

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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EPIPHANY

By the late Rev. Nikon D. Patrinoacos.

In the Orthodox calendar the feast of the Epiphany is called "Theophania" (Θεοφάνεια), meaning the manifestation of God. After Pascha, Epiphany is the most ancient feast relating to our Lord and is observed by the Christian Church on January 6th.

The first evidence attesting to the feast of the Epiphany comes from Clement of Alexandria (+215). He relates that a Gnostic (heretical) group observed the Baptism of our Lord on January 6th, believing that it was at the time of Baptism that Divinity took the flesh in Christ.

The date of January 6th was selected because according to some ancient reckoning, the day began to grow longer on that date and so it was celebrated by pagans as the day of victory of light over darkness. In Rome, though, the day of the birth of the Invincible Sun was celebrated on December 25th. These two pagan festivals were thus replaced by a Christian feast signifying the epiphany (manifestation) of the Sun of justice and of the True Light of the world.

The 25th of December began to be celebrated in early Christian Rome as the day of the Nativity, while in the East January 6th remained as the Epiphany day, including both the Nativity and Baptism of our Lord. By the end of the 4th century, December 25th as the day of the Nativity in most of the East, and January 6th remained as the feast of our Lord's Baptism.

When the Eastern Epiphany day was introduced in the West, the already celebrated Nativity on December 25th remained as such, and January 6th, although accepted as the day of Baptism, took the character of manifestation of Christ's Divinity to the pagan world. Hence, the Magi, figuratively representing the entire heathen world, were taken to be the recipients of the saving grace of the newly manifested Christ. Only the Armenian Church in the East still celebrates the Nativity and Epiphany together on January 6th.

The most characteristic feature of the Orthodox day of Theophania is the sanctifying of waters by invoking the Spirit that appeared in the form of a dove over Christ at the time of His Baptism. The Orthodox receive sanctified water at the end of the special service of Epiphany and with it sanctify their homes, gardens, and other possessions while some preserve it for the entire year partaking of it at times of illness and other personal or family adversities.

The twelve days between the Nativity of our Lord, December 25th, and the day of the Epiphany, January 6th, is called *Dodekaemeron* (twelve days) and is considered to be one continuous festive period. On December 26th, the Most Holy Virgin Mary and Mother our Lord is honored, and on January 1st, the day of our Lord's Circumcision is celebrated. The festive character of the period is often observed by abolishing all kinds of fasts, apart from the day prior to the Epiphany when the service of the Great Agiasmos is performed.

The staff of "Orthodox Heritage" and the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN wish our readers a blessed and prosperous New Year. As we start our ninth year of publication, we wish to thank our supporters for their prayers, ideas, feedback and monetary support throughout the last eight years.

We remind our readers that this periodical is made possible through your donations and thus ask that you not forget your 2011 subscription contributions. Please refer to the top of page 2 for contribution and payment information.

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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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THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS: THE TRUE STORY

By Philip Jones, 29 Oct 2007.

This past weekend, MSN has been running a "forum" entitled "Should the 24-Week Abortion Limit Be Reduced" referring to UK guidelines on the time limit up to what point an abortion may be carried out. This "time-scale" has been in effect since 1967. Pro-Life campaigners in the UK are saying that owing to medical advances, babies of 24 weeks have a better chance of survival and this upper limit should be reduced. It also publishes a thought provoking statistic; 186,000 "legal" abortions were carried out last year (2006, *Ed.*) in the UK.

In his book "The Death of the West" Patrick Buchanan states that between 1973 and 2000, 40 million legal abortions were carried out in the US, and a third of all pregnancies now end up at the "clinic," making abortion the most practiced surgical procedure in the US.

I went and made my own contribution to the "forum" whilst it was at a fairly early stage. What shocked me is the arrogance and vehemence of the "Pro-Choice" comments. Then there are the "Apologists" for abortion with remarks like "Isn't it better for the fetus to be aborted, rather than be born unwanted, or in bad or poor circumstances." I wonder if they would feel the same if their parents had had the same idea. But then, they wouldn't be here to make such banalities...

What is evident throughout, is that no matter which way people view this subject, almost none have any grasp of the "Big Picture."

In 1960, people of European stock constituted a quarter of the earth's population of three billion.

By 2000, whilst the world population doubled, the "Euro stock" had stopped reproducing. Only Albania in Europe maintained a replacement level birth-rate. Between 2000 and 2050, the world population is expected to rise to nine billion. This increase will come almost entirely from the developing world, while 100 million people of European decent will die un-replaced. By 2050, Western peoples will make up only one tenth the world populace and will begin to feel minorities in many of their own cities.

This decline has awesome implications for the West. People there will be faced with stark choices; import millions of immigrants to work and pay the taxes needed to support a burgeoning elderly population, or keep on raising taxes, and push back the "retirement" age ever further.

Together with the contraceptive pill, "Planned Parenthood," and the almost maniacal promotion of feminism and homosexuality throughout all avenues of the media and state education, women in the West have been indoctrinated into believing that a valid life can only be attained via career, and that marriage and motherhood is somehow a poor choice.

One of the most staggering factors in all this is how self-ish and callous many women have become. Now, one can almost hear the "Feminazi's" preparing their "men should step up to the plate and take some responsibility" tirade. But hold on a minute; these are the very same types, who have been encouraging males to "get in touch with their feminine side" for decades. After being "nanny'd" much of their lives, is it any wonder that young men today are unable, or at the very least reluctant to take on the burden

of a family. More to the point, even if they so desired, where would they find a young woman so inclined.

The “Pro-Choice” lobby cannot be taken in isolation. It is part of a long running and long-term UN coordinated war on population. The contention that the Earth is overpopulated is one of the great “hoaxes” of the past 100 years. Overpopulation is a crucial link in the “One-World” agenda, which the UN uses to justify far reaching controls over economy, environment and our reproductive lives. “World Bank” loans are given to “developing” nations on the condition that they partake in “family planning,” and “Third World” countries have suffered greatly from this ideology, along with the economic exploitation of their peoples and natural resources.

Convincing women in the west not to have babies has been easy. The full spectrum of the mass media has been coordinated to ensure that the feminist view is always given the fullest and most positive coverage. In education, films, TV and popular music, nowhere is marriage and motherhood encouraged.

Young women are told “behave just as the boys do,” practice “safe sex,” and if all goes wrong, well there is always the abortion clinic. Many women treat their wombs like “trash-cans.” They show no regard for themselves, nor the life growing inside them. Then they moan that modern men have no respect for them. Little wonder that the relationship between the men and women has never been more strained.

But of course, this is exactly what the “Lords of Money” want. A strong family, is a “bulwark” against their plans for the world control of sad and isolated people.

Divide and rule is an age old song, and the feminists have danced well to it. What will happen to all the Ms’ when they have served their purpose, (having largely assisted in the depopulating of our planet, the emasculation of the male, the alienation of millions of young men and women, who will never know how it is to find lifelong love and companionship, and the needless and malevolent slaughter of the innocents growing in the wombs) and find their services “no longer required” when the Draconian State, imposed with their complicity, drags them back into a new “Dark Age.”

The saddening aspect in all of this is how effective the whole thing has been. Mention abortion, or marriage or family to the vast majority of women and the almost “robot like” response is so uniformly predictable in its support of the “feminist ideal” expounded by Ms. Freidan and Co. Women are of course among the primary victims in this “scam,” together with those helpless souls who have no voice, nor say as to whether they live or die. Millions of them sentenced to death for the simple “crime” of being conceived.

THE HOLY ORTHODOX FATHERS ON ABORTION

From the Editor: On January 22nd, our Nation will observe the grievous 38th anniversary of that ungodly Supreme Court decision that has given legal status to the slaughter of God’s most precious and innocent human beings. In the defense of the millions who may yet perish before our civilized Western culture recognizes this murderous act for what it truly is, we present a handful of related writing by the Church’s Holy Fathers on this evil act. May His divine mercy be upon all of us and may 2011 become a year of renewed interest and activism by all Orthodox Christians against the evil practice of abortion.

Thou shall not slay thy child by causing abortion, nor kill that which is begotten; for “everything that is shaped, and has received a soul from God, if it be slain, shall be avenged, as being unjustly destroyed.”

Ante-Nicene Fathers: Vol. VII, Moral Exhortations

Concerning women who commit fornication, and destroy that which they have conceived, or who are employed in making drugs for abortion, a former decree excluded them until the hour of death, and to this some have assented. Nevertheless, being desirous to use somewhat greater lenity, we have ordained that they fulfill ten years [of penance], according to the prescribed degrees.

314 AD, Council of Ancyra, Canon 21

I cannot bring myself to speak of the many virgins who daily fall and are lost to the bosom of the Church, their mother... Some go so far as to take potions, that they may insure barrenness, and thus murder human beings almost before their conception. Some, when they find themselves with child through their sin, use drugs to procure abortion, and when, as often happens, they die with their offspring, they enter the lower world laden with the guilt not only of adultery against Christ but also of suicide and child murder.

396 AD, Jerome Letters 22:13

And near that place I saw another strait place... and there sat women... And over against them many children who were born to them out of due time sat crying. And there came forth from them rays of fire and smote the women in the eyes. And these were the accursed who conceived and caused abortion.

137 AD, The Apocalypse of Peter 25

The law, moreover enjoins us to bring up all our offspring, and forbids women to cause abortion of what is begotten, or to destroy it afterward; and if any woman appears to have so done, she will be a murderer of her child, by destroying a living creature, and diminishing humankind.

Flavius Josephus, Against Apion, Book 2:25

Christians marry, like everyone else, and they beget children, but they do not cast out their offspring.

250 AD, Letter of Diognetus 5:6

ON ANGELS, THEIR CREATION, ESSENCE AND NATURE

By St. John the Damascene, from "An Exposition of the Orthodox Faith."



God is Himself the Maker and Creator of the angels; He brought them out of nothing into being and created them after His own image, an incorporeal race (having no material body or form, *Ed.*), a sort of spirit or immaterial fire. In the words of the divine David, *He maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire.* And He has described their lightness and the ardour, and heat,

and keenness and sharpness with which they hunger for God and serve Him, and how they are borne to the regions above and are quite delivered from all material thought.

An angel, then, is an intelligent essence, in perpetual motion, with free-will, incorporeal, ministering to God, having obtained by grace an immortal nature; and the Creator alone knows the form and limitation of its essence. But all that we can understand is, that it is incorporeal and immaterial. For all that is compared with God Who alone is incomparable, we find to be dense and material. For in reality only the Deity is immaterial and incorporeal.

The angel's nature then is rational, and intelligent, and endowed with free-will, change, able in will, or fickle. For all that is created is changeable, and only that which is uncreated is unchangeable. Also, all that is rational is endowed with free-will. As it is, then, rational and intelligent, it is endowed with free-will; and as it is created, it is changeable, having power either to abide or progress in goodness, or to turn towards evil.

It is not susceptible of repentance because it is incorporeal or uncarate, i.e., without the nature of a body or substance. For it is owing to the weakness of his body that man comes to have repentance.

It is immortal, not by natures but by grace. For all that has had beginning comes also to its natural end. But God alone is eternal, or rather, He is above the Eternal; for He, the Creator of times, is not under the dominion of time, but above time.

They are secondary intelligent lights derived from that first light which is without beginning, for they have the power

of illumination; they have no need of tongue or hearing, but without uttering words they communicate to each other their own thoughts and counsels.

Through the Word, therefore, all the angels were created, and through the sanctification by the Holy Spirit were they brought to perfection, sharing each in proportion to his worth and rank in brightness and grace.

They are circumscribed; for when they are in the Heaven they are not on the earth; and when they are sent by God down to the earth they do not remain in the Heaven. They are not hemmed in by walls and doors, and bars and seals, for they are quite unlimited. Unlimited, I repeat, for it is not as they really are that they reveal themselves to the worthy men to whom God wishes them to appear, but in a changed form which the beholders are capable of seeing. For that alone is naturally and strictly unlimited which is un-created. For every created thing is limited by God Who created it.

Further, apart from their essence they receive the sanctification from the Spirit; through the divine grace they prophesy; they have no need of marriage for they are immortal.

Seeing that they are minds, they are in mental places, and are not circumscribed after the fashion of a body. For they have not a bodily form by nature, nor are they tended in three dimensions. But to whatever post they may be assigned, there they are present after the manner of a mind and energize accordingly; however, they cannot be present and energize in various places at the same time.

Whether they are equals in essence or differ from one another we know not. God, their Creator, Who knoweth all things, alone knoweth. But they differ from each other in brightness and position, whether it is that their position is dependent on their brightness or their brightness on their position; and they impart brightness to one another, because they excel one another in rank and nature. And clearly the higher share their brightness and knowledge with the lower.

They are mighty and prompt to fulfill the will of the Deity, and their nature is endowed with such celerity that wherever the Divine glance bids them there they are straightway found. They are the guardians of the divisions of the earth; they are set over nations and regions, allotted to them by their Creator; they govern all our affairs and bring us succour (help or assistance, especially in time of difficulty). And the reason surely is because they are set over us by the divine will and command and are ever in the vicinity of God.

With difficulty they are moved to evil, yet they are not absolutely immoveable; but now they are altogether immoveable, not by nature but by grace and by their nearness to the Only Good.

They behold God according to their capacity, and this is their food.

They are above us for they are incorporeal, and are free of all bodily passion, yet are not passionless; for the Deity alone is passionless.

They take different forms at the bidding of their Master, God, and thus reveal themselves to men and unveil the divine mysteries to them.

They have Heaven for their dwelling-place, and have one duty, to sing God's praise and carry out His divine will.

Moreover, as that most holy, and sacred, and gifted theologian, Dionysios the Areopagite, says, all theology, that is to say, the holy Scripture, has nine different names for the heavenly essences. These essences are divided into three groups, each containing three. And the first group, he says, consists of those who are in God's presence and are said to be directly and immediately one with Him, viz., the Seraphim with their six wings, the many-eyed Cherubim and those that sit in the holiest Thrones. The second group is that of the Dominions, and the Powers, and the Authorities; and the third, and last, is that of the Rulers and Archangels and Angels

Some, indeed, like Gregory the Theologian, say that these were before the creation of other things. He thinks that the angelic and heavenly powers were first and that thought was their function. Others, again, hold that they were created after the first heaven was made. But all are agreed that it was before the foundation of man. For myself, I am in harmony with the theologian. For it was fitting that the mental essence should be the first created, and then that which can be perceived, and finally man himself, in whose being both parts are united.

But those who say that the angels are creators of any kind, they are the mouth of their father, the devil. For since they are created things they are not creators. But He Who creates and provides for and maintains all things is God; He is the only One Who alone is uncreated and is praised and glorified in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Fallen Angels, the Devil and Demons

He who from among these angelic powers was set over the earthly realm, and into whose hands God committed the guardianship of the earth, was not made wicked in nature but was good, and made for good ends, and received from his Creator no trace whatever of evil in himself. But he did not sustain the brightness and the honour which the Creator had bestowed on him; his free choice was changed from what was in harmony to what was at variance with his nature, and became roused against God Who created him, and determined to rise in rebellion against Him; and he was the first to depart from good and become evil.

Evil is nothing else than absence of goodness, just as darkness also is absence of light. Goodness is the light of the

mind, and, similarly, evil is the darkness of the mind. Light, therefore, being the work of the Creator and being made good (for God saw all that He made, and behold they were exceeding good) produced darkness through free-will. But along with him (the devil) an innumerable host of angels subject to him were torn away and followed him and shared in his fall. Wherefore, being of the same nature as the angels, they became wicked, turning away at their own free choice from good to evil.

Hence they have no power or strength against any one except what God in His dispensation hath conceded to them, as for instance, against Job and those swine that are mentioned in the Gospels. But when God has made the concession they do prevail, and are changed and transformed into any form whatever in which they wish to appear.

Of the future both the angels of God and the demons are alike ignorant; yet they make predictions. God reveals the future to the angels and commands them to prophesy, and so what they say comes to pass. But the demons also make predictions, sometimes because they see what is happening at a distance, and sometimes merely making guesses; hence much that they say is false and they should not be believed, even although they do often, in the way we have said, tell what is true. Besides they know the Scriptures.

All wickedness, then, and all impure passions are the work of their mind. But while the liberty to attack man has been granted to them, they have not the strength to over master any one. We all have it in our power to receive or not to receive the attack. Wherefore there has been prepared for the devil and his demons, and those who follow him, fire unquenchable and everlasting punishment.

Note, further, that what in the case of man is death is a fall in the case of angels. For after the fall there is no possibility of repentance for them, just as after death there is for men no repentance.



Blessed is he who is not attached to anything transitory or corruptible. Blessed is the intellect that transcends all sensible objects and ceaselessly delights in divine beauty. If you make *provision for the desires of the flesh* (Rom 13:14) and bear a grudge against your neighbor on account of something transitory, you worship the creature instead of the Creator.

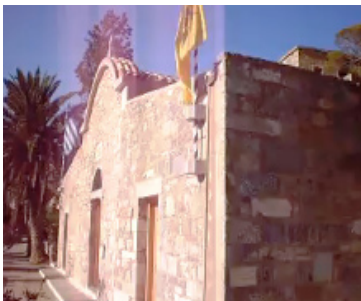
St. Maximos the Confessor

THE LEPERS' PRIEST IN THE ISLAND OF SPINALONGA

From the English novel "The Island," by Victoria Hislop.

Much is being said recently about the Greek island of Spinalonga, on account of the book entitled "The Island," by the English authoress Victoria Hislop, which became a series on Greek television. It is a historical novel, set on the island of Spinalonga, off the coast of Crete, and on the village of Plaka which lies within swimming distance across it. The Island tells the story of a woman on the cusp of a life-changing decision. She knows little or nothing about her family's past and has always resented her mother for refusing to discuss it. She knows only that her mother, Sophia, grew up in Plaka, a small Cretan village, before moving to London. Making her first visit to Crete to see the village where her mother was born, Alexis discovers that the village of Plaka faces the small, now deserted island of Spinalonga, which, she is shocked and surprised to learn was Greece's leper colony for much of the 20th century.

† † †



St. Panteleimon Church, in the island of Spinalonga

One of the historical facts that we were informed of is that the lepers who lived on Spinalonga island were angry at God, the reason being that their ailment was a huge, unbearable ordeal. A priest from the town of Ierapetra in Crete had dared to visit them once, to perform a Liturgy together with the colony's new settlers, at the church of Saint Panteleimon that existed on the island and was falling into ruin. They say that not a single soul turned up at the first Liturgy.

The lepers listened to the chanting, stubbornly remaining inside their cells, sometimes drowning it out with their groans and sometimes with their curses. But the priest went there again. During that second visit, one of the patients bravely showed himself at the doorstep of the church, with the following statement:

"Priest, I will sit through your Liturgy, but only under one condition. At the end, you will give me Communion. And if your God is as almighty as you say, you will afterwards conclude the Liturgy (=by partaking of the same Chalice) and not be afraid of my leprosy."

The priest nodded compliantly. These words were overheard from the neighboring cells and various individuals began to gather near the side of the church, where there was a small gap in the crumbling wall that offered them a limited view of the inner sanctum. The lepers remained in

waiting until the end of the Liturgy and watched the priest, in tears and kneeling before the Sacred Table of Offering, as he concluded the ritual.

A month went by. The lepers waited for him. They were convinced that this time he would come as a patient and not as a priest. And yet, the priest returned, healthy and rosy-cheeked, and with his morale invigorated began to ring the church bell of the old chapel.

From that time on, and for at least ten years, Spinalonga island had a priest of its own. The lepers restored the church by themselves, and along with the church, they restored their faith. They took Holy Communion regularly and they would always secretly observe their priest during the conclusion of the Liturgy, to make sure that their personal "miracle of Spinalonga" was repeated, over and over again.

In 1957, with the discovery of antibiotics and the cure for leprosy, the leprosarium was shut down and the island was deserted. Only the priest remained on the island, until 1962, offering memorial services for the lepers, until five years after their death.

Behold, therefore, a contemporary, discreet hero; one who was never honoured for his work by anyone and—in case you didn't notice—whose name we haven't stated, quite simply because... we do not know it! But we are quite sure that God knows it, and that is good enough!



THE HAND OF THE PRIEST

By Bishop Nicholas of Achrida.

Your Priest may only be 25 years old. But, his priesthood is from the foundation of the earth. Therefore, when you kiss his hand, you reverence his priesthood, which reaches and extends successively from Christ and the Apostles until your Priest.

When you kiss the hand of your Priest, you kiss the entire chain of righteous and holy priests and hierarchs, from the Apostles until today. You kiss and reverence Saint Ignatius the God-bearer, Saint Nicholas, Saint Basil, Saint Sava and all of the *angels upon earth and heavenly men*, who, adorned the Church while on earth and now array Heaven. It is a holy kiss, just as the Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians. Therefore, you should kiss the hand of the Priest which blesses you. It is blessed by God. With the grace of the priesthood. With the grace of the Holy Spirit. You should kiss the hand of your Priest. No matter how young he is. And, listen to him.

A LIVING ANGEL WITH THE GIFT OF INSIGHT

From "Ascetics in the World," a publication of the Sacred Monastery of St. John the Forerunner, Metamorphosis, Chalkidiki, Greece.

In September of a certain year, there was a great deal of turmoil observed in the Department of Oncology of the University Hospital of Rion. Little Dimitri was asking urgently for the Hospital's priest. He was insisting on immediately receiving Holy Communion...

He was 13. He had been in that specific clinic for about one and a half years. A minor headache had led him there. The doctors had diagnosed brain cancer. His native town was Fieri of Albania; his parents unbaptized. They had lived in Patrae for several years. Shortly after his admission to the Hospital, the young boy had asked to be baptized. He had heard about Christ, and wanted to become a "child" of His. He was baptized, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," after the necessary catechesis of course.

Everyone in the clinic was extremely fond of him. The cancer had progressed considerably and had by now deprived him of his sight. He was entirely unable to see, anything and anyone. But he could listen, with the utmost and amazing patience. He never complained. He would say that God loved him very much. He prayed, and would ask his parents to do the same.

All those who visited him could perceive that there was something different in that boy. He spoke constantly about God. He was always courteous and happy. His face shone. He wanted to partake of the Precious Gifts frequently. When his mother would sometimes be in another area of the clinic, he would shout out to her:

"Mother, come quickly! Papa is coming, with Christ! He is coming up the stairs! Come and get me ready!"

And that was exactly what would happen: the priest would come, and he would find little Dimitri sitting upright in his bed, with his mouth wide open and crossing himself with reverence. Even though he never knew the exact time of the priest's arrival, he could "see" him coming, with his gift of insight; this was despite the two closed doors that came between his room and the corridor that the priest was coming from. This has been verified by the pious Mrs. Maria Galiatsatou, who had volunteered to look after that boy.

"Mrs. Maria, I want to tell you something," he said to her one day. "When Papa comes together with Christ, I can see him approaching as he walks up the stairs, and next to him are two tall, beautiful people with pure white gowns, who lean towards the Holy Chalice to protect it, with their arms outstretched."

One time, when the doctor asked him: "How are you, my little Dimitri?"

He replied: "Mister Doctor, can I tell you something privately? I am just fine. But you shouldn't worry so much because your wife went away. God will be with you, because you are a good person."

The doctor remained frozen for an instant. No-one else knew about the grievous incident that had occurred the previous day at his place: that his wife had abandoned him, to be with another man.....

"Now that is a child of God" was what those who had met him would say.

The last time that he received Holy Communion, he was unable to sit up in his bed, but he did receive Christ with joy and longing as he lay there.

"Thank you very much," he whispered and then went to sleep forever. When the priest went to the morgue the next day to read the Trisagion Prayer over little Dimitri, he remarked:

"It's the first time in my life that I have seen a corpse like this. His face was smiling...it was aglow.... and it had the colour of amber (the color of a reposed saintly person, Ed.)."

His parents came to love Christ very much, and they now want to be baptized also...

May we all be worthy of little Dimitri's intercessions!



Have patience, my children; do not lose your courage in the struggle, and do not let your knees weaken under the pressure of temptations, for our good God will not allow us to be tempted beyond our strength. Why do you give room to Satan to war against you with greater intensity? Have faith in God, and whatever He permits will be to our advantage. Do we perhaps know better than He?

Cast your care upon the Lord, and He will take care of you. Do not put forth your will, for faith is the offspring of grace and divine visitation. Has not each one of us experienced personally miracles of God's divine providence? Didn't divine grace visit N.? If you had not sacrificed yourselves, would N. be in the army of Christ now? Didn't Christ sacrifice Himself for us? Certainly! And had He not given Himself to death on the Cross, we would not be what we are by divine grace.

This shows that things that are very good, those that are on a higher spiritual level, are bought with blood. But their reward is so great that it cannot be measured, and their glory is equal to the angels!

I feel for you, and this is why I also suffer. In times of temptation, man forgets everything and is brought to a state that he did not want in times of peace.

Elder Ephraim, "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

LOST TO THE WEST

An Introduction to the book "Lost to the West," by Lars Brownworth.

Rome never fell, it simply moved five hundred miles East, to Byzantium. For over a thousand years the Byzantines commanded one of the most visceral and vivid empires the world has ever known. The once common idea that the lights went out on classical and Western civilization when Rome fell in 476 A.D. has long since been debunked, but Mr. Brownworth weighs in to illustrate that the Roman Empire's center of power simply shifted to Constantinople. In a narrative by turns spellbinding and prosaic, Mr. Brownworth marches us through centuries of history and introduces the successive rulers of Byzantium, detailing a culture he describes as both familiar and exotic. He follows religious, political and cultural change up through the Islamic conquest of 1453. Christian refugees fled Byzantium into Europe, taking with them their long-standing love of ancient culture and introducing Western Europe to Plato, Demosthenes, Xenophon, Aeschylus and Homer, fanning the flames of the renaissance of Hellenistic culture that had already begun in various parts of Europe.

The book—see the cover displayed (available at Amazon.com)—is recommended reading for those Orthodox Christians wishing to explore some of the historical aspects of our Faith and its great significance on the western culture's formation.

† † †

I first met Byzantium in a pleasant little salt marsh on the north shore of Long Island. I had paused there to read a book about what was innocently called the "later Roman Empire," prepared to trace the familiar descent of civilization into the chaos and savagery of the Dark Ages. Instead, nestled under my favorite tree, I found myself confronted with a rich tapestry of lively emperors and seething barbarian hordes, of men and women who claimed to be emperors of Rome long after the Roman Empire was supposed to be dead and buried. It was at once both familiar and exotic; a Roman Empire that had somehow survived the Dark Ages, and kept the light of the classical world alive. At times, its history seemed to be ripped from the headlines. This Judeo-Christian society with Greco-Roman roots snuggled with immigration, the role of church and state, and the dangers of a militant Islam. Its poor wanted the rich taxed more, its rich could afford to find the loopholes, and a swollen bureaucracy tried hard to find a balance that brought in enough money without crushing everyone.

And yet Byzantium was at the same time a place of startling strangeness, alluring but quite alien to the modern

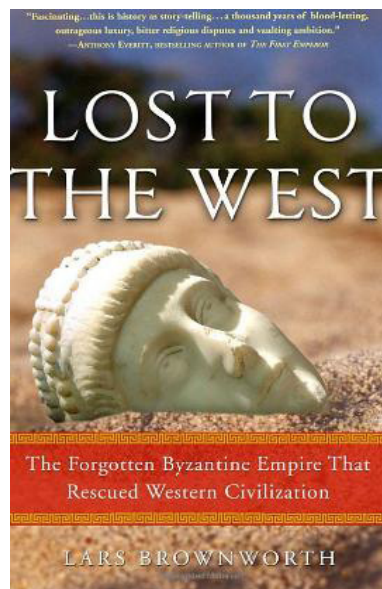
world. Holy men perched atop pillars, emperors ascended pulpits to deliver lashing sermons and hairsplitting points of theology could touch off riots in the streets. The concepts of democracy that infuse the modern world would have horrified the Byzantines. Their society had been founded in the instability and chaos of the third century, a time of endemic revolts with emperors who were desperately trying to elevate the dignity of the throne. Democracy, with its implications that all were equal, would have struck at the very underpinnings of their hierarchical, ordered world, raising nightmares of the unceasing civil wars that they had labored so hard to escape.

The Byzantines, however, were no prisoners of an oppressive autocratic society. Lowly peasants and orphaned women found their way onto the throne, and it was a humble farmer from what is now Macedonia who rose to become Byzantium's greatest ruler, extending its vast domains until they embraced nearly the entire Mediterranean. His successors oversaw a deeply religious society with a secular educational system that saw itself as the guardian of light and civilization in a swiftly darkening world. They were, as Robert Byron so famously put it, a "triple fusion:" a Roman body, a Greek mind, and a mystic soul.

It's a better definition than most, in part because the term "Byzantine" is a thoroughly modern invention, making the empire attached to it notoriously difficult to define. What we call the Byzantine Empire was in fact the eastern half of the Roman Empire, and its citizens referred to themselves as Roman from the founding of Constantinople in to the fall of the city eleven centuries later.

For most of that time, their neighbors, allies, and enemies alike saw them in this light; when Mohammed II conquered Constantinople, he took the title Caesar of Rome, ruling, as he saw it, as the successor of a line that went back to Augustus. Only the scholars of the Enlightenment, preferring to find their roots in ancient Greece and classical Rome, denied the Eastern Empire the name "Roman," branding it instead after Byzantium, the ancient name of Constantinople. The "real" empire for them had ended in 476 with the abdication of the last western emperor and the history of the "impostors" in Constantinople was nothing more than a thousand-year slide into barbarism, corruption, and decay.

Western civilization, however, owes an incalculable debt to the scorned city on the Bosphorus. **For more than a millennium**, its capital stood as the great bastion of the East, protecting a nascent, chaotic Europe, as one after another would-be world conqueror foundered against its walls.



Without Byzantium, the surging armies of Islam would surely have swept into Europe in the seventh century, and as Gibbon mused, the call to prayer would have echoed over Oxford's dreaming spires.

There was more than just the force of arms to the Byzantine gift, however. While civilization flickered dimly in the remote Irish monasteries of the West, it blazed in Constantinople, sometimes waxing, sometimes waning, but always alive. Byzantium's greatest emperor, Justinian, gave us Roman law, the basis of most European legal systems even today, its artisans gave us the brilliant mosaics of Ravenna and the supreme triumph of the Hagia Sophia, and its scholars gave us the dazzling Greek and Latin classics that the Dark Ages nearly extinguished in the West.

If we owe such a debt to Byzantium, it begs the question of why exactly the empire has been so ignored. The Roman Empire fractured—first culturally and then religiously between East and West—and as the two halves drifted apart, estrangement set in. Christianity was a thin veneer holding them together, but by 1054, when the Church ruptured into Catholic and Orthodox halves, the East and West found that they had little to unite them and much to keep them apart. The Crusades drove the final wedge between them, engendering lasting bitterness in the East, and derision in the West. While what was left of Byzantium succumbed to Islamic invasion, Europe washed its hands and turned away, confident in its own growing power and burgeoning destiny. This mutual contempt has left Byzantium consigned to a little-deserved obscurity, forgotten for centuries by those who once took refuge behind its walls.

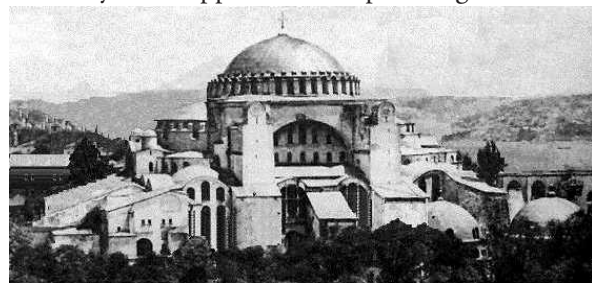
Most history curricula fail to mention the civilization that produced the illumination of Cyril and Methodios, the brilliance of John I Tsimiskis, or the conquests of Nikephoros II Phokas. The curtain of the Roman Empire falls for most with the last western emperor, and tales of heroism in Greece end with the Spartan king Leonidas. But no less heroic was Constantinos Dragases, standing on his ancient battlements in 1453 or Belisarius before the walls of Rome. Surely we owe them as deep a debt of gratitude.

This book is my small attempt to redress that situation, to give voice to a people who have remained voiceless far too long. It's intended to wet the appetite, to expose the reader to the vast sweep of Byzantine history, and to put flesh and sinew on their understanding of the East and the West. Regrettably, it can make no claims to being definitive or exhaustive. Asking a single volume to contain over a thousand years of history is taxing enough, and much must be sacrificed to brevity. In defense of what's been left on the cutting-room floor, I can only argue that part of the pleasure of Byzantium is in the discovery.

Throughout the book I've used Latinized rather than Greek names: Constantino instead of Konstandinos on the grounds

that they'll be more familiar and accessible to the general reader. I've also used a personality driven approach to telling the story since the emperor was so central to Byzantine life; few societies have been as autocratic as the Eastern Roman Empire. The person on the imperial throne stood halfway to heaven, the divinely appointed sovereign whose every decision deeply affected even the meanest citizen.

Hopefully, this volume will awaken an interest in a subject that has long been absent from the Western canon. We share a common cultural history with the Byzantine Empire, and can find important lessons echoing down the centuries. Byzantium, no less than the West, created the world in which we live, and—if further motivation is needed to study it—the story also happens to be captivating.



It is becoming increasingly more obvious that the spirit of the Church is being supplanted and replaced by the spirit of occultism and para-religion... Occultist groups already number in the hundreds; their spirit—which as a trend is widely known with the term “New Age”—influences basic sectors of most aspects of our lives. Entangled in this trend are tens of thousands of sub-sectors and groups, exactly like the junctions in an immense network... This network has been characterized by the “apostles” of this trend, as a “silken conspiracy.”

We are already living in an era like the one that the original Church was in, where everything around Her was determined by “another spirit.” As such, the Church is once again called upon today, to give Her apologetics ministry the place that this ministry held during the proto-Christian Church. In that Church, apologetics had a central place in ecclesiastic life. It was a basic concern, not only of the major theologians and pastors of the Church, but also of every faithful.

It has already been underlined in the New Testament, that the duty of all the faithful is that they *be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.* (1 Pet 3:15)

Our apologetics ministry cannot possibly be conducted in a drastic manner and in accordance with the tradition of the Church, if it is not supported by an in-depth study and a proper understanding of every external provocation. It is unfortunate, that there is no Research Centre that preoccupies itself with this matter.

Fr. Anthony Alevizopoulos (+1996)

SACRED SCRIPTURE AND SACRED TRADITION

By Fr. Michael Pomazansky.

Sacred Scripture

“Sacred Scripture” is a term we apply to those books written by the holy Prophets and Apostles under the action of the Holy Spirit; therefore they are called “divinely inspired.” They are divided into books of the Old Testament and the books of the New Testament.

The Church recognizes 38 books of the Old Testament. After the example of the Old Testament Church, several of these books are joined to form a single book, bringing the number to two books, according to the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. These books, which were entered at some time into the Hebrew canon, are called “canonical.” To them are joined a group of “non-canonical” books—that is, those which were not included in the Hebrew canon because they were written after the closing of the canon of the sacred Old Testament books.

The Church accepts these latter books also as useful and instructive and in antiquity assigned them for instructive reading not only in homes but also in churches, which is why they have been called “ecclesiastical.” The Church includes these books in a single volume of the Bible together with the canonical books. As a source of the teaching of the faith, the Church puts them in a secondary place and looks on them as an appendix to the canonical books. Certain of them are so close in merit to the Divinely-inspired books that, for example, in the 85th Apostolic Canon the three books of Maccabees and the book of Joshua the son of Sirach are numbered together with the canonical books, and, concerning all of them together it is said that they are “venerable and holy.” However, this means only that they were respected in the ancient Church; but a distinction between the canonical and non-canonical books of the Old Testament has always been maintained in the Church.

The Church recognizes twenty-seven canonical books of the New Testament. Since the sacred books of the New Testament were written in various years of the apostolic era and were sent by the Apostles to various points of Europe and Asia, and certain of them did not have a definite designation to any specific place, the gathering of them into a single collection or codex could not be an easy matter; it was necessary to keep strict watch lest among the books of apostolic origin there might be found any of the so-called

“apocrypha” books, which for the most part were composed in heretical circles. Therefore, the Fathers and teachers of the Church during the first centuries of Christianity preserved a special caution in distinguishing these books, even though they might bear the name of Apostles.

The Fathers of the Church frequently entered certain books into their lists with reservations, with uncertainty or doubt, or else gave for this reason an incomplete list of the Sacred Books. This was unavoidable and serves as a memorial to their exceptional caution in this holy matter. They did not trust themselves, but waited for the universal voice of the Church. The local Council of Carthage in 318, in its 33rd Canon, enumerated all of the books of the New Testament without exception.

St. Athanasius the Great names all of the books of the New Testament without the least doubt or distinction, and in one of his works he concludes his list with the following words: “Behold the number and names of the canonical



books of the New Testament. These are, as it were, the beginnings, the anchors and pillars of our faith, because they were written and transmitted by the very Apostles of Christ the Savior, who were with Him and were instructed by Him. Likewise, St. Cyril of Jerusalem also enumerates the books of the New Testament without the slightest remark as to any kind of distinction between them in the Church. The same complete listing is to be found among the Western ecclesiastical writers, for example in Augustine. Thus, the complete canon of the New Testament books of Sa-

cred Scripture was confirmed by the catholic voice of the whole Church. This Sacred Scripture, in the expression of St. John Damascene, is the “Divine Paradise.”

Sacred Tradition

In the original precise meaning of the word, “Sacred Tradition” is the tradition which comes from the ancient Church of Apostolic times. In the second to the fourth centuries this was called “the Apostolic Tradition.”

One must keep in mind that the ancient Church carefully guarded the inward life of the Church from those outside of her; her Holy Mysteries were secret, being kept from non-Christians. When these Mysteries were performed—Baptism or the Eucharist—those outside the Church were not present; the order of the services was not written down, but was only transmitted orally; and in what was preserved in secret was contained the essential side of the faith. St. Cyril of Jerusalem (4th century) presents this to us especially clearly. In undertaking Christian instruction for those who

had not yet expressed a final decision to become Christians, the hierarch precedes his teachings with the following words: “When the catechetical teaching is pronounced, if a catechumen should ask you, ‘What did the instructors say?’ you are to repeat nothing to those who are without (the Church). For we are giving to you the mystery and hope of the future age. Keep the Mystery of Him Who is the Giver of rewards. May no one say to you, ‘What harm is it if I shall find out also?’ Sick people also ask for wine, but if it is given at the wrong time it produces disorder to the mind, and there are two evil consequences; the sick one dies, and the physician is slandered” (Prologue to the Catechetical Lectures, ch. 12).

In one of his further homilies St. Cyril again remarks: “We include the whole teaching of faith in a few lines. And I would wish that you should remember it word for word and should repeat it among yourselves with all fervor, without writing it down on paper, but noting it by memory in the heart. And you should beware, lest during the time of your occupation with this study none of the catechumens should hear what has been handed down to you” (Fifth Catechetical Lecture, ch. 12).

In the introductory words which he wrote down for those being “illuminated!”—that is, those who were already coming to Baptism, and also to those present who were baptized—he gives the following warning: “This instruction for those who are being illumined is offered to be read by those who are coming to Baptism and by the faithful who have already received Baptism; but by no means give it either to the catechumens or to anyone else who has not yet become a Christian, otherwise you will have to give an answer to the Lord. And if you make a copy of these catechetical lectures, then, as before the Lord, write this down also” (that is, this warning, End of the Prologue to the catechetical Lectures).

In the following words St. Basil the Great gives us a clear understanding of the Sacred Apostolic Tradition: “Of the dogmas and sermons preserved in the Church, certain ones we have from written instruction, and certain ones we have received from the Apostolic Tradition, handed down in secret. Both the one and the other have one and the same authority for piety, and no one who is even the least informed in the decrees of the Church will contradict this. For if we dare to overthrow the unwritten customs as if they did not have great importance, we shall thereby imperceptively do harm to the Gospel in its most important points. And even

more, we shall be left with the empty name of the Apostolic preaching without content. For example, let us especially make note of the first and commonest thing, that those who hope in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ should sign themselves with the Sign of the Cross.

Who taught this in Scripture? Which Scripture instructed us that we should turn to the east in prayer? Which of the saints left us in written form the words of invocation during the transformation of the bread of the Eucharist and the Chalice of blessing? For we are not satisfied with the words which are mentioned in the Epistles or the Gospels, but both before them and after them we pronounce others also as having great authority for the Mystery, having received them from the unwritten teaching.

By what Scripture, likewise, do we bless the water of Baptism and the oil of anointing and, indeed, the one being baptized himself. Is this not the silent and secret tradition? And what more? What written word has taught us this anointing with oil itself? Where is the triple immersion and all the rest that has to do with Baptism, the renunciation of Satan and his angels to be found? What Scripture are these taken from? Is it not from this unpublished and unspoken teaching which our Fathers have preserved in a silence inaccessible to curiosity and scrutiny, because they were thoroughly instructed to preserve in silence the sanctity of the Mysteries? For what propriety would there be to proclaim in writing a teaching concerning that which it is not allowed for the unbaptized even to behold?”

From these words of St. Basil the Great we may conclude: first, that the Sacred Tradition of the teaching of faith is that which may be traced back to the earliest period of the Church, and, second, that it was carefully preserved and unanimously acknowledged among the Fathers and teachers of the Church during the epoch of the great Fathers and the beginning of the Ecumenical Councils.

Although St. Basil has given here a series of examples of the “oral” tradition, he himself in this very text has taken a step towards the “recording” of this oral word. During the era of the freedom and triumph of the Church in the fourth century, almost all of the tradition in general received a written form and is now preserved in the literature of the Church, which comprises a supplement to the Holy Scripture.

We find this sacred ancient Tradition:

(1) in the most ancient record of the Church, the Canons of the Holy Apostles;



(2) in the Symbols of Faith of the ancient local churches;
 (3) in the ancient Liturgies, in the rite of Baptism, and in other ancient prayers;

(4) in the ancient Acts of the Christian martyrs. The Acts of the martyrs did not enter into use by the faithful until they had been examined and approved by the local bishops; and they were read at the public gatherings of Christians under the supervision of the leaders of the churches. In them we see the confession of the Most Holy Trinity, the Divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, examples of the invocation of the saints, of belief in the conscious life of those who had reposed in Christ, and much else;

(5) in the ancient records of the history of the Church, especially in the book of Eusebius Pamphilus, Bishop of Caesarea, where there are gathered many ancient traditions of rite and dogma—in particular, there is given the canon of the sacred books of the Old and New Testaments;

(6) in the works of the ancient Fathers and teachers of the Church;

(7) and, finally, in the very spirit of the Church's life, in the preservation of faithfulness to all her foundations which come from the Holy Apostles.

The Apostolic Tradition which has been preserved and guarded by the Church, by the very fact that it has been kept by the Church, becomes the Tradition of the Church herself; it “belongs” to her, it testifies to her; and, in parallel to Sacred Scripture it is called by her, “Sacred Tradition.”

The witness of Sacred Tradition is indispensable for our certainty that all the books of Sacred Scripture have been handed down to us from Apostolic times and are of Apostolic origin. Sacred Tradition is necessary for the correct understanding of separate passages of Sacred Scripture, and for refuting heretical reinterpretations of it, and, in general, so as to avoid superficial, one-sided, and sometimes even prejudiced and false interpretations of the books that comprise our Sacred Scripture.

Finally, Sacred Tradition is also necessary because some truths of the faith are expressed in a completely definite form in Scripture, while others are not entirely clear and precise and therefore demand confirmation by the Sacred Apostolic Tradition.

The Apostle commands, *Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.* (2 Thess 2:15).

Besides all this, Sacred Scripture is valuable because from it we see how the whole order of Church organization, the canons, the Divine Services and rites are rooted in and founded upon the way of life of the ancient Church. Thus, the preservation of “Tradition” expresses the succession of the very essence of the Church.

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

HELL AND PARADISE

By Elder Paisios the Athonite.

We asked the Elder to tell us a few words about Hell and Paradise.

- Elder, what is Hell like?

- Let me tell you a story that I've heard:

Once there was a simple man who kept asking God to show him what Paradise and Hell are like... So, one night, in his sleep, he heard a voice saying: “Come, let me show you what Hell looks like.”

He suddenly found himself in a room, where many people were seated around a table. In the middle of that table was a pot filled with food. But all those people were hungry, because they were unable to eat. They each held a very long spoon in their hand. They were able to take food out of the pot, but due to the spoon's length, they couldn't bring the spoon to their mouth. Because of this, some were complaining, others were shouting, others were weeping...

Then he heard the same voice saying to him: “Come now, and let me show you what Paradise also looks like.”

He again found himself suddenly in another room, where many people were seated around a table, just like the one before, and in the middle of that table was—again—a pot full of food. Those people also held the same kind of long spoon in their hand. But every one of these people was full and happy, because each would dip his spoon in the pot and feed the person near him...

Do you understand now, how you too can feel that you're living in Paradise, from this lifetime? Whoever does a good deed feels gladness, because he is rewarded with a divine consolation. Whoever does bad things suffers, and he makes the terrestrial Paradise a terrestrial Hell. Do you have love, kindness inside you? Then you are an angel, and everywhere you go or stand, you will be carrying Paradise with you. Do you have passions, meanness? Then you have the devil inside you, and everywhere you go or stand, you carry Hell along with you.

We begin to live Paradise or Hell from this life, here...



When St. Paul says *Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice* (Phil 4:4) or be people of joy—what do you think, that this is something optional? Did you think, I can have joy if I want to and if I do not feel like it, I can be miserable? No, rejoice is a commandment. As a Christian, you are not allowed to be miserable! You must be a joyful Christian, a cheerful Christian.

Fr. Athanasios Mitilinaios
 From his homilies on the “Book of Revelation”

Τὰ Ὀκτὼ Θανάσιμα Ἀμαρτήματα τῆς Σύγχρονης Ἑλλάδας

«Αδέσμευτος Τύπος», 2 Αὐγούστου, 2010.

Νέα δυναμική παρέμβαση ἀπὸ τὸν μητροπολίτη Θεσσαλονίκης Ἄνθιμο, ὁ ὁποῖος στὸ κυριακάτικο κήρυγμά του ἀπὸ τὸν Ναὸ τῆς Παναγίας Ἀχειροποιήτου ἀναφέρθηκε στὰ ὀκτὼ θανάσιμα ἀμαρτήματα τῆς σύγχρονης ἐποχῆς. Ὅπως τόνισε ὁ δυναμικὸς ἱεράρχης, τὰ σύγχρονα «ἀμαρτήματα» εἶναι ἡ ἀπληστία, ἡ φιλοχρηματία, οἱ ἐκτρώσεις, τὰ κοινὰ ἐγκλήματα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ εἰς βάρος τῆς πατρίδας προδοσία.

«Ἡ κρίση δὲν εἶναι οἰκονομικὴ μόνον ἀλλὰ εἶναι, ὄντως, σὲ ὅλες τὶς διαστάσεις τῆς ἠθικῆς, γιατί καὶ ἡ κλοπὴ τῶν χρημάτων, ὅταν ἔγινε, ὅπως ἔγινε, ἐὰν ἔγινε... ἔγινε γιατί ὑπῆρχε κρίση ἠθικῆς», εἶπε χαρακτηριστικὰ ὁ μητροπολίτης Θεσσαλονίκης, ὁ ὁποῖος ἄρχισε νὰ ἀπαριθμεῖ καὶ νὰ ἐρμηνεύει τὰ γνωρίσματα τῆς ἐποχῆς:

1. **Εὐκόλος πλουτισμός.**

2. **Ἀπληστία.**

3. **Εὐδαιμονισμός, καλοπέραση.** «Ταξίδια, διακοπές, διασκεδάσεις, γλέντια, ποτά, ἔξοδα, δάνεια ἀπὸ τὴν τράπεζα γιὰ διακοπές, δάνεια διακοπῶν. Τὸ 2005 εἶπα σὲ κήρυγμα, στὸν Ἅγιο Δημήτριο, μὴν παίρνετε δάνεια ἀπὸ τὶς τράπεζες, θὰ σᾶς βγοῦν ξινά. Ὅπως καὶ βγῆκαν, καὶ πολλοὶ ἀπὸ ἐσᾶς ἔχασαν τὰ σπίτια τους».

4. **Φιλοχρηματία,** ἡ ἀγάπη ἀποκτήσεως περισσοτέρων χρημάτων πάνω στὴν ὁποία ἄνθισε ὁ συνδικαλισμὸς τῶν ἐργαζομένων. «Ὅλοι εἴμαστε ἐργαζόμενοι καὶ ὅλοι ἀγαποῦμε καὶ τιμᾶμε τοὺς ἐργαζομένους. Ἀλλὰ σὲ ὅλα τὰ ἐπαγγέλματα καὶ σὲ ὅλες τὶς τάξεις τῆς πατρίδας μας, ὁ ἐπαγγελματισμὸς αὐτῶν ποὺ ἀσκοῦν τὸν συνδικαλισμὸ ὁδήγησε στὴ διαρκὴ ἐπιδίωξη γιὰ αὐξηση τῶν ἐσόδων, εἰς βάρος τῆς ἀντοχῆς τοῦ κράτους, ποὺ ξεκίνησε ἕναν “δρόμο” ἀλλὰ δὲν ἄντεξε νὰ τὸν βγάλει εἰς πέρας. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ ἀλήθεια».

5. **Σαρκολατρεία καὶ φιληδονία.** «Τὴν σαρκολατεία τὴν ξέρετε, ποὺ ὁδηγεῖ στὴ φιληδονία, τὴν πορνεία καὶ τὴν μοιχεία ποὺ εἶναι τόσο πολὺ διαδεδομένα».

6. **Ἐκτρώσεις ἢ ἀμβλώσεις.** «Μέσα σὲ ἕναν χρόνον ὑπολογίζεται ὅ,τι οἱ ἐκτρώσεις στὴν Ἑλλάδα φτάνουν τὶς 150.000. Βάλτε 10 χρόνια ἐπὶ 150 χιλιάδες, χάσαμε ἑνάμισι ἑκατομμύριο πληθυσμό. Αὐτὸ εἶναι κρῖμα, ἔγκλημα ἔναντι τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἔναντι τῆς Πατρίδος, ἔναντι τῆς Κοινωνίας, ἔναντι τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ μας. Ψυχρὴ δολοφονία ἀνθρωπίνων υπάρξεων».

7. **Κοινὰ ἐγκλήματα.**

8. **Ἡ εἰς βάρος τῆς Πατρίδος μας προδοσία.** «Λένε μερικοὶ καὶ τὰ γράφουν. Γράφουν φοβερὰ πράγματα. Καὶ ἐναντίον ἡμῶν. Καὶ ὅσο καὶ ἂν εἴμεθα λίγοι ποὺ

ὀμιλοῦμε γιὰ τὴν πατρίδα, γιὰ τὴν Ἑλλάδα, γιὰ τὸν πολιτισμὸ μας, γιὰ τὴν ἱστορία μας, γι' αὐτὸ τὸ ἔθνος τὸ μεγάλο τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ, ποὺ ἔχει χιλιάδες χρόνια ἱστορία, δὲν ὑπάρχει ἄλλος λαὸς στὴν Βαλκανικὴ μὲ τέτοια ἱστορία. Καὶ μετὰ τὸ προδίδουμε; Ἔ, αὐτὸ εἶναι σατανοπληξία. **Εἶναι σατανοπληξία νὰ ἀπορρίπτεις τὸ γένος σου**», κατέληξε ὁ κ. Ἄνθιμος.



Ἡ Ἀληθινὴ Ταπείνωση

Εἶπα κάποτε στὸν Γέροντα Πορφύριο:

—Γέροντα, δὲν μπορῶ νὰ συνεργασθῶ μ' αὐτὸν τὸν ἀδελφό... εἶναι γκρινιάρης.

—Μωρὲ ἐσὺ ἔχεις ἐγωισμό. Τὸ ξέρεις; Ἀπ' αὐτὸν τὰ παθαίνεις ὅλα.

—Τὸ ξέρω, Γέροντα, τὸν ἔχω ἀπὸ μικρός. Εὐχέστε νὰ μοῦ δώσει ὁ Θεὸς ταπείνωση στὴν καρδιά μου.

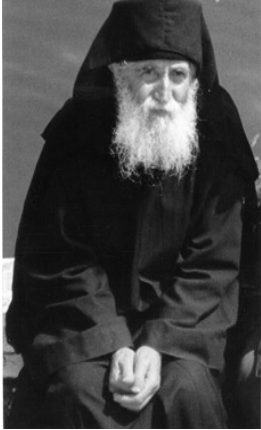
—Παίδι μου, ὄντως ταπείνωση χρειάζεσαι. Ἀλλὰ ὄχι αὐτὴ τὴ ταπείνωση ποὺ τὴ λέμε μὲ λόγια, οὔτε αὐτὴ ποὺ νομίζουμε ὅ,τι ἀποκτήσαμε. Ἡ ταπείνωση ἢ ἀγία, εἶναι δῶρο Θεοῦ στὴν ψυχὴ. Τὸ δίνει ὁ Θεὸς ὅταν εὕρει καθαρὴ προετοιμασία. Τότε ἐπιβλέπει μὲ εὐχαρίστηση καὶ ἔλκει τὴν ψυχὴ αὐτὴ πρὸς ἑαυτόν.

—Λοιπὸν κι ἐσὺ μὴ λὲς «αὐτὸς εἶναι γκρινιάρης, αὐτὸς ζηλιάρης, αὐτὸ θυμώνει» κ.λ.π. Μὴ λὲς «δὲν μπορῶ νὰ κάνω μαζί του, δὲν κάνω ποτέ». Αὐτὸς δὲν εἶναι τρόπος. Αὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι ὀρθόδοξο, δὲν εἶναι Χριστιανικὸ. Ἔτσι ξεχωρίζεις τὸν ἑαυτό σου ἀπὸ τὴ χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ, διότι τὸν ξεχώρισες ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀδελφούς σου. Ἀντίθετα, θὰ παραβλέπεις τὶς ἀδυναμίες τους καὶ χωρὶς νὰ τὶς μιμῆσαι, θὰ γίνεσαι ἕνα μὲ αὐτοὺς στὴ συνεργασία. Ὅ,τι θέλουν καὶ ὅπως τὸ θέλουν. Ἔτσι τὸ θέλουν; Ἔτσι. Ἀλλιῶς; Ἀλλιῶς. Μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο καταστρέφονται τὰ τεῖχη ποὺ μᾶς χωρίζουν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀδελφούς μας. Ἔτσι συνδεόμεθα μὲ τὸ Χριστό. Ὅσο πιὸ πολὺ συνδέεσαι καθημερινὰ μὲ τοὺς ἀδελφούς σου, τόσο περισσότερο εἰσέρχεσαι μυστικὰ μέσα στὴν Ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

—Σοῦ ἔχει δώσει πολλὰ χαρίσματα ὁ Θεός. Σὲ προίκισε μὲ δῶρα σπάνια. Τὸ νιώθεις; Νὰ τὸν εὐχαριστεῖς συνεχῶς καὶ νὰ ταπεινώνεσαι στὴν Ἀγάπη Του. Παρακάλα τὸ Θεό, νὰ σοῦ στείλει τὴν ἀγία ταπείνωση. Ὅχι αὐτὴ ποὺ λέει, «εἶμαι τελευταῖος, εἶμαι τιποτένιος». Αὐτὴ εἶναι σατανικὴ ταπείνωση. Ἡ ἀγία ταπείνωση, ἐπαναλαμβάνω, εἶναι δῶρο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀκοῦς; Δῶρο, χάρισμα. Ὅχι ἀπὸ δικές μας προσπάθειες. Ἐσὺ προετοίμαζε τὸν ἑαυτό σου, καὶ ζήτα ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ αὐτὸ τὸ ἅγιο δῶρο. Μὴ λὲς, ἔχω αὐτὸ τὸ ἐλάττωμα, τὸ προσφέρω στὸ Θεό. Τίποτα. Ἐσὺ, ἀγωνίσου, ἐξουθένωνε τὸν ἑαυτό σου, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα

Ὁ Καλὸς καὶ ὁ Κακὸς Λογισμὸς

Ἀπόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο τοῦ Γερομονάχου Χριστοδοῦλου, Ἀγορεύειν μετὰ τίτλο «Ὁ Γέρον Παΐσιος».



Ρωτήσαμε μιὰ μέρα τὸ Γέροντα Παΐσιο γιὰ τὸ ἐξῆς πρόβλημα ποὺ ἀντιμετωπίζουμε:

—Γέροντα, μᾶς λέτε συνέχεια νὰ ἔχουμε καλὸ λογισμό. Θὰ σᾶς ποῦμε, ὅμως, μιὰ περίπτωση, γιὰ νὰ δοῦμε τί μᾶς συμβουλευέτε νὰ ἀπαντοῦμε. Ἔρχονται μερικοὶ ἄνθρωποι καὶ μᾶς λένε: Ὁ τάδε ἱερέας παίρνει πολλὰ λεφτὰ ἀπὸ τὰ μυστήρια, ὁ δεῖνα καπνίζει πολὺ τσιγάρο καὶ πηγαίνει στὰ καφενεῖα, ὁ ἄλλος λένε

πὼς εἶναι ἀνήθικος καί, γενικά, βγάζουν ἓνα δριμὺ κατηγορητήριο ἐναντίον τῶν κληρικῶν, καὶ μάλιστα παρουσιάζουν μαζί κι ἀποδείξεις τῶν ὄσων λένε. Σ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τί μπορούμε νὰ λέμε;

Τότε, ὁ Γέροντας ἄρχισε νὰ μᾶς λέει:

—Γνώρισα ἐκ πείρας ὅ,τι σ' αὐτὴ τῇ ζωῇ οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι χωρισμένοι σὲ δυὸ κατηγορίες. Τρίτη δὲν ὑπάρχει—ἢ στὴ μιὰ θὰ εἶναι, ἢ στὴν ἄλλη. Ἡ μία, λοιπόν, κατηγορία τῶν ἀνθρώπων μοιάζει μετὰ τὴ μύγα. Ἡ μύγα ἔχει τὴν ἐξῆς ιδιότητα: νὰ πηγαίνει πάντα καὶ νὰ κάθεται σὲ ὅ,τι βρώμικο ὑπάρχει. Γιὰ παράδειγμα, ἂν ἓνα περιβόλι εἶναι γεμάτο λουλουῖα, ποὺ εὐωδιάζουν, καὶ σὲ μιὰ ἄκρη τοῦ περιβολιοῦ κάποιον ζῶο ἔχει κάνει μιὰ ἀκαθαρσία, τότε μιὰ μύγα, πετώντας μέσα σ' αὐτὸ τὸ πανέμορφο περιβόλι, θὰ πετάξει πάνω ἀπὸ ὅλα τὰ ἄνθη καὶ σὲ κανένα δὲν θὰ καθίσει. Μόνο ὅταν δεῖ τὴν ἀκαθαρσία, τότε ἀμέσως θὰ κατέβει καὶ θὰ καθίσει πάνω σ' αὐτὴν καὶ θὰ ἀρχίσει νὰ τὴν ἀνασκαλεύει, ἀναπαυόμενη στὴ δυσωδία ποὺ προκαλεῖται ἀπὸ τὸ ἀνακάτεμα αὐτό, καὶ δὲ θὰ ξεκολλᾷ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ.

—Ἄν τώρα ἔπιανες μιὰ μύγα, καὶ αὐτὴ μπορούσε νὰ μιλήσει καὶ τὴ ρωτούσες νὰ σοῦ πεῖ μήπως ξέρει ἂν πουθενὰ ὑπάρχουν τριαντάφυλλα, τότε ἐκεῖνη θὰ ἀπαντοῦσε πὼς δὲ γνωρίζει καν τί εἶναι αὐτά. «Εγώ, θὰ σοῦ πεῖ, ξέρω πὼς ὑπάρχουν σκουπίδια, τουαλέτες, ἀκαθαρσίες ζῶων, μαγειρεῖα, βρωμιές». Ἡ μία λοιπὸν μερίδα τῶν ἀνθρώπων μοιάζει μετὰ τὴ μύγα. Εἶναι ἢ κατηγορία τῶν ἀνθρώπων ποὺ ἔχει μάθει πάντα νὰ σκέφτεται καὶ νὰ ψάχνει νὰ βρεῖ ὅ,τι κακὸ ὑπάρχει, ἀγνοώντας καὶ μὴ θέλοντας ποτὲ νὰ σταθεῖ στὸ καλὸ.

—Ἡ ἄλλη κατηγορία τῶν ἀνθρώπων μοιάζει μετὰ τὴ μέλισσα. Ἡ ιδιότητα τῆς μέλισσας εἶναι νὰ βρίσκει καὶ νὰ κάθεται σὲ ὅ,τι καλὸ καὶ γλυκὸ ὑπάρχει. Ἄς ποῦμε,

γιὰ παράδειγμα, πὼς σὲ μιὰ αἴθουσα, ποὺ εἶναι γεμάτη ἀκαθαρσίες ἔχει κάποιος τοποθετήσει σὲ μιὰ γωνιὰ ἓνα λουκοῦμι. Ἄν φέρουμε ἐκεῖ μιὰ μέλισσα, ἐκεῖνη θὰ πετάξει καὶ δὲν θὰ καθήσει πουθενὰ ἕως ὅτου βρεῖ τὸ λουκοῦμι. καὶ μόνον ἐκεῖ θὰ σταθεῖ.

—Ἄν πιάσεις τώρα τὴ μέλισσα καὶ τὴ ρωτήσεις ποῦ ὑπάρχουν σκουπίδια, αὐτὴ θὰ σοῦ πεῖ ὅτι δὲ γνωρίζει. Θὰ σοῦ πεῖ «ἐκεῖ ὑπάρχουν γαρδένιες, ἐκεῖ τριαντάφυλλιες, ἐκεῖ θυμάρη, ἐκεῖ μέλι, ἐκεῖ ζάχαρη, ἐκεῖ λουκοῦμια» καὶ γενικὰ θὰ εἶναι γνώστης ὅλων τῶν καλῶν καὶ θὰ ἔχει παντελὴ ἄγνοια ὅλων τῶν κακῶν. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ δευτέρη ομάδα τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐκεῖνων ποὺ ἔχουν καλοὺς λογισμοὺς καὶ σκέπτονται καὶ βλέπουν τὰ καλά.

—Ὅταν σ' ἓνα δρόμο βρεθοῦν νὰ περπατοῦν δυὸ ἄνθρωποι οἱ ὁποῖοι ἀνήκουν στὶς δυὸ αὐτὲς κατηγορίες, τότε, φτάνοντας στὸ σημεῖο ἐκεῖνο ὅπου ἓνας τρίτος ἔκανε τὴν «ἀνάγκη» του, ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς πρώτης κατηγορίας, θὰ πάρει ἓνα ξύλο καὶ θ' ἀρχίσει νὰ σκαλίζει τὶς ἀκαθαρσίες.

—Ὅταν, ὅμως, περάσει ὁ ἄλλος, τῆς δευτέρας κατηγορίας, ποὺ μοιάζει μετὰ τὴ μέλισσα, προσπαθεῖ νὰ βρεῖ τρόπο νὰ τὶς σκεπάσει μετὰ χῶμα καὶ μετὰ μιὰ πλάκα, γιὰ νὰ μὴν αισθανθοῦν καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι περαστικοὶ τὴ δυσωδία αὐτὴ, ποὺ προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὶς βρωμιές.

Καὶ κατέληξε ὁ Γέροντας:

—Εγώ σὲ ὅσους ἔρχονται καὶ μοῦ κατηγοροῦν τοὺς ἄλλους—καὶ μετὰ δυσκολεύουν—τοὺς λέω αὐτὸ τὸ παράδειγμα καὶ τοὺς ὑποδεικνύω νὰ διαλέξουν σὲ ποῖα κατηγορία θέλουν νὰ βρίσκονται καὶ ἀναλόγως νὰ ψάξουν νὰ βροῦν καὶ τοὺς ἀνάλογους ἀνθρώπους τῆς κατηγορίας τους.



Ο πρ. Κλεόπας Ἰλίο εἶχε πάει τὸ 1977 στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος γιὰ νὰ προσκυνήσει. Πῆγε σὲ πολλὰ μοναστήρια, καὶ ὅταν ἔφθασαν στὸ γέροντα Παΐσιο, ὁ πρ. Κλεόπας τοῦ ζήτησε μιὰ συμβουλή:

—Πατέρα Παΐσιε, θὰ ἤθελα νὰ παραμείνω στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος, ἐσεῖς τί συμβουλή μοῦ δίνετε;

Ὁ γέροντας Παΐσιος εἶχε τὸ διορατικὸ χάρισμα καὶ τοῦ εἶπε:

—Πατέρα Κλεόπα ἂν μείνεις στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος θὰ εἶσαι ἓνα λουλοῦδι ποὺ θὰ προστεθεῖ στὰ ἄλλα πνευματικὰ λουλοῦδια τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὅρους. Ἀλλὰ ἂν θὰ πᾶς στὴ Ρουμανία—καὶ αὐτὸ νὰ κάνεις, νὰ πᾶς—θα θεωρεῖσαι ἓνας ἀπόστολος.

Καὶ τότε ὁ πρ. Κλεόπας ὑπάκουσε, βλέποντας πὼς αὐτὸς ὁ λόγος βγήκε ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἂν καὶ εἶχε μεγάλη ἀγάπη γιὰ τὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος καὶ τὴν Παναγία...

Ἀπὸ τὸ «Ρουμᾶνοι Γέροντες»

Ὁ Ἅγιος Νικόλαος Πλανᾶς

Ἀρχιμ. Ἀλέξανδρου Μοστράτου (ἀπὸ ἓνα Ἑλληνορθόδοξο φυλλάδιο).

Ἀπὸ τὸν Συντάκτη: Ἀγαπητοὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀδερφοί, ἀκόμα καὶ στὶς μέρες μας κυκλοφοροῦν Ἅγιοι ἀνάμεσά μας, δὲν εἶναι ὑπερβολή. Ἄς προσπαθήσουμε νὰ τοὺς μιμηθοῦμε, κατὰ τὸ δυνατὸν φυσικά.

† † †

Χαίροις ὁ τῆς Νάξου θεῖος βλαστός καὶ τῶν Τερέων ὁ ἐν πᾶσιν ὑπογραμμός, ἐλεημοσύναις, νηστειαῖς, ἀγρυπνίαις καὶ προσευχαῖς σχολάζων, πάτερ Νικόλαε.



Κορυφαία ἔκφραση τῆς ἀληθινῆς κατὰ Χριστὸν ζωῆς τοῦ κάθε συνειδητοῦ πιστοῦ καὶ πιδὸ πολὺ τοῦ πραγματικοῦ καὶ τελείου ἱερέως, ἀποτελεῖ ἡ ζωὴ καὶ τὸ ἔργον τοῦ Ἁγίου ἱερέως Νικολάου τοῦ Πλανᾶ, ἁγίου τῶν ἡμερῶν μας.

Ἦ εὐάνδρος καὶ Ἁγιοτόκος Νάξος εἶχε τὴν θεία εὐνοία καὶ εὐλογία νὰ εἶναι ἡ γενέτειρά του. Γεννήθηκε τὸ ἔτος 1851. Οἱ γονεῖς του, καπετάν Γιάννης καὶ Αὐγουστίνα, ἦταν ἄνθρωποι εὐποροὶ, εὐσεβεῖς καὶ καλοκάγαθοι, ὅπως ὅλοι οἱ νησιῶτες. Εἶχαν καὶ ἓνα ἐμπορικὸ καΐκι ποὺ πήγαινε ἀπὸ τὴ Νάξο στὴ Σμύρνη, Κωνσταντινούπολη, ἀκόμα καὶ στὴν Ἀλεξάνδρεια τῆς Αἰγύπτου.

Ἦ ὅλη του ζωὴ, ἀπὸ τὰ παιδικὰ του χρόνια ἀκόμα, προέλεγε τὴ μέλλουσα ζωὴ καὶ πολιτεία του. Τὶς θεῖες θαυματουργικὲς δυνάμεις ἔλαβε μὲ τὴν χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀπὸ τὰ παιδικὰ του χρόνια. Ἔτσι, γνῶριζε τὸν καταποντισμὸ τοῦ καΐκιου τοὺς ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν Πόλη καὶ τὸ εἶπε στοὺς γονεῖς του.

Τὰ πρῶτα γράμματα ἔμαθε ἀπὸ τὸν παπποῦ του—πατέρα τῆς μητέρας του—ἱερέα Γεώργιο Μελισσοργό, κοντὰ στὸν ὁποῖο ἔμαθε νὰ διαβάξει τὸ ἱερὸ Ψαλτήριον. Μαζὶ του ἐπίσης πήγαινε στὶς θεῖες Λειτουργίες καὶ τὸν διακονοῦσε στὸ Ἱερὸ Βῆμα, ἐνῶ παράλληλα δεχόταν τὰ νάματα τῆς Θείας Λατρείας. Ὅταν ὁ Νικόλαος ἦταν δεκατεσσάρων ἐτῶν, ὁ πατέρας του ἄφησε τὸν κόσμον αὐτό. Ἔτσι ἡ μητέρα του μαζὶ μὲ τὴν ἀδελφή του ἦρθαν στὴν Ἀθήνα καὶ πῆγε καὶ ὁ ἴδιος μαζὶ τοὺς. Ἔμεναν στὴν περιοχὴ ποὺ εἶναι μετὰξὺ τοῦ Ἱ. Ναοῦ τοῦ Ἁγ. Ἰωάννη τῆς Πλάκας καὶ τοῦ Ναοῦ τοῦ Ἁγ. Παντελεήμονος Ἰλισσοῦ, ὅπου ὑπῆρχαν πολλοὶ Ναξιῶτες.

Μοίρασαν μὲ τὴν ἀδελφή του τὴν πολὺ ἀξιόλογη πατρικὴ τους περιουσία. Ἀλλὰ τὸ μερίδιό του τὸ ἔβαλε

ἐνέχυρον γιὰ κάποιο φτωχό, ποὺ δὲν τοῦ τὸ ἐπέστρεψε ποτέ. Ἔτσι παρέμεινε γιὰ ὅλη του τὴ ζωὴ φτωχός. Σὲ ἡλικία δεκαεπτὰ ἐτῶν συνῆψε τίμιον γάμον κατόπιν πιέσεων τῆς μητέρας τοὺς μὲ τὴν Ἑλένη Προβελεγγίου ἀπὸ τὰ Κύθηρα. Ἀπὸ τὸν γάμον αὐτὸ ἀπέκτησε ἓνα γιό, τὸν Ἰωάννη. Ἔστερα πέθανε ἡ σύζυγός του. Στὶς 28 Ἰουλίου τοῦ ἔτους 1879 χειροτονήθηκε διάκονος στὸν Ἱ. Ναὸ Μεταμορφώσεως Σωτῆρος Πλάκας. Στὶς 2 Μαρτίου τοῦ 1885 χειροτονήθηκε πρεσβύτερος καὶ τοποθετήθηκε στὸν Ἱ. Ναὸ Ἁγ. Παντελεήμονος Ἰλισσοῦ. Ὑπηρετήσε ἐπίσης στὴν Ἐνορία τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἰωάννη τῆς ὁδοῦ Βουλιαγμένης. **Στὸν δὲ Ἱ. Ναὸ Ἁγ. Ἐλισσαίου λειτουργοῦσε καθημερινά, μὲ ψάλτες τὸν Ἀλέξανδρο Παπαδιαμάντη καὶ τὸν Ἀλέξανδρο Μωραϊτίδη!**

Ὁ Ἅγιος Νικόλαος ὑπῆρξε ὁ ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὁ ἄοκνος ἱεροουργός καὶ λάτρης τοῦ Τριαδικοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἦ μεγάλη του εὐλάβεια, ἡ ἀπεριόριστη καλωσύνη του, ἡ υπερβολικὴ του ἀφιλοχρηματία, ἡ ἀπλότητά του, τὸ ἀκτινοβόλο ἱερατικὸ του ἦθος, ἡ ἀφθαστη ἱεροπρέπεια του, ἡ ταπείνωσή του, ἡ ἀγάπη του γιὰ τὴ θεία λατρεία καὶ οἱ λοιπὲς ἀρετὲς του τὸν καταξίωσαν στὴ συνείδηση τοῦ λαοῦ.

Δὲν ἀγάπησε ποτέ του τὰ πλούτη. Ὅσα τοῦ ἔδιναν ἀμέσως τὰ ἔδινε στοὺς φτωχοὺς. Εἶχε μισθοδοτήσει ἔνδεκα οἰκογένειες χηρῶν καὶ ὀρφανῶν. Χρόνια καὶ χρόνια τοὺς ἔδινε ἐπίδομα μέχρι ποὺ τὰ παιδιά τοὺς ἔγιναν δεκατεσσάρων ἐτῶν. Βοηθοῦσε νεαροὺς διακόνους στὶς σπουδὲς τοὺς. Ἐνίσχυε ὑλικά καὶ πνευματικὰ ὅσους εἶχαν ἀνάγκη. Ὑπῆρξε ἀκαταπόνητος. Γιὰ μισὸ καὶ πλέον αἰῶνα λειτουργοῦσε καθημερινά. Λιτός, ἀπέριττος σὲ ὅλες τοὺς τὶς ἐκδηλώσεις!

Πλοῦτος του καὶ θησαυρός του, κέντρο τῆς ζωῆς του, ἡ λειτουργικὴ ζωὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας! Ἄνθρωπος προσευχῆς, τοῦ ὁποῖου ἡ ζωὴ ἦταν μιὰ διακονία πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης. Ἦταν νηστευτής. Ἐνήστευε ὅλες τὶς Σαρακοστὲς καὶ τὸ λάδι. Ἀπλός καὶ πανέξυπνος, εὐστοχος στὶς ἀπαντήσεις του, συνδύαζε τὴν ἀπλότητα καὶ τὴν ἱεροπρέπεια, τὴν ἀφέλεια μὲ τὴν ἀγιότητα. Δὲν εἶχε σπουδάσει σὲ Πανεπιστήμια, οὔτε σὲ Ἐκκλησιαστικὲς Σχολές, οὔτε σὲ Λύκεια καὶ Γυμνάσια. Καὶ ἴσως νὰ μὴ φοίτησε καὶ σὲ καμμιά τάξη τοῦ τότε Ἑλληνικοῦ Σχολείου. Κατεῖχε ὁμως ἄριστα τὴν σοφία τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ὁ Θεὸς δόξασε τὸν Ἅγιο Νικόλαο μὲ τὸ νὰ θαυματουργεῖ. Εἶναι ἀμέτρητα τὰ θαύματά του. Ἔθεράπευε ἀσθενεῖς, ἀπομάκρυνε δαιμόνια, προέλεγε τὰ μέλλοντα, ἔλυνε δύσκολα θέματα, συμβούλευε πρεπόντως.

Ἐημέρωσε ἡ Κυριακὴ τοῦ Ἀσώτου, 28^η Φεβρουαρίου τοῦ ἔτους 1932. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ μέρα ποὺ λειτουργήσε γιὰ τελευταία φορὰ στὸ ἐπίγειο θυσιαστήριον. Μετὰ τὴ Θεία Λειτουργία ἔχασε τὶς αἰσθήσεις του. Ἦταν δέκα

ή ώρα τὸ βράδυ τῆς 2^{ας} Μαρτίου. Ἐκανε τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ καὶ εἶπε: «Τὸν δρόμον τετέλευκα. Δόξα σοι ὁ Θεός! Ἡ θεία χάρις νὰ σὰς εὐλογεῖ». Μὲ αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια ἄφησε τὸν κόσμον τοῦτο.

Τὸ πρωὶ ἔφεραν τὸ ἱερό του λείψανο στὸν Ναὸ τοῦ Ἁγ. Ἰωάννου τῆς ὁδοῦ Βουλιαγμένης, ὅπου ἐτέθη σὲ λαϊκὸ προσκύνημα γιὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρες. Οἱ λαϊκὲς ἐκδηλώσεις ἦταν πρωτοφανεῖς καὶ τὸ πλῆθος τοῦ λαοῦ ἀναρίθμητο. Χιλιάδες λαοῦ κατέφθασαν ἀπὸ τὸ λεκανοπέδιο Ἀττικῆς γιὰ νὰ ἀποχαιρετήσουν τὸν σύγχρονον Ἅγιο.

Στὶς 29 Αὐγούστου τοῦ 1992, τὰ ἱερώτατα καὶ θαυματουργὰ λείψανα τοῦ Ἁγίου Νικολάου τοῦ Πλανᾶ τοποθετήθηκαν σὲ ἀσημένια λάρναικα, ποὺ σήμερα βρίσκεται στὸ δεξιὸ κλίτος τοῦ παραπάνω Ναοῦ. Ἡ Ἁγία μας Ἐκκλησία τὸν ἀνεκήρυξε καὶ ἐπισήμως ὡς ἅγιο κατὰ τὴν 135^η Συνοδικὴ Περίοδο (1991 - 1992) τοῦ Πανσέπτου Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριαρχείου, ἔπειτα ἀπὸ εἰσήγηση τοῦ Σεβ. Μητροπολίτου Πατρῶν κ. Νικοδήμου καὶ μὲ φροντίδα τοῦ Σεβ. Ποιμενάρχου μας κ. Ἀμβροσίου. Ἡ μνήμη του τιμᾶται κατὰ τὴν καθιερωμένη πανήγυρη τῆς 2^{ας} Μαρτίου. Ἐάν ἡ ἡμέρα τῆς ἐορτῆς συμπίπτει κατὰ τὴν περίοδο τῆς Μ. Τεσσαρακοστῆς, τότε ἡ μνήμη του ἐορτάζεται κατὰ τὴν ἐπόμενη Κυριακῆ. Ὡσαύτως στὴ Νάξο ἐορτάζει τὴν πρώτη Κυριακῆ τοῦ Σεπτεμβρίου, ἐνῶ στὴν Πάρο τὴν τρίτη Κυριακῆ τοῦ Σεπτεμβρίου, κατὰ τὴν καθιερωθεῖσα προσφάτως Σύναξη τῶν Πέντε Ἁγίων τῆς Ἱ. Μ. Παροναξίας.

Παραθέτουμε ἐλάχιστα ἀπὸ τὰ πολλὰ θαυματουργικὰ περιστατικὰ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ Ἁγ. Νικολάου.

Ἐμφάνιση τῶν

Ἁγ. Ἰωάννου καὶ Παντελεήμονος

Κατὰ τὸ ἔτος 1923, ἓνα πνευματικοπαίδι του ἐξαιρετικῶς ἀγαπημένο ἀπὸ τὸν γέροντα, ἄνθρωπος γεμᾶτος ἀπὸ ὑγεία καὶ δράση, ἔπαθε διάρρηξη σκωληκοειδίτιδος καὶ ἔζησε ὀκτώ ἡμέρες. Μέσα σ' αὐτὲς τὶς λίγες ἡμέρες ὁ Ἁγ. Νικόλαος «κατέβασε» τὸν οὐρανὸ στὴ γῆ, ἀπὸ τὴν ἀδιάκοπη καὶ ἐγκάρδια προσευχὴ γιὰ νὰ ζήσει τὸ ἀγαπημένο πνευματικὸ του παιδί.

Τὸ βράδυ, ὅταν πῆγε στὸ σπῆτι του, λέει καταλυπημένος στοὺς δικούς του: «Ὁ Ἥλιος θὰ πεθάνει, μοῦ τὸ εἶπαν ὁ Ἁγ. Ἰωάννης καὶ ὁ Ἁγ. Παντελεήμων».

Πέρασαν τρεῖς μῆνες, ὥσπου νὰ μπορέσει ἡ ἀδελφὴ τοῦ θανόντος—λόγω τοῦ πένθους—νὰ τὸν ρωτήσῃ πῶς ἀκριβῶς εἶδε τὴν ὄπτασία. Τῆς λέγει, λοιπόν, ὅ,τι «τὴν

ώρα ποὺ λειτουργοῦσα, εἶδα ἀπέναντι, ὀπισθεν τῆς Ἁγ. Τραπεζῆς, τὸν Ἁγ. Ἰωάννη καὶ τὸν Ἁγ. Παντελεήμονα καὶ μοῦ εἶπαν: “Διαβιβάσαμε τὴν αἴτησή σου στὸν Δεσπότη Χριστό, ὁ Ὅποιος μᾶς εἶπε ὅ,τι θὰ πεθάνει”. Ἀνωτέρα διαταγὴ, μοῦ εἶπαν».

Δέν Πατάει στὴ Γῆ

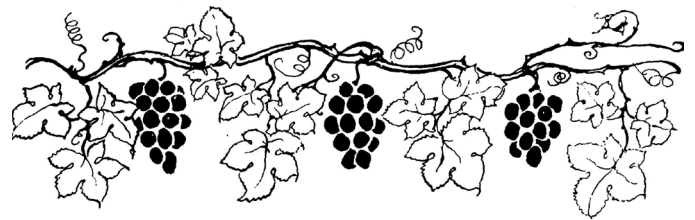
Δύο μικροὶ φίλοι, καθὼς βάδιζαν στὸ δρόμο, συνάντησαν τὸν Ἁγ. Νικόλαο. Ὁ ἓνας ἀπὸ τοὺς δύο ἦταν τύπος ἀγαθός καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἦταν ἀγαθός οἱ φίλοι του τὸν ἔλεγαν βλάκα· ἀλλὰ δέν συνέβαινε αὐτό, ἦταν ἀπλῶς ἀθῶος καὶ πολὺ θρησκευόμενος. Στὸ δρόμο ποὺ συνάντησαν τὸν Ἁγ. Νικόλαο, λέει ὁ ἀγαθὸς στὸν φίλο του: «Κοίταξε νὰ δεῖς, ὁ παπᾶς δέν πατάει στὴ γῆ!» Καὶ ὁ μὲν ἀγαθὸς ἔβλεπε τὸν Ἅγιο 30 πόντους πάνω ἀπὸ τὸ ἔδαφος, ὁ δὲ ἄλλος δέν μποροῦσε νὰ τὸν δεῖ.

Ἐπάνω σὲ Σύννεφο

Τὸ 1920, τὴν ἡμέρα τῶν Χριστουγέννων, λειτουργοῦσε ὁ Ἁγ. Νικόλαος στὸν Ἱ. Ναὸ τοῦ Ἁγ. Ἰωάννου Βουλιαγμένης. Κοινώνησε μιὰ δεκαπεντάχρονη ὀνόματι Ἰουλία καὶ μιὰ κυρία κοινώνησε τὸ βρέφος τῆς, καὶ μετὰ τὸ δίνει στὴν Ἰουλία γιὰ νὰ κοινωνήσει καὶ ἡ ἴδια.

Παίρνοντας τὸ βρέφος ἡ

Ἰουλία στὰ χέρια τῆς, γυρίζει τὸ βλέμμα τῆς πρὸς τὸν ἱερέα καὶ παραλίγο νὰ τῆς φύγει τὸ παιδί ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια. Τῆς λέει τότε ἡ κυρία: «Πρόσεξε, τὶ ἔπαθες». Καὶ ἡ Ἰουλία τῆς ἀπαντᾷ: «Βλέπω τὸν παπᾶ νὰ στέκει πάνω σ' ἓνα σύννεφο».



Εἶστε Δυσारेστημένοι μὲ τοὺς ἱερεῖς σας;

Ἐσεῖς ἄραγε τὶ κάνατε γιὰ τοὺς ἱερεῖς γιὰ νὰ εἶστε εὐχαριστημένοι; Ζητήσατε ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ ἓνα τουλάχιστον παιδί γιὰ νὰ τὸ ἀφιερῶσετε σ' Αὐτόν; Νομίζετε ὅ,τι φταῖνε μόνο οἱ ἱερεῖς; Μὰ εἶναι παιδιά σας! Ὅπως τοὺς γεννήσατε ἔτσι τοὺς ἔχετε. Γιατί ρίχνετε τὸ φταίξιμο μόνο σ' ἐκείνους;

Χρειαζέται καλύτερους ἱερεῖς; Γεννήστε τους! Ὅλος ὁ λαὸς εἶναι ὑπεύθυνος. Ὁ λαὸς ἔχει τοὺς ὀρμηνευτὲς ποὺ τοῦ ἀξίζουν.

Ἐπαναλαμβάνω: Χρειαζέστε καλύτερους ἱερεῖς; Γεννήστε τους!

Πρ. Ἀρσένιος Μπόκα (+1989)

Υπάρχουν ἄνθρωποι, σπάνιο φυσικά, ποὺ ἔρχονται στὸν κόσμο, ἔτοιμοι γιὰ τὴ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ, εὐλογημένοι καὶ μακάριοι. Ἔρχονται καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ καὶ εἰρηνοποιοί. Ὁ Παπα-Νικόλας Πλανᾶς ἀπὸ τὴ νῆσο Νάξο, ποὺ ἔζησε στὶς τελευταῖες δεκαετίες, τοῦ 19^{ου} αἰῶνα καὶ τὶς πρώτες δεκαετίες τοῦ 20^{ου} αἰῶνα, ἀνήκει σ' αὐτὴ τὴν κατηγορία ἀνθρώπων.

Δρ. Κλεῖτος Ἰωαννίδης

Μητροπολίτης Αύγουστίνος Καντιώτης: Ὁ Πύρινος Προφήτης

ΠΗΓΗ: Ελληνορθόδοξο περιοδικό «Ο ΣΩΤΗΡ».



Καὶ ἐξάρας τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ἔτελεύτησεν» ὁ ὑπεραιωνόβιος Μητροπολίτης πρ. Φλωρίνης Αὐγουστίνος (Καντιώτης). Ἐπειτα ἀπὸ 104 ἔτη ζωῆς σίγησε ὀριστικῶς πλέον ἢ προφητικῆ φωνῆ του στὴ γῆ, τὸ βροντῶδες ἀφυπνιστικὸ κήρυγμά του. Ἀλλὰ τὸ πλουσιότατο κοινωνικὸ καὶ συγγραφικὸ του ἔργο—ἔγραψε περισσότερα ἀπὸ 80 βιβλία—καὶ τὸ φωτεινὸ

παράδειγμά του θὰ συνεχίζουσαν νὰ ἐμπνέουσαν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ...

Σελάγισε ὡς ἀστέρας φωτεινότατος στὸ στερέωμα τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας καθόλου σχεδὸν τὸν περασμένο αἰῶνα. Λαμπρὸς καὶ ἀκατηγόρητος, εὐθύς καὶ ὀλόφωτος, ἀκαμπτος, πύρινος καὶ πνευματοφόρος, ἀτρόμητος καὶ ἀνυποχώρητος, οἰκοδομοῦσε τὸν λαό. Συγκινοῦσε, συνήγειρε, ἠλέκτριξε τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ὁ μακαριστὸς Ἱεράρχης μόνον τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ τὴν Ἐκκλησία του εἶχε πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν...

Μιμούμενος τὸν Ἱερό Χρυσόστομο δὲν φοβήθηκε νὰ ἐλέγξει κατὰ πρόσωπο τὸν τότε βασιλέα Παῦλο καὶ τὸν τότε πρωθυπουργό Κων. Καραμανλῆ, γιὰ τὴ φανερὴ καὶ σκανδαλώδη ὑποστήριξή τους πρὸς τὴ Μασωνία. Οὔτε τὴ βασίλισσα Φρειδερίκη δίστασε νὰ ἐλέγξει γιὰ τὴ στάση της καὶ τὴν πρόσκλησή της πρὸς τὸν Βουδισμό... Στὰ χρόνια τῆς Κατοχῆς, μόνον στὴν Κοζάνη λειτουργοῦσαν συσσίτια ὑπὸ τὴν ἐποπτεία του μὲ 8.000 σιτιζομένους καθημερινῶς...

Ὁμολογητῆς καὶ ὑπερασπιστῆς τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων δογμάτων, τόλμησε νὰ διακόψει, μὲ ἄλλους δύο Ἱεράρχες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος, τὸ μνημόσυνο τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριάρχου Ἀθηναγόρου, γιὰ τὰ ἀνοίγματα καὶ τὶς ὑποχωρήσεις του πρὸς τοὺς Παπικοὺς καὶ τὸν Οἰκουμενισμό...

Ὅσα καὶ ἂν γραφοῦν διὰ τὸν ἀνεπανάληπτον «πατέρα Αὐγουστίνου», ὅπως ἀπεκαλεῖτο ὑπὸ πάντων—ἔνδειξις καὶ αὐτὴ τῆς ταπεινοφροσύνης του—θὰ εἶναι, ὄχι μόνον ὀλίγα, ἀλλὰ ὀλίγιστα. Διὰ νὰ χρησιμοποιήσωμεν θεόπνευστον φράσιν: «Τοιοῦτος ἡμῖν ἔπρεπεν Ἀρχιερεὺς». Διό, καὶ μακαρίζοντες αὐτόν, δοξάζομεν τὸν Κύριον, δοξάζομε καὶ εὐχαριστοῦμεν τὸν Θεό, διότι ἐχάρισε στὴν Ἑλλάδα καὶ στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία τέτοιον πύρινον προφήτη—Ἐπίσκοπο.

Ἐννέα Πατρικὲς Νουθεσίαι πρὸς Πιστοὺς

Γέροντα Ἰωαννικίου Μπαλάν.

(1) Εἶπε ὁ γέροντας σ' ἓναν νέο δόκιμο ποὺ μόλις εἶχε λάβει δῶρο ἓνα κομποσκοῖνι ἀπὸ ἓναν ἄλλο πατέρα. «Αὐτὸ τὸ κομποσκοῖνι θὰ σοῦ ζητήσῃ πολὺ κόπο...»

(2) Οἱ ἀρχάριοι στὴν προσευχὴ νὰ λένε ὅσο πιὸ συχνὰ τὸ «Πάτερ ἡμῶν» ἢ τὸν Ν' ψαλμὸ ἢ κάποια ἄλλη προσευχὴ χωρὶς νὰ ἐπιμένουν στὴν ἀρχὴ τόσο στὴν εὐχὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, ἀλλὰ προσπαθώντας ν' ἀποκτήσουσαν κατάστασι ἐγρήγορσις στὴν παρουσία τοῦ Θεοῦ.

(3) Καλλίτερα νὰ εἶσαι στὸν κόσμον μὲ τὸν πόθο νὰ γίνῃς μοναχὸς παρὰ νὰ εἶσαι στὸ μοναστήρι μὲ τὸ μυαλὸ στὰ ἐγκόσμια. Ὅποιος εἶναι στὸν κόσμον καὶ δοκιμάζεται ἔτσι, ἄς βάλῃ ὡς στόχο τουλάχιστον τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια τῆς ζωῆς του νὰ τὰ περάσῃ στὸ μοναστήρι.

(4) Νὰ κοινωνάτε τὰ παιδιά σας κάθε Κυριακῆ. Κι ἂν κατὰ τὴ διάρκειά της ἐβδομάδας εἶναι καμιά μεγάλη γιορτὴ νὰ τὰ κοινωνάτε καὶ τότε.

(5) Διαβάζεται τοὺς βίους τῶν ἁγίων. Ἐκεῖ θὰ βρεῖτε μεγάλη πίστι καὶ συμβουλές περὶ προσευχῆς. Θὰ βρεῖτε τὴν ἱστορία καὶ τὴν ἀληθινὴ φιλοσοφία, κατανοητὴ γιὰ ὅλους. Καὶ πάνω ἅπ' ὅλα, θὰ βρεῖτε μορφές ἀνθρώπων μέσω τῶν ὁποίων ἐργάστηκε τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα.

(6) Ἐὰν ὅλοι οἱ Χριστιανοὶ στὴ χώρα μας νήστευαν μίαν ἐβδομάδα, ἂν θὰ σταματοῦσαν τὶς ἐκτρώσεις καὶ τὶς ἀνομιές, ἂν θὰ μετανοοῦσαν εὐλικρινῶς, ἂν θὰ ἐξομολογοῦνταν καὶ θὰ κοινωνοῦσαν, θὰ βλέπατε μεγάλα θαύματα. Θὰ γύριζε ὁ Θεὸς τὸ πρόσωπό Του πάλι πρὸς τὴ χώρα μας.

(7) Πιὸ λίγη τηλεόρασι καὶ πιὸ πολλὴ προσευχὴ. Ὅποιος δὲ βλέπει καθόλου τηλεόρασι κάνει τὸ καλλίτερο.

(8) Ἀπὸ τὸν καθημερινὸ κανόνα προσευχῆς νὰ μὴ λείπει τὸ Ψαλτήριον, τουλάχιστο 1-2 καθίσματα.

(9) Ἡ μητέρα νὰ προσεύχεται μαζὶ μὲ τὸ παιδί της. Νὰ τὰ μάθει ἀπὸ μικρὰ νὰ προσεύχονται. Ὁ καθένας μὲ ὅ,τι ταιριάζει στὴν ἡλικία του, ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ ἐπιμένῃ σ' αὐτό. Ἔτσι τὰ παιδιά μεγαλώνουν μὲ τὸ Χριστὸ καὶ τὰ μεγαλώνει Ἐκεῖνος.



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

Ὁ Καλόψυχος Χαρτοπαίχτης

Ἐνα χαριτωμένο Κυπριακὸ διήγημα (παραμῦθι), καταγραφὲς ἀπὸ τὸν Χαράλαμπο Ἐπαμεινώνδα.

Ἐξέβηκεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς μὲ τοὺς μαθητὲς Του νὰ γυρίσει τὰ χωριά, νὰ δεῖ τὶ γίνεται. Ἦρθεν ἀπὸ τὴν ἄκραν ἑνὸς χωριοῦ πρὸς τὰ πάνω. Ἐνα ἀπὸ τὰ σπίτια ἦταν ἀνοικτό. Τοὺς λέγει:

—Δὲν ἔχετε λίγο τόπο νὰ μείνουμε κι ἐμεῖς ἐδῶ;

—Δὲν ἔχουμε, ἀπάντησαν αὐτοί.

Πῆγαν εἰς ἄλλο σπίτι.

—Δὲν ἔχουμε, δὲν ἔχουμε, μέχρι ποὺ τελείωσαν τὰ σπίτια τοῦ χωριοῦ.

Εἰς τὴν τελειωμὴ τοῦ χωριοῦ, εἶχε τὸ μικρὸ σπιτάκι του ἕνας ἄνθρωπος. Τοῦτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἦταν χαρτοπαίχτης. Πρὶν λίγο καιρὸ εἶχε παίξει τὸ περβόλι του στὰ χαρτιά καὶ ἐπῆραν τοῦ το. Μετὰ ἔπαιξε τὴ φρακτὴ του τὴν ἄλλη, ἐπῆραν τοῦ τὴν καὶ ἐκείνη. Στὸ τέλος ἔπαιξε καὶ τὸ σπίτι του, ἀλλὰ ἐπῆραν τοῦ το καὶ τὸ σπίτι. Πῆγε τότε ὁ φτωχὸς στὴν ἄκραν τοῦ χωριοῦ, ὅπου ἦταν μία πλατεία ποὺ δὲν τὴν ὀριζε κανένας. Ἐκαμε μία μικρὴ δόμη, ὅπως-ὅπως, καὶ περνοῦσε μὲ τὴ γυναῖκα του καὶ τὰ δυὸ του μωρά.

Ὅτε κι ἐξέβη ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς καὶ ἔκαμε πρὸς τὰ πάνω, καὶ ρωτοῦσε, ἀλλὰ ἡ ἀπάντηση εἰς τὸ ἕνα σπίτι ἦταν «δὲν ἔχουμε» καὶ στὸ ἄλλο σπίτι «δὲν ἔχουμε», ἔφθασε στὴ τελειωμὴ τοῦ χωριοῦ μόνος Του ἀφοῦ οἱ μαθητὲς του ἔκοψαν πίσω. Ἡῦρεν ἐκεῖνον τὸν φτωχὸ τὸν χαρτοπαίχτη καὶ τὸν ρωτᾷ.

—Δὲν ἔχεις λίγο τόπο νὰ μείνουμε καὶ ἐμεῖς;

—Ἐ, ἐκεῖ ποὺ θὰ μείνουμε ἐμεῖς, νὰ μείνεις καὶ Ἐσὺ.

Κι ἐνέβη ἔσσω ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς. Λέγει τότε ἡ γυναῖκα τοῦ ἀντρός της:

—Δὲν ἔχουμε τίποτε. Ἐβαλα κάτι κρομμύδια ὄφτὰ καὶ πατάτες. Τὶ θὰ τοῦ βάλουμε νὰ φάει;

Ἰσά, ἐκείνη τὴ ὥρα ἀναφανίσκουν ἀπὸ τὸν πόρον τῆς αὐλῆς τοῦ σπιτιοῦ, ἕνας, ἀλλόνας-ἀλλόνας μαθητῆς δώδεκα μαθητῆς. Μὲ τὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ δεκατρεῖς.

—Τὶ θὰ κάμουμε τώρα; Λαλεῖ του ἡ γυναῖκα.

—Τὶ θὰ κάμουμε τώρα; Οὔσσου, φρῖσσε, μὴν πεῖς τίποτα.

Σιώπησε ἡ γυναῖκα. Ὑστερα παραμέρισαν ἐκεῖ καὶ ἐδῶ, καὶ ἄπλωσε ἕνα ψαθὶ χαμαὶ καὶ ἔβαλε πάνω ἕνα τραπεζομάνδυλον. Σκόρπισε κατόπι πάνω, ἐκεῖνα τὰ κρομμύδια καὶ τὶς πατάτες καὶ τὰ ψωμιά.

—Ἐ, λέγει ἡ γυναῖκα, θὰ χορτάσουν; Δὲν ἔχουμε τίποτα ἄλλο. Τὶ νὰ κάμω;

Ἐκασαν, ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς καὶ οἱ μαθητῆς Του καὶ ἔτρωγαν. Μῆτε τὰ κρομμύδια ἔλειψαν, μῆτε οἱ πατάτες, μῆτε τὰ ψωμιά ἔλειψαν. Ἐφαγαν, ἔφαγαν κι ἔμειναν καὶ κάμποσα κομμάτια περισσεύματα. Εὐλόγησέν τα ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς. Μποροῦν νὰ λείψουν;

Μόλις ἔφαγαν, σηκώθηκαν.

—Ἐ, ποῦ θὰ ξαπλώσουν τώρα; Λαλεῖ του ἡ γυναῖκα.

Νὰ τοὺς ἀπλώσουμε κάμποσα ροῦχα χαμαὶ στὸ ψαθὶ καὶ ὁ Δάσκαλός τους νὰ κοιμηθεῖ μέσα στὴ μονὴ μας. Ἐμεῖς νὰ βγοῦμε ἔξω. Εἶναι καλοκαίρι, λαλεῖ της, θὰ βροῦμε νὰ κουλουρωθοῦμε πούποτε.

Βολεύτηκαν ἔτσι. Κοιμήθηκαν ἄλλοι ἐκεῖ, ἄλλοι ἐδῶ, πέρασε ἡ νύκτα. Μὲ τὸ χάραμαν τοῦ ἡλίου, ἐσηκώθησαν. Πρὶν νὰ ξεβεῖ τῆς πόρτας γιὰ νὰ φύγουν, ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς λαλεῖ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου:

—Τὶ καλὸ θέλεις νὰ σοῦ κάμω;

—Καὶ τὶ σᾶς ἔκαμα ἐγώ;

—Ποῦ μᾶς φιλοξένησες.

—Μά...

—Ὅχι, καὶ τοῦτο ποῦ μᾶς ἔκαμε καλὸν ἐνὶ. Εἰπέ μου τὶ θέλεις.

—Περνᾷ σου νὰ μὲ κάμεις νὰ κερδίω στὰ χαρτιά;

—Γιὰ ὄνομα τοῦ Θεοῦ! Εἰπέ μου ἄλλο πράγμα νὰ σοῦ κάμω νὰ σάσεις τὰ παιδιὰ σου.

—Ὅχι, λαλεῖ του, εἶχα δυὸ φρακτῆς, ἐπῆραν μοῦ τες, εἶχα ἕνα

σπίτι, ἐπῆραν μοῦ το καὶ ἐκεῖνο. Τώρα τοὺς ἔχω ἄχι νὰ τὰ πάρω πίσω.

—Ἐ, πῆγαινε παίξε καὶ θὰ κερδίσεις, εἶπεν του, κι ἀποχαιρετίστηκαν.

Στὸ μετὰξ, ἔκαμε κανένα μῆνα ποὺ δὲν πῆγε στὸν καφενέ. Μόλις ἔφυγε ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς, μάνι-μάνι πῆγε βουρητὸς.

—ὦ! Μὰ ποῦ ἦσουν τόσο καιρὸ; Τοῦ εἶπαν οἱ συγχωριανοὶ του μόλις τὸν εἶδαν. Ἐλα νὰ παίξουμε χαρτιά.

—Νὰ παίξουμε, ἀπαντᾷ ἐκεῖνος.

Ἐβαλαν ἀπὸ μία λίρα πάνω. Παίξουν, κέρδισε. Βάλλουν ἀπὸ δυὸ, κέρδισε. Βάλλουν τρεῖς, κέρδισε. Βάλλουν παραπάνω, κέρδισε πάλι.

—Ὅχι λαλεῖ τους. Τοὺς παραδες ἀφήστε τους. Νὰ βάλουμε τὸ περβόλι μου. Ἄν μὲ κερδίσετε νὰ σᾶς δώσω τοῦτα ποὺ κέρδισα.

Βάλλουν τὸ περβόλι, τὸ κέρδισε. Βάλλουν καὶ τὸ ἄλλο, τὸ κέρδισε καὶ ἐκεῖνο.



—Νὰ βάλουμε τὸ σπίτι.

Ἔβαλαν καὶ τὸ σπίτι, κέρδισε καὶ τὸ σπίτι. Πῆγε τότε στὴ γυναίκα του καὶ λαλεῖ της.

—Νὰ σηκωθοῦμε, νὰ πάρουμε τὰ πράγματα στὸ σπίτι μας, γιατί παίζαμε χαρτιὰ καὶ κέρδισα πίσω ὅλη τὴ περιουσία μας.

Ἔτσι, πῆγαν ἔσσω τους. Πέρασε ὁ καιρὸς, μεγάλωσαν τὰ παιδιά τους, γέρασαν αὐτὸς κι ἡ γυναίκα του. Μίαν ἡμέρα κάλεσε τὰ παιδιά του.

—Ὅταν πεθάνω λαλεῖ τους, νὰ μοῦ βάλετε μία τράπουλα χαρτιὰ μέσα στὸν κόρφο.

—Νὰ σοῦ βάλουμε πατέρα.

Ἔ, μετὰ ἀπὸ κάμποσο καιρὸ, πέθανε. Ἐφεραν μία τράπουλα χαρτιὰ καὶ τοῦ τὰ ἔβαλαν μέσα στὸν κόρφο. Σὰν πῆγε εἰς τὸν Ἀφέντη μου τὸ Θεὸ ἐκεῖ πάνω, ἤρθαν κοντά του οἱ Σατανάδες.

—Ἐλα ᾧδε, θὰ σὲ πάρουμε στὴ Κόλαση. Θὰ σὲ πάρουμε στὴ Κόλαση.

—Θὰ μὲ πάρετε στὴ κόλαση; Νὰ παίξουμε χαρτιὰ, κι ἂν μὲ κερδίσετε νὰ μὲ πάρετε.

—Οὐ! Ἐμεῖς τὰ δείξαμε τὰ χαρτιὰ. Εἶναι δική μας εὐρετὴ αὐτὰ τὰ χαρτιὰ πὺν ἔχεις πάνω σου.

Κάθονται παίζουν, κέρδισε. Ξαναπαίζουν, κέρδισε πάλι.

—Ὁ κύρης μου εἶναι μέσα στὴν κόλαση;

—Ναὶ εἶπαν αὐτοί.

—Βγάλτε τον καὶ φέρτε τον ἐδῶ.

Ἐφέρον τον.

—Ἡ μάνα μου εἶναι μέσα στὴν Κόλαση;

—Εἶναι μέσα.

—Ἐ, νὰ παίξουμε ξανά.

Παίζουν ξανά, κέρδισε. Ἐβγαλαν καὶ τὴ μάνα του. Ξαναπαίζουν, κέρδισε πάλι.

—Ὁ παπποῦς μου εἶναι μέσα;

Εἶναι μέσα.

—Ὁ ἄλλος ὁ παπποῦς μου εἶναι καὶ αὐτὸς μέσα;

—Ναὶ εἶναι καὶ αὐτός.

—Φέρτε τους ἔξω.

Ἔτσι, ἕναν-ἕναν ἔβγαλε δώδεκα νομάτους. Στὸ μεταξὺ ἤρθεν ὁ Ἄγγελος νὰ τὸν πάρει στὴν Παράδεισο. Ἀκολουθοῦν πίσω του καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι.

—Τοῦτοι οὗλοι ἴντα λογοῦνται; Ρωτᾶ τον ὁ Ἄγγελος.

—Ἐ, τοῦτος εἶναι ὁ παπποῦς μου, τούτη ἡ μαμμοῦ μου, τοῦτος εἶναι ὁ κύρης μου, τούτη εἶναι ἡ μάνα μου. Εἶναι οὗλοι δικοί μου.

—Μά, μόνον ἐσένα πρόσταξε ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς νὰ πάρουμε. Τούτη ἡ σουρμαγιὰ οὐλή;

—Μὰ εἶναι δικοί μου. Ποῦ ἐνὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστός;

—Ἐνὶ δαμαί.

—Φωνάξετέ του νὰ ἔρθει.

Ἄνταν ἤρθε ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς καὶ τὸν εἶδε, λαλεῖ του.

—Μὰ ἐσὺ εἶσαι ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστός! Δὲν εἶσαι αὐτὸς πὺν ἤρθες ἔσσω μας!

—Εἶμαι, τοῦ λέγει ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστός.

—Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ μου, λαλεῖ τοῦ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, μὰ ὅταν ἤρθες ἔσσω μας, ἦσουν μόνος σου. Ἔστερα πὺν ἤρθαν καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι οἱ δικοί σου, Σοῦ εἶπα νὰ βγεις ἔξω; Τοῦτος εἶναι ὁ κύρης μου, ἡ μάνα μου, ὁ ἀδελφός μου, ὁ νουνός μου, ὁ τάδε, ἡ δείνα. Τοὺς ἔβγαλα ἀπὸ τὴν κόλαση.

—Ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς τὸν κοίταξε, χαμογέλασε καὶ τοῦ εἶπε.

—Κέρδισες τὴ Βασιλεία Τοῦ Θεοῦ γιατί εἶσαι καλόψυχος καὶ ἄς εἶσαι καὶ χαρτοπαίχτης.

Ἔτσι αὐτὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος τοὺς πῆρε οὐλοὺς μέσα στὸ Παράδεισο. Εἶδες τί κάμνει ἡ καλοσύνη! Ἔνα χωριὸ δὲν τὸν ἔβαλε μέσα στὸ σπίτι τους τὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστό, ἐκεῖνος ὁ φτωχὸς ἔβαλέν Τον κι φιλοξένησέν Τον. Εἶδες;



Γιὰ κάθε πράγμα ὑπάρχει ὁ κατάλληλος καιρὸς, ὅπως εἶπε καὶ ὁ Σολομών (Ἐκκλ. 3:1, 17). Γιὰ τὴν προσευχὴ ὁμως κάθε καιρὸς εἶναι κατάλληλος καὶ κανένας ἀκατάλληλος. *Εὐλογῆσω τὸν Κύριον ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ, διαπαντὸς ἡ αἰνεῖσις αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ στόματί μου.* (Ψαλμ. 33:2). Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ ἀπόστολος μᾶς προστάζει νὰ προσευχόμεστε *ἀδιάλειπτα* (Α΄ Θεσ. 5:17), ἐπειδὴ κάθε καιρὸς εἶναι κατάλληλος γιὰ δέηση. Τὸ ἴδιο μᾶς παραγγέλλει καὶ ὁ Κύριος λέγοντας: *Ἀγρυπνεῖτε ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ δεόμενοι ἵνα ἀκατακρίτως στήτε ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ βήματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ.* (Λουκ. 21:36).

Ὅποιος θέλει λοιπὸν νὰ καθαρίσει τὴν καρδιά του, ἄς τὴ φλογίζει συνεχῶς μὲ τὴ μνήμη τοῦ Κυρίου, πὺν πρέπει νὰ τὴν ἔχει μοναδικὴ νοερὴ μελέτη καὶ ἀκατάπαυστη ἐνασχόλησή του. Γιατὶ ὅσοι θέλουν ν' ἀποβάλουν τὴ σαπίλα τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ τους, δὲν πρέπει ἄλλοτε νὰ προσεύχονται καὶ ἄλλοτε ὄχι, ἀλλὰ νὰ καταγίνονται πάντα μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ καὶ νὰ τηροῦν τὸ νοῦ τους (σὲ καθαρότητα καὶ σὲ συνεχὴ μνήμη τοῦ Θεοῦ), ἀκόμα κι ὅταν εἶναι κάπου ἔξω ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἱερὸς Ναοῦς.

Ἀντιόχου τοῦ Πανδέκτη

Χριστιανοί Δίχως Χριστόν

Πρεσβ. Διονυσίου Τάτση.

Πόσο Χριστιανική είναι η κοινωνία μας; Πόσο Χριστιανοί είναι οι Χριστιανοί μας; Μήπως ή όποια πίστη τους έχει νεκρωθεί; Μήπως ο Χριστός έπηρεάζει ελάχιστους ανθρώπους;

Τὰ έρωτήματα απασχολούν τους άληθινούς Χριστιανούς και τους καλοπροαίρετους, που θέλουν να στραφούν στο Χριστό. Ο Νήφων, προβληματισμένος όπως κι εγώ, άπάντησε: «Μπορώ ν' άπαντήσω με εύκολία. Προφανώς η κοινωνία μας δεν είναι Χριστιανική, για να μη πω ό,τι είναι αντιΧριστιανική. Οί άνθρωποι, παρόλο που φέρουν τη σφραγίδα του Χριστιανού, είναι άδιάφοροι. Η πίστη τους δεν έπηρεάζει καθόλου τη ζωή τους. Ο Χριστός γι' αυτούς άπουσιάζει. Θα τολμούσα να πω ό,τι ο Χριστός άπουσιάζει και άπ' τη ζωή πολλών κληρικών! Και άπ' τη ζωή πολλών μοναχών! Κάθε φορά που παρατηρώ ή μαθαίνω τον τρόπο ζωής των ανθρώπων, πέφτω σε κατάθλιψη και άνησυχώ. Πόση δουλειά άλήθεια χρειάζεται για να βελτιωθεί ή εικόνα. Και δεν φτάνει μόνο ο λόγος. Άποτελεσματικότερος είναι ο άγιος τρόπος ζωής. Όλοι δέχονται ό,τι τρεις Άγιοι γέροντες σε μία μεγάλη πόλη μπορούν να πετύχουν περισσότερα άπ' ό,τι δεκάδες ιεροκήρυκες».

«Ο λόγος του Θεού αντικαταστάθηκε άπ' τον λόγο του κόσμου και της ματαιότητας. Οί σύγχρονοι άνθρωποι έγκατέλειψαν τον Ίερό Ναό του Θεού και στράφησαν στα θέατρα, στα κέντρα διασκέδασης, στα γήπεδα, στις πολιτικές συγκεντρώσεις και στις κοσμικές έκδηλώσεις. Έκει περνούν πολλές ώρες την εβδομάδα, αλλά για τον έκκλησιασμό τους την Κυριακή δεν έχουν ούτε μισή ώρα διαθέσιμη. Δεν έχουν δίψα Θεού, γι' αυτό και δεν νιώθουν ό,τι τους λείπει ή Θεία Λατρεία», είπα συμπληρωματικά. «Μένουν άνεπηρέαστοι και άπ' τὰ πρότυπα της Έκκλησίας. Οί ιερές εικόνες των Αγίων δεν τους συγκινούν. Στη θέση τους μπήκαν τὰ πορτρέτα των συγγραφέων, των ήθοποιών, των τραγουδιστών, των ζωγράφων, των πολιτικών, των φιλοσόφων κ.λπ. Αυτούς προσέχουν και έκτιμούν. Αυτούς μιμούνται και αυτών γίνονται όπαδοί. Γνωρίζουν και λεπτομέρειες άπ' την προσωπική τους ζωή. Άποδέχονται και όλα τὰ άρνητικά τους και αυτό τους οδηγεί σε πολλές πτώσεις και δυστυχίες. Δυστυχώς οί περισσότεροι άνθρωποι έμπιστεύονται τὰ πρόσωπα της δημοσιότητας και όχι τους Άγίους της Έκκλησίας».

«Πρέπει να έπισημάνω ό,τι τὰ πρόσωπα αυτά, ένώ έχουν κάποιο χάρισμα και παράγουν κάποιο έργο, δεν έχουν ήθος. Είναι φιλόδοξα και φιλήδονα. Πολλές φορές έχουν και άρμοδιότητες στο δημόσιο

τομέα και θέλουν να προβάλλονται και να ρυθμίζουν τὰ πράγματα όπως εκείνοι θέλουν. Άπέναντι δε στους συνειδητούς Χριστιανούς αντιδρούν με τρόπο άπαξιωτικό, πως τάχα είναι περιορισμένης αντίληψης και άρνητες κάθε κοσμικής χαράς. Δεν βρίσκουν σχεδόν τίποτα τὸ θετικό και τους θέτουν στο περιθώριο», είπα ένοχλημένος.

«Η αντίδραση αυτή θα έλεγα ό,τι είναι φυσιολογική, αφού οί Χριστιανοί άρνούνται όλα όσα εκείνοι επέλεγουν και κάνουν. Όστόσο, βλέπω ό,τι στο βάθος της ψυχής τους έχουν κάποιο σεβασμό γι' αυτούς, γιατί θαυμάζουν τη συνέπεια στη ζωή τους, αλλά και την άθωότητα και άγάπη τους. Δεν έχουν όμως τον ήρωισμό να τον έκδηλώσουν ή να τους μιμηθούν. Τὸ κοσμικό φρόνημα τους έχει αίχμαλωτισμένους».

«Νήφων, θα ήθελα να μου πεις τὰ χαρακτηριστικά του Χριστιανού, του ανθρώπου δηλαδή που είναι κοντά στο Χριστό».

«Τὰ συνοψίζω σ' ένα. Είναι στραμμένος στο Χριστό με πίστη και άγάπη, γι' αυτό και προσεύχεται όσο γίνεται περισσότερο, αλλά και αγαθοποιός είναι σ' όλες τις έκδηλώσεις του. Βέβαια, τὰ πράγματα δεν είναι εύκολα στην καθημερινή πράξη. Οί βιοτικές μέριμνες περιορίζουν τὸ έλεύθερο χρόνο, που πρέπει ν' αφιερώνει στην προσευχή και την έμπρακτη άγάπη προς τους άδελφούς του. Αυτό όμως δεν είναι ένοχο. Άπ' τη στιγμή, που υπάρχει ή άγαθή προαίρεση, ο Θεός αυξάνει την πρόνοιά του στον άληθινό Χριστιανό, του άνοίγει δρόμους και του δίνει νέες δυνατότητες».

«Τὰ πράγματα δεν βελτιώνονται. Η κατρακύλα είναι μεγάλη. Χάνονται και οί εκλεκτοί. Και μακάριοι είναι εκείνοι, που άντιστέκονται και διατηρούν τη λυχνία τους αναμμένη», είπα σχεδόν απογοητευμένος.

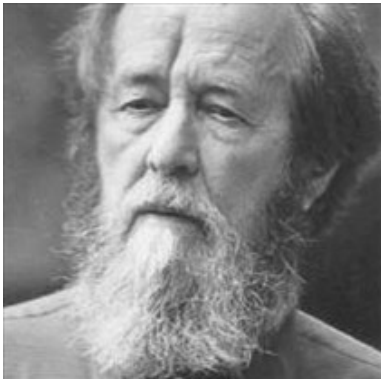


Ο σκοπός μας δεν είναι να καταδικάζουμε τὸ κακό, αλλά να τὸ διορθώνουμε. Με την καταδίκη ο άνθρωπος μπορεί να χαθεί, με την κατανόηση και τη βοήθεια θα σωθεί. Τὸν άμαρτωλό πρέπει να τὸν αντικρίζουμε με άγάπη και με σεβασμό στην έλευθερία του. Όταν ένα οικογενειακό μας πρόσωπο ρίχνει ένα βάζο άπὸ τὸ τραπέζι και τὸ σπάει, συνήθως όργιστόμαστε. Άν εκείνη τη στιγμή, την κρίσιμη, με μιὰ κίνηση ψυχικής άνύψωσης μας, δείξουμε κατανόηση και δικαιολογήσουμε τὴ ζημία, κερδίσαμε και την ψυχή μας και την ψυχή του άδελφού μας. Κι αυτή είναι όλη ή πνευματική ζωή μας: Μιὰ κίνηση άνύψωσης μας, μέσα στις δοκιμασίες των θλίψεων, άπὸ την άγανάκτηση του έγωισμού στην κατανόηση της άγάπης.

Γέροντας Πορφύριος (+1991)

MEN HAVE FORGOTTEN GOD...

By Alexander Solzhenitsyn (+2008).



The 1983 Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion was awarded to Alexander Solzhenitsyn for being “a pioneer in the renaissance of religion in atheist nations.” At the awards ceremony in Buckingham Palace on May 10, 1983, Solzhenitsyn delivered a short speech, followed later that day by an address at Guild-hall.

They are printed here with several abbreviations for lack of space. In spite of the fall of the Soviet Communism (which had been a central focus of Mr. Solzhenitsyn’s work) his words are ever more applicable for our days and especially for our western society.

† † †

Your Royal Highness: Permit me to express my appreciation to you for taking part in this ceremony. Your participation lands special dignity to these proceedings.

This is the first time that the Templeton Prize has been awarded to an Orthodox Christian... And I am very much aware that Eastern Orthodoxy, which, during the 65 years of Communist rule, has been subjected to persecution even fiercer and more extensive than that of early Christian times, has had—and still has today—many hands worthier than mine to accept it.

In this persecution-filled age, it is appropriate that my own very first memory should be of Chekists in pointed caps entering St. Panteleimon’s Church in Kislovodsk, interrupting the service, and crashing their way into the sanctuary in order to loot. And later, when I started going to school—passing on my way a kilometer long compound of the Cheka-GPU and a glittering sign of the League of Militant Atheists—school-children egged on by Komsomol members taunted me for accompanying my mother to the last remaining church in town and tore the cross from around my neck.

Orthodox churches were stripped of their valuables in 1922 at the instigation of Lenin and Trotsky. In subsequent years, including both the Stalin and the Krushchev periods, tens of thousands of churches were torn down or desecrated, leaving behind a disfigured wasteland that bore no resemblance to Russia such as it had stood for centuries. Entire districts and cities of half a million inhabitants were left without a single church. Our people were condemned to live in this dark and mute wilderness for decades; groping their way to God and keeping to this course by trial and error...

More than half a century ago, while I was still a child, I recall hearing a number of older people offer the following explana-

tion for the great disasters that had befallen Russia: **Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this has happened.**

Since then I have spent well over fifty years working on the history of our Revolution; in the process I have read hundreds of books, collected hundreds of personal testimonies, and have already contributed eight volumes of my own toward the effort of clearing away the rubble left by that upheaval. But if I were asked today to formulate as concisely as possible the main cause of the ruinous Revolution that swallowed up some sixty million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: **Men have forgotten God; that’s why all this has happened.**

What is more, the events of the Russian Revolution can only be understood now, at the end of the century, against the background of what has since occurred in the rest of the world. What emerges here is a process of universal significance. And if I were called upon to identify briefly the principal trait of the entire twentieth century, here too, I would be unable to find anything more precise and pithy than to repeat once again: **Men have forgotten God.**

The failings of human consciousness, deprived of its divine dimension, have been a determining factor in all the major crimes of this century. The first of these was World War I, and much of our present predicament can be traced back to it. It was a war (the memory of which seems to be fading) when Europe, bursting with health and abundance, fell into a rage of self-mutilation which could not but sap its strength for a century or more, and perhaps forever. The only possible explanation for this war is a mental eclipse among the leaders of Europe due to their lost awareness of a Supreme Power above them. Only a godless embitterment could have moved ostensibly Christian states to employ poison gas, a weapon so obviously beyond the limits of humanity.

The same kind of defect, the flaw of a consciousness lacking all divine dimension, was manifested after World War II when the West yielded to the satanic temptation of the “nuclear umbrella.” It was equivalent to saying: Let’s cast off worries, let’s free the younger generation from their duties and obligations, let’s make no effort to defend ourselves, to say nothing of defending others, let’s stop our ears to the groans emanating from the East, and let us live instead in the pursuit of happiness. If danger should threaten us, we shall be protected by the nuclear bomb; if not, then let the world burn in Hell for all we care. The pitifully helpless state to which the contemporary West has sunk is in large measure due to this fatal error: the belief that the defense of peace depends not on stout hearts and steadfast men, but solely on the nuclear bomb...

Today’s world has reached a stage which, if it had been described to preceding centuries, would have called forth the cry: “This is the Apocalypse!” Yet we have grown used to this kind of world; we even feel at home in it.

Dostoevsky warned that “great events could come upon us and catch us intellectually unprepared.” This is precisely what has happened. And he predicted that “the world will be saved only after it has been possessed by the demon of evil.” Whether it really will be saved we shall have to wait and see: this will depend on our conscience, on our spiritual lucidity, on our individual and combined efforts in the face of catastrophic circumstances. But it has already come to pass that the demon of evil, like a whirlwind, triumphantly circles all five continents of the earth...

In its past, Russia did know a time when the social ideal was not fame, or riches, or material success, but a pious way of life. Russia was then steeped in an Orthodox Christianity which remained true to the Church of the first centuries. The Orthodoxy of that time knew how to safeguard its people under the yoke of a foreign occupation that lasted more than two centuries, while at the same time fending off iniquitous blows from the swords of Western crusaders. During those centuries the Orthodox faith in our country became part of the very pattern of thought and the personality of our people, the forms of daily life, the work calendar, the priorities in every undertaking, the organization of the week and of the year. Faith was the shaping and unifying force of the nation.

But in the 17th century, Russian Orthodoxy was gravely weakened by an internal schism. In the 18th, the country was shaken by Peter’s forcibly imposed transformations, which favored the economy, the state, and the military at the expense of the religious spirit and national life. And along with this lopsided Petrine enlightenment, Russia felt the first whiff of secularism; its subtle poisons permeated the educated classes in the course of the 19th century and opened the path to Marxism. By the time of the Revolution, faith had virtually disappeared in Russian educated circles; and amongst the uneducated, its health was threatened.

It was Dostoevsky, once again, who drew from the French Revolution and its hatred of the Church the lesson that “revolution must necessarily begin with atheism.” That is absolutely true. But the world had never before known a godlessness as organized, militarized, and tenaciously malevolent as that practiced by Marxism. Within the philosophical system of Marx and Lenin, and at the heart of their psychology, hatred of God is the principal driving force, more fundamental than all their political and economic pretensions. Militant atheism is not merely incidental or marginal to Communist policy; it is not a side effect, but the central pivot.

The 1920’s in the USSR witnessed an uninterrupted procession of victims and martyrs amongst the Orthodox clergy. Two metropolitans were shot, one of whom, Veniamin of Petrograd, had been elected by the popular vote of his diocese. Patriarch Tikhon himself passed through the hands of the Cheka-GPU and then died under suspicious circumstances. Scores of archbishops and bishops perished. Tens of thousands

of priests, monks, and nuns, pressured by the Chekists to renounce the Word of God, were tortured, shot in cellars, sent to camps, exiled to the desolate tundra of the far North, or turned out into the streets in their old age without food or shelter. All these Christian martyrs went unswervingly to their deaths for the faith; instances of apostasy were few and far between. For tens of millions of laymen access to the Church was blocked, and they were forbidden to bring up their children in the Faith: religious parents were wrenched from their children and thrown into prison, while the children were turned from the faith by threats and lies...

It is true that millions of our countrymen have been corrupted and spiritually devastated by an officially imposed atheism, yet there remain many millions of believers: it is only external pressures that keep them from speaking out, but, as is always the case in times of persecution and suffering, the awareness of God in my country has attained great acuteness and profundity. It is thus here that we see the dawn of hope: for no matter how formidably Communism bristles with tanks and rockets, no matter what successes it attains in seizing the planet, it is doomed never to vanquish Christianity.

The West has yet to experience a Communist invasion; religion here remains free. But the West’s own historical evolution has been such that today it too is experiencing a drying up of religious consciousness. It too has witnessed racking schisms, bloody religious wars, and rancor, to say nothing of the tide of secularism that, from the late Middle Ages onward, has progressively inundated the West. This gradual sapping of strength from within is a threat to faith that is perhaps even more dangerous than any attempt to assault religion violently from without.

Imperceptibly, through decades of gradual erosion, the meaning of life in the West has ceased to be seen as anything more lofty than the “pursuit of happiness,” a goal that has even been solemnly guaranteed by constitutions. The concepts of good and evil have been ridiculed for several centuries; banished from common use, they have been replaced by political or class considerations of short lived value. It has become embarrassing to state that evil makes its home in the individual human heart before it enters a political system. Yet it is not considered shameful to make dally concessions to an integral evil.

Judging by the continuing landslide of concessions made before the eyes of our very own generation, the West is ineluctably slipping toward the abyss. Western societies are losing more and more of their religious essence as they thoughtlessly yield up their younger generation to atheism. If a blasphemous film about Jesus is shown throughout the United States, reputedly one of the most religious countries in the world, or a major newspaper publishes a shameless caricature of the Virgin Mary, what further evidence of godlessness does one need? When external rights are completely unrestricted,

why should one make an inner effort to restrain oneself from ignoble acts?

Or why should one refrain from burning hatred, whatever its basis—race, class, or ideology? Such hatred is in fact corroding many hearts today. Atheist teachers in the West are bringing up a younger generation in a spirit of hatred of their own society. Amid all the vituperation we forget that the defects of capitalism represent the basic flaws of human nature: allowed unlimited freedom together with the various human rights; we forget that under Communism, the identical flaws run riot in any person with the least degree of authority; while everyone else under that system does indeed attain “equality”—the equality of destitute slaves.

This eager fanning of the flames of hatred is becoming the mark of today’s free world. Indeed, the broader the personal freedoms are, the higher the level of prosperity or even of abundance—the more vehement, paradoxically, does this blind hatred become. The contemporary developed West thus demonstrates by its own example that human salvation can be found neither in the profusion of material goods nor in merely making money.

The deliberately nurtured hatred then spreads to all that is alive, to life itself, to the world with its colors, sounds, and shapes, to the human body. The embittered art of the twentieth century is perishing as a result of this ugly hate, for art is fruitless without love. In the East, art has collapsed because it has been knocked down and trampled upon, but in the West the fall has been voluntary, a decline into a contrived and pretentious quest where the artist, instead of attempting to reveal the divine plan, tries to put himself in the place of God.

Here again we witness the single outcome of a worldwide process, with East and West yielding the same results, and once again for the same reason: **Men have forgotten God.**

With such global events looming over us like mountains, nay, like entire mountain ranges, it may seem incongruous and inappropriate to recall that the primary key to our being or non-being resides in each individual human heart, in the heart’s preference for specific good or evil. Yet this remains true even today, and it is, in fact, the most reliable key we have.

The social theories that promised so much have demonstrated their bankruptcy, leaving us at a dead end. The free people of the West could reasonably have been expected to realize that they are beset by numerous freely nurtured falsehoods, and not to allow lies to be foisted upon them so easily.

All attempts to find a way out of the plight of today’s world are fruitless unless **we redirect our consciousness, in repentance, to the Creator of all:** without this, no exit will be illumined, and we shall seek it in vain. The resources we have set aside for ourselves are too impoverished for the

task. We must first recognize the horror perpetrated not by some outside force, not by class or national enemies, but within each of us individually, and within every society. This is especially true of a free and highly developed society, for here in particular we have surely brought everything upon ourselves, of our own free will. We ourselves, in our daily unthinking selfishness, are pulling tight that noose...

Our life consists not in the pursuit of material success but in the quest for worthy spiritual growth. Our entire earthly existence is but a transitional stage in the movement toward something higher, and we must not stumble and fall, nor must we linger fruitlessly on one rung of the ladder. Material laws alone do not explain our life or give it direction. The laws of physics and physiology will never reveal the indisputable manner in which the Creator constantly, day in and day out, participates in the life of each of us, unfailingly granting us the energy of existence; when this assistance leaves us, we die. And in the life of our entire planet, the Divine Spirit surely moves with no less force: this we must grasp in our dark and terrible hour.

To the ill-considered hopes of the last two centuries, which have reduced us to insignificance and brought us to the brink of nuclear and non-nuclear death, we can propose only a determined quest for the warm hand of God, which we have so rashly and self-confidently spurned. Only in this way can our eyes be opened to the errors of this unfortunate twentieth century and our bands be directed to setting them right. There is nothing else to cling to in the landslide: the combined vision of all the thinkers of the Enlightenment amounts to nothing.

Our five continents are caught in a whirlwind. But it is during trials such as these that the highest gifts of the human spirit are manifested. If we perish and lose this world, the fault will be ours alone...



As soon as you wake up in the morning, pray for a while, saying: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me.* Then your first work should be to shut yourself in your own heart, as if taking up position in an arena.

Having established yourself there, bring yourself to the consciousness and feeling that your enemy and the passionate urge against which you struggle at the moment is already there, on your left, ready for immediate attack; therefore rouse against them a firm resolve to conquer or die, but never to submit.

St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite (+1809)

A DEAD NEW YEAR'S BABY IS FOUND...

By Angela Michael, Jan. 1, 2010.

*From the Editor: The article below appeared exactly one year ago; it received no headlines and it was read by just a handful of our fellow citizens, albeit it should have been the lead story by at least the media that proclaims itself to defend conservative values. We are including it in our publication and entreat all of our brethren to contemplate the treacherous topic of abortion for what it truly is: the willful, first-degree murder of the most innocent and defenseless of His creation, a baby in his or her mother's womb. We implore all of our readers to join the rest of our citizenry on January 22nd, as we all make our voice heard on the treacherous anniversary of the Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision anniversary. Let us comprehend and teach ourselves, our family, our brethren that **abortion is not a political issue, but a moral issue that has become politicized!***

† † †

A fresh blanket of snow covered the ground as a speeding ambulance chased down a two lane country road in the cold night, leading to a small Illinois metro-east hospital in Maryville, Illinois transporting a newborn baby boy. He had been born within the hour and first-responders were working feverishly to revive his tiny body. Inside the emergency room they were met with resuscitation equipment, but it was too late. He was pronounced dead on arrival.

Another late-term botched abortion. The mother, a 16 year old, delivered him in the toilet after starting her three-day abortion procedure over at Granite City's little slaughterhouse, Hope Clinic for Women, on Tuesday. Missouri abortionist and former felon Allen Palmer was the hired assassin. She stated that the abortion staff kept giving her injections. The next night, she went into full term labor, went into the bathroom, and delivered her baby boy into the cold waters of the toilet. She left him to call Hope Clinic. She notified the on-call person of the situation. They told her to, "Bring the baby in a bag back to the clinic in the morning." She panicked and called 911.

At the hospital, emergency personnel took one look at the baby and were saddened and disgusted. They listened to the mother's abortion sequence and the abortion mill's response to her emergency home delivery. Just on appearances, this

little one was perfectly formed, but dead on arrival. He was 3 lbs. 5 oz. and 31 weeks gestation. In just nine weeks he would have been considered full-term.

The hospital has called for a full investigation. Illinois supposedly does not allow babies to be killed after viability at 24 weeks, so we have placed several calls to local law enforcement demanding a thorough investigation. Who is policing and regulating abortion mills in Illinois? No one. Do we expect the abortion mill to use the scout's honor code? That's like asking the fox to guard the hen house.

This baby would have survived. It appears his mother let him drown. She told paramedics she couldn't handle picking him up out of the toilet, so she left him to die. He was a boy. The abortion mill may try and soothe her and buy her silence. They will whisper, "You just had a miscarriage." I would agree partly; it was a terrible miscarriage of justice for that little boy. Who will be his voice? The revelers are busy with welcoming the new year and the world will go on, but I don't know how much longer God's justice can sleep while such savagery abounds.

This horrific incident did not have to happen, but it does every day across our nation, especially inside late-term slaughterhouses such as Hope Clinic. This is not the only late-term baby that has been brought to this very same hospital after a botched abortion from Hope Clinic. The abortion mill gets by with murder and make a lot of money off it. Not only do the death merchants make money off of the abortion fee, but they turn around and sell the baby's body for medical research and cosmetic firms. That is why they told her to bring the baby back in a bag to the clinic the following day.

This is despicable. Just hours from putting the old year away, and looking forward to welcoming the New Year... This is a wake-up call. This has not only traumatized the young mother for having to face the truth of what she did and having to peer at her little boy's face lying in the toilet, but also to the first responders who are trained to rescue and save lives. Abortion is evil. It has a rippling effect on everyone involved, even the innocent by-stander sworn to preserve and save lives and do no harm.

It has outraged this metro-east hospital. Hopefully they will not be intimidated by the abortionist and his empire, or their silenced sealed. They need to pursue this complaint and hold the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation accountable for the discrepancies and inhumane treatment



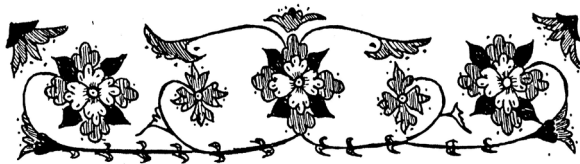
As of the day we celebrated Thanksgiving in 2010, America had seen over 53 million abortions "legally performed" since the 1973 Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision

inside abortion mills such as Hope Clinic and the less than standard medical ethics. Clean house inside Granite City's little slaughterhouse, Hope Clinic for Women. Medical professionals know that abortion is the "red-light" district of medicine. Pray for all those involved, especially the eyewitnesses to this senseless event that they have the courage to persevere in their duty to expose the barbaric death of this baby, no matter the cost.

Let this little boy's short life not fade in vain; let it make a difference in Illinois and in society on how we treat the weakest among us. Let his voice be the messenger. This atrocity must stop! We must bring sanity back into the picture. We are all too aware "What an irony that a society confronted with plastic bags filled with the remains of aborted babies should be more concerned about the problem of recycling the plastic." (W. Egan).

This is morally and ethically wrong! Anyone with a working heart knows this is wrong. This is not healthcare. With the acceptance of each and every abortion the conscience of our nation is dying. There are two victims in every abortion: A dead baby and a dead conscience...

Innocent blood has a voice, and that voice cries out for justice.



I've noticed that everybody that is for abortion has already been born.

Ronald Reagan

If it isn't a baby, then you aren't pregnant, so what are you aborting?

Author Unknown

Only half the patients who go into an abortion clinic come out alive.

Author Unknown



When the devil fights us, we ought to fight him back. Our greatest weapon is prayer. Do not be negligent; kneel immediately and pray to God, and quickly you will feel strong. Prayer is conversation with God. When we experience the joy of prayer, then we will feel great exultation. It is a foretaste of the life of Paradise. But you have to struggle, in order to experience that joy. And, if you struggle mightily, God will give it to you.

Elder Ieronymos of Aegina (+1966)

THE BRICK

Author Unknown.

A young and successful executive was traveling down a neighborhood street, going a bit too fast in his new Jaguar. He was watching for kids darting out from between parked cars and slowed down when he thought he saw something.

As his car passed, no children appeared. Instead, a brick smashed into the Jag's side door! He slammed on the brakes and backed the Jag back to the spot where the brick had been thrown. The angry driver then jumped out of the car, grabbed the nearest kid and pushed him up against a parked car shouting, "What was that all about and who are you? Just what the heck are you doing? That's a new car and that brick you threw is going to cost a lot of money. Why did you do it?"

The young boy was apologetic. "Please, mister... please, I'm sorry but I didn't know what else to do," he pleaded.

"I threw the brick because no one else would stop..."

With tears dripping down his face and off his chin, the youth pointed to a spot just around a parked car. "It's my brother," he said. "He rolled off the curb and fell out of his wheelchair and I can't lift him up."

Now sobbing, the boy asked the stunned executive, "Would you please help me get him back into his wheelchair? He's hurt and he's too heavy for me."

Moved beyond words, the driver tried to swallow the rapidly swelling lump in his throat. He hurriedly lifted the handicapped boy back into the wheelchair, then took out a linen handkerchief and dabbed at the fresh scrapes and cuts. A quick look told him everything was going to be okay.

"Thank you and may God bless you," the grateful child told the stranger.

Too shook up for words, the man simply watched the boy push his wheelchair-bound brother down the sidewalk toward their home.

It was a long, slow walk back to the Jaguar. The damage was very noticeable, but the driver never bothered to repair the dented side door. He kept the dent there to remind him of this message: **Don't go through life so fast that someone has to throw a brick at you to get your attention!**



You find yourself in a darkened room and you try to move your hands so as to brush away the darkness, which, of course, does not move. If, however, you open a window and light enters, the darkness disappears. The same when one studies Holy Scripture, the lives of the Saints and the writings of the Holy Fathers; they are the light that chases away the darkness of the soul.

Blessed Elder Porphyrios (+1991)

REPENT FOR THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN IS AT HAND

By ROCOR Archbishop Alpy (Gramanovich) of Chicago.

After His Baptism by John, the Lord Jesus Christ began to preach, calling men to repentance: *Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.* This call to repentance remains in effect up to now; it refers to each one of us.

What is the meaning of repentance? One must recognize one's own untruth and make God's truth the aim of one's life. Repentance is usually accompanied by confession. John the Baptist acted thus when he baptized, because his baptism was unto repentance. Confession was thus in practice from the very foundation of the Christian Church.

How should one repent? Is it enough to repent within oneself before God, and not in the presence of a man, for example, a priest? Some think this: "I repent before God, and there is no need of a priest or anyone else."

Such an approach is incorrect. First of all, it does not correspond to the human psyche. It often happens that someone who has performed a serious sin, even though he repents within his soul, supposing that he is doing this before God, still finds no rest for himself; his sin follows him everywhere. And then a man looks for a way out; he wants to speak to someone about his heavy state of soul. And if there is no priest, or if he himself is not ready to turn to a priest, he seeks out at least a friend or simply any man, and tells him, and he feels better. This can be called a "natural" confession.

This device of natural confession is often used in literature. The great Russian writer Dostoevsky, for example, used it in his novel "Crime and Punishment." Raskolnikov, after performing a terrible murder and enduring great moral suffering because of it, confessed to Sonia Marmeladov, and this confession was the turning point in his correction.

One must look at repentance and confession also from the religious-church point of view. Confession is a Mystery, Church Sacrament, a kind of small judgment. The priest who hears a confession is a witness of it, but at the same time he is a judge, because he gives forgiveness in the name of the Lord Jesus. The significance of this small judgment is this: a man must endure some kind of shame for his sin. Often it happens that a man confesses small things but is silent about the adultery he has committed. Why? Because he is shameful to speak about it. However, through this small shame before a single witness a man is delivered from eternal shame after the Fearful and Universal Judgment, when the Lord will come to judge the living and the dead.

Let us not spare our sins; why carry around an unneeded burden? Because it is shameful? But this is a false shame. One should be ashamed of sin. And only through shame can one be delivered from sin. *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* (Mt 6:14-15).

Great Lent will be approaching soon; this is a time of increased prayer and repentance. At this time we must make use of all our spiritual powers to ask from God forgiveness of our sins. However, so that our repentance might be fruitful, we ourselves must be reconciled with our close ones.

What is the most obvious sign of reconciliation? It is when we ask forgiveness of our neighbor. On the Sunday which is the eve of Great Lent, the Holy Church has established the custom of asking forgiveness of each other; this day is popularly called "Forgiveness Sunday."

From whom should the initiative for reconciliation come, if there is some evident hostility between people? Most people would say "From the guilty party." And the innocent one will agree with this and will say: "He offended me; he began it, and therefore he should ask forgiveness of me. In my heart I forgive him, but I do not see why I should ask forgiveness of him."

In every conflict between men, even as just a principle of law, one must recognize one party as guilty and the other as innocent; but as a principle of morality, or rather, proceeding from the spiritual knowledge of things, the innocent party to some degree is also guilty, because he may have done some evil himself previously, and now it has fallen upon him like a boomerang. And if we look at it from the psychological side, it turns out that when the innocent party is the first to ask forgiveness of the guilty one for the conflict that has occurred, the guilty one will be touched by this and will most certainly hasten to be reconciled.

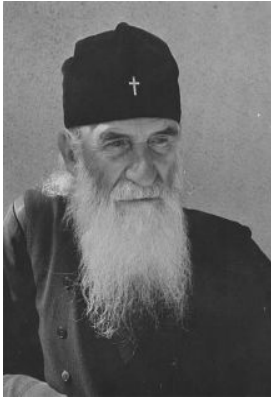
It is even easier for the innocent one to ask forgiveness, since the guilty one is more inclined to self-justification, so as in some degree to soften his guilt and not appear before others in a bad light. Therefore, for reconciliation it makes no difference from whom the initiative proceeds, whether from the guilty or the innocent party.

And this is why the Lord says: *Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee. Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.* (Mt 5:23-24). But before God we are always guilty. If we ask forgiveness, by this we open the door for God's mercy towards us.

Can self-love really be dearer to us than God's mercy? Let us think on this...

FROM TIME TO ETERNITY: THE INTERNAL MISSION OF OUR CHURCH

By St. Justin Popovich (+1979).



St. Justin was a renowned Serbian theologian, a patristic scholar, a poet and a true philosopher, who had command of several languages. He devoted his many talents to defending the Faith against ecumenism—for which he was called “the conscience of the Serbian Church”—and unmasking the true face of humanism as a regression to ancient paganism. As an antidote, he vigorously preached the eternal truth of

Christ the God-man. Appropriately, this “holy messenger of glad tidings” was born and died on the Feast of Annunciation.

† † †

It is difficult, very difficult, for infinite and eternal life to enter the narrow human soul and the even narrower human body. The imprisoned inhabitants of earth stand with suspicion before everything that is beyond here. Imprisoned in time and place, they cannot bear anything beyond time, anything beyond space to enter into them, anything eternal. They regard such an invasion as an attack, and they respond with war. Furthermore, given the fact that the “rust” of time corrupts man, he does not like the intervention of eternity in his life and he adapts to it with difficulty. He often regards this intervention as an act of violence, an unforgivable audacity. At times he becomes a harsh rebel against eternity, because he sees that in the face of it, he is insignificant, while at other times he lashes out against it in vehement hatred because he views it through a very human, very earthly, inner-worldly prism.

Submerged with the body in matter, tied by the force of weight in time and space, his spirit withdrawn from eternity, the worldly man abhors the difficult excursions towards the beyond and the eternal. The chasm between time and eternity is for him unbridgeable, because he lacks the necessary ability and strength to step over it. Besieged from all sides by death, man mocks those who tell him: “Man is immortal and eternal.” Immortal as regards to what? His mortal body? Eternal as regards to what? His feeble spirit?

For man to be immortal, he must feel himself immortal in the center of his self-awareness. Without this, both immortality and eternity are for him conditions imposed from outside. And if man once had this sense of immortality and the recognition of eternity, this occurred so long ago, that already it has atrophied under the weight of death. And truly,

it has atrophied: this is what the whole mysterious structure of human existence tells us.

Our whole problem thus lies in how to rekindle that quenched feeling, how to resurrect that atrophied recognition. People cannot do it on their own, neither can the transcendent gods of philosophy. Only God can do this, He Who incarnated His immortal Self in the human self-awareness and His eternal Self in human self-consciousness. Through His Person, the God-man Christ bridged the chasm between time and eternity and reinstated the relations between them. For this reason only that person truly feels himself immortal and truly knows himself to be eternal who organically unites himself with the God-man Christ, with His Body, the Church.

Hence, for man and humanity, Christ became the unique crossing and passage from time to eternity. For this reason, in the Church, the Orthodox Church, the God-man Christ became and remained the unique way and the unique guide from time to eternity, from the self-awareness of mortality to the self-awareness of immortality.

The eternal living personality of the God-man Christ is precisely the Church. The Church is always the personality, and furthermore the theanthropic personality, the theanthropic spirit and body. The definition of the Church, the life of the Church, its purpose, its spirit, its program, its methods—all have been given in that wondrous Person of the God-man Christ. Therefore, the mission of the Church is organically and personally to unite all its faithful with the Person of Christ; to make their self-awareness Christ-awareness and their self-knowledge (self-consciousness) Christ-knowledge (Christ-consciousness); for their life to become life in Christ and through Christ; so that not they themselves live in themselves but *Christ lives in them* (Gal 2:20).

The mission of the Church is to secure for her members immortality and eternity, making them *partakers of the Divine nature* (II Pet 1:4). The mission of the Church is furthermore to create in each member the conviction that the normal condition of the human personality is comprised of immortality and eternity and not temporality and mortality, and that man is a sojourner who through mortality and temporality journeys towards immortality and eternity.

The Church is the theanthropic eternity incarnated in the boundaries of time and space. It is in this world, but *it is not of this world* (Jn 18:36). It is in this world to elevate this world to the world above, from which she herself came. The Church is ecumenical, catholic, theanthropic, eternal, and for this reason it entails a blasphemy, an unforgivable blasphemy against Christ and the Holy Spirit to make the Church a national institution, to narrow her to the small, finite, and temporal purposes and methods of a nation. Its purpose is supra-national, ecumenical, panhuman: to unite in Christ all people, completely, regardless of nationality or race or social stratum. There is *neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free,*

there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28), because *Christ is all, and in all* (Col 3:11).

The methods of this panhuman-theanthropic union of all people in Christ have been given by the Church in her holy Mysteries and in her theanthropic words (asceses, virtues). And truly, the Mystery of Divine Eucharist composes and defines and comprises the method of Christ and the means for uniting all people: through this Mystery man is organically united with Christ and with all faithful.

Through the personal exercise of the theanthropic virtues—faith, prayer, fasting, love, meekness, and utter compassion and charity, man makes himself firm in this union, he preserves himself in this holiness, he lives Christ as the unity of his personality and as the essence of his unity with the other members of the holy Body of Christ, the Church.

The Church is the personality of the God-man Christ, a theanthropic organism, not a human organization. The Church is indivisible, just like the person of the God-man, just like the body of the God-man. Therefore, it is a fundamental mistake for the indivisible theanthropic organism of the Church to be divided into small ethnic organizations.

It is the twelfth hour, it is time for our ecclesiastical representatives to cease being exclusively slaves of ethnicism, and to become hierarchs and priests of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The mission of the Church which is given by Christ and realized by the Holy Fathers is: for the awareness and realization to be planted and cultivated in the soul of our people that each member of the Orthodox Church is a catholic person, an eternal and theanthropic person, that he belongs to Christ and for this reason is a brother of all human beings, and a servant of all men and creatures.

This is the purpose of the Church given by Christ. Every other purpose is not of Christ but of the antichrist. For our local Church to be the Church of Christ, the catholic Church, she must constantly realize this purpose in our people. By what means can she realize this theanthropic purpose? Only through theanthropic means, never with human means or any other whatsoever. On this point the Church differs essentially from everything human and earthly.

The Theanthropic Virtues of the Church

The **theanthropic means** are none other than the theanthropic asceses-virtues. Only the theanthropic virtues exist among them in an organic relation. The one springs from the other, the one completes the other.

The **first** among the asceses-virtues is the ascesis of faith. Through this ascesis the soul of our people must pass and constantly pass: that is, this soul must be given up to Christ without reservations and compromises, must go deeply into the theanthropic depths, and be elevated to the theanthropic heights. The awareness must be created in our people that the faith of Christ is a supranational, ecumenical and catholic,

trinitarian virtue, and that for one to believe in Christ means to serve Christ and only Christ, in all aspects of one's life.

The **second** is: the theanthropic virtue of prayer and fasting. This virtue must become a method of life for our Orthodox people; it must become the soul of its soul, because prayer and fasting are the almighty means given by Christ for purification from every impurity—not only of the human being, but also of society and of the people, and of humanity. Prayer and fasting are able to cleanse the soul of our people from our impurities and from our sins. The soul of our people must be identified with the Orthodox life of prayer. Prayer and fasting must be performed not only for individuals, not only for the people, but for everyone and for everything (*in all and for all*): for friends and enemies, those who persecute and kill us, because this is what distinguishes Christians from pagans.

The **third** theanthropic virtue is the theanthropic virtue of love. This love has no boundaries. It does not ask who is worthy and who is not; it loves everyone: it loves friends and enemies, it loves sinners and criminals (but it does not love their sins and crimes); it blesses those who curse, and like the sun it enlightens both the wicked and the good. Christian love is distinguished from the love of the other self-styled and relative loves: from pharisaical, humanistic, altruistic, ethnic, animal love. The love of Christ is always total love. This love is acquired only through prayer, because it is a gift of Christ. And the Orthodox heart prays with intensity: *O Lord of love, give me Thy love for all people and for all things!*

The **fourth** is the theanthropic virtue of meekness and humility. Only he *who is meek in heart* makes rebellious and wild hearts meek. Only he who is humble in heart humbles proud and haughty souls. To *show meekness towards all people* is the obligation of every true Christian (Tit 3:2). But man becomes truly meek and humble when he makes the meek and humble Lord Jesus the heart of his heart, He who alone *is truly meek and humble of heart* (Mt 11:29). The soul of the people must be made meek with the meekness of Christ. Every man must learn to pray: *O most meek Lord, make my wild soul meek!* The Lord humbled Himself with the greatest humility: He became incarnate, He became man. If you are Christ's, humble yourself to the utmost, to a worm; incarnate yourself in the pain of every pained person, in the affliction of every afflicted person, in the sufferings of every tortured person, in the grief of every animal and bird. Humble yourself below everyone: be everything to everyone—through Christ and according to Christ. When you are alone, pray: *O Humble Lord, humble me through Thy humility!*

The **fifth** is the theanthropic virtue of patience and humility. That is, to forbear evil, not to return evil for evil, to forgive with total compassion the curses, the slanders, the wounds. This is Christ's: constantly to feel crucified in the world, persecuted by the world, cursed and spat upon. The world cannot bear Christ-bearing people, just as it could not bear

Christ. Martyrdom is the atmosphere in which the Christian bears fruit. We must teach this to our people. For Orthodox, martyrdom is purification. It is Christian not only to bear sufferings with joy, but also to forgive with total compassion those who cause them, to pray for them to God, just as did Christ and the Archdeacon Stephen. For this reason, pray: *O long-suffering Lord, give me long-suffering, magnanimity and meekness!*

The Mission of our Church Is...

...to make these virtues-ascetes the methods of life for the people, to weave the Christ-like theanthropic virtues into the soul and life of the people. In this lies the salvation of the soul from the world and from all soul-corrupting, homicidal, atheistic movements and worldly organizations. Against the "educated" atheism and the gentlemanly cannibalism of contemporary civilization, we must array Christ-bearing personalities, which with the meekness of a sheep will be victorious over the excited passions of the wolves, and with the innocence of doves will save the soul of the people from the cultural and political stench.

For this reason the main obligation of our Church is to create Christ-bearing ascetics. The voice which must be heard in it today is: Go back to the Christ-bearing ascetics, towards the Holy Fathers! Go back to the ascetes and virtues of the Holy Fathers! Go back to the virtues of Saints Anthony and Athanasios, of Saints Basil and Gregory, of Saints John Chrysostom and Damascene, of Saints Sergei and Seraphim, of Saints Savva, Prochor and Gabriel, and others! Because these theanthropic ascetes-virtues created all of these saints, and today, only they alone are capable of sanctifying every soul and the soul of our whole people.

This theanthropic purpose is eternal and unalterable, and its means are also eternal and unalterable, because *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever* (Heb 13:8). Here is the difference between the human world and the world of Christ: the human one is finite and temporal, while Christ's is unalterable and eternal.

Orthodoxy, as the unique bearer and guardian of the perfect and all-radiant Person of the God-man Christ, is realized exclusively with the theanthropic-Orthodox means, the ascetical virtues in grace, not with means lent by Roman Catholicism or Protestantism. The latter are "Christianities" according to the version of the proud European man, and not of the humble God-man.

God Himself facilitates this mission of our Church, because in our people there exists a spirit of asceticism, as Orthodoxy created it through the ages. The Orthodox soul of our people inclines towards the Holy Fathers, towards the Orthodox Ascetics. The personal, familial, and parochial asceticism, especially in prayer and fasting, is characteristic of Orthodoxy. Our people, the Orthodox people, are the people of Christ because, like Christ, they summarize the Gospel in these two

virtues: prayer and fasting. They are convinced that every impurity, every impure thought, every impure desire, every impure spirit, can be *chased out of man only by prayer and fasting* (Mt 17:21). In the depths of their hearts our people know Christ, they know Orthodoxy, know what it is that makes the Orthodox man Orthodox. **Orthodoxy always creates ascetical rebirths; it does not recognize other rebirths.**

The ascetics are the only missionaries of Orthodoxy. Asceticism is the only missionary school of Orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is asceticism and life, for this reason only with asceticism and life does she reach and realize her mission.

Asceticism must be developed by all of our people. The parish must become an ascetical center. But this can only be done by an ascetic parish priest. Prayer and fasting, the ecclesiastical life of the parish, the liturgical life—these are the chief means by which Orthodoxy brings about rebirth in people. The parish, the parish community must be reborn, and in Christ-loving and brother-loving love humbly serve Christ and all people with meekness and humility, with sacrifice and self-denial. This service ought to be saturated and nourished by prayer and a liturgical life. This is fundamental and absolutely essential.

But all of these demand as a prerequisite that our hierarchs, our priests, our monastics become ascetics, and for this: Let us beseech the Lord.



I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. (Pss 121:1).

Observe a soul at a loss and bewildered from being in trouble, and wishing to attain comfort from God, Who is not unaware. This again is a good effect and advantage of temptations, exciting and stirring up the soul, making it look for influence from on high and sever connections with everything of this life.

I mean, if the Jews, materialistic and attached to the earth as they were, became so zealous by hardship in captivity and set their eyes on heaven, much more would it be right for us to do this in our situation and have recourse to God, required as we are to display a greater diligence than they. Since, you see, they were isolated in the midst of their enemies, and had no city of their own, no rampart, no tower, no weapons, no human assistance, no abundance of resources, nothing else of this kind, but dwelt as captives and slaves amidst people who were their masters and enemies together, they took refuge in the invincible hand when oppressed by the magnitude of the disasters, and deprived of human help they began to come to their senses from this isolation.

St. John Chrysostom

HAVING COMPASSION

By St. John Cassian (*The Philokalia Vol. 1; Faber and Faber pgs. 105-106*).

There was once a very zealous brother who was greatly troubled by the demon of unchastity. He went to a certain father and confessed his private thoughts to him; but this father, being inexperienced, became angry when he heard about them and told the brother that he was contemptible and unworthy of the monastic habit for having entertained thoughts such as these.

When the brother heard this, he lost heart, left his cell and set off back to the world. Through God's providence, however, Abba Apollos, one of the most experienced of the elders, chanced to meet him and, seeing him over-wrought and very despondent, asked him why he was in this state. At first the brother did not reply because he was so depressed but, after the elder had pleaded with him, he told him what was wrong, saying: "Because I was often troubled by evil thoughts, I went to tell them to the elder; and as he said I have no hope of salvation, I have given up and am now on my way back to the world."

When Abba Apollos heard this, he comforted and encouraged him, saying: "Do not be surprised, my child, and do not lose hope. I too, old and grey as you see me, I am still troubled much by these thoughts. Do not be discouraged by this burning desire, which is healed not so much by human effort as by God's compassion. Please do this for me: go back to your cell just for today."

This the brother did; and Apollos, after leaving him, went to the cell of the elder who had caused his despair. Standing outside he implored God with tears and said: "O Lord, who puts us to the test for our own benefit, let this elder be given the brother's battle, so that in old age he may learn through experience what he has not been taught over these many years: how to feel sympathy with those who are under attack by the demons."

As he finished his prayer, he saw a dark figure standing near the cell shooting arrows at the elder. Wounded by the arrows, the elder at once began to stumble back and forth as though drunk. Unable to withstand the attack, he finally left his cell and set off for the world by the same road that the young monk had taken.

Seeing what had happened, Abba Apollos confronted him, and asked him where he was going and why he was so troubled. Although he realized that the holy man knew what was wrong with him, he was too ashamed to say anything. Abba Apollos then said to him: "Return to your cell, and in the future recognize your own weakness. The devil has either not noticed or has despised you, and so not thought you worth fighting. Not that there has been any question of a fight: you could not stand up to his provocation even for a

day! This has happened to you because, when you received a younger brother who was being attacked by our common enemy, you drove him to despair instead of preparing him for battle. You did not recall that wise precept: "*Deliver them that are being led away to death; and redeem them that are appointed to be slain*" (Prov 24:11). You did not even remember the parable of our Savior, which teaches us not to *break a bruised reed or quench smoking flax* (Mt. 12:20). None of us could endure the plots of the enemy, or allay the fiery turmoil of our nature, if God's grace did not protect our human weakness. Seeing, then, that God has had this compassion for us, let us pray to Him together and ask Him to withdraw the whip with which He has lashed you. *For he maketh sore, and bindeth up; he woundeth, and his hands make whole.* (Job 5:18)."

After Abba Apollos had said this and had prayed, the attack which had been launched against the elder was at once suspended. Finally, Abba Apollos advised him to ask God to give him *the tongue of the learned* so as to *know how to speak a word in season.* (Isa 50:4).



ST. HERMAS

One of the Seventy, he is mentioned in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (16:14). A Greek by birth, he spent a long time in Rome. He was bishop in Philippoupolis, and finished his life a martyr. He compiled the very instructive book "The Shepherd" through revelations from angels of God.

Hermas was a rich man, but fell into extreme poverty through his own sins and those of his sons. A man appeared to him, clad in white and with a staff in his hand, and told him that he was the angel of repentance, sent to him before the end of his life. The angel gave him twelve "commandments:"

1. To believe in God.
2. To live in simplicity and innocence.
3. To love truth and flee from falsehood.
4. To guard his thoughts in chastity.
5. To learn patience and magnanimity of soul.
6. To know that a good and an evil spirit attend every man.
7. To fear God, but not the devil.
8. To perform every good deed and to restrain himself from every evil one.
9. To pray to God in faith from the depths of his heart, so that his prayer might be heard.
10. To preserve himself from melancholy, the daughter of doubt, and from anger.
11. To try true and false prophecies.
12. To preserve himself from every evil desire.

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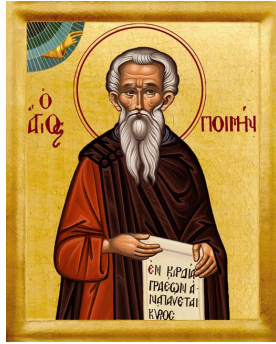
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A REFLECTION ON NEW YEAR'S DAY

By St. Alexander Hotovitzky, January 1902.

Again I stand on the threshold of a New Year; I stand on the crest of a mountain, where I may make a halt and review, before I walk again on my path. I shall halt, I shall rest, I shall hush my troubled heart, be it only for this short moment, I shall hide from the blizzard, which had followed me ever since I set out, and will meet me again the moment I leave my seclusion. Oh, Lord! Help me calmly examine my soul and Thy creation.

I gaze at God's creation, at everything which He had sent to me, which has been placed close to me, which, through His will, has come together in my life, and, with my hand on my heart, from the depth of my heart and conscience, I say: all this is very good! Yonder is my happy childhood—how brightly it shines, diffusing its aroma from the distant long ago, how it lights up my path before me, how it freshens my soul, during spells of exhaustion! Yonder is my ardent youth and with it all that brought to my soul the first raptures of feeling. Here are my lessons, my joys, my bitter losses, here are the people to like with whom is my happiness, here are others, whom I have buried in the damp earth, almost unconscious with grief; here are all in whose company I grew up, with whom I worried, from whom I have received gifts of love and of wrath, from whom have I accepted honour and dishonour; here is Nature, which, at times, appeared to me more alive and more responsive, which had more power to energize my spirit, than living beings themselves; here are my pleasures, my connections, my illnesses.

All, all this is very good. All was good, that God's Providence sent into my life. Nothing was in vain. Everything was for good.

My past! How far it stretches back in the wondrous country, whence come to me a glad sound, or a beloved image, consolation, and hope, and bitter remorse. I gaze at it and I smile for joy, I gaze at it and I cover my face with my hands for shame. Yet I know: it is mine, it is myself, it is a part of my life, and no power can take it from me or erase what is written in it. And that which is written in it is the future, it is the fate of man.

Many are the lives in it, whose mysterious meaning will be disclosed at some future time, at the time when the seed that was sown, will come to ripeness, when, in letters of fire, it will bring forward the word, traced on it by eternal wisdom, un-revealed as yet to mind and conscience, but not to be separated from life. Whilst man lived his days, whilst he worked and slept, whilst he laughed and cried, whilst he moved and rested—eternal Wisdom traced this word on his life and sealed it with a seal of its own, putting a magic spell on it, until the time comes for the seal to be broken, and for a dark corner of a man's life to be lit up by the light of God's understanding, which lies hidden in life.

It is an agony to read some of these words, but once you have read them, your heart will know, that those are words of God's love, of God's solicitude for man. And with every new word, a mystery is revealed, a veil is drawn away and man is made able to understand the thoughts and longings of his own heart.

All is very good. Yet, even now, my restless heart is throbbing with unknown longing and straining to see into the distant future. Oh Lord! Let Thy blessing rest on 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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THE LITURGICAL STRUCTURE OF LENT

By Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann (+1983), from "The Russian Orthodox Journal," March 1959, pp. 6-8.

To understand the various liturgical particularities of the Lenten period, we must remember that they express and convey to us the spiritual meaning of Lent and are related to the central idea of Lent, to its function in the liturgical life of the Church. It is the idea of *repentance*. In the teaching of the Orthodox Church however, repentance means much more than a mere enumeration of sins and transgressions to the priest. Confession and absolution are but the result, the fruit, the "climax" of true repentance. And, before this result can be reached, become truly valid and meaningful, one must make a spiritual effort, go through a long period of preparation and purification.

Repentance, in the Orthodox acceptance of this word, means a *deep, radical reevaluation of our whole life*, of all our ideas, judgments, worries, mutual relations, etc. It applies not only to some "bad actions," but to the whole of life, and is a Christian judgment passed on it, on its basic presuppositions. At every moment of our life, but especially during Lent, the Church invites us to concentrate our attention on the ultimate values and goals, to measure ourselves by the criteria of Christian teaching, to contemplate our existence in its relation to God. This is repentance and it consists therefore, before everything else, in the acquisition of the *Spirit of repentance*, i.e., of a special state of mind, a special disposition of our conscience and spiritual vision.

The Lenten worship is thus a *school of repentance*. It teaches us *what* is repentance and *how* to acquire the *spirit of*

repentance. It prepares us for and leads us to the spiritual regeneration, without which "absolution" remains meaningless. It is, in short, both teaching about repentance and the way of repentance. And, since there can be no real Christian life without repentance, without this constant "reevaluation" of life, the Lenten worship is an essential part of the liturgical tradition of the Church. The neglect of it, its reduction to a few purely formal obligations and customs, the deformation of its basic rules constitute one of the major deficiencies of our Church life today.

The aim of this article is to outline at least the most important structures of Lenten worship, and thus to help Orthodox Christians to recover a more Orthodox idea of Lent.

SUNDAYS OF PREPARATION

Three weeks before Lent proper begins, we enter into a period of *preparation*. It is a constant feature of our tradition of worship that every major liturgical event—Christmas, Easter, Lent, etc., is announced and prepared long in advance. Knowing our lack of concentration, the "worldliness" of our life, the Church calls our attention to the seriousness of the approaching event, invites us to meditate on its various "dimensions"; thus, before we can *practice* Lent, we are given its basic *theology*.

Pre-Lenten preparation includes four consecutive Sundays preceding Lent.

Sunday of the Publican and Pharisee

On the eve of this day, i.e., at the Saturday Vigil Service, the liturgical book of the Lenten season, the *Triodion* makes its first appearance and texts from it are added to the usual liturgical material of the Resurrection service. They develop the first major theme of the season: that of *humility*; the Gospel lesson of the day (Lk 18:10-14) teaches that humility is

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the condition of repentance. No one can acquire the spirit of repentance without rejecting the attitude of the Pharisee. Here is a man who is always pleased with himself and thinks that he complies with all the requirements of religion. Yet, he has reduced religion to purely formal rules and measures it by the amount of his financial contribution to the temple. Religion for him is a source of pride and self-satisfaction. The Publican is humble and humility justifies him before God.

Sunday of the Prodigal Son

The Gospel reading of this day (Lk 15:11-32) gives the second theme of Lent: that of a return to God. It is not enough to acknowledge sins and to confess them. Repentance remains fruitless without the desire and the decision to change life, to go back to God. The true repentance has as its source the spiritual beauty and purity which man has lost. *I shall return to the compassionate Father crying with tears, receive me as one of Thy servants.* At Matins of this day to the usual psalms of the Polyeleos *Praise ye the name of the Lord* (Pss 135), the Psalm 137 is added, *By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea we wept, when we remembered Zion... If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning...* The Christian recalls what he lost: the communion with God, the peace and joy of His Kingdom. He was baptized, introduced into the Body of Christ. Repentance, therefore, is the renewal of baptