelical pastor. He lives in Christ in the full sense of this word... As an Orthodox monk he fasts, that is, does not eat meat, and keeps a very strict fast on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays... He serves the Liturgy every morning in a small chapel in the building of the patriarchate. There is no choir there, and only the parishioners chant.

"He vests himself before the service and unvests after the service, he confesses and communes parishioners himself. He has worn the same *rasa* and cassock from the time of his tonsure to the angelic order (and this was fifty years ago). He



does not replace them. He washes, irons, and mends them himself. He prepares his own food. Once he told me that he had made himself a pair of good boots out of women's boots. He has all the instruments for fixing boots; he himself can fix any shoes. He frequently serves in different churches, and when he sees that a priest has a torn *rasa* or *phelonion*, he says to him: 'Bring it, and I'll fix it...' Being around such a person is a great benefit for the education of our soul, for spiritual growth."

Patriarch Pavle was a doctor of theology (he had received this before becoming Patriarch), and was the author of several books: a monograph on the "Monastery of St. Joannicius of Devich" and the three-volume "To Clarify Certain Questions of Faith," several selections of which have recently appeared in translations into other languages.

Due to his poor health, Patriarch Pavle had been in the hospital for some time prior to his repose. The Synod of the Serbian Orthodox Church performed the functions of ecclesiastical administration during his lengthy illness. Patriarch Pavle had repeatedly requested to be retired for reasons of health, but the last Council of Bishops had decided that he would remain the spiritual head of the Serbian Church until his very last breath.

Patriarch Pavle was very close to the people, and the people loved him very much. He was a unique figure, even for the Serbian Church and the next Patriarch, of course, is different.

Predrag Miodrag, who knew the Patriarch well, wrote the following: "He was very accessible. When his sister was alive, he frequently walked to her house by foot. He generally liked to go about by foot, without an escort. Anyone could approach him and speak with him. He received visitors at his residence every day. People went to him with their needs and their small questions, and he always offered the right comfort-word of consolation for each one of them.

"He got up very early and, when everyone was still sleeping, he served the Liturgy, praying for the entire Serbian people. All of Serbia was in his heart. He was small in stature, but great in spirit. He had thin fingers, but when he formed these fingers into the sign of the cross, legions of demons fled; he wore thin cotton vestments, but beneath these vestments was hidden the soul of a brave warrior. The Serbian people used to say: 'This is our angel, who protects and defends us.' They were right..."

Patriarch Pavle belonged to a different tradition. He was a mystically prayerful monk, rather than a sanguine Prince of the Church. He was a Patriarch who blended, harmoniously, three key functions of his throne: that of the father, of the priest, and of the prophet. He understood, and lived, the legacy of Prince Lazar, martyred at Kosovo in 1389: *The Kingdom on Earth is but paltry and small; yet the Kingdom of Heaven is forever and knows no bounds.*

May his soul dwell with the Righteous!

DEVELOPING THE INTELLECT AND WILL OF THE SOUL

By St. Theophan the Recluse.



In the soul we find three powers: the intellect, the will, the heart, or, as the Holy Fathers say, the intellectual, desiring and incensive powers.

Each of them is assigned particular curative exercises by the holy ascetics. These related exercises are both receptive and conducive to grace. They need not be contrived according to some theory, but rather chosen from tested

ascetic labors particularly suited to a given power.

For the mind:

1) Reading and hearing the Word of God, the writings of the Holy Fathers and the lives of the God-pleasers. 2) Studying and impressing upon yourself all the God-given truths in brief statements (the catechesis). 3) Asking questions of those older and more experienced. 4) Mutual informative discourse with friends.

For the will:

1) Submission to the whole church rule. 2) Submission to civil order, or to family duty, for they are conduits of God's will. 3) Obedience to God's will as manifested in your fate. 4) Obeying your conscience in the doing of good deeds. 5) Subjecting yourself to the spirit that is zealous to fulfill its vows.

For the heart:

1) Attending holy Church services. 2) Prayer, as specified by the Church; home prayer rule. 3) Using holy crosses, icons and other sacred substances and objects. 4) Observing holy customs established and promoted by the Church.

For each of these three powers, corresponding exercises are given to them. They act directly to develop the powers, but in a way that does not quell the spirit—to the contrary, it ignites the spirit more and more. The latter serves as a measure and stabilizer to the former, which subjects itself to the latter to the point of speechless submission or even total cessation. [Ed.: An article by St. Theophan addressing exercises for the development of the heart was presented in *Orthodox Heritage*, May-June 2008 issue. This article addresses the saint's guidance for the mind and the will.]

† † †

Exercises That Develop the Intellect, and Also Warm the Spiritual Life

A Christian intellectual development occurs when all the truths of the Faith are impressed so deeply into the intellect that the intellect's whole existence is made up of these truths alone. When it begins to reason over something, it

reasons according to what it knows of the Christian truths, and would never make the slightest move without them. The Apostle calls this keeping the image of *a sound mind* (2 Tim 1:7).

Exercises or work related to this are: reading and hearing the Word of God, patristic literature, Lives of the Holy Fathers, mutual discourse and asking questions of those more experienced. It is good to read or listen, better to have a mutual discourse, and even better to ask questions of those more experienced.

The most fruit-bearing is the Word of God, then patristic literature and the Lives of Saints. Incidentally, it is needful to know that the Lives of saints are better for beginners, patristic literature for the intermediate, and the Word of God for the perfect.

All of these are the sources of Truth as well as the means for drawing from them; obviously, impressing them in the mind along with preserving the spirit of zeal also help.

Often one text will warm the spirit for more than a day. There are Lives of which the mere remembrance is enough to inflame zeal. There are also passages in patristic writings that inspire. Therefore we have this good rule: write down such passages and save them, in case you need them later to warm your spirit.

Often neither internal nor external work helps—the spirit remains sleepy. Hasten to read something from somewhere. If this does not help, run to someone to discuss it. The latter performed with faith is rarely fruitless.

There are two kinds of reading: one—ordinary, almost mechanical, and another—discriminating, according to spiritual need and advice. But the first kind is also not useless. It is, as we have said already, what is simply repeated and not studied.

It is most necessary for everyone to have someone with whom he can discuss spiritual matters—someone who already knows all our problems and to whom we can boldly reveal everything on our soul. It is best if it is only one person; two is too many. Idle conversations carried on only in order to pass the time should be avoided at all cost.

Here is a rule for reading:

- Before reading you should empty your soul of everything.
- Arouse the desire to know about what is being read.
- Turn prayerfully to God.
- Follow what you are reading with attention and place everything in your open heart.
- If something did not reach the heart, stay with it until it reaches.
- You should of course read quite slowly.
- Stop reading when the soul no longer wants to nourish itself with reading. That means it is full. If the soul finds one passage utterly stunning, stop there and read no more.

The best time for reading the Word of God is in the morning, Lives of Saints after the mid-day meal, and Holy Fathers before going to sleep. Thus you can take up a little bit each day.

During such occupations, you should continually keep your mind on the main goal—impressing the truth on yourself and awakening the spirit. If reading or discourse does not bring this about, then they are but idle itching of the tongue and ears, or empty discussion. If it is done with intelligence, then the truths impress themselves and rouse the spirit, and one thing aids the other. But if the reading or discourse digresses from the proper image, then there is neither one nor the other—truth is stuffed into the head like sand, and the spirit becomes cold and hard, smokes over and puffs up.

Impressing the spirit is not the same as searching for it. This requires only that you clarify what the truth is, and hold it in your mind until they bond together. Let there be no deductions or limitations—only the face of truth.

We can see that the rule for everyone is this: impress the Holy little truth in a way that will awaken you. The methods for fulfilling this rule vary, and it is not at all possible to prescribe the same one for everyone.

Thus, reading, listening and discourse that do not impress the truth or awaken the spirit should be considered wrong, as they lead away from the truth. It is a sickness to read many books out of curiosity alone, when only the mind follows what is being read, without leading it to the heart or delighting in its flavor.

This is the science of dreaming; it is not creative, does not hasten success, but is devastating and always leads to arrogance. All your work should be limited, as we have said, to the following: clarify the truth and hold it in the mind until the heart tastes of it. The Holy Fathers put it simply: remember it, hold it in the mind, and have it always before your eyes.

† † †

Exercises for Developing the Will, Focusing Also On Awakening the Spirit

Developing the will means impressing upon it good dispositions or virtues—humility, meekness, patience, continence, submissiveness, helpfulness and so on. Thus, in blending with and grafting onto the will, the virtues would eventually constitute its very nature, and when something is undertaken by the will, it would be undertaken according to their inspiration and in their spirit, and they would govern and reign over our deeds.

Such a disposition of will is the safest and most stable. But inasmuch as it is contrary to the spirit of sin, its achievement requires toil and sweat. That is why the activity related to this is for the most part directed against the chief infirmity of the will, that is—self-will, unsubmissiveness, and intolerance of the yoke.

This infirmity is healed by submission to the will of God, with denial of your own and of any other. The will of God is revealed through the various forms of obedience that each person carries. Its first and most important requirement is observing the laws or commandments according to each person's duty or calling; next is observing the rubrics of the Church, the dictates of civil and family order, the dictates of circumstance that are wrought by providential will, and the demands of a zealous spirit—all done with discernment and counsel.

All of this is within the field of righteous deeds which is open to anyone and everyone. Therefore, know only how to arrange this for yourself and you will not experience a dearth of means for developing the will. For this you must clarify for yourself the sum of righteous deeds that are possible for you to do—in your station, calling and circumstances—together with an assessment of what, when, how, in what measure, and what can and should be done.

Having clarified all this, determine the general outline of the deeds and their order, so that nothing you do would be accidental. Remember at the same time that this is only an outline—details may change according to what is required under the circumstances. Do everything with discernment.

Therefore it is best to daily go over all the possible occurrences and deeds. Those who are used to doing righteous deeds never pre-determine what they are going to do, but do always the deeds that God sends to them; for everything comes from God. He reveals His own determinations to us through different occurrences.

By the way, all of this is only deeds. Doing them only straightens you out. In order to flow also into virtues through them, you must forcefully keep a true spirit of good works. To be more precise, do everything with humility and fear of God according to God's will and to His glory. He who does something out of self-reliance, with boldness and audacity, out of self-gratification or man-pleasing, no matter how righteous the works may be, only fosters within himself an evil spirit of self-righteousness, arrogance and pharisaism.

Carrying a right spirit, you should also be in remembrance of the laws, especially the law of graduality and constancy; that is, always begin with the small and ascend to what is higher. Then, once you have begun, do not stop.

By this you can avoid:

- Embarrassment that you are not perfect, for perfection does not come all at once. The time will come.
- Thoughts that you have already done everything; for there is no end to the heights.
- Arrogant aspirations, ascetic feats beyond your strength.

The last stage is when good deeds have become natural for you, and the law no longer weighs upon you as a burden.

The one who achieves this most successfully is one who is blessed with the grace of living with an actively virtuous

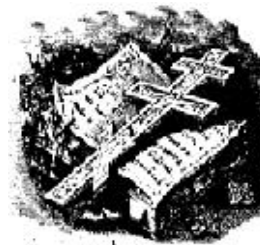
man, especially if he is being taught this science. He will not have to repeat and re-do every failure he has allowed through ignorance and inexperience. As they say, even if you do not read or intellectualize, only find a reverent man, and you will quickly learn the fear of God. This is applicable to any virtue.

Incidentally, it is good to choose one outstanding virtuous work according to your character and station, and stick with it unswervingly—it will be the foundation or basis from which you can go on to others. It will save you in times of weakness—it is a strong reminder and quickly inspires. The most reliable of all is almsgiving, which leads to the King.

This concerns only works and not dispositions, which should have their own inner framework that is founded on the spirit, and are in a certain way independent of the consciousness and free will—they are as the Lord grants. All the saints accept the beginning of this to be the fear of God, and the end to be love. In the middle are all the virtues, one building upon another. Although they are perhaps not all the same, they are inevitably built on humble, compunctionate repentance and sorrow over sins, which are the essence of virtue. A description of each virtue—its nature, activity, degrees of perfection, and deviations from them—is the subject of special books and patristic instructions. Get to know all of this through reading.

This kind of virtuous activity directly develops the will and impresses the virtuous into it. At the same time it also keeps the spirit in constant tension. Just as friction causes warmth, so do good works warm the heart. Without them a good spirit also grows cold and evaporates. This is what usually befalls those who do not do anything, or those who limit themselves to merely not doing evil and unrighteousness. No, we must also find good works to do.

Incidentally, there are also those who make too much fuss over their works, and therefore quickly exhaust themselves and dissipate the spirit. Everything should be done in moderation.



The man who still loves empty fame or is attached to some material thing is the one who is offended at men for the sake of temporal goods, who bears them grudges or hate, who is a slave of shameful thoughts; to the God-loving soul all these things are foreign.

St. Maximus the Confessor, (+662)

EVIL AND INQUIRING INTO GOD'S JUSTICE

By Elder Paisios the Athonite.

In his desire to demonstrate how God provides and cares for His creation, whenever we tend to become indignant and not understand His actions, the Elder would tell us stories such as the following one:

An ascetic who had observed the injustice that exists in the world prayed to God and asked Him to reveal the reason that righteous and pious people suffer misfortunes and are tortured without any obvious explanation, whereas the unrighteous and sinners become wealthy and enjoy comforts. In the middle of the ascetic's prayer, he heard a voice instructing him as follows:

"Do not ask for those things that your mind and the power of your knowledge cannot reach, nor seek to learn what is hidden, because the judgments of God are an abyss. However, because you have requested to learn, go down into the world and sit in a certain spot discreetly and note whatever you shall see from there, so that with this minor test, you will get an idea of what God's judgments are. That way, you will come to understand just why God's providential administration in all things is unsearchable and unfathomable."

On hearing this, the old ascetic carefully walked down towards the inhabited areas until he reached a meadow that was crossed by a busy main road. There was a spring and an old tree nearby, so the elder hid himself carefully in the hollow trunk of the tree and decided to observe from there. Soon after, a wealthy man on horseback rode past. He stopped at the spring for a drink of water and lay down on the grass to rest. After quenching his thirst, he took out a pouch with 100 gold coins from his garment and began to count them. When he finished counting, he placed the pouch back in his garment; however, without realizing it, the pouch fell to the ground, into the grass.

He ate, he rested, he slept a little, and then he got back on his horse and rode off, without realizing he had lost the pouch with the gold coins.

After a while, another passer-by came to the spring. He found the pouch with the gold coins, grabbed it, and ran off with it, into the fields.

A little while later, another passer-by appeared. Tired as he was, he too stopped at the spring, took a drink of water, took out a piece of bread that he carried with him and sat down to eat.

Just as that poor man was eating, the wealthy horseman reappeared in a fury, his face red with anger. He pounced upon the unsuspecting man, yelling at him to give him back his gold coins. The poor man, not having any idea about those coins, reassured him with solemn oaths that he had seen no such thing. But angry as the horseman was, he began to beat the poor man until he eventually killed him. He then proceeded to search through the poor man's clothes, found nothing, and left him, greatly shocked and saddened.

The elder saw all these things happen before his eyes, and stood in wonder, overwhelmed with sorrow at the unjust

murder that he had witnessed and turned in prayer to the Lord, saying:

"Lord, what is the meaning of this will of Yours? I beg You to explain how Your Benevolence can tolerate such an injustice? A person lost the coins, another found them, and another was unfairly murdered!"

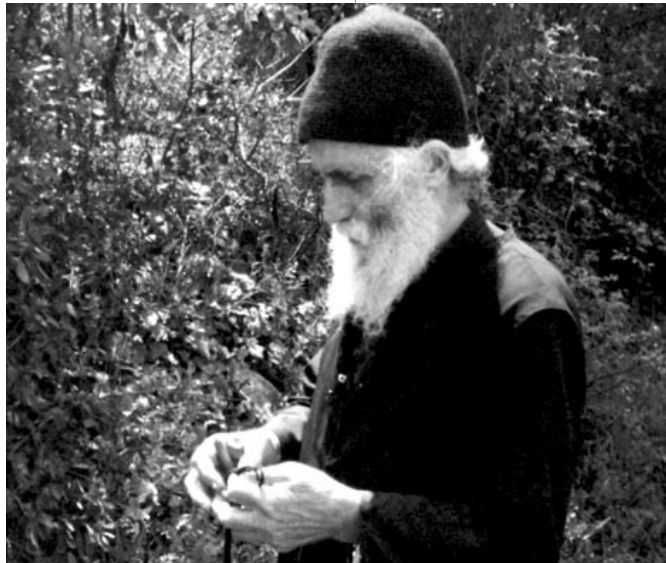
As the elder continued to pray with tears, an Angel of the Lord descended and said to him:

"Do not be sorrowed, elder, nor be disillusioned and imagine that all these things happened supposedly without the

will of God. Because of all the things that you just witnessed, some were by God's concession, others were for education, and others had providential reasons. So listen now: He who lost the coins was the neighbour of the one who found them. The latter had an orchard worth 100 gold coins. Being greedy, the rich man forced him to give up the orchard for only 50 coins. Unable to do anything else, the poor man prayed to God to take care of the injustice. Therefore, it was God's providence which had responded to the poor man's prayer and had given him back the money, two-fold.

"The other man—the poor and weary one—who had found nothing and yet was unfairly murdered? Well, he had committed murder, but only once in his life. However, he had repented sincerely, and for the rest of his life had made sure that his works were Christian and pleasing to God. He constantly beseeched God to forgive him for the murder he had committed, and would usually say, 'My Lord, please give me a death just like the one that I had inflicted!'

"Naturally, the Lord forgave him from the very first moment that he showed signs of repentance. But He was especially



moved by the sensitivity of His child, who not only made sure he upheld all His Commandments, but also desired to pay for his old crime. Thus, the Lord granted his wish, allowing him to die in the manner that he had prayed for. God did not deprive him of his wish, and allowed him to die a violent death, just as he had asked, and then took him into His bosom, in fact even crowning him with a glorious wreath for the sensitivity he had shown!

“Finally, the other man, the greedy one who lost all the gold coins and then committed murder, he would have had a disastrous end on account of his greed and his love of money, so God allowed him to fall into the sin of murder, so that his soul would be severely pained and thus seek to repent. Given the turn of events, that person has now abandoned all worldly pleasures and is going away, to become a monk!

“Now then, in which of these cases did you find God to be unjust or cruel or insensitive? “For this reason, you must no longer concern yourself with in-depth examinations of God’s judgments, because He metes them out fairly, in the manner that He deems appropriate, when you on the other hand misconstrue them as injustices.

“You should also know that there are many other things that happen in the world by the will of God, for reasons that people cannot understand. Thus, the proper thing to say is: *You are Just, O Lord, and straight are Your judgments.* (Pss 137).

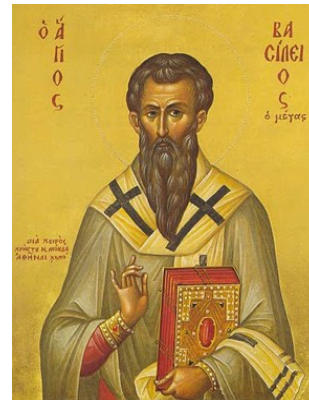


It was said of Abba Agathon that he forced himself to fulfill all the commandments. When he sailed in a vessel he was the first to handle the oars and when the brethren came to see him he laid the table with his own hands, as soon as they had prayed, because he was full of the love of God. When he was at the point of death he remained three days with his eyes fixed, wide-open. The brethren roused him saying, “Abba Agathon, where are you?” He replied, “I am standing before the judgment seat of God.” They said, “Are you not afraid, Father?” He replied, “Until this moment, I have done my utmost to keep the commandments of God; but I am a man; how should I know if my deeds are acceptable to God?” The brethren said to him, “Do you not have confidence in all that you have done according the law of God?” The old man replied, “I shall have no confidence until I meet God. Truly the judgment of God is not that of man.” When they wanted to question him further, he said to them, “Of your charity, do not talk to me any more, for I have no more time.” And so he died with joy. They saw him depart like one greeting his dearest friends. He preserved the strictest vigilance in all things, saying, “Without great vigilance a man does not advance in even a single virtue.”

From “Sayings of the Desert Fathers”

THE VISION OF ST. BASIL THE GREAT, AND JULIAN THE APOSTATE

Translated from the Greek Orthodox periodical “Transfiguration” («Μεταμόρφωσις»).



In the years when Julian the Apostate wished to revive idolatry—as some try to do in our days (neo-idolatry)—and to build again the Temple of Solomon (in his attempt terrible flames poured forth from that place and he was unable to complete his task), he stopped near Caesarea on his way to Persia [for war].

St. Basil the Great knew Julian from Athens; the two of them studied together, however each took a different road. The Metropolitan of the city [St. Basil] therefore went out to meet the emperor and he brought three loaves of bread from those that the Saint ate. The Saint ate barley bread and it is from those loaves that he offered to Julian.

Julian accepted the gift and ordered St. Basil to be rewarded grass from the surrounding fields!

The Saint, seeing this scorn, said: “We, O emperor, from that which we eat offered to you, just as you requested. And your kingdom, as is appropriate, returned the gift from that which you eat.”

As soon as the emperor heard these words, he was greatly angered and abruptly told the Saint:

“For now accept this “gift of grass.” And when I return from Persia a victor, then I will burn your city and I will remove your infantile people and enslave them, because you dishonor the gods which I worship, and you will thus receive the appropriate reward [i.e., punishment].”

And when he finished these terrible threats, the emperor Julian headed for Persia.

The Saint returned to Caesarea and called all of the people. When he told them the threats of the king to destroy the city and enslave them, he advised them to consider gathering a great gift of moneys and gold for the emperor; he thus instructed them to gather whatever they had in one place and when the king would return, they would throw their treasures in the streets, and being avaricious, he would be appeased and would not do any evil upon them.

The Christians obediently went and gathered an uncountable treasure: gold, silver, and precious stones! The Saint placed it in the treasury, writing the name of each to keep them, until he learned of Julian’s return.

Some time later, when he learned that he was returning, St. Basil gathered the Christians and told them all to fast for three days. Then they all ascended the mountain of Caesarea called Didymos ("Twin"), because it had two peaks.

On that mountain was a Church of the Most-Holy Theotokos, where all the Christians, when they reached it, began with contrite heart to entreat the merciful Christ and His Most-Pure Mother, that the decision of the impious emperor be changed. Then as they were continuing in prayer, St. Basil saw a multitude of heavenly armies circle the mountain and among them was a woman sitting on a throne with much glory, who said to the Angels that were around:

"Call Mercurius to me, that he go and put to death the enemy of my Son, Julian!"

Then the Archbishop of Caesarea observed that the Holy Martyr Mercurius arrived, armed with his weapon, and having received the command from that woman who was the Most-Holy Theotokos, he immediately disappeared! At that very moment, Julian the Apostate, as he was on his Persian campaign, was wounded by the spear of an unknown soldier, who immediately disappeared. The mortally wounded Julian, as he lay dying, cried out, "Thou hast conquered, O Galilean!"

Then, the Queen of all Angels, Panagia, called St. Basil and gave to him a book which contained the details of Creation and the manner by which man fallen from God. In the beginning of the book was an epigraph which exclaimed, "He said," while prior to the end of the book (which talked of the fall of man) was written the word "End." This meant that the Saint would author a hermeneutical book on the Six Days of Creation of Moses (and on the creation of the World in general), titled "The Hexaimeron." However, the chapter on the creation of man by God would not be completed by him; and as prophesied by the Holy Mother, it was actually completed after his repose, by his brother, St. Gregory of Nyssa.

The Saint "awoke" from the vision right away and with some of the clergy descended immediately to the city of Caesarea, where the Church of the St. Mercurius was located; therein he found St. Mercurius' relics and his weapons. (The saint was martyred at that same location a hundred years prior).

St. Basil entered this church and (not seeing the relics or the weapons), he asked the protector of the relics of the Church what occurred. He of course did not know anything. Then the Great Basil understood that it was a true vision and that the most impious Julian would be killed that night.

Immediately, the Holy Metropolitan again ascended the mountain and told the Christians:

"Rejoice and be glad today, my brethren. Our prayer was heard, because the infamous king suffers the appropriate punishment. Therefore giving thanks to God, let us return to the city that each may receive the money that he gave."

As soon as the Christians heard these, they all said with a loud voice:

"We were planning to give to the impious king to preserve our lives. Now should we not offer them to the King of Heaven and earth, who granted us life?"

The Saint therefore praised their willingness and ordered a third be given back to each from whom it was given, and the rest to be given to build homes for the poor, homes for strangers, hospitals, orphanages, etc. (all of these later comprised the wondrous Christian, philanthropic complex called Basiliad).

† † †

From the Editor: Another version of the above story informs us that the Saint did not separate the gold and coins given by each of the faithful. Thus, after the death of the emperor, St. Basil asked some of his people to bake loaves of bread within which he hid their coins, jewelry, etc., and handed the bread out to his flock. Miraculously, each loaf contained precisely what each person had given. It is thus that the tradition of "vasilopita" started and continues all the way to our days. Vasilopita (Greek: Βασιλόπιτα, Vasilópita, literally: "St. Basil's pie") is a traditional New Year's Day bread or cake (January 1st is also the Feast day of St. Basil). This custom exists in Greece and many other areas in eastern Europe and the Balkans; the cake often contains a hidden coin or trinket which gives new year "blessings" to the receiver.

† † †

Apolytikion of St. Basil in the First Tone

Your voice resounded throughout the world that received your word by which, in godly manner, you taught dogma, clarified the nature of beings, and set in order the character of people. Venerable father, Royal Priesthood, intercede to Christ God to grant us great mercy.



I, too, will proclaim the greatness of this day: the Immaterial becomes incarnate, the Word is made flesh, the invisible makes itself seen, the intangible can be touched, the timeless has a beginning, the Son of God becomes the Son of Man—Jesus Christ, always the same, yesterday, today and forever...

This is the solemnity we are celebrating today: the arrival of God among us, so that we might go to God, or, more precisely, return to Him... Revere the Nativity, which releases you from the chains of evil. Honor this tiny Bethlehem, which restores Paradise to you. Venerate this crib; because of it, you, who were deprived of meaning (logos), are fed by the divine Meaning: the divine Logos Himself.

St. Gregory the Theologian

THE LITTLE THINGS IN LIFE

By St. John Maximovitch.

St. John Maximovitch was well known for his remarkable faith which he exemplified in his daily life, both as a shepherd as well as an Orthodox Christian. Vladika John's constant attention to self mortification had its root in the fear of God, which he possessed in the tradition of the ancient Church and of Holy Russia.

The following incident, told by O. Skopichenko and confirmed by many from Shanghai, well illustrates his daring, unshakable faith in Christ.

"A Mrs. Menshikova was bitten by a mad dog. The injections against rabies she either refused to take or took carelessly.... And then she came down with this terrible disease. Bishop John found out about it and came to the dying woman. He gave her Holy Communion, but just then she began having one of the fits of this disease; she began to foam at the mouth, and at the same time she spit out the Holy Gifts which she had just received. The Holy Sacrament cannot be thrown out. And Vladika picked up and put in his mouth the Holy Gifts vomited by the sick woman. Those who were with him exclaimed: 'Vladika, what are you doing! Rabies is terribly contagious!' But Vladika peacefully answered: 'Nothing will happen; these are the Holy Gifts.' And indeed nothing did happen."

The present article exemplifies the depth of simplicity in his faith as well as the manner by which he guided his flock while he was with us.

† † †

Many people believe that to live according to the faith and to fulfill the will of God is very difficult. Actually, it is very easy. One needs only attend to details, to trifles, and try to avoid evil in the slightest and most trivial things. This is the simplest and surest way to enter the world of the spirit and draw near to God.

A man often thinks that the Creator demands great things of him, that the Gospel insists on complete self-sacrifice, the abolition of one's personhood, etc., as a condition of faith. A man is so frightened by this that he begins to be afraid of becoming acquainted with God, of drawing near to God, and hides himself from God, not even wishing to look into God's Word. "If I can't do anything important for God, then I'd just better stay away from things spiritual, stop thinking about eternity, and live 'in a normal way'."

There exists, at the entrance to the spiritual realm, a "hypnosis of great deeds:" one must either do some big thing or do nothing. And so people do nothing at all for God or for their souls! It is very strange—the more a man is devoted

to the little things of life, the less he wishes to be honest or pure or faithful to God in those same little things. And, moreover, each one must adopt a correct attitude toward little things if one wishes to come near to the kingdom of heaven.

"Wishes to come near"... In this is summed up all the difficulties of the religious life. Often one wishes to enter into the kingdom of heaven quite unexpectedly, in some miraculous and magical way, or, by right—through some kind of great feat. But neither the one nor the other is the right way to find the higher world.

One does not enter God's presence in some wondrous manner while remaining indifferent on earth to the needs of the kingdom of God and its bright eternity, nor can one purchase the treasures of the kingdom of God by some kind of eternal act, however great that act might be. Yet good deeds, holy deeds are necessary for one to grow into a

higher life, a bright will, a good desire, a heavenly psychology, a heart that is both pure and fair.

Verily, verily I say unto you that whosoever offers one of the least of these but a cup of cold water, in the name of a disciple, shall not lose his reward. In this saying of the Lord is the highest expression of the smallness of the good. *A glass of water*—this is not much...

In every communication between people there must without fail be a good spirit. This spirit is Christ, openly manifest or hidden.

In the name of a disciple—this is the first step in communicating with another person in the name of Jesus Christ Himself. Many people, not as yet knowing the Lord and the wondrous fellowship

in His Name still have among themselves an unselfish, pure and human fellowship which brings them ever closer to the Spirit of Christ.

As a matter of fact, the lesser good is more necessary for mankind than the greater. People can get along with their lives without the greater good; without the lesser they can not exist. Mankind perishes not from a lack of the greater good, but from an insufficiency of just this lesser good. The greater good is no more than a roof, erected on the brick walls of the lesser good.

The lesser, easier good was left on this earth for man by the Creator Himself, who took all the greater good upon Himself. Whosoever does the lesser, the same creates—and through him the Creator Himself creates—the greater good. Of our little good the Creator makes His Own great good. For as our Lord is the Creator who formed all things from



nothingness, so is He more able to create the greater good from the lesser.

Through such lesser, easy work, done with the greatest simplicity, a man is accustomed to the good and begins to serve it with his whole heart, sincerely, and in this way enters into an atmosphere of good, lets down the roots of his life into new soil, the soil of the good. The roots of human life quickly accommodate themselves to this good earth, and soon cannot live without it. Thus is a man saved: from the small comes the great. *Faithful in little things* turns out to be *faithful in the greater*.

Lay aside all theoretical considerations that it is forbidden to slaughter millions, women, children, and elderly; be content to manifest your moral sense by in no way killing the human dignity of your neighbor, neither by word, nor by innuendo, nor by gesture.

Do not be angry over trifles *against your brother vainly* (Mt 5:22) or in the daily contacts of life speak untruth to your neighbor. These are trifles, small change, of no account; but just try to do this and you will see what comes of it.

It is hard to pray at night. But try in the morning. If you can't manage to pray at home than at least as you ride to your place of employment attempt with a clear head the *Our Father* and let the words of this short prayer resound in your heart. And at night commend yourself with complete sincerity into the hands of the Heavenly Father. This indeed is very easy.

And give, give a glass of cold water to everyone who has need of it; give a glass filled to the brim with simple human companionship to everyone that lack it, the very simplest companionship,

O wondrous path of little things, I sing thee a hymn! Surround yourselves, O people, gird up yourselves with little works of good—with a chain of little, simple, easy and good feelings which cost us naught, a chain of bright thoughts, words and deeds. Let us abandon the big and the difficult. That is for them that love it and not for us for whom the Lord in His Mercy, for us who have not yet learned to love the greater, has poured forth the lesser love everywhere, free as water and air.



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ORTHODOX CHRISTMAS SERVICES

By Rev. Alexander Schmemmann, from "The Services of Christmas," published by the Orthodox Church in America.

The Nativity Cycle

As Orthodox Christians, we begin the celebration of the Nativity of Christ (December 25) with a time of preparation. Forty days before the feast of the birth of Our Lord we enter the period of the Christmas Fast, to purify both soul and body to enter properly into and partake of the great spiritual reality of Christ's Coming.

This fasting season does not constitute the intense liturgical season that is characteristic of Great Lent; rather, the Christmas Lent is more of an "ascetical" rather than a "liturgical" nature. Nevertheless, the Christmas fasting season is reflected in the life of the Church in a number of liturgical notes that announce the coming feast.

Within the forty days preparation the theme of the approaching Nativity is introduced in the services and liturgical commemorations, little by little. If the beginning of the fast on November 15th is not liturgically marked by any hymn, five days later, on the eve of the Feast of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple, we hear the first announcement from the nine "Irmoi" of the Christmas Canon:

"Christ is born, glorify Him!"

With these words something changes in our life, in the very air we breathe, in the entire mood of the Church's life. It is as if we perceive far, far away, the first light of the greatest possible joy—the coming of God into His world! Thus the Church announces the coming of Christ, the Incarnation of God, His entrance into the world for its salvation.

Then, on the two Sundays preceding Christmas, the Church commemorates the Forefathers and the Fathers: the prophets and the Saints of the Old Testament who prepared that coming, who made history itself into the expectation, the waiting for, the salvation and reconciliation of mankind with God.

Finally, on December 20th, the church begins the Forefeast of the Nativity, whose liturgical structure is similar to the Holy week preceding Pascha—for the birth of the Son of God as child is the beginning of the saving ministry which will lead Him, for the sake of our salvation, to the ultimate sacrifice of the Cross.

The Eve of the Nativity

The liturgical services of December 24th, the Eve of the Nativity, are:

- The Hours
- Vespers, and
- The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great.

Coming at the end of the Forefeast, and indeed of the entire "Advent," the Hours summarize all the themes of the feast and make them into a last and solemn announcement.

In the special Psalms, hymns and biblical readings prescribed for each hour, the joy and power of Christ's Coming are proclaimed. It is one last meditation on the cosmical meaning of the Nativity, on the decisive and radical change it performed in the entire creation.

Vespers, which usually follows the Hours, inaugurates the celebration of the feast itself, for, as we know, the liturgical day begins in the evening. The tone of this celebration is given by the five stichera on *Lord, I call....* What they really are is an explosion of joy for the gift of Christ's Incarnation which is now fulfilled! Eight biblical readings show that Christ is the fulfillment of all prophecies, that His Kingdom is the Kingdom of *all ages*, that all human history finds its meaning in it, and the entire cosmos its centre.

The Liturgy of St. Basil which follows Vespers was in the past the baptismal liturgy at which catechumens were baptized, chrismated and integrated into the Church, the Body of Christ. The double joy of the feast, for the newly-baptized and other members of the Church, is reflected in the prokeimenon of the day:

The Lord said to me: Thou art my son, this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of me, and I shall give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance, and the ends of the earth as Thy possession.

Then, at the end of the Liturgy, the celebrant, taking a lighted candle to the very centre of the Church, and surrounded by the entire congregation, intones the Troparion and kontakion of the feast:

*Thy Nativity, O Christ our God,
Has shone to the world the light of wisdom.
For by it, those who worshipped the stars
Were taught by a star to adore Thee,
The Sun of Righteousness,
And to know Thee, the Orient from on high.
O Lord, glory to Thee!*

The Vigil and the Liturgy

Since Vespers of the feast already have been celebrated, the Vigil begins with Great Compline and the joyful proclamation from Isaiah "God is with us!" The order of Matins is that of a great feast. Now, for the first time, the full Canon "Christ is born," one of the most beautiful canons in Orthodox worship, is sung while the faithful venerate the icon of Christ's Nativity. The Praises follow, summarizing the joy and themes of the entire feast:

*Make glad, O you righteous!
Greatly rejoice, O heavens!
Dance for joy, O mountains; for Christ is born!
The virgin has become like the cherubic throne.
She carries at her bosom God the Word, made flesh.
Shepherds glorify the newborn child.
Wise men offer the master gifts.
Angels praise Him and sing:
O Lord, past understanding, glory to Thee!*

Concluding the celebration of the Nativity of Christ is the Liturgy of the day itself with its festal antiphons proclaiming:

The Lord will send Thee the scepter of power from Zion: Rule in the midst of Thine enemies. With Thee is dominion on the day of Thy birth, in the radiance of holiness.

The Post-Feast

On the second day of the feast, the Synaxis of the Theotokos is celebrated. Combining the hymns of the Nativity with those celebrating the Mother of God, the Church points to Mary as the one through whom the Incarnation was made possible. His humanity—concretely and historically—is the humanity He received from Mary. His Body is, first of all, her body, His life is her life. This feast, the assembly in honour of the Theotokos, is probably the most ancient feast of Mary in the Christian tradition, the very beginning of her veneration by the Church.

Six days of post-feast bring the Christmas season to a close on December 31st. At the services of all these days, the Church repeats the hymns and songs glorifying Christ's Incarnation, reminding us that the source and the foundation of our salvation is only to be found in the One who, as God before the ages, came into this world and for our sake was *born as a little Child*.



ON THE GREAT MYSTERY OF THE MOTHERHOOD OF OUR PANAGHIA

The Lord entered into her and became a servant; He, Who is the Word, entered and became silent within her; thunder entered her, and made no sound; there entered the Shepherd of all, and—in her—He became the Lamb... The mighty One entered, and put on insecurity in her womb; the Provisioner of all entered, and experienced hunger; He, Who gives drink to all, entered, and experienced thirst. Naked and stripped there came forth from her He, Who clothes all! Praise be to Thee, to Whom all things are easy; for Thou art almighty.

If she could carry Thee, it is because Thou, the great Mountain, hast lightened Thy weight; if she feeds Thee, it is because Thou hast taken on hunger; if she gives Thee her breast, it is because Thou, of Thine own will, hast thirsted; if she caresses Thee, it is because Thou, Who art the fiery coal of mercy, hast preserved her bosom unharmed. ... Whoever saw a child, who beholdeth every place? His look is like One Who orders all creatures that are above and that are below."

St. Ephraim the Syrian

Μέγα Μυστήριο: Ἡ Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ

Τοῦ Φώτη Κόντογλου.

Μυστήριο ξένον, λέγει ὁ Ὑμνωδός, τῇ Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὸ νὰ γεννηθῇ σὰν ἄνθρωπος, ὅχι κανένας προφήτης, ὅχι κανένας ἄγγελος, ἄλλα ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεός! Ὁ ἄνθρωπος, θὰ μπορούσε νὰ φθάσει σὲ μία τέτοια πίστι; Οἱ φιλόσοφοι καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι τετραπέρατοι σπουδασμένοι, ἦτανε δυνατὸ νὰ παραδεχθοῦν ἓνα τέτοιο πράγμα; Ἀπὸ τὴν κρισάρα τῆς λογικῆς τους δὲν μπορούσε νὰ περάσει ἡ παραμικρὴ ψευτιά, ὅχι ἓνα τέτοιο «τερατολόγημα»! Ὁ Πυθαγόρας, ὁ Ἐμπεδοκλῆς καὶ ἄλλοι τέτοιοι θαυματουργοί, ποὺ ἦτανε καὶ σπουδαῖοι φιλόσοφοι, δὲν μπορούσαν νὰ τοὺς κάνουνε νὰ πιστέψουνε κάποια πράγματα πολὺ πιστευτά, καὶ θὰ πιστεύανε ἓνα τέτοιο τερατολόγημα; Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ Χριστὸς γεννήθηκε ἀνάμεσα σὲ ἀπλοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἀνάμεσα σὲ ἀπονήρευτους τσοπάνηδες, μέσα σὲ μία σπηλιά, μέσα στὸ παχνί, ποὺ τρώγανε τὰ βόδια.

Κανένας δὲν τὸν πῆρε εἶδηση, μέσα σὲ ἐκεῖνον τὸν ἀπέραντο κόσμον, ποὺ ἐξουσιάζανε οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι, γιὰ τοῦτο εἶχε πεῖ ὁ προφήτης Γεδεών, πὼς θὰ κατέβαινε ἡσυχὰ στὸν κόσμον, ὅπως κατεβαίνει ἡ δροσιὰ ἀπάνω στὸ μπουμποῦκι τοῦ λουλουδιοῦ, «ὥς ὑετὸς ἐπὶ πόκον». Ἀνάμεσα σὲ τόσες μυριάδες νεογέννητα παιδιὰ, ποῖος νὰ πάρει εἶδηση τὸ πιὸ πτωχὸ ἀπὸ τὰ πτωχά, ἐκεῖνο ποὺ γεννήθηκε ὅχι σὲ καλύβι, ὅχι σὲ στρουγγα, ἀλλὰ σὲ μία σπηλιά; Καὶ κεῖνὴ ξένη, γιὰ τὴν εἶχανε οἱ τσομπαναρέοι νὰ σταλιάζουνε τὰ πρόβατά τους.

Τὸ «ὑπερεξαίσιον καὶ φρικτὸν μυστήριο» τῆς Γεννήσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔγινε τὸν καιρὸ ποὺ βασιλεὺς ἓνας μοναχὰ αὐτοκράτορας ἀπάνω στὴ γῆ, ὁ Αὐγουστος, ὁ ἀνιψιδὸς τοῦ Καίσαρα, ὕστερα ἀπὸ μεγάλη ταραχὴ καὶ αἱματοχυσία ἀνάμεσα στὸν Ἀντώνιο ἀπὸ τὴν μία μεριά, καὶ στὸν Βρούτο καὶ τὸν Κάσσιο ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη. Τότε γεννήθηκε καὶ ὁ ἓνας καὶ μοναχὸς πνευματικὸς βασιλιάς, ὁ Χριστὸς. Κι' αὐτὸ τὸ λέγει ἡ ποιήτρια Κασσιανὴ στὸ δοξαστικὸ ποὺ σύνθεσε, καὶ ποὺ τὸ ψέλνουνε κατὰ τὸν Ἑσπερινὸ τῶν Χριστουγέννων: **Αὐγούστου μοναρχήσαντος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ἡ πολυαρχία τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπαύσατο. Καὶ τοῦ ἐνανθρωπήσαντος ἐκ τῆς ἀγνῆς ἡ πολυθεΐα τῶν εἰδώλων κατήργηται. Ὑπὸ μίαν βασιλείαν ἐγκόσμιον αἱ πόλεις γεγέννηται. Καὶ εἰς μίαν δεσποτείαν Θεότητος τὰ ἔθνη ἐπίστευσαν...**



Τὴ Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴν προφητέψανε οἱ προφῆτες. Πρῶτος ἀπ' ὅλους τὴν προφήτεψε ὁ πατριάρχης Ἰακώβ, τὴ μέρα ποὺ εὐλόγησε τοὺς δώδεκα υἱοὺς του, καὶ εἶπε στὸν Ἰούδα **δὲν θὰ λείψει ἄρχοντας ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰούδα μήτε βασιλιάς ἀπὸ τὸ αἷμά του, ὥς ποὺ νὰ ἔλθει ἐκεῖνος, γιὰ τὸν ὁποῖον εἶναι γραμμένο νὰ βασιλεύει ἀπάν' ἀπ' ὅλους, καὶ αὐτὸν τὸν περιμένουνε ὅλα τὰ ἔθνη.** Ὡς τὸν καιρὸ ποὺ γεννήθηκε ὁ Χριστὸς, οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι, τὸ γένος τοῦ Ἰούδα, εἶχανε ἄρχοντες, δηλαδὴ κριτὲς καὶ ἀρχιερεῖς, ποὺ ἦτανε καὶ οἱ πολιτικοὶ ἄρχοντες τους. Ἀλλὰ τότε γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ ἔγινε ἄρχοντας τῆς Ἰουδαίας ὁ Ἡρώδης, ποὺ ἦτανε ἐθνικὸς καὶ ἔβαλε ἀρχιερεῖς τὸν Ἀνάνιον «ἀλλογενή», ἐνῶ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς εἶχανε πάντα μητέρα Ἰουδαία. Τελευταῖος Ἰουδαῖος ἀρχιερεὺς στάθηκε ὁ Ὑρκανός.

Καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι προφῆτες προφητέψανε τὴ Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, προπάντων ὁ Ἡσαΐας. Τὴ Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴ λένε οἱ ὕμνωδοὶ (**τὸ πρὸ αἰῶνων ἀπόκρυφον καὶ Ἀγγέλοις ἄγνωστον μυστήριο**), κατὰ τὰ λόγια τοῦ Παύλου ποὺ γράφει: **Ἐμοὶ τῷ ἐλαχιστοτέρῳ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις αὐτῇ ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν εὐαγγελίσασθαι τὸν ἀνεξιχνίαστον πλοῦτον τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ φωτίσαι πάντας τίς ἡ οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου τὸν ἀποκεκρυμμένου ἀπὸ τῶν αἰῶνων ἐν τῷ Θεῷ, τῷ τὰ πάντα κτίσαντι διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἵνα γνωρισθῇ νῦν ταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἡ πολυποίκιλος σοφία τοῦ Θεοῦ.** (Ἐφεσ. 3:8-10). Ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος λέγει, πὼς αὐτὸ τὸ μυστήριον δὲν τὸ γνωρίζανε

καθαρὰ καὶ μὲ σαφήνεια οὔτε οἱ Ἄγγελοι, γι' αὐτὸ ὁ ἀρχάγγελος Γαβριὴλ μὲ τρόπο τὸ εἶπε στὴν Παναγία.

Καὶ στοὺς Κολασσαεῖς γράφοντας ὁ θεόγλωσσος Παῦλος, λέγει: **Τὸ μυστήριο τὸ ἀποκεκρυμμένον ἀπὸ τῶν αἰῶνων καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν γενεῶν, νυνὶ ἐφανερώθη τοῖς ἁγίοις αὐτοῦ, οἷς ἠθέλησε ὁ Θεὸς γνωρίσαι τίς ὁ πλοῦτος, τῆς δόξης τοῦ μυστηρίου τούτου ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, ὃς ἐστὶ Χριστὸς ἐν ἡμῖν ἡ ἐλπίς τῆς δόξης.** Λέγει, πὼς φανερώθηκε αὐτὸ τὸ μυστήριον στοὺς ἁγίους, ποὺ θέλησε ὁ Θεὸς νὰ τὸ μάθουνε, καὶ αὐτοὶ θὰ τὸ διδάσκανε στὰ ἔθνη; στοὺς εἰδωλολάτρες, ποὺ προσκυνούσανε γιὰ θεοὺς πέτρες καὶ ζῶα καὶ διάφορα ἄλλα κτίσματα.

Ἐξακόσια χρόνια πρὸ Χριστοῦ ὁ βασιλεὺς Ναβουχοδονόσορ εἶδε στὸ ὄνειρό του, πὼς βρέθηκε μπροστά του ἓνα θεόρατο φοβερὸ ἄγαλμα, καμωμένο ἀπὸ χρυσάφι, ἀσῆμι, χάλκωμα, σίδερο καὶ σεντέφι. Κι

ἄξαφνα, ἓνας βράχος ξεκόλλησε ἀπὸ ἓνα βουνὸ καὶ χτύπησε τὸ ἄγαλμα καὶ τὸκανε σκόνη. Καὶ σηκώθηκε ἓνας δυνατὸς ἄνεμος καὶ σκόρπισε τὴ σκόνη, καὶ δὲν ἀπόμεινε τίποτα. Ὁ βράχος ὅμως ποὺ τσάκισε τὸ ἄγαλμα ἔγινε ἓνα μεγάλο βουνό, καὶ σκέπασε ὅλη τὴ γῆ. Τότε ὁ βασιλεὺς φώναξε τὸν προφήτη Δανιὴλ καὶ ζήτησε νὰ τοῦ ἐξηγήσει τὸ ὄνειρο.

Κι ὁ Δανιὴλ τὸ ἐξηγήσε καταλεπτῶς, λέγοντας πὼς τὰ διάφορα μέρη τοῦ ἀγάλματος ἦταν οἱ διάφορες βασιλεῖες, ποὺ θὰ περνούσανε ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμον ὕστερα ἀπὸ τὸν Ναβουχοδονόσορα· καὶ πὼς στὸ τέλος ὁ Θεὸς θὰ ἀναστήσει κάποια βασιλεία ποὺ θὰ καταλύσει ὅλες τὶς βασιλεῖες, ὅπως ὁ βράχος ποὺ εἶχε δεῖ στὸ ἐνύπνιό του ἐξαφάνισε τὸ ἄγαλμα μὲ τὰ πολλὰ συστατικά του: **Καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῶν βασιλέων ἐκείνων, ἀναστήσει ὁ Θεὸς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ βασιλείαν, ἥτις εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας οὐ διαφθαρήσεται**, κάποιο βασιλεῖο, λέγει, ποὺ δὲν θὰ καταλυθεῖ ποτὲ στοὺς αἰῶνες τῶν αἰώνων.

Αὐτὴ ἡ βασιλεία ἡ αἰώνια, ἡ ἀφθαρτὴ, εἶναι ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἡ βασιλεία τῆς ἀγάπης στὶς ψυχὲς τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ ιδρύθηκε μὲ τὴν ἀγία Γέννηση τοῦ Κυρίου ποὺ γιορτάζουμε σήμερα. Καὶ ἐπειδὴ εἶναι τέτοια βασιλεία, γι' αὐτὸ θὰ εἶναι αἰώνια, γι' αὐτὸ δὲν θὰ χαλάσει ποτέ, ὅπως γίνεται μὲ τὶς ἄλλες ἐπίγειες καὶ ὑλικὲς βασιλεῖες. Ὅπως ὁ βράχος μεγάλωνε κι ἔγινε ὄρος μέγα καὶ σκέπασε τὴ γῆ, ἔτσι καὶ τὸ κήρυγμα τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου ξαπλώθηκε σ' ὅλη τὴν οἰκουμένη, μὲ τὸ κήρυγμα τῶν Ἀποστόλων: **Εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἐξῆλθεν ὁ φθόγγος αὐτῶν, καὶ εἰς τὰ πέρατα τῆς οἰκουμένης τὰ ῥήματα αὐτῶν.**

Ὡστε βγήκε ἀληθινὴ ἡ ἀρχαιότερη προφητεία τοῦ Ἰακώβ, πὼς σὰν πάψει ἡ ἐγκόσμια ἐξουσία τῶν Ἰουδαίων, θὰ ἔρθει στὸν κόσμον ἐκεῖνος ποὺ προορίστηκε, **ἡ προσδοκία τῶν ἐθνῶν.**

Σημείωσε πὼς οἱ Ἑβραῖοι πιστεύανε πὼς ἡ φυλὴ τους μονάχα ἦταν βλογημένη, καὶ πὼς ὁ Θεὸς φρόντιζε μονάχα γι' αὐτή, καὶ πὼς οἱ ἄλλοι λαοί, «τὰ ἔθνη», ἦταν καταραμένα καὶ μολυσμένα κι ἀνάξια νὰ δεχτοῦν τὴ φώτιση τοῦ Θεοῦ. Λοιπὸν εἶναι παρὰ ξένο νὰ μιλά ἡ προφητεία τοῦ Ἰακώβ γιὰ τὰ ἔθνη, γιὰ τοὺς εἰδωλολάτρεις θὰ περιμένουν τὸν Μεσσία νὰ τοὺς σώσει καὶ μάλιστα νὰ μὴ λείει κἄν πὼς τὸν ἀναμενόμενο Σωτῆρα τὸν περιμένανε οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι μαζί μὲ τὰ ἔθνη, ἀλλὰ νὰ λείει πὼς τὸν περιμένανε μονάχα οἱ ἐθνικοί: **καὶ αὐτὸς προσδοκία ἐθνῶν.**

Ὅπως κι ἔγινε. Γιατί, τὴ βασιλεία ποὺ ἴδρυσεν ὁ Χριστὸς στὸν κόσμον, τὴ θεμελίωσαν μὲν οἱ ἀπόστολοι, ποὺ ἦταν Ἰουδαῖοι, ἀλλὰ τὴν ξαπλώσανε καὶ τὴν στερεώσανε μὲ τοὺς ἀγῶνες τους καὶ μὲ τὸ αἷμα τοὺς οἱ ἄλλες φυλές, «τὰ ἔθνη».

Εἶναι ὁλότελα ἀκατανόητο, γιὰ τὸ πνεῦμα μας, τὸ ὅτι κατέβηκε ὁ Θεὸς ἀνάμεσά μας σὰν ἄνθρωπος

συνηθισμένος καὶ μάλιστα σὰν ὁ φτωχότερος ἀπὸ τοὺς φτωχοὺς. Αὐτὴ τὴ μακροθυμία μονάχα ἅγιες ψυχὲς εἶναι σὲ θέση νὰ τὴ νιώσουνε ἀληθινά, καὶ νὰ κλάψουνε ἀπὸ κατάνυξη.

Κάποιοι, μ' ὅλα αὐτὰ ποὺ εἶπαμε, δὲν θὰ νιώσουνε τίποτα ἀπὸ τὸ Μυστήριο, ποὺ γιορτάζουμε. Σ' αὐτοὺς, ἐγὼ ὁ τιποτένιος, δὲ μπορῶ νὰ πῶ τίποτα. Μοναχὰ θὰ τοὺς θυμίσω τὰ αὐστηρὰ λόγια ποὺ γράφει στὴν ἐπιστολὴ του ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Εὐαγγελιστής, ὁ ἀγαπημένος μαθητὴς τοῦ Χριστοῦ, κ' ὁ θερμότερος κήρυκας τῆς ἀγάπης: **Πᾶν πνεῦμα, ὃ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα, ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐστι. Καὶ πᾶν πνεῦμα, ὃ μὴ ὁμολογεῖ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα, ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ οὐκ ἐστίν. Οὗτος ἐστὶν ἀντίχριστος!**



Τὸ βασικότερο πρᾶγμα εἶναι νὰ κρατοῦμε πάντοτε τὴν ἐπίγνωση τῆς ἀνεπάρκειάς μας ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ. Τότε μπαίνουμε σὲ διαρκὴ ἔνταση ἀνάμεσα στὴν αὐτομεμψία καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὴ μετάνοια καὶ τὴν ἐλπίδα στὸ ἔλεος τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀπὸ τὴ μία πλευρὰ ζοῦμε στὴν ὁδύνη, γιατί εἴμαστε τόσο μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ ποὺ ἀγαπάμε. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη, αὐτὴ ἡ ὁδύνη καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγάπη ἐνεργοῦν σὰν ἐσωτερικὴ φωτιά, ποὺ μᾶς ὠθοῦν μὲ δύναμη πρὸς τὸν Θεό.

Ἡ ἔνταση αὕτη βοῦκε τὴν «τομωτέρα» ἔκφρασή της στὸ λόγο τοῦ Χριστοῦ πρὸς τὸν Γέροντα Σιλουανό: **Κράτει τὸν νοῦ σου εἰς τὸν ἄδην, καὶ μὴ ἀπελπίζουν.** Ὁ λόγος αὐτὸς μπορεῖ νὰ προκαλέσει φόβο, φρίκη καὶ πανικὸ ἀλλὰ δὲν πρέπει νὰ μᾶς συντρίβει. Ἀποτελεῖ τὴ θεμελιώδη ἀρχὴ τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ ζωῆς μας.

**Γέροντας Σωφρόνιος Σαχάρωφ
«Περὶ Πνεύματος καὶ Ζωῆς»**



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, ἃς συνδράμουν, ἂν θέλουν, στὴν ταπεινὴ προσπάθειά μας ἀποστελλοντας κατὰ περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἐτήσια συνδρομὴ τῶν 24 δολλαρίων πρὸς ἐνίσχυση τῆς ἀδελφότητος «Ὅσιος Ποιμῆν».

Ὁνειρον Ἀλεξάνδρου Παπαδιαμάντη, Ἀμίσθου Ἱεροψάλτου

Ν. Δ. Τριανταφυλλοπούλου, φιλολόγου καὶ ὑπεύθυνου διὰ τὴν κριτικὴ ἐκδοση τῶν «Ἀπάντων» τοῦ Ἀλ. Παπαδιαμάντη.

Ἀπὸ τὸν Ἐκδότη: Ὁ κυρ-Ἀλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης (4 Μαρτίου 1851 - 3 Ἰανουαρίου 1911) ἦταν κορυφαῖος Ἑλληνας λογοτέχνης, ἐπονομαζόμενος ὁ «Ἅγιος τῶν ἐλληνικῶν γραμμάτων». Εἰς τὸ παρὸν διήγημα, ὁ συγγραφεὺς παρουσιάζει μερικὲς στιγμὲς ἀπὸ τὶς τελευταῖες ὥρες τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ κυρ-Ἀλεξάνδρου: Ὁ γέρον τῆς Σκιάθου σχεδιάζει τὸ τελευταῖο του διήγημα, λίγο προτοῦ ἀποδημήσει, παραμονὲς τῶν Φώτων...



† † †
Ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης, υἱὸς τοῦ ἱερέως Ἀδαμαντίου Ἐμμανουήλ, διηγηματογράφος καὶ ἱεροψάλτης, ὠνειρεύθη τὴν νύκτα τῆς 2^{ας} πρὸς 3^{ην} Ἰανουαρίου 1911, εἰς τὴν Σκιάθον, ὅτι εὕρισκετο εἰς τὰς Ἀθήνας, ἔλαβε δὲ σημείωμα τοῦ Βλ. Γαβριηλίδου, μὲ τὸ ὁποῖον ὁ διευθυντὴς τῆς

«Ἀκροπόλεως» τὸν ἐκάλει νὰ περάσῃ τὸ ταχύτερον ἀπὸ τὰ γραφεῖα τῆς ἐφημερίδος. Μολονότι ἐνόησεν ὅτι ἐπρόκειτο περὶ ἀναθέσεως ἐργασίας, καὶ μολονότι ἡ οἰκονομικὴ του κατάστασις πᾶν ἄλλο ἢ ἀνθηρὰ ἦτο, ἐδυσφόρησεν ἐλαφρῶς, ἔκαμε βῶλον τὸ σημείωμα καὶ τὸ κατέπιεν, ἀλλ' ἡ κατάποσις ὑπῆρξεν ὀδυνηρὰ· πῶς καὶ ἠϋχήθη τότε νὰ εἶχεν ὀλίγον γάλα.

Αἰφνιδίως ἐπαρουσιάσθη ὁ φίλος του Νιρβάνας, ὅστις τοῦ ἔτεινε ποτήριον γάλακτος λέγων:

—Ἀλέξανδρε, τόσον καιρὸν ἐπιμένω ὅτι, ἐὰν ἔπινες τακτικώτερα γάλα, θὰ ὠφελεῖσο πολὺ, ἀλλ' ἐσὺ μὲ πείσμα μου ἀντιτάσσεις τὴν ἀπαράγραπτον τήρησιν τῆς νηστείας. Σήμερα, ὅμως, ἡμπορεῖς ἀνενόχως νὰ καταλύσῃς, καθ' ὅτι διανύομεν τὸ Δωδεκάμηρο.

Ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος ἔλαβε τὸ ποτήριον, ἀλλ' ὅταν τὸ ἔφερεν εἰς τὰ χεῖλη του διεπίστωσεν ὅτι περιεῖχε διάλυμα ἀσβέστου, ταυτοχρόνως δὲ εἶδεν ὅτι ὁ Νιρβάνας διελύετο ὡς καπνός! Τοῦ Ἀχιτόφελ βουλαί, παίγνια τοῦ Βεελζεβούλ!

Τοῦτο τὸν ἐνέβαλεν εἰς τὴν ὑπόψιν ὅτι ἐνδεχομένως καὶ ὁ Γαβριηλίδης ἤθελε νὰ τὸν βάλῃ εἰς πειρασμόν. Ἐνθυμήθη ὅτι πρὸ ἐτῶν τοῦ ἐξήτησεν ἀσυστόλως νὰ μεταφράσῃ, Μεγαλοβδομαδιάτικα κιόλας, τὰ πρακτικὰ τῆς διεξαγομένης τότε ἐν Ἀγγλίᾳ δίκης θηλυπρεποῦς καὶ ἀκολάστου συγγραφέως. Εἶχε μετὰ βδελυγμίας ἀρνηθῇ, ἀλλ' εἰς τῶν συντακτῶν τῆς «Ἀκροπόλεως» εὔρε τὴν εὐκαιρίαν, ὡς ἐνόμισε, νὰ τοῦ δώσῃ, ἀκαίρως καὶ δωρεάν, μάθημα φιλοχριστίας εἰπών:

—Κύριε Ἀλέξανδρε, δὲν κινδυνεύετε νὰ φανῇτε ἀντίχριστος, ὅταν ἀντιμετωπίζετε μὲ τόσῃ ἀνεπιείκειαν τὰς ἀδυναμίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων;

Τρομερῶς ἐξερράγη τότε αὐτὸς καὶ ἀνταπέδωσεν ἐντόκως τὴν διδαχὴν, τοῦ ἔκοψε δὲ τὴν καλημέραν ἐπὶ ὀλόκληρον μῆνα διὰ τὸ βλάσφημον «ἀντίχριστος».

Θὰ ἐπήγαινε, λοιπόν, εἰς συνάντησιν τοῦ Γαβριηλίδου, πλὴν ὅμως «κουμπωμένος».

Καθ' ὁδὸν εὗρέθη ἀντίπρωρος πρὸς τὸν συμπατριώτην του Λαλεμήτρον, ὅστις τὸν ἐχαίρετίσεν μὲ ἄκραν διαχυτικότητα καὶ μὲ ἴσην ἀφελότητα τὸν ἐκάλεσε νὰ καθίσωσιν εἰς παρακείμενον ζαχαροπλαστεῖον, ὀνομαστὸν διὰ τοὺς λουκουμάδες του. Ἐδέχθη τὴν πρόσκλησιν, εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὸ κατάστημα καὶ ὁ Λαλεμήτρος παρήγγειλε δυὸ μερίδας. Ἦσαν λουκουμάδες ἐξαίρετοι καὶ τοὺς ἐτίμησαν δεόντως. Ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης ἐποτίσθη μέχρις ὀνύχων ἀπὸ τὴν ἡδύτητά των, ὅλην ἄρωμα!

—Εὐχαριστῶ διὰ τὸ κέρασμα· μὲ ἔκαμες νὰ θυμηθῶ τὴν πατρίδα, εἶπεν εἰς τὸν Λαλεμήτρον.

—Ἐχω ὅμως ἓνα παράπονο, ἀπήντησεν, ἀπροσδοκῆτως ἀλλὰ καὶ μετὰ συστολῆς ἐκεῖνος

Θορυβηθεὶς ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης τὸν ἠρώτησεν ἂν τυχὸν τοῦ ὀφείλει χρήματα καὶ τὸ ἐλησμόνησεν· ἂν περὶ αὐτοῦ πρόκειται, νὰ μὴ ἀνησυγῇ, θὰ λάβῃ σήμερα καλὴν παραγγελίαν καὶ προκαταβολήν, θὰ τὸν ἐξοφλήσῃ ἀμέσως. Πάσχων νὰ τὸν πείσῃ ἡσθάνετο νὰ ἀναπέμπωνται ἐκ τοῦ στομάχου εἰς τὸ στόμα οἱ λουκουμάδες ὡς γεῦσιν χολῆς.

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος συνεστάλη ἔτι περισσότερον, ὅταν ὡς ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης ἐπῆρε τὸν ἀνασασμόν του, ἐμορμύρισεν ὅτι οὐδέποτε ἔτυχε νὰ ἔχουν χρηματικὰς δοσοληψίας, καὶ πῶς εἶχε σκεφθῇ αὐτὰ τὰ περὶ χρέους; Ἄλλης λογῆς ἦτον τὸ παράπονό του, ὅτι δηλαδὴ τὴν ἱστορίαν τοῦ Γιάννη τ' Μοθωνιοῦ, ὅπου ἐγύρισε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀμερικὴ καὶ ἐπανδρεύθηκε τῇ σαστικίᾳ του, τὸ Μελαχρῶ τῆς Κουμπουρτζίνας, ὁ κυρ-Ἀλέξανδρος τὴν εἶχε βάλει στὸ χαρτί, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἰδικήν του, ὅπου καὶ αὐτὸς ἐβασανίσθη πέντε χρόνια στὴν Ἀλάσκα κ' ἐτυφλώθη, καὶ ἐπέστρεψε στὴ Σκιάθου θαυματουργὰ θεραπευμένος, αὐτὴν λοιπὸν τὴν ἐλησμόνησεν.

Ἐξέφραξε τὸ παράπονον μὲ τὴν κεφαλὴν κάτω νεύουσας, καὶ ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης μειδιῶν τοῦ ὑπενθύμισεν ὅτι ὁ ἐξάδελφός του, ὁ Ἀλέκος, εἶχεν ἀφηγηθῇ εἰς ὑπερεβδομήκοντα σελίδας τὸν νόστον του, ἄρα ἀδίκως παρεπονεῖτο, κινδυνεύων οὕτω νὰ θεωρηθῇ ἀχάριστος. Ὁ Λαλεμήτρος ἠκροῶτο ταπεινῶς, ἐντούτοις εὔρε τὸ θάρρος ν' ἀπαντήσῃ:

—Ἐχεις δίκιο, κυρ-Ἀλέξανδρε, ἀλλὰ δὲν μπορῶ νὰ μὴν τὸ πῶ· ἐσὺ θὰ τὴν ἔγραφες νοστιμώτερα. Ὡστόσο, σὲ παρακαλῶ, νὰ μὴν κάνῃς λόγο στὸν ἐξάδελφό σου γιὰ τὴν κουβέντα μας γιατί νὰ τὸν πικράνω;

Ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης ἡσθάνθη ὑποχωροῦσαν τὴν πικρότητα τῆς γεύσεώς του. «Ἴδου ὅτι καὶ ὁ Λαλειῆτρος ἔχει, καθὼς λέγουν, προτιμήσεις ὕφους!» εἶπεν ἐνδομύχως καὶ παρευθὺς ἄκανθα οἰήσεως ἀνεφύη ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ του καὶ ἦτο εἰς τὴν ἀκμὴν νὰ κομπάσῃ «Ἀλέκο, σέ...», ἀλλὰ συνῆλθε πάραυτα καὶ ἀνελόγισθη τὸ ἀποστολικὸν **Τί ἔχεις, ὃ οὐκ ἔλαβες; εἰδὲ καὶ ἔλαβες, τί καυχᾶσαι ὥς μὴ λαβὼν;**

Ἐτείνει τὴν χεῖρα του πρὸς τὸν Λαλειῆτρον.

—Ὡραῖοι οἱ λουκουμάδες! Θὰ εἰπῶ εἰς τὸν Μωραϊτίδην ὅτι ἐκεῖνον ἤθελες νὰ κεράσῃς, ἀλλὰ δὲν τὸν εὔρες καὶ ἐπωφελήθην ἐγώ...

Ἀπεχωρίσθησαν, καὶ ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης ἐτάχυνε τὸ βῆμα. Ὅταν ἔφθασεν εἰς τὴν «Ἀκρόπολιν», ὁ Γαβριηλίδης τὸν ὑπεδέχθη μὲ πλαστὴν ἀγανάκτησιν:

—Ἀλέξανδρε, εἶπεν, ἐχάθηκαν τὰ μόνιπα; Ἄς ἔπαιρνες ἓνα, ἀδελφέ, κι ἂς τὸ ἐχρῶνες εἰς ἐμέ! Βουλιάζουμε, Ἀλέξανδρε!

Τοῦ ἀνεκοίνωσεν ὅτι ἡ ἐφημερὶς εἶχε κατακλυσθῇ ἀπὸ χεῖμαρρον ἐπιστολῶν ἐξ ὅλης τῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ τῶν ὁμογενῶν τῆς ἀλλοδαπῆς. Διεμαρτύροντο οἱ ἀναγνώσται διὰ τὴν ἀπουσίαν ἐορτίου διηγήματός του εἰς τὸ χριστουγεννιάτικον καὶ πρωτοχρονιάτικον φύλλον καὶ διεμήνουν ὅτι ἂν καὶ ἡ ἔκδοσις τῶν Θεοφανείων στερῇται παπαδιαμαντικοῦ ἀφηγήματος, δὲν θὰ ἡγόραζον τὴν ἐφημερίδα καὶ ἂς κρατήσῃ ὁ κύριος διευθυντὴς τὰς ἐπιστροφὰς τῶν φύλλων διὰ νὰ τυλίγῃ τὸ προσφάγι του ἢ νὰ ψήνῃ ρέγγες!

—Ἀκοῦς, Ἀλέξανδρε, ἐπέφερε μὲ βεβιασμένον πως γέλωτα, ἀκοῦς τὰ ἀπειλητικὰ αἰτήματα τοῦ ἀναγνωστικοῦ συνδικάτου; Κακὴν δημοκρατίαν τοὺς ἐδιδάξαμεν, φίλτατε, ἀλλὰ παρέλκει τώρα πᾶσα συζήτησις περὶ τοῦ ἀρίστου τῶν πολιτευμάτων. Λοιπόν, ἔχομεν τέσσαρας ἡμέρας ἕως τὰ Φῶτα, φρόντισε, Ἀλέξανδρε τὴν Παραμονὴν τὸ πρωί, νὰ μοῦ παραδώσῃς τὸ διήγημα.

—Μόνον ἂν ἐπήγαινα στὴν Σκιάθον, ὑπέλαβεν ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης, θὰ ἠμποροῦσα, ἴσως, νὰ τὸ γράψω.

—Λοιπόν, τί περιμένεις; ἐβρυχήθη ὁ Γαβριηλίδης. Ναυλὼν πλοῖον καὶ ἀποπλέεις εἰς τρεῖς ὥρας, μόλις φθάσῃς στρώνεσαι στὸ γράψιμο, οὔτε κεφάλι θὰ σηκώσῃς. Ἀλέξανδρε, οὔτε νερὸ θὰ πιῇς, οὔτε λέξιν θὰ ἀπευθύνῃς εἰς ἄλλον καὶ τὴν Παραμονὴν τηλεγραφεῖς τὸ διήγημα.

—Ἀλλὰ ἐνδέχεται λόγῳ τοῦ καιροῦ νὰ μὴ λειτουργᾷ ἡ τηλεγραφικὴ γραμμὴ, εἶπεν ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος.

—Τότε πλέεις εἰς Χαλκίδα καὶ τηλεγραφεῖς ἐκεῖθεν, καὶ δὲν ἀναχωρεῖς εἰς τρεῖς ὥρας ἀλλὰ τώρα ἀμέσως, καὶ λάβε τὸ ἡμῖς τῆς ἀμοιβῆς, εἶπεν ἐν ἐξάψει ὁ Γαβριηλίδης καὶ τοῦ ἐνεχείρισε φάκελον.

Ἀνάρπαστοι κατέβησαν εἰς Πειραιᾶ, ὁ Γαβριηλίδης ἐναύλωσε ταχύπλουν, ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης ἐπεβίβασθη, καὶ τὸ σκάφος ἀπέπλευσεν. Ἐκ πείσματος τοῦ πλοίαρχου δὲν εἰσῆλθον εἰς τὸν Εὐβοϊκόν, τοῦ ὁποίου ὁ διάπλους εἶναι καταφανῶς ὀλιγότερον τρικυμιώδης ἀπὸ τὴν θαλασσίαν ὁδόν, τὴν διὰ τοῦ Αἰγαίου. Ἀνελπίστως ἐπέρασαν τὰ ἐπικίνδυνα τοῦ Καφηρέως ἄνευ ἰσχυρῶν κλυδωνισμῶν, ἀργότερα ὅμως ὁ καιρὸς ἤρχισε νὰ χειροτερεύῃ καὶ ὅταν πλέον προσήγγιζαν εἰς τὴν Σκύρον ἦτο ξίδι μοναχό, θάλασσα κιαμέτ!

Ὁ καπετάνιος ἠγκυροβόλησε στὲς Τρεῖς Μποῦκες, τὸν ἀσφαλέστατον λιμένα τῆς νήσου, καὶ ἐδήλωσεν ὅτι δὲν πρόκειται «νὰ σηκώσῃ ἄγκυραν, ἂν δὲν ξανοίξῃ». Εἰς μάτην διεμαρτυρήθη ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης, λέγων ὅτι

τὸ πλοῖον εἶχεν ἀδρῶς ναυλωθῇ καὶ ὁ πλοίαρχος ὥφειλε νὰ κάμῃ νόμο-τρόπο, ὥστε αὔριον, τὸ βραδύτερον, νὰ εὐρίσκωνται εἰς τὴν Σκιάθον. Ἐκεῖνος ἀντέτεινε ὅτι καμμία ναύλωσις δὲν εἶναι ὑπερτέρα τῆς σωτηρίας τοῦ σκάφους, καὶ ἂς μὴ λησιμονῇ ὅτι ὁ ἴδιος ἔχει περιγράψει εἰς διήγημά του ἀβαριάς ἀναγκαίας πρὸς ἀποφυγὴν καταποντισμοῦ σκάφους καὶ ψυχῶν.

Ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης ἐκλείσθη εἰς τὸν θαλαμίσκον του. Ἦτο ἡ τετάρτη πρὸ τῆς ἐορτῆς ἡμέρα. Ἐξάπλωσεν εἰς

τὴν κουκέταν του καὶ ἐσυλλογιζέτο ὅτι, ἂν δὲν «ἐπεφτε ὁ καιρὸς» ἐκινδύνευε νὰ μὴ γράψῃ τὸ διήγημα καί, τὸ χειρότερον, νὰ χάσῃ τὰς Ὁρας τῶν Θεοφανίων. Ἀλλ' ἂν ἐνέδωσεν εἰς τὴν παράλογον ἀπαίτησιν τοῦ Γαβριηλίδου, τὸ ἔκαμεν ἐπὶ τῇ προσδοκίᾳ τῆς Ἀκολουθίας τῶν Ὁρῶν ἐν τῇ προσφιλέστατῃ νήσῳ. Ὅχι, δὲν θὰ ἐπέτρεπεν ὁ Θεὸς νὰ μὴ τὰς συμψάλῃ μὲ τὸν κυρ-Ἀλεξανδρὴν, τὸν ψάλτην τοῦ ναοῦ τῶν Τριῶν Ἱεραρχῶν!

ἤρχισε νὰ αἰσθάνεται θέρμην, καὶ μικρὸν ῥίγος τὸν διεπέρασεν. Ἐσκεπάσθη καλῶς καὶ ἐσκέπτετο πλέον ὅτι ἡ ἐσπευσμένη ἀναχώρησις δὲν τοῦ ἐπέτρεψε νὰ μηνύσῃ εἰς τὸν ἐξάδελφον Ἀλέκον νὰ μὴ λείψῃ ἐκεῖνος καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἅγιον Ἐλισσαῖον. Ἀλλ' ἐνεφανίσθη τότε ὁμιλος ἐνοριτῶν καί, κυρίως, ἐνοριτισσῶν τοῦ ναυδρίου, οἱ ὅποιοι ἐπρόβαλαν τὴν ἀπαίτησιν νὰ ἐπιστρέψῃ διὰ νὰ ψάλῃ αὐτὸς τὰς Ὁρας. Ἄλλως, ἠπειλοῦν, θὰ ἐκκλησιάζοντο ἄλλοι.

Τοὺς ἐνουθέτησε καὶ τοὺς ἐξώρκιζε νὰ μὴ ἐκπειράζωσι Κύριον τὸν Θεόν των, εἰς τὰ θεῖα δὲν χωροῦν ἐκβιασμοί, καὶ πῶς ἦτον δυνατὸν νὰ εὐρεθῇ πάλιν εἰς Ἀθήνας ἄνευ



θαύματος; Ἀπεδείχθησαν ὁμως «ἀγύριστα κεφάλια», καὶ ἐκεῖνος, διὰ νὰ μὴ κολασθῶσιν, ἀνέβη εἰς τὸ κατάστρομα καὶ ἐρρίφθη εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν. Συντόνως κολυμβῶν ἔφθασεν αἰσίως εἰς Πειραιᾶ καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ἀνῆλθε διάβροχος εἰς Ἀθήνας καὶ εἰσῆλθεν εἰς τὸν θαλπερὸν ναῖσκον, καθ' ἣν στιγμήν ὁ τριτεξάδελφός του ἡτοιμάζετο νὰ ψάλῃ τὸ ἐξαίσιον καὶ ἀθάνατον Δοξαστικὸν τῆς Ἑνάτης Ὁρας. Θεωρῶν ὁμως, ἄνευ ἐκπλήξεως, εἰσερχόμενον τὸν καταστάζοντα Παπαδιαμάντη τοῦ λέγει φυσικότατα:

— Ἀλέξανδρε, ἰδικόν σου τὸ Δοξαστικόν!

Ἡσθάνθη φρικίασιν εὐφροσύνης καὶ ἐξύπνησε καὶ ἐνόησεν ὅτι δὲν θὰ προλάβῃ τὰς Ὁρας τῶν Φώτων. Ἡ ἀδελφή του Κυρατσούλα, ποὺ εἶχε τὴν ἔγνοια του, τὸν ἠρώτησεν, ἐν συνοχῇ καρδίας:

— Τί θέλεις, Ἀλέξανδρε; Ἀφυπνίσθησαν σχεδὸν ἔντρομοι καὶ αἱ ἄλλαι, ὅπου ἐλαγοκοιμῶντο εἰς τὴν διπλανὴν κάμαρην.

— Ἦσυχάσατε!, εἶπε πρᾶεως, θὰ ψάλω τὸ Δοξαστικόν.

Εἶτα μὲ τρέμουσας φωνήν, ὡς πτηνὸν ἀποδημητικὸν ἀπερχόμενον εἰς θερμότερους οὐρανούς, ἐμινύρισε τὸ πανηγυρικὸν ᾄσμα:

— Τὴν χεῖρά σου τὴν ἀψαμένην τὴν ἀκήρατον κορυφὴν τοῦ Δεσπότου... ἔπαρον ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν πρὸς αὐτὸν Βαπτιστά...

Καὶ βλέπων ὅτι ὁ μέγιστος ἐν γεννητοῖς γυναικῶν τὸν ἐπεσκίαζεν ἤδη διὰ τῶν χειρῶν καὶ τῶν περυγῶν του, ἔκλινε πρὸς τὴν πλευρὰν τῆς καρδίας καὶ ἀπέπτη...



Ὁ καθένας θὰ πρέπει νὰ κρατήσῃ τὴν τέχνην ἢ τὸ ἐπάγγελμά του. Ὁ στρατηγὸς νὰ συνεχίσῃ νὰ διοικῇ, ὁ ἀγρότης νὰ καλλιεργῇ τὴ γῆ, ὁ τεχνίτης νὰ ἐξασκῇ τὴν τέχνην του. Καὶ θὰ σὰς πῶ γιατί. Δὲν εἶναι ἀνάγκη νὰ ἀπομακρυνθοῦμε στὴν ἔρημο, νὰ τρῶμε ἀνούσια τροφή, νὰ ἀλλάξουμε τὰ ἐνδύματά μας, νὰ ἀδιαφορήσουμε γιὰ τὴν υγεία μας, ἢ νὰ κάνουμε ὅτιδήποτε ἀνόητο, ἐπειδὴ μπορούμε νὰ μένουμε στὰ σπίτια μας χωρὶς νὰ ἀποχωρισθοῦμε τὰ πράγματά μας, καὶ νὰ ἐξασκοῦμε ταυτόχρονα τὴν συνεχὴ προσευχή.

Ἅγιος Νικόλαος ὁ Καβάσιλας

Ὁταν ἡ ψυχὴ κρίνεται ἄξια ν' ἀπολαύσῃ τὴν κοινωνία μὲ τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ φωτὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ ὅταν ὁ Θεὸς λάμπει πάνω της μὲ τὴν ὁμορφίαν τῆς ἁφατῆς δόξας Του, ἐτοιμάζοντάς της γιὰ θρόνο καὶ κατοικία δική Του, γίνεται ὅλη φῶς, ὅλη πρόσωπο, ὅλη μάτια· καὶ δὲν ὑπάρχει μέρος σ' αὐτὴ ποὺ νὰ μὴν εἶναι γεμάτο ἀπὸ τὰ πνευματικὰ μάτια τοῦ Φωτός.

Ἅγιος Μακάριος ὁ Αἰγύπτιος

Ἕνας Ἀσκητὴς Ἐπίσκοπος

Ὁ Μητροπολίτης Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης Ἀντώνιος (+2005)

ΠΗΓΗ: Ἀπὸ τὶς ἱστοσελίδες τοῦ ὀρθοδόξου ἐναλλακτικοῦ ραδιοφώνου.



Ὁ Μακαριστὸς Σεβασμιότατος Μητροπολίτης Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης Ἀντώνιος Κόμπος γεννήθηκε τὸ 1920 στὸ Ἄργος τῆς Ἀργολίδος ἀπὸ φτωχοὺς καὶ εὐσεβεῖς γονεῖς. Ἦταν ἀπόφοιτος τῆς Μαρασλείου Παιδαγωγικῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν καὶ τῆς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν.

Κάτοχος μεγάλης θεολογικῆς παιδείας, συμπλήρωσε τῆς σπουδῆς του στὰ Πανεπιστήμια Ὁξφόρδης καὶ Παρισίων. Διετέλεσε καθηγητὴς καὶ Διευθυντὴς Ἱερατικῶν Σχολῶν.

Κατὰ τὰ ἔτη 1971-74 ὑπηρέτησε ὡς ἱεροκέρυκας εἰς τὴν Ἱερὰν Μητρόπολιν Αἰτωλίας καὶ Ἀκαρνανίας. Ἐχειροτονήθη διάκονος στὶς 03.12.1967, πρεσβύτερος δὲ στὶς 04.12.1967 καὶ τὴν 23ην Μαΐου 1974 ἐξελέγη Μητροπολίτης Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης. Ἐξέδωσε ἀξιόλογα ἐπιστημονικὰ ἔργα. Δημοσίευσε βιβλιοκρισίας καὶ ἄρθρα ἐποικοδομητικὰ εἰς διάφορα περιοδικὰ. Εκοιμήθη ἐν Κυρίῳ τῇ 17/12/2005.

† † †

Ὁ «Ἀσκητὴς τῆς Πόλης»

ποὺ δὲν Εἶχε... Λιμουζίνα,

ποὺ Ἐπαιρνε τὸ Λεωφορεῖο καὶ τὸ Τρόλεϊ!

«Δὲν μὲ πειράζει ποὺ δὲν ἔχω αὐτοκίνητο, ὅπως οἱ ἄλλοι μητροπολίτες, οὔτε ποὺ μὲ ἀποκαλοῦν δεσπότη τῶν τρόλεϊ. Μπορεῖ νὰ κουράζομαι ἀλλὰ, δόξα τῷ Θεῷ, ἀκόμη κρατιέμαι γερὰ στὰ πόδια μου».

Τὸν χαρακτηρίζουν «ἀσκητὴ τῆς πόλης». Μαγειρεῦει μόνος του, καθαρίζει ὁ ἴδιος τὸ μητροπολιτικὸ σπίτι, δὲν χρησιμοποιεῖ κινητὸ τηλέφωνο, ἐνῶ σπάνια μιλά καὶ στὸ σταθερό. Ἐπισκέπτεται τὴν Ἀθήνα γιὰ νὰ συμμετάσχει στὶς Συνόδους χρησιμοποιώντας... τὸ λεωφορεῖο τοῦ ΚΤΕΛ, κάνει περιοδεῖες στὰ «κουτσοχώρια» μὲ τὰ πόδια καὶ ἔχει ξεχάσει πῶς εἶναι τὰ πλούσια ἀρχιερατικὰ ἄμφια. «Εγὼ εἶμαι ἕνας καλόγερος», ἐπιμένει ὁ ἴδιος.

Ὁ 84χρονος Μητροπολίτης Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης Ἀντώνιος ξεχωρίζει γιὰ τὴ λιτὴ καὶ ταπεινὴ ζωὴ ποὺ κάνει.

«Τί νὰ τὸ κάνει ἕνας καλόγερος τὸ κινητό, ἀφήστε ποὺ βλάπτει κιόλας», ἀπαντᾷ μὲ χαμόγελο στὴν παρατήρηση τῶν «ΝΕΩΝ», ὅτι δὲν ἀκολουθεῖ τὴν τεχνολογία. «Ἐγὼ εἶχα γέροντα τὸν Μητροπολίτη Κορινθίας, ποὺ πῆγε μετὰ στὴν Ἀμερική. Αὐτὸς μοῦ εἶχε πεῖ ὅτι ὁ ἐπίσκοπος εἶναι καλόγερος καὶ ἔτσι πρέπει νὰ εἶναι». Ὅταν καλεῖται νὰ σχολιάσει τὸ ὅτι δὲν συμβαίνει τὸ ἴδιο μὲ ἄλλους μητροπολίτες, περιορίζεται νὰ πεῖ πὼς «πρέπει νὰ ἔχουμε ἀκτιμοσύνη, καρτερία καὶ παρθενία, αὐτὲς εἶναι οἱ ἀρετὲς τοῦ μοναχοῦ».

«Ἅγιος Ἄνθρωπος»

Οἱ κάτοικοι τῆς Σιάτιστας κάνουν λόγο γιὰ «ἅγιο ἄνθρωπο», ποὺ εἶναι κλειστός, δὲν δίνει δικαιώματα καὶ ζεῖ ὅπως οἱ καλόγεροι. Μερικοὶ ὑποστηρίζουν ὅτι ἔχει περιορισμένη παρουσία στὰ κοινά, τονίζοντας πάντως ὅτι ἀποτελεῖ «στάση ζωῆς» γιὰ τὸν ἴδιο.

«Εἶναι κάτι παραπάνω ἀπὸ καλός. Δὲν εἶναι διακοσμητικός, ἀρνεῖται τὰ λοῦσα καὶ τὶς πολυτέλειες, οὔτε αὐτοκίνητο δὲν ἔχει», εἶπε ὁ κ. Γιώργος Ρᾶμος, ποὺ διατηρεῖ περίπτερο στὴ Σιάτιστα. «Τί σχέση μπορεῖ νὰ ἔχει αὐτὸς ὁ μητροπολίτης μὲ τοὺς ἄλλους, ποὺ ἔχουν καταθέσεις δισεκατομμυρίων», συμπληρώνει ὁ κ. Νίκος Τζάλας.

Ὁ Μητροπολίτης Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης ἀπαντᾷ μὲ χαμόγελο σὲ ὅλα. Ὅταν ὅμως καλεῖται νὰ σχολιάσει τὰ σκάνδαλα ποὺ συνταράσσουν τὸ τελευταῖο διάστημα τὴν Ἐκκλησία τῆς Ἑλλάδος, παίρνει ἀποστάσεις. «Δὲν θὰ κρίνω κανέναν, ἐγὼ εἶμαι πιὸ ἀμαρτωλὸς ἀπ' ὅλους, δὲν μπορῶ νὰ πῶ τίποτε. Ἡ Ἱεραρχία ἀποφάσισε νὰ γίνεи καθαροί», λέει καὶ κλείνει τὸ θέμα.

«Εὐτυχῶς Ἔχουμε Δωρεές»

Ὅσο γιὰ τὶς περιουσίες τῶν Μητροπόλεων, ὁ ἴδιος ἀποκαλύπτει, χωρὶς μάλιστα νὰ ἐρωτηθεῖ, ὅτι τὰ ἐτήσια ἔσοδα ἀπὸ τοὺς ναοὺς δὲν ὑπερβαίνουν τὶς τέσσερις χιλιάδες εὐρώ. «Εὐτυχῶς ἔχουμε καὶ κάποιες δωρεές καὶ φροντίζουμε τὰ παιδιὰ νὰ σπουδάσουν· μὲ πενταροδεκάρες καὶ φραγκοδίφραγκα χτίσαμε μοναστήρια», λέει. Ἡ Μητρόπολη Σιατίστης πληρώνει τὸ ἐνοίκιο δυὸ φοιτητῶν στὴ Θεσσαλονίκη, ἐνῶ χορηγεῖ μηνιαῖο βοήθημα 100 εὐρώ σὲ φοιτητὲς ποὺ κατάγονται ἀπὸ τὴν περιοχὴ.

Εἶναι πρόθυμος νὰ ξεναγήσει στὰ διαμερίσματα τῆς Μητροπόλεως, ἐνῶ παράλληλα ικανοποιεῖ ὅλα τὰ

αἰτήματα ὑπαλλήλων καὶ μοναχῶν. Ἡ μοναχὴ Εἰρήνη, ἀπὸ τὸ μοναστήρι τῆς Κοίμησης τῆς Θεοτόκου, ποὺ ἐπισκέφθηκε τὴ Μητρόπολη γιὰ δουλειὲς τοῦ μοναστηριοῦ, λέει: «Δὲν τὸν βλέπετε, πόσο ταπεινὸς εἶναι; Ἀκόμη καὶ τὰ ράσα του τὰ πλένει ὁ ἴδιος· δὲν ἀφήνει κανέναν νὰ τὸν βοηθήσει».

«Εἶναι κατ' Οὐσίαν Ἀσκητής...»

«Εἶναι κατ' οὐσίαν ἀσκητής, ζεῖ γι' αὐτὸ ποὺ τάχθηκε, ποὺ δὲν εἶναι ἐπάγγελμα ἀλλὰ λειτουργημα», ὑποστήριξε ὁ ὑπάλληλος τῆς Μητροπόλεως κ. Ζήσης Γούτας. Ὁ Μητροπολίτης ἀσχολεῖται καὶ μὲ τὶς δουλειές, ἐξυπηρετώντας τὸν κόσμο ποὺ ἔρχεται νὰ τὸν συναντήσει. «Δὲν ἀρνεῖται σὲ κανέναν νὰ ἀσχοληθεῖ μὲ τὸ πρόβλημά του».

Ἡ μεγάλη ἀγάπη του εἶναι τὰ «κουτσοχώρια», ὅπως χαρακτηρίζει ὁ ἴδιος, τὰ ὁρεινὰ χωριά τῆς περιφέρειάς του, αὐτὰ τῶν 20 καὶ 30 κατοίκων. «Πήγαινα σὲ ἕνα χωριὸ μὲ στρατιωτικὸ αὐτοκίνητο καὶ τὰ ὑπόλοιπα τὰ περπατοῦσα μὲ τὰ πόδια». Αἰσθάνεται ἀκμαῖος γιὰ νὰ συνεχίσει τὶς περιοδεῖες του σὲ ὅλες τὶς ἐνορίες τῆς Μητροπόλεως, παρὰ τὰ χρόνια του. «Ὅταν ὕστερα ἀπὸ χρόνια δὲν θὰ μπορῶ ἄλλο, θὰ ἀποσυρθῶ στὸ μοναστήρι, ἐκεῖ εἶναι ἡ ζωὴ μου», καταλήγει.

Ἕνα παράδειγμα τῶν παράξενων ἡμερῶν μας γιὰ ὅλους μας... καὶ ἰδιαίτερα γιὰ τὸν κλῆρο μας...

Αἰωνία του η μνήμη!



Τὸ νὰ γίνεις ἀπαθὴς—μὲ τὴν Πατερικὴ καὶ ὅχι μὲ τὴ Στωικὴ ἔννοια τοῦ ὁρου—παίρνει καιρὸ καὶ θέλει σκληρὴ δουλειά, μὲ αὐστηρὴ ζωὴ, νηστεία καὶ ἀγρυπνία, προσευχή, ἰδρώτα αἵματος, ταπείνωση, τὴν καταφρόνια τοῦ κόσμου, σταύρωση, τὰ καρφιά, τὴ λόγχη στὴν πλευρά, τὸ ξύδι καὶ τὴ χολή, ἐγκατάλειψη ἀπ' τὸν καθένα, προσβολὲς ἀπὸ τρελοὺς ἀδελφοὺς συσταυρωμένους, βλαστήμιες ἀπ' τοὺς περαστικούς. Καὶ μετὰ, ἀνάσταση ἐν Κυρίῳ, τὴν ἀθάνατη ἀγιότητα τοῦ Πάσχα.

Πρ. Θεόκλητος Διονυσιάτης



Μὲ τὸν ἀγιορεῖται ἀσκητὴ π. Γαβριὴλ εἰς τὴν Σκήτῃν Ἱ. Μονῆς Κουτλουμουσιῶν.

Ἀπεικόνιση τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀλεξάνδρου σὲ Ἐκκλησία

*Συντάχθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ Μακεδονικὸ Πρακτορεῖο Εἰδήσεων (ΜΠΕ),
Τρίτη, 14 Σεπτεμβρίου 2010.*

Στὸν ἱερὸ ναὸ τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἀχιλλεῖου, στὸν Πεντάλοφο Κοζάνης, ἡ ἀτμόσφαιρα εἶναι κατανυκτική. Μέσα στὴν κατάγραφη ἀπὸ ἀγιογραφίες ἐκκλησία, ποὺ χτίστηκε τὸ 1740 καὶ ἀντέχει ἀκόμη στὸ χρόνο, μπορεῖ κάποιος νὰ διαπιστώσει τὸ λόγο ποὺ ὁ ναὸς αὐτὸς ἀποτελεῖ σημεῖο ἀναφορᾶς τοῦ ἑλληνισμοῦ ἐπὶ αἰῶνες.

Στὸ νάρθηκά του ἀπεικονίζεται μία πολὺ οἰκεία μορφή γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς Ἕλληνες, ποὺ ὅμως δὲν ἀνήκει στὸ χώρο τῶν ἁγίων. Πρόκειται γιὰ τὸν Μέγα Ἀλέξανδρο, ποὺ οἱ Χιοναδίτες ζωγράφοι (ἀπὸ τοὺς Χιονάδες τῆς Κόνιτσας) συμπεριέλαβαν στὶς πλούσιες τοιχογραφίες, ποὺ κοσμοῦν τὸ ἐσωτερικὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας. Μὲ τὸν τρόπο αὐτὸ ἐξέφρασαν τὸ σεβασμὸ τοὺς σὲ μιὰ προσωπικότητα ποὺ προετοίμασε τὸ ἔργο τοῦ χριστιανικοῦ εὐαγγελίου, μέσω τῆς διάδοσης τῆς ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσας καὶ τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ.

«Ἡ τοιχογραφία ἔχει θέμα τὴν κόλαση, τὸν πύρινο ποταμὸ καὶ τὴ Δευτέρα Παρουσία. Ἐκεῖ, ἐμφανίζονται ἱεράρχες, μάρτυρες, προφῆτες καὶ ἀπόστολοι καὶ στὴ συνέχεια ἑβραῖοι καὶ τύραννοι βασιλεῖς, ὅπως οἱ Πέρσες, Δαρεῖος, Κύρος καὶ Πῶρος, ποὺ ἀπεικονίζονται, κρατώντας στὰ χέρια τοὺς σπαθιά. Ἀκριβῶς δίπλα τοὺς ἐμφανίζεται ἡ μορφή τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀλεξάνδρου, ὁ ὁποῖος νίκησε τοὺς Πέρσες βασιλεῖς. Στὰ χέρια του κρατᾷ βασιλικὸ σκήπτρο καὶ στὸ κεφάλι του φορᾷ κορῶνα. Εἶναι δὲ χαρακτηριστικὸ ὅτι, οἱ συγκεκριμένοι βασιλεῖς ἀναφέρονται στὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη, κάποιοι μάλιστα ἀπὸ προφῆτες», ἐπισημαίνει ὁ ζωγράφος Ἀργύρης Παφίλης.

«Τέτοιον εἶδους ἀπεικονίσεις δὲν δημιουργοῦν δογματικὸ ζήτημα, καθὼς οἱ συγκεκριμένες μορφές ἐμφανίζονται στὸν νάρθηκα τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν καὶ χωρὶς φωτοστέφανο. Εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὸ τὸ παράδειγμα τοῦ ναοῦ, ποὺ βρίσκεται στὴ λίμνη τῶν Ἰωαννίνων. Ἐκεῖ, ἔχουν τοιχογραφηθεῖ οἱ μορφές ἀρχαίων Ἑλλήνων φιλοσόφων, ὅπως ὁ Σωκράτης καὶ ὁ Πλάτωνας, μὲ τὸ σκεπτικὸ ὅτι ὁ καθένας, μὲ τὸ ἔργο τοῦ διακόνησε τὸ ἔργο τῆς ἐκκλησίας, κατὰ τὰ χρόνια ποὺ ἀκολούθησαν», ἐξηγεῖ ὁ μητροπολίτης Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης Παῦλος.

Ὅπως ἀναφέρει χαρακτηριστικά, ἡ ἐκκλησία δὲν φοβήθηκε τέτοιες ἀπεικονίσεις, καθὼς ἀποδίδει σὲ

τέτοιες μορφές σημαντικὸ ρόλο στὸ σχέδιο τῆς Θείας Οἰκονομίας. «Ἡ Οἰκονομία τοῦ Θεοῦ προετοίμασε τὴ σωτηρία τοῦ κόσμου μέσα ἀπὸ πλῆθος ἀνθρώπων, ποὺ τυπικὰ φαίνονται νὰ εἶναι ἄσχετοι μὲ τὴν ἐκκλησία, ἀλλὰ οὐσιαστικὰ εἶναι μέσα στὰ σχέδια τοῦ Θεοῦ», προσθέτει.

Ἀντιλαμβανόμενη τὴν ἱστορικὴ σημασία τοῦ ναοῦ, ἡ νομαρχία Κοζάνης προχώρησε στὴν ὑπογραφή σύμβασης, ὕψους 215.000 εὐρώ, γιὰ τὴν ἀποπεράτωσή του, καθὼς ἤδη εἶχε ἀρχίσει νὰ φανερώνει τὰ σημάδια τοῦ χρόνου.

Οἱ τοιχογραφίες εἶχαν ἀρχίσει νὰ καταστρέφονται, ἡ σκεπὴ ἐπέτρεπε στὸ νερὸ νὰ κυλάει στὸ ἐσωτερικὸ τοῦ ναοῦ, ἐνῶ ἡ ὑγρασία ἔκανε ἔντονη τὴν ἐμφάνισή της. «Ἐγιναν σημαντικὲς ἐργασίες, ἀπαραίτητες γιὰ τὴ στερέωση καὶ τὴν ἀνάδειξη τοῦ μνημείου, μὲ κύριο γνώμονα τὴ διατήρηση τῆς αἰσθητικῆς του ἀξίας», ἐπισημαίνει ἀπὸ τὴν πλευρὰ τῆς ἡ ἀρχιτέκτων μηχανικὸς τοῦ ἔργου, Δήμητρα Κοψαχείλη καὶ ἀναφέρει ὅτι, οἱ ἐργασίες περατώθηκαν μὲ τὴν ἐποπτεία τῆς 17^{ης} Ἐφορείας Βυζαντινῶν Ἀρχαιοτήτων Κοζάνης καὶ τὴ Διεύθυνση Τεχνικῶν Ὑπηρεσιῶν τῆς νομαρχίας Κοζάνης.

Μιλώντας γιὰ τὴν ἱστορία τοῦ ναοῦ, σημειώνει ὅτι στὴν ἀνατολική του ὄψη βρίσκεται ἐντοιχισμένη μία πλάκα ποὺ ἀναφέρει ὅτι χτίστηκε τὸ 1740, ἐνῶ κοσμήθηκε στὸ ἐσωτερικὸ τῆς στὰ 1774, μὲ τοιχογραφίες ἀπὸ τοὺς Χιοναδίτες ζωγράφους. Ἐνδιαφέρον παρουσιάζουν τὸ ξυλόγλυπτο τέμπλο, τὰ προσκυνητάρια, ὁ δεσποτικὸς θρόνος καὶ ὁ ζωγραφιστὸς ἄμβωνας. Ἡ κ. Κοψαχείλη δὲν παραλείπει νὰ ἀναφερθεῖ καὶ στὴ μεγάλη ἀγάπη τῶν κατοίκων γιὰ τὴ συγκεκριμένη ἐκκλησία, σὲ σημεῖο πού, ὅταν τὴν ἔβλεπαν νὰ καταρρέει, προσφέρονταν οἱ ἴδιοι νὰ βοηθήσουν στὶς ἐργασίες ἀποπεράτωσης.

Εἶναι πράγματι συγκινητικὴ ἡ ἀγάπη, ἡ εὐλάβεια καὶ ὁ σεβασμὸς τῶν κατοίκων τῆς περιοχῆς τοῦ Πενταλόφου στὸν ναό. Κάθε χρόνο τελεῖται λειτουργία τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς γιορτῆς τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἀχιλλεῖου.

Πέρσι, μάλιστα, ἡ Θεία Λειτουργία μᾶς ἐπιφύλαξε μία μεγάλη ἐκπληξη», σημειώνει ὁ μητροπολίτης Παῦλος καὶ ἐξηγεῖ: «Ὅταν πῆγα νὰ λειτουργήσω, βρῆκα ἓνα ἀντιμῆνσιο τοῦ 1912, ἓνα ὕψος ποὺ ἀπεικονίζει τὴν ἀποκαθήλωση καὶ χρησιμοποιεῖται γιὰ τὴν τέλεση λειτουργίας, ἀκόμη καὶ ἐκτὸς ναοῦ. Ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ χρόνια, τὸ ἀντιμῆνσιο βρισκόνταν στὴ συγκεκριμένη θέση καὶ ἡ ἀνακάλυψή του ἦταν ἡ καλύτερη ἀνταμοιβὴ γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς συγκεντρωμένους.»



Ποιὸς θὰ Ἐμπνεύσει;

Τοῦ Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου Διονυσίου Τάτση, ἐβδομαδιαία ἐφημερίς «Ορθόδοξος Τύπος», 6 Αὐγούστου, 2010.

Στὴν ἐποχή μας ἡ ἁμαρτία ἔχει ἐξαπλωθεῖ παντοῦ. Ὁ Θεὸς ἀπουσιάζει ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία δὲν συγκινεῖ. Ὁ διάβολος κάνει κουμάντο στοὺς περισσότερους. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ οἱ ἀληθινοὶ κληρικοὶ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ ἡσυχάσουν. Στενοχωροῦνται γιὰ ὅσα συμβαίνουν καὶ σκέφτονται τρόπους προσέλευσης τῶν ἀνθρώπων στὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ περιορισμοῦ τῆς δράσης τῶν ὁργάνων τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου.

Τὰ ἀποτελέσματα ὡστόσο εἶναι πενιχρά. Παρόλο ποὺ στὴ μικρὴ μας πατρίδα ὑπάρχουν πάνω ἀπὸ ὀγδόντα Μητροπολίτες καὶ ἀρκετοὶ βοηθοὶ ἐπίσκοποι, δὲν ἔχει γίνει κάτι σπουδαῖο. Σὲ αὐτὸ μερίδιο εὐθύνης ἔχουν καὶ οἱ ἐφημέριοι κληρικοί, οἱ ὁποῖοι μερμνοῦν μόνο γιὰ τοὺς ἐκκλησιαζόμενους, ἐνῶ ἔχουν ξεχάσει τὸ δυσεξαρίθμητο πλῆθος τῶν λεγόμενων χριστιανῶν, ποὺ βρίσκεται ἐκτὸς τοῦ Ἱ. Ναοῦ.

Γενικὰ τὸ παράδειγμα τῶν Μητροπολιτῶν καὶ τῶν κληρικῶν δὲν φωτίζει πιά. Οὔτε καὶ ἡ Ἱ. Σύνοδος γίνεται σεβαστή. Παρατηρεῖται παντοῦ μιὰ ἁμαρτωλὴ ἐκκοσμίκευση καὶ ἕνας ἀπαράδεκτος συμβιβασμός. τὸ ἥθος τῶν κληρικῶν εἶναι ὑποβαθμισμένο. Οἱ ἀποφάσεις τῆς Συνόδου δὲν οἰκοδομοῦν πάντα. Ὑπάρχουν πολλές περιπτώσεις ὅπου «οἰκονομοῦν» τὸ κοσμικὸ φρόνημα τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἐκφράζουν μιὰ ἀδικαιολόγητη ἀνοχή. Θὰ ἔλεγα ὅτι ἡ Σύνοδος εἶναι ὄργανο τῶν καταφατικῶν ἀπαντήσεων. Δὲν τολμᾷ νὰ πεῖ «ὄχι», γιὰτὶ ὑπολογίζει τὸ θόρυβο, ποὺ θὰ ξεσηκώσουν οἱ δημοσιογράφοι καὶ οἱ πολιτικοί. Λεῖπει ἡ ἀρετὴ τῆς παρρησίας. Λεῖπει ἀκόμα καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ὁμολογίας.

Ἀλήθεια, σκέφτηκε κανεὶς πόσο δειλοὶ εἶναι οἱ Μητροπολίτες μας ἀπέναντι στὸν Οἰκοθμενικὸ Πατριάρχη, ποὺ πρωτοστατεῖ στὸν Οἰκουμενισμὸ καὶ ἐξισώνει τὴν Ὀρθοδοξία μὲ τὸν Παπισμὸ καὶ Προτεσταντισμὸ;

Εἶναι πολλὰ τὰ κακῶς κείμενα στὴν Ἐκκλησίαν μας. Πιὸ ἐνοχλητικὴ ὅμως εἶναι ἡ ἀδράνεια γιὰ τὴ διόρθωσή τους. Δὲν ὑπάρχει τὸ ἕνα πρόσωπο, ποὺ μὲ τὴν ἀγιότητα βίου καὶ τὴν κατὰ Θεὸν σοφία, θὰ μπορούσε νὰ βοηθήσει ἢ καλύψαι νὰ ἐμπνεύσει τοὺς ἀξιωματούχους τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν ἀπλὸ κληρο.

Στὴν συνέχεια παραθέτω μιὰ σύντομη ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ Μεγάλου Βασιλείου πρὸς τὸν Μέγα Ἀθανάσιο ἐπίσκοπο Ἀλεξανδρείας, ἡ ὁποία εἶναι χρήσιμη καὶ στὶς μέρες μας καθὼς ἀναφέρεται σὲ ἕναν Ἅγιο, ποὺ μπορούσε νὰ βοηθήσει στὴ θεραπεία πολλῶν ἀρρωστημάτων, γιὰτὶ διέθετε τελειότητα, δύναμη στὶς προσευχὲς του καὶ κατὰ Θεὸν σοφία. Γράφει λοιπὸν ὁ Μ. Βασίλειος:

«Ὅσο τὰ ἀρρωστήματα τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν γίνονται βαρύτερα, τόσο περισσότερο στρεφόμεστε ὅλοι πρὸς τὴν τελειότητά σου, διότι ἔχουμε πιστέψει ὅτι μόνο μία παραμυθία γιὰ τὰ δεινὰ μᾶς ἔχει μείνει, ἡ δική σου προστασία. Πράγματι ὁμοφώνως ὅλοι ὅσοι γνωρίζουν τὴν τελειότητά σου, ἔστω καὶ λίγο, εἴτε ἐξ ἀκοῆς εἴτε ἐκ προσωπικῆς συναντήσεως, πιστεύουν ὅτι ἐσὺ μπορεῖς νὰ μᾶς διασώσεις ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τὴν τρικυμία καὶ λόγω τῆς δύναμης τῶν προσευχῶν σου καὶ λόγω τῆς ἰκανότητάς σου νὰ δείχνεις τὰ καλύτερα στὶς δύσκολες περιστάσεις. Γι' αὐτὸ μὴ παύεις νὰ προσεύχεσαι ὑπὲρ τῶν ψυχῶν μας καὶ νὰ μᾶς διεγείρεις μὲ τὰ γράμματα. Ἐάν γνώριζες πόση εἶναι ἡ ὠφέλεια ἀπὸ τὰ γράμματα, δὲν θὰ ἄφηνες καμιά εὐκαιρία νὰ μᾶς γράφεις. Ἐάν δὲ ἀξιωθοῦμε, μὲ τὴ βοήθεια τῶν προσευχῶν σου, νὰ σὲ δοῦμε καὶ νὰ ἀπολαύσουμε τὰ ἀγαθὰ σου καὶ νὰ προσθέσουμε στὴν ἱστορία τῆς ζωῆς μας τὴ συνάντησή μὲ τὴν πραγματικὰ μεγάλη καὶ ἀποστολική σου ψυχὴ, θὰ θεωρήσουμε ὅτι λάβαμε παραμυθία ἀπὸ τὴν φιλάνθρωπία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀντίρροπο γιὰ ὅλες τὶς θλίψεις, ποὺ δοκιμάσαμε στὴ ζωὴ μας».

Μακάρι νὰ βρεθεῖ καὶ γιὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἕνα πρόσωπο, μὲ τὶς ἀρετὲς τοῦ Μεγάλου Ἀθανασίου, γιὰ νὰ στηρίξει τοὺς κληρικοὺς καὶ λαϊκοὺς στὶς δύσκολες μέρες ποὺ περνᾶμε.



Διψᾷ ἡ ψυχὴ μου τὸν Κύριον καὶ μετὰ δακρύων ζητῶ Αὐτόν. Πῶς νὰ μὴ Σὲ ζητῶ; Σὺ πρῶτος μὲ ἐζήτησες καὶ ἔδωκας εἰς ἐμὲ νὰ γευθῶ τῆς γλυκύτητος τοῦ Πνεύματος τοῦ Ἁγίου καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ μου Σὲ ἠγάπησεν ἕως τέλους. Τὸν πρῶτον χρόνον τῆς ζωῆς μου εἰς τὸ μοναστήριον, ἡ ψυχὴ μου ἐγνώρισε τὸν Κύριον καὶ τοῦτο ἔμαθον ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα, ὅτι πολὺ ἀγαπᾷ ἡμᾶς ὁ Κύριος.

Τώρα ἐγήρασα καὶ ἐτοιμάζομαι διὰ τὸν θάνατον καὶ χάριν τοῦ λαοῦ γράφω τὴν ἀλήθειαν. Ὡ ἀδελφοί μου, πίπτω εἰς τὰ γόνατα καὶ παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς: Πιστεῦτε εἰς τὸν Θεόν, πιστεῦτε ὅτι ὑπάρχει τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα. Αὐτὸ μαρτυρεῖ περὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ εἰς ὅλας τὰς ἐκκλησίας ἡμῶν καὶ εἰς τὴν ψυχὴν μου.

Εἶμαι μεγάλως ἁμαρτωλὸς καὶ ὅμως εἶδα τὴν ἄμετρον ἀγάπην καὶ τὸ ἔλεος τοῦ Κυρίου ἐπ' ἐμέ. Τὸ ἱλαρὸν καὶ πρᾶον βλέμμα τοῦ Κυρίου ἔθελε τὴν ψυχὴν μου.

Ὡ! Ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Κυρίου! Δὲν ἔχω δυνάμεις νὰ περιγράψω αὐτήν. Διότι εἶναι ἀπείρως μεγάλη καὶ θαυμαστή. Δὲν δύναμαι νὰ Σὲ λησμονήσω. Σε νοσταλγεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ μου Κύριε, καὶ μὲ δάκρυα Σὲ ζητῶ...

«Ἡ Ἀγάπη Πάντοτε Ἐλπίζει, Ὁ Γέρον Σιλουανὸς»
Ἀρχ. Σωφρονίου (Σαχάρωφ)

ATHEISM: THE UNFORTUNATE BOAST OF OUR DAYS

By Photios Kontoglou, from the Greek Orthodox magazine "Orthodox Philotheos Martyrdom," Orthodox Kypseli publications, Thessaloniki, Greece.

Atheism! A great title and boast of the contemporary man. Whoever receives it (to receive it you only need to be tonsured as a "monk" of the godless and the faithless) appears to others as wise, even though he is illiterate; serious, even though he is ridiculous; official, even though he is insignificant; important, even though he is unimportant; he even appears as a scientist even though he is incompetent.

I am not referring to the person who truly wishes to believe but cannot, even if the deep rooted reason of unbelief is always human pride, this viper that hides so cunningly in man, the viper that man cannot understand. Whatever it may be, the people who truly struggle and fight against their faithless self have our deepest sympathy. For them we, who believe, beg God to help them believe as He did to the father with his sick child, by begging Christ to heal him. And He replied *if you believe, everything is possible to the believer*. And the father cried loudly and with tears replied, *I believe Lord. Help me in my little faith*.

The unbelievers about whom we refer in this article are not so. They are the type of people that have never cried with pain and contrition to open the closed door, the door of repentance, as that tormented father did. Most importantly, they have neither been moved nor felt any bitterness from their unbelief; they simply refuse to assume any responsibility or blame. All the blame is God's who does not appear to them to tell them, "Come, poke me, touch me, talk to me as you talk between yourselves, analyze me with your chemistry, dissect me with your anatomy blades, weigh me, measure me, satisfy your faithless feelings, and satiate your insatiable logic."

These self-appointed unbelievers, when they show off their "bright minds," pumped up by airs of pride and the cunning agility of their brains, are unable to comprehend how silly and narrow-minded they appear to those who believe. To believe, they demand certain proofs that make the believer pity them for the limited view they have on the spirit and spiritual matters.

The believer is well aware how far the pondering of the unbeliever can get, for he too as a person has the same logic, the logic of the flesh, the worldly logic. The unbeliever, on the other hand, is unaware of what is within the believer; he is also unaware of what is beyond practical knowledge, namely the mysteries that are hidden from the eyes, and as such he decides that they simply do not exist. Thus, with his

over-exemplified foolishness, he feels smug and talks with disdain for those that are in a position to feel the deeper meaning of the world; he reminds us of an unfortunate person who is blind and deaf and yet he believes he can see and hear everything.

The believer has spiritual sight and spiritual hearing as well as some type of "super feeling." Conversely, the unbeliever is unable to comprehend that mystical world with the coarse means at his disposal, namely his bodily, physical senses and feelings. How could he touch the fine and odd messages of the world, when this poor, miserable human being does not have the aeries that are needed to receive them?

St. Paul, in his 1st epistle to the Corinthians and in a manner known only to himself, writes about what is possible for believers and unbelievers to respectively sense and comprehend. *We preach*, he says, *the wisdom of God that is embedded in mystery and is hidden, the wisdom that God destined before time, for our glory. None of the rulers of this world (namely, the wise men of worldly wisdom) came to know this mystery. Our Lord uncovers that which according to the scriptures no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor has ascended to the heart of any man, the things that God prepared, for those that love Him. God has revealed the truths through His Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit that probes everything, even the depth of God.*

Man knows the *modus operandi* of man through the spirit that is within him. Likewise, the mysteries of God are only known to the Spirit of God. We did not receive the spirit of the world (namely the philosophy and worldly knowledge); instead, we have been gifted the Spirit of God to understand all the things that He gave us. And these divine gifts are not expressed with words that human wisdom uses but words that the Holy Spirit teaches; the Holy Spirit that speaks spiritually with spiritual people.

Unfortunately, the (rational) man of worldly knowledge does not accept what is spoken by the Spirit of God, because he believes them to be "nonsense" and is thus not in a position to understand how to examine it spiritually. The spiritual man examines every person while he himself cannot be examined by anyone. Unbelief existed always. Today, however, with the atrocious vanity that consumes us, we display it as if it accords us great value.

The person who believes in God and the revealed truth is ignored as narrow minded and foolish and often becomes the brunt of all jokes. He is looked upon as "defective" by most people, especially the "high achievers," the ones the world characterizes as "successful." These are the people that make lots of money and have a "good" time, giving not a cent to anyone; they live their lives according to the saying "Let's eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

For this reason, he who believes in God needs to be courageous and ignore the worldly honours and material interests.

Conversely, for the person that boasts that he believes in nothing:

(1) The world holds him in high regard and respect; the more the unbeliever he claims to be, the more regard and respect is shown to him by the clever and serious world. Such a man frowns upon others, offers few and heavy words, is short tempered and gruff, and is seen as a “positive man,” a “strong man.”

(2) Everything happens to him conveniently and is neither bothered nor is he worried for anything. He has no responsibilities and is pestered by nothing. “Down here” he says, “is both hell and paradise. Life is to be enjoyed, for us the clever ones. Those sleeping or drugged with the poison of God, let them die...”

Bottom line, there is no easier thing than to be an unbeliever! Just press one switch and everything comes conveniently. The devil said to Christ, “kneel and worship me and the stones will become bread.”

So says the “smart” one: “It is ridiculous for any man to sit with and waste his time with nonsense, like a bunch of old women, with gods, with hell and paradise, with lampadas, censings, with chalices, priests and nuns! And especially in our age, and at a time that science delivers men to other planets! Listen my friend, can you believe how foolish these people are?”

That is what the smart ones and the honourable ones of this world say about the believers. And as they lay down these theories, they are applauded by many, being regarded as sensible in everything because they do not “chase shadows” but are strong minded and thus succeed in everything they try.

Yes, they succeed only in the short term; unbelief is “the wide gate, and the broad road” which the unbelievers do not believe that “leads to perdition” as Christ said, but “to world prosperity.” Conversely, belief is “the narrow gate and the grief-stricken road” which the unbelievers do not believe “leads to life” but “to world unhappiness and disdain.” *Many are they that enter through the wide gate* according to our Lord, and *few are those who find the narrow gate*.

All the unbelievers say that if they witness a miracle they would believe. However, belief does not happen by force but with the involvement of the soul. For this, to all who ask for a miracle to believe it is not granted, according to our Lord’s address to the Pharisees, *This evil and adulterous generation, demands for a sign to be given it*.

However, even if an unbeliever witnesses a miracle, his pride would not allow him to believe for he fears that he may be seen as gullible and thus become disdained by his social circle.

Sometime ago I wrote five or six brief articles on the miracles that were happening in a village on the island of Mytelene, with the title “Amazing Mysteries.” Many readers were signifi-

cantly moved, especially the humble and illiterate people, *the babes of the world and the weak ones*. The clever ones, however, paid no attention to it and a few of them mocked me and publicly remarked that I write nonsense.

But *God is not mocked*. From then to now, the miracles have not ceased and progressively became more numerous and even terrifying for some. People that see them, write to me about them in detail and I compile them in a book that will be like a hot iron for the unbelieving mouths (it concerns the book “Great Sign” that was published by “Astir” publications).

During this age, discoveries are made of ancient churches with relics of those who appear as alive to simple people, in their sleep, or while they are awake, or in icons and other heirlooms. Everything could have been found and could have quickly and completely uncovered this terrible crater, that would have swept the unbelievers with its sacred lava, if there were greater means at the disposal of the poor ones who dig with fire like faith.

However, whatever the circumstances of this world may be, with God’s grace, *the healer of the sick and the replenisher of those lacking*, it will all come to a good end, in accordance with His divine will. Our indestructible faith will triumph, and this and all other blessed tasks will achieve their Godly purpose and a thundering voice will be heard to the ends of the world saying: *What god is so great as our God? You are the God who alone does great wonders*.



PRESIDENT OBAMA DROPS “CREATOR” FROM DECLARATION QUOTE

On Wednesday, Sept. 15th, 2010, President Obama attended the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute’s 33rd Annual Awards Gala at the Washington Convention Center. In his remarks, Mr. Obama took the “liberty” to remove the reference to the Creator from the Declaration of Independence when he quoted a portion at a meeting of the Congressional Hispanic Congress. For those having access to the videotapes speech, the reference appears shortly past the 22-minute mark of his speech.

Mr. Obama said, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, endowed with certain inalienable rights: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

But the actual quotation is:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

GROUND ZERO MOSQUE CONTROVERSY MISSES BIGGER ISSUE

By Fr. Barnabas Powell (Fr. Barnabas is the priest of St. Michael's Orthodox Church, in Pueblo, Colorado).

As sympathetic as I am toward opponents of the proposed Ground Zero mosque, I don't think they realize how fortunate they are to be able to voice their opinions. Eastern Christians have never had such luxury. The former cradle of Christianity is now filled with mosques. Many were originally our churches, and were taken as spoils of conquest.

Consider Hagia Sophia, the Church of Holy Wisdom. Built in the seventh century, this magnificent temple was later visited by emissaries of the Russian Prince Vladimir, a pagan seeking a new faith. "We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth," the delegates reported, adding, "we know only that God dwells there among men."

Hagia Sophia was the Patriarch of Constantinople's cathedral for a thousand years, until 1453. Then, after generations of effort, the Turks sacked the capital, extinguishing Eastern Christendom's temporal glory and throwing millions of Orthodox Christians into centuries of darkness.

When the Turkish Sultan Mohammed II battered down the doors of Hagia Sophia (where Orthodox clergy were celebrating a final Eucharist) and proclaimed the Islamic credo, "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger," Hagia Sophia was transformed into a mosque. Icons that couldn't be destroyed were plastered over. Crosses were torn down, replaced with the crescent moon.

Appointing a new Patriarch, the Sultan consigned him to a ruined church out of sight. Over ensuing generations, the patriarchate was progressively dispossessed of its churches until today it huddles on the verge of extinction within a walled compound in Istanbul's red light district. This is an abiding theme of Orthodoxy's encounter with Islam: defeat followed by dispossession, prominent churches becoming prominent mosques.

I've never been to Constantinople, but I've seen a similar story in Serbia. On a tour of her spiritual treasures, I journeyed to Serbia's oldest temple—the 7th century St. Peter's Church. It wasn't converted into a mosque, but a forest of minarets now surrounds it. When the Turks conquered this land, many Orthodox families became Muslim to avoid the "tribute in blood." This was the policy that each infidel family must surrender their eldest son to be converted to Islam and enrolled in the Genitsars—the Sultan's personal bodyguard. To keep their children, the population of Serbia's ancient capital became overwhelmingly Muslim. Their ancestors worshipped Christ in St. Peter's Church, but they now heed the call of the muezzin, blasted from loudspeakers strapped around every minaret.

When I spoke with some young, nominally Orthodox Serbs about this jarring juxtaposition, and suggested an effort to

re-evangelize these lost sheep, they thought I was nuts. "You cannot convert a Muslim," they said, "They'll kill you. All we can do is stop them from building mosques. They should at least keep them out of sight."

Which brings us back to Ground Zero. Efforts to block this mosque will fail. Not only will they prove unconstitutional, they'll give Muslims an excuse to claim "persecution," and our liberal "intelligentsia" more ammunition to shoot at our cultural heritage. Counter-intuitive though it seems, perhaps this mosque is precisely what's needed to make us examine our priorities.

In the wake of 9/11, we were told to "go shopping" to demonstrate our resilience, as if our future could be assured through better consumerism. In another age, we might have taken refuge in churches rather than department stores. Perhaps what frightens us about Islam is that it inspires a level of devotion in its followers that we no longer want to be confronted with in our complacent age.

We subconsciously interpret this mosque as a symbol of our own spiritual anemia, and fear the challenge it presents. The real question is not what we're against, but what, if anything, we're for. The tragedy is not that Muslims want to worship their god, but that we've become a stranger to ours.

A crowded mosque is nowhere nearly as disturbing a symbol as is an empty church...



The contentious man, in whom there is no end of strife, is he who is not content with an initial disturbance, but goads himself to get angry for a second time. Obviously, if one gets angry and immediately comes to his senses, recognizes his mistake, and makes a prostration before the brother at whom he was angry, such a person is not called contentious. In the soul of this man, all strife is at rest, and for the present, by making a prostration to his brother, he has prevented the friendship from being destroyed, while in the future, by practicing repentance, he will come into a state of calm and tranquility.

However, one who gets angry and does not recognize his fault, but becomes still angrier, because he regrets that he did not say more than he did when he was upset, is called contentious. In his soul, strife never abates, and at the moment of strife, the agitation of his heart gives way to remembrance of wrongs, distress, and wickedness; and after this, the strife and the agitation caused by anger increase and multiply within him. That is, strife is aroused and it continues spreading until it completely dominates the hapless man and demonizes him. But may Jesus Christ, our good Master and Lord, deliver us from the lot of such people.

From the Gerontikon

THE FIRST U.S. THANKSGIVING PROCLAMATION

Signed in script type by George Washington, appearing in The Massachusetts Sentinel of October 14th, 1789.



This historic proclamation was issued by George Washington, the Father of our Nation, during his first year as President. It sets aside Thursday, November 26th as “A Day of Public Thanksgiving and Prayer.”

Signed by George Washington on October 3rd, 1789 and entitled “General Thanksgiving,” the decree appointed the day “to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the

many and signal favors of Almighty God.”

While there were Thanksgiving observances in America both before and after Washington’s proclamation, this represents the first to be so designated by the new national government.

We cannot help but wonder whether our current President would dare go against those who have made our Almighty God a “politically incorrect term” and exercise the needed courage by declaring a similar proclamation.

† † †

Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor, and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me “to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.”

Now therefore I do recommend and assign Thursday the 26th day of November next to be devoted by the People of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being, who is the beneficent Author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be. That we may then all unite in rendering unto him our sincere and humble thanks, for his kind care and protection of the people of this country previous to their becoming a nation, for the signal and manifold mercies, and the favorable interpositions of his providence, which we experienced in the course and conclusion of the late war, for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty, which we

have since enjoyed, for the peaceable and rational manner, in which we have been enabled to establish constitutions of government for our safety and happiness, and particularly the national One now lately instituted, for the civil and religious liberty with which we are blessed; and the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge; and in general for all the great and various favors which He hath been pleased to confer upon us.

And also that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions, to enable us all, whether in public or private stations, to perform our several and relative duties properly and punctually, to render our national government a blessing to all the people, by constantly being a government of wise, just, and constitutional laws, discreetly and faithfully executed and obeyed, to protect and guide all sovereigns and nations (especially such as have shown kindness unto us) and to bless them with good government, peace, and concord. To promote the knowledge and practice of true religion and virtue, and the increase of science among them and us, and generally to grant unto all mankind such a degree of temporal prosperity as He alone knows to be best.

Given under my hand at the City of New York the third day of October in the year of our Lord 1789.

George Washington



THANKSGIVING PRAYER OF ST. BASIL

We bless Thee, O most high God and Lord of mercy, Who art ever doing numberless great and inscrutable things for us—glorious and wonderful; Who grantest to us sleep for rest from our infirmities, and repose from the burdens of our much toiling flesh. We thank Thee that Thou hast not destroyed us with our sins, but hast loved us forever; and though we are sunk in despair, Thou hast raised us up to glorify Thy power. Therefore, we implore Thine incomparable goodness: enlighten the eyes of our understanding and raise up our mind from the heavy sleep of indolence; open our mouth and fill it with Thy praise, that we may be able—without distraction—to sing and confess Thee, Who art God glorified in all and by all, the eternal Father, with Thine Only-begotten Son, and Thine All-Holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen

St. Basil the Great (+Jan. 1st, 379)

ON GOD'S LOVE AND OUR SORROWS AND SUFFERINGS IN THIS LIFE

By Abbot Nikon (letters to his spiritual children).

Why are you writing such despondent letters? Are you the only one there who is encumbered with difficulties? The point is not in external difficulties, I think you understand that yourself, but in your spiritual constitution. No matter where you may go, you can't hide from yourself or the enemy. All that is yours will go with you and elsewhere will cause you even more suffering than here.

You must not forget that the spiritual law states that *We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God*, (Acts 14:22); *If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me*, (Mt 16:24); *The Kingdom of Heaven is taken by force*, (Mt 11:12); *In your patience possess ye your souls*, (Lk 21:19); *He that endureth to the end shall be saved*, (Mt 10:22); *In the world you shall have tribulation*, (Jn 16:33); *The world hateth you*, (Jn 15:19). If you desire to labor for the Lord, prepare your soul for temptation.

The Holy Fathers express this same thought in a short but powerful way: *Give blood and receive the Spirit*. This is the common law for all who seek salvation. If you turn to examples, you will find in the life of every saint confirmation of this law. An example for all has been given by the Lord Jesus Christ, the apostles, martyrs, confessors and the righteous. These are shining examples known to all. In a less striking way, all who wished to live piously in Jesus Christ were persecuted, insulted, endured illness and sorrows—both external and internal. Besides this, you should know the prophecy of the ancient fathers, that *in the last times monastics will be saved not through spiritual feats, but through endurance of sorrows*. To such an extent is this true and needful that the surest sign of God's favor and God's love for a person is the multitude of sorrows and sicknesses which befall him. And conversely: *If a man considers himself a believer and has no misfortunes or illnesses, then this, according to the Holy Fathers, is a sign that he has not found favor with the Lord*.

Now apply all this to yourself. The Lord, loving you and desiring your salvation, is sending you the means indispensable for all men without exception—sorrows. And what do you do? You do not understand this; you think that sorrows are useless for you, even ruinous. They are ruinous—not for your soul, but for your sinful fallen nature; they are deadly for the fallen man but salvific for the “new man.” The enemy knows this and confuses you; he gives false thoughts, impatience, despondency, judgment of others—their lifestyles, authority, etc.

You must understand the devil. According to the Word of God, sorrows and sufferings in the earthly life of a Christian are not only evil, but they are God's gifts: *Unto you is given* (in Greek, ‘a gift is given’) *in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake*. (Phil 1:29).

The sorrows necessary for a man's salvation may be accepted with varying degrees of difficulty or ease, depending on one's outlook. If a man accepts on faith the word of God concerning the necessity and unavoidability of sorrows for salvation, if he acknowledges his countless sins in word, deed and thought, he will consider himself fully deserving not only of those sorrows which are sent, but also much greater ones, and he will humble himself before God and man. Then the sorrows will become easier to bear and later will give rise to that which is more precious than the whole world with all its earthly joys. In the words of the Apostle Paul, *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him*. (1 Cor 2:9).

If a person complains about his sorrows and illnesses, seeks to put the blame for his misfortunes on someone else, on demons or on circumstances, and tries at all costs to avoid them, then the enemy helps him in this. He shows him the imagined guilty ones (authority, the status quo, neighbors, etc.) evoking in him animosity and hatred toward them, a desire for revenge, a desire to hurt them, and thus bring the soul of such a person into darkness, despair, hopelessness, the depths of the earth, in order not to see or hear the supposed enemy. In fact, he is listening to and satisfying his real deadly enemy, the devil, who is suggesting all this evil to him and wanting to destroy him, sometimes even leading him to suicide—which is certain perdition.

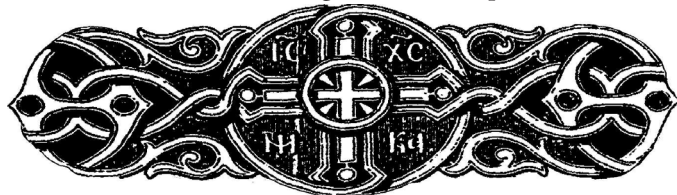
If you wish to find peace of soul, happiness and sure salvation, humble yourself beneath the mighty hand of God and He will raise you up. This means: accept all that happens to you as from the hand of God and not from men, for indeed, nothing which occurs to us can happen without God's will. People and circumstances are only God's tools, and often they do not understand what they are doing. The Lord Jesus Christ told everyone that His forthcoming sufferings on the Cross were not the work of people—the Pharisees, Scribes, Pilate, Judas; they were only instruments: *The Cup which My Father hath given Me, must I not drink it?*

The cup of suffering was given to Jesus Christ not by men, but by the Father in Heaven for the redemption of fallen man. And to all of us who desire to be saved, it is the Lord Who will give us the cup of suffering, and not people. If the Lord suffered for us, then how, tell me, can we not suffer for our countless sins which, moreover, we do not even see. One must beg the Lord, *Grant me to see my own faults*.

If we receive this gift of seeing our sins, if we feel their weight and recognize the full irreconcilability of God with sinful man, the necessity of seeking forgiveness for these sins from the Lord and the cleansing of our leprous soul by the power of God—then we will fall before the Lord; we will weep before Him like the sinning woman and will cry out from our whole soul like the publican, “God be merciful to me, a sinner, forgive my sins, cleanse my leprous soul, do not deprive me of Thy Heavenly Kingdom, do not give me into the hands of my enemies—the demons.”

Humble yourself before God; that is, like the wise thief say from your whole heart, *I have received as I deserve according to my deeds. Remember me, O Lord, when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom.*

Do not be like the other thief who railed at everyone, cursed, blamed others for his sufferings, and in this way only made his situation worse and perished. The Lord has done everything for our salvation; He wants salvation for all sinners—and we must toil for our own salvation, force ourselves to live (i.e., think, feel) the way our Lord Jesus Christ did and how He taught in the Gospel.



Try to turn your whole life into service to God; if you are reading anything at home, begin this work by a short fervent prayer that God may teach you and make you wise in faith and piety and in the careful accomplishment of your duties; never read idly, in order to pass the time; by thus doing, you lower the word, which should serve entirely for our salvation, and not for idle words, nor as a means for pleasure and spending time agreeably.

If you talk to your neighbor, speak reasonably, prudently, instructively, edifyingly; avoid idle speaking as the poison of a serpent, remembering *that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment* (Mt 12:36)—that is, they shall hear the just sentence of the Judge.

If you are teaching children, your own or those of others, turn this work into God's service, teaching them zealously, considering beforehand the best means of making the instruction clear, comprehensible, complete (as far as possible), and fruitful. Conquer by the name of the Lord and by the sign of the cross the snares of the enemy, who endeavors to disturb, darken, oppress, and weaken you. *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* (1 Cor 10:31).

St. John of Kronstadt
“My Life in Christ”

YOU SHALL CALL HIS NAME JESUS

Long before the Christ Child was born in the flesh in a humble cave outside Bethlehem, His Father had named him for us through His angels and prophets:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counseller, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. (Is 9:6).

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. [that is, “**God saves**”]. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David. (Lk 1:30-32).

Behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS, for He shall save His people from their sins.” Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel,” which being interpreted is, **God with us.** (Mt 1:21-23, citing Is 7:14).



This Christmas night, peace was bestowed upon the whole world; so let no one threaten. This is the night of the Most Gentle One; let no one be cruel. This is the night of the Most Humble One; let no one be proud. Now is the day of joy; let us not revenge. Now is the day of goodwill; let us not be mean. In this day of peace, let us not be conquered by anger. Today the Beautiful One impoverished Himself for our sake; so you rich ones, invite the poor to your table. Today we received a gift for which we did not ask; so let us give alms to those who implore us and beg. This present day's fast opens the heavenly door to our prayers. Let us open our door to those who ask our forgiveness. Now the Divine Being took upon Himself the seal of humanity, in order for humanity to be decorated by the seal of Divinity.

St. Isaac the Syrian

THE CONVERSION OF A CITY

By St. Gregory of Nyssa, from "The Life of St. Gregory Thaumaturgos." St. Gregory of Neocaesarea (+270), also known as Gregory Thaumaturgos (or Gregory the Wonderworker) is commemorated on November 17th.



After leaving his solitude, [St. Gregory the Wonderworker] at once hastened to the city where he felt obliged to establish a church for God. He knew that the whole region was under the grip of demons and that the temple of the true God was not yet constructed; the entire city and surrounding area was filled with pagan altars, sacred places and all the people were devoted to images. They adorned the temples and sacred places with images and the madness

of idolatry with processions; their defilement gave substance to rites and ceremonies. Just as a noble commander routs the enemy in combat by the strength of his battle order, so does that great man's valor set an example against the demons. How does he accomplish this?

Upon arriving in the city at evening from the countryside, a violent rainstorm forced [Gregory] into the temple. This place was renowned because one of the demons revered there was accustomed to manifest himself to the temple's custodians, and a certain prophet was empowered to utter oracles. Once [Gregory] entered the temple with several companions, one of the demons was petrified at the invocation of Christ's name. Having purified the air with the figure of the Cross which had been defiled, he spent the entire night in prayer and singing hymns according to his usual custom. In this way [Gregory] transformed the place into a temple of prayer which had been profaned by unclean sacrifices and images [Is 56.7, Mk 11.17]. After completing night prayer, he resumed at daybreak, but when the temple's custodian began to perform his rites to the demons at sunrise, he claimed that he could not approach the temple because [Gregory] blocked the way.

The custodian then attempted to invite demons into the temple using sacrifices of purification and sacred rituals. However, his endeavors were ineffectual because the demons were not accustomed to respond to this enticement. Overcome with a furious rage, the custodian seized that great man and threatened him with various intimidations and to bring him to the leaders.

He wanted to lay hands upon him and reveal his audacity to the king because a Christian who was hostile to the gods had the effrontery to enter the temple. His admission to the temple for performing services was refused, and he could no longer visit places where oracles were made to demons.

The custodian's harsh anger was enkindled at [Gregory's] splendid resolve, and he hurled all kinds of threats against the blessing offered by the true God. He alleged to have more fortitude than his opponent and had the privilege of entering those places anytime he wished as well as being able to prove this. The temple keeper was so struck with admiration at [Gregory's] ability to perform wonders that he again invoked the demons to enter the temple. Having learned about this, the great man suddenly snatched a piece of the book and gave it to the temple keeper while angrily commanding the demons. The words of this epitaph read as follows: "Gregory to Satan: Enter."

When the temple keeper received this little book to place on the altar according to custom, he offered burnt sacrifices and various types of unclean rites and again beheld what he had seen before the demons were ejected from the temple which contained the idols. Having accomplished this, he realized that Gregory was endowed with divine power which made him stronger than the demons. Before leaving the city, he promptly grasped Gregory in order to learn about his secret and about God who had vanquished the demons. When the great man gave a brief account about the mystery of piety, a certain temple guardian approached him who was in all likelihood uninitiated into divine matters. He was inclined to believe that it was too inconsequential for God to appear to men in the flesh. But when Gregory said that these miracles are possible not by reason but by faith, the temple keeper begged to see a miracle which would strengthen him in the faith. Right then and there it is said to everyone's surprise that Gregory performed a great miracle.

After the temple guardian found a huge stone which in his eyes seemed unmovable by human means but only through the power of faith, Gregory ordered it transferred to another place. That great man at once charged the large stone which seemed endowed with life to move to that place designated by the temple's keeper. Once this was accomplished, the man immediately believed and forsook his entire family, household, wife, children, friends, the priesthood and possessions. In their place he requested to participate in [Gregory's] greatness, accomplishments, divine philosophy and teaching.

Thus [Gregory] prevailed against the demons' strength and paraded the temple guardian as a victory trophy, a sight which filled the people with awe. With faith and courage he triumphantly entered the city, not with chariots, horses, asses and boasting in the number of supporters but attended by the full array of virtues. The town's entire populace gathered to learn about this wonder, and everyone desired to see that man called Gregory. They considered him a god who exercised authority and did whatever he wished against the demons in order to subject them. Having vanquished their patron to his authority and despising the honor which was formerly theirs, he changed their way of life and everything which pertained to it.

THE EVIL OF ABORTION: OUR UNSPOKEN JIHAD

By Matt Spivey, from the "American Thinker" magazine, 01/22/09.

In Arabic, the word "jihad" means "inner struggle," and for those involved in one particular battle, there is no simple answer and varying perspectives cause, in many cases, violent reactions and repercussions. That word has come to signify the murder of innocence and the demolition of security in a time of worldwide uncertainty. The death toll keeps rising as years keep passing, and fighting in this war guarantees earning the label of "radical," "extremist," or "fanatic." Yet those who do keep fighting are actually trying to save lives. With the 36th year of "Roe v. Wade" passing today, the war rages on.

Sarah Palin was the only candidate in the 2008 election to take a truly vocal stance in her pro-life values, and as we all have learned, she lives what she believes. For her efforts in promoting life and keeping sacred every human, no matter how small, she received the above adjectives from liberals as famous as Michael Moore, who called her "an extremist," to the most unimportant of bloggers who called her "one of those radical Christians" and a "flaky fanatic." And it's not just the big-mouth blowhards who took the potshots. Even widely read publications like Newsweek have said her "pro-life extremism is ... ethically flawed." The Huffington Post called her "the most extremist" candidate we have seen in decades, if ever. And NARAL unsurprisingly released headlines describing her as "radically pro-life." But perhaps Palin's "pro-life fanaticism" was masquerading as another term her opponents misconstrued—common sense.

In a time when Americans are overseas fighting certain groups of people who believe it is their duty to kill blameless victims for their own religious glorification, equating the terminology associated with such hostile perpetrators to a woman who campaigns to keep alive and treat equally all citizens regardless of their stage of life is not only descriptively inaccurate, but tragically inappropriate.

In addition to misleading the public with misrepresentative words, some celebrities are rewriting the documents of our founding fathers in the process. Roseanne Barr, on "Real Time" with Bill Maher, compared Palin's desire to overturn "Roe v. Wade" to "overturning the laws" that gave women the right to vote. Likewise, fellow comedian Whoopi Goldberg claimed on "The View" that prohibiting abortion

would be like "rewriting the Constitution" and worried of the reinstitution of slavery. As a clear indication of the failure of our public schools, these women clearly do not know the difference between the process of a Supreme Court decision and the creation of Constitutional amendments. As most high school Government students should be able to attest, "Roe v. Wade" is not an amendment and does not need the involvement of an overwhelming majority of the states and a strenuous ratification procedure like the abolition of slavery and institution of women's suffrage each did.

So while we clear the air on appropriate adjectives to describe the beliefs of conservatives and what abortion legislation actually entails and represents, let's look at something that gets overlooked in this heated debate: the facts. According to a 2007 study in the not-so-conservative Time Magazine, less than 1.5% of abortions are attributed to rape or incest. Problems with the health of the mother account for 12% of abortions but do not clarify as to the mortal danger of the mother giving birth; thus we can assume the percentage of the mother's life being at risk to be much lower.



Nearly all other cases of abortion, Time states, are labeled as matters of "convenience," with reasons given by women that include "can't afford it" and "would drastically change my life." No kidding.

The conservative Center for Bioethical Reform puts these numbers at 1% rape/incest, 6% maternal health reasons, and **93% convenience**. Other independent sources cite the statistics for abortive occurrences as being even lower in

cases of rape or incest and in life-threatening cases for the mother, while the personal choice number rises to 98%. The reproductive health and policy oriented Guttmacher Institute shows similar results. Despite a few percentage shifts here and there, the blatantly obvious theme we can identify is that the greatest arguments for abortion, even from some Republicans, are actually much rarer than we are led to believe by activists and the media.

Abortion is not an issue about violence against women. If it were liberals would be fine with doctors providing abortions only in cases of rape or incest—the 1% rate does not make a case, however. Therefore, we may deduce that nearly all pregnancies occur through voluntary sex, and those involved are fully aware of the consequences of such an activity. We can then take the next logical step and surmise that abortion is not even about protecting moms. Since all those women having voluntary sex should know the risks of having a living thing growing inside them, they are automatically putting themselves in potential peril for

the purpose of having a child. So let's call the pro-abortion crowd what they really are: activists for having sex without consequence or responsibility.

As a personal contrast to the misguided hype of liberals, I once met a woman with a pro-life stance. I asked her what she would do if she was raped. She explained to me that there are thousands of loving families in this country who would love to raise a child that she was not ready for.

So I asked what she would do if she ever got pregnant through a contraceptive malfunction. She plainly told me that there are no accidents. If you're planning on having sex, you're planning on having a baby.

So I went for the toughest question of all. I asked if she would want to be saved if the baby was endangering her life. Without a second of hesitation, she responded with more grace, toughness, and selflessness than I'd ever seen in another person. She simply said, "Let me go—the baby's more important."

That is true feminism. That is generosity, and determination, and love at its most inspirational. That is what being pro-choice really means: making the right decision, and when a complicated result arises, making another right decision. And then doing that every day. And that's why I married that young woman.

Is my wife a radical? Are conservatives really extremists or fanatics by believing all children should be respected in life and raised in love? Maybe some like Sarah Palin are genuine leaders who will guide not only those closest to them, but all Americans, to do what is right, even when it is difficult. January 22 is a dark day for those who believe in God's gift of life, but maybe the jihad against the unborn can be prevented if facts are made clear, derogatory words are attributed to rightful perpetrators, and we all take more personal responsibility. I don't think that's too extreme.



THE GOOD TURKISH JUDGE

From "Elder Hieronymos, the Hesychast of Aegina (+1966)," by Peter Botsis, Athens, 1991.

Shortly before World War I, a Turk visited Fr. Hieronymos' humble hermitage. The Turk told the elder that his master, a judge, had sent him to invite the elder to his house.

The elder became a little worried. He was not accustomed to receiving invitations to "social receptions" and his mind began to suspect that he might experience some evil or temptation. However, he prayed to God and followed the Turkish servant.

On their arrival at the judge's large home, the judge himself welcomed him, with much warmth, as a matter of fact. They sat on a great divan (sofa-like furniture) and the judge began the conversation:

"Efendi (master, *Ed.*) papa, I am a Turk, a Moslem. From the salary I receive, I keep whatever is necessary for my family's support, and the rest I spend on alms. I help widows, orphans, the poor; I provide dowries for impoverished young women so that they can get married, I help the sick. I keep the fasts with exactness, I pray and, in general, I try to live a life consistent with my faith. Also, when I sit in judgment, I strive to be just, and never take a person's position into account, no matter how great he is."

Then looking deep into the elder's eyes, he asked:

"What do you say? Are all these things that I do sufficient for me to gain that Paradise that you Christians talk about?"

The elder was impressed by all that the Turkish judge told him, and he immediately brought to mind the Roman centurion Cornelius mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. In the Turkish judge and the Roman centurion he perceived two similar lives. He understood that the judge was a just man of noble sentiments.

"Perhaps," thought the elder, "my mission is like that of the Apostle Peter, who instructed the Roman centurion." The elder determined, therefore, that he would bear witness to his Faith.

"Tell me, efendi, do you have children?"

"Yes, I do."

"Do you have servants?"

"I have servants also."

"Which of the two carry out your orders better—your children or your servants?"

"Assuredly, my servants, because my children—with the familiarity that they have toward me—often disobey me and do whatever they wish, whereas my servants always do whatever I tell them."

"Tell me, I pray thee, efendi, when you die, who will inherit your wealth—your servants, who executed your wishes faithfully, or your children who disobey you?"

"Well, my children, of course. Only they have rights of inheritance, whereas the servants do not."

"Well then, efendi, what you do is good, but the only thing your good works can do is place you in the category of those that are good servants. If, however, you desire to inherit Paradise, the Kingdom of the Heavens, then you have to become a son. And that can be accomplished only through Baptism."

The Turkish judge was greatly impressed by the elder's parable. They spoke for a long time after this, and at the end he asked the elder to catechize him and baptize him. And thus, after a little while, the good judge was baptized and became a Christian.

AND ALL THINGS, WHATSOEVER YE SHALL ASK IN PRAYER, BELIEVING, YE SHALL RECEIVE [MT 21:22]

Author unknown (this beautiful story was written by a doctor who worked in Central Africa).

One night I had worked hard to help a mother in the labor ward; but in spite of all we could do, she died, leaving us with a tiny, premature baby and a crying two-year-old daughter... We would have difficulty keeping the baby alive; as we had no incubator (we had no electricity to run an incubator). We also had no special feeding facilities.

Although we lived on the equator, nights were often chilly with treacherous drafts. One student midwife went for the box we had for such babies and the cotton wool that the baby would be wrapped in. Another went to stoke up the fire and fill a hot water bottle. She came back shortly in distress to tell me that in filling the bottle, it had burst (for rubber perishes easily in tropical climates).

"And it is our last hot water bottle!" she exclaimed.

As in the West, it is no good crying over spilled milk, so in Central Africa it might be considered no good crying over burst water bottles. They do not grow on trees, and there are no drugstores down forest pathways.

"All right," I said, "put the baby as near the fire as you safely can, and sleep between the baby and the door to keep it free from drafts. Your job is to keep the baby warm."

The following noon, as I did most days, I went to have prayers with many of the orphanage children who chose to gather with me. I gave the youngsters various suggestions of things to pray about and told them about the tiny baby... I explained our problem about keeping the baby warm enough, mentioning the hot water bottle, and that the baby could so easily die if it got chills. I also told them of the two-year-old sister, crying because her mother had died.

During prayer time, one ten-year-old girl, Ruth, prayed with the usual blunt conciseness of our African children.

"Please, God" she prayed, "Send us a hot water bottle today. It'll be no good tomorrow, God, as the baby will be dead, so please send it this afternoon."

While I gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, she added:

"And while You are about it, would You please send a dolly for the little girl so she'll know You really love her?"

As often with children's prayers, I was put on the spot.. Could I honestly say "Amen"? I just did not believe that God could do this. Oh, yes, I know that He can do everything; the Bible says so. But there are limits, aren't there? The only

way God could answer this particular prayer would be by sending me a parcel from the homeland. I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, ever, received a parcel from home. Anyway, if anyone did send me a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator!

Halfway through the afternoon, while I was teaching in the nurses' training school, a message was sent that there was a car at my front door. By the time I reached home, the car had gone, but there on the porch was a large 22-pound parcel. I felt tears pricking my eyes. I could not open the parcel alone, so I sent for the orphanage children. Together we pulled off the string, carefully undoing each knot. We folded the paper, taking care not to tear it unduly... Excitement was mounting. Some thirty or forty pairs of eyes were focused on the large cardboard box.

From the top, I lifted out brightly-colored, knitted jerseys. Eyes sparkled as I gave them out. Then there were the knitted bandages for the leprosy patients, and the children looked a little bored. Then came a box of mixed raisins and sultanas—that would make a batch of buns for the weekend. Then, as I put my hand in again, I felt the....could it really be?

I grasped it and pulled it out. Yes, a brand new, rubber hot water bottle. I cried. I had not asked God to send it; I had not truly believed that He could...

Ruth was in the front row of the

children. She rushed forward, crying out:

"If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly, too!"

Rummaging down to the bottom of the box, she pulled out the small, beautifully-dressed dolly. Her eyes shone! She had never doubted! Looking up at me, she asked:

"Can I go over with you and give this dolly to that little girl, so she'll know that Jesus really loves her?"

"Of course," I replied!

That parcel had been on the way for five whole months, packed up by my former Sunday school class, whose leader had heard and obeyed God's prompting to send a hot water bottle, even to the equator. And one of the girls had put in a dolly for an African child—five months before, in answer to the believing prayer of a ten-year-old to bring it "that afternoon."

And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. (Is 65:24).

Stop telling God how big your storm is. Instead, tell the storm how big your GOD IS. Believe and you shall receive; doubt and you shall do without!



The Cave of Our Lord's Nativity

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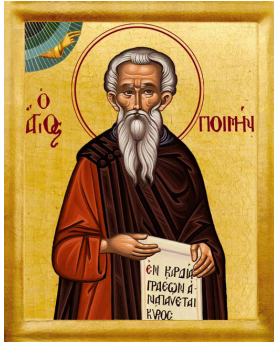
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THE DELUDED “ASCETIC” WHO MADE 3,000 PROSTRATIONS A DAY

Source: “Contemporary Ascetics of Mount Athos,” vol. 1, by Archimandrite Cherubim, pp. 259-60.



Elder Daniel Katounakiotis of blessed memory was an early 20th century Athonite elder who had the gift of discernment. His brotherhood, at the Katounakia region of the Holy Mountain, continues to this day and is known as “Danielaioi.”

† † †

When Elder Daniel Katounakiotis (+1929) was in the Russian Monastery, he observed that a certain monk living in asceticism in a kathisma outside the Monastery played a role of a great ascetic. He fasted severely, wore the most wretched clothes, walked around barefoot even in winter, etc. Among other things, while the rule called for 300 prostrations a day, he made 3000. For this reason the other monks marvelled at him.

Elder Daniel, even though he was younger at the time, displayed no enthusiasm. He discerned a situation that was not pleasing to God. He noticed that the door of his kathisma contained an opening which allowed the passers-by to look in and praise his great asceticism. His love moved him to report the situation to the abbot, and thus save the brother from delusion.

The abbot set out for the kathisma of the “super-ascetic.”

“How are you doing here, father?”

“By your prayers, Elder, well. I struggle and weep over my sins.”

“Only you never come to tell me your thoughts.”

“What could I tell you, Elder? You know them all. I am a sinner who struggles.”

“How do you struggle? Tell me, do you make prostrations?”

“Yes, Elder, I make a few.”

“How many?”

“By your prayers, 3,000 a day.”

“What! Why 3,000? Who gave you a blessing to do so many? No, don’t ever do 3,000 again. What are you trying to portray—a ‘super-ascetic?’ From now on do only fifty, so you won’t get proud.”

With that the abbot left.

The incision had been made, and the abscess soon revealed its foul contents. For the former “great ascetic” made a 180-degree turn. He was unable to make even fifty prostrations. Instead of ragged clothes he now wore whatever was most expensive, and had the choicest foods brought to his poor table. Naturally, the other fathers were astonished, and they understood that his excessive ascetic practices had been fed by the spirit of pride. This explained this surprising change, for the spirit of delusion runs after extremes.

According to patristic wisdom, the extreme, the superfluous, and the excessive are “of the demons”.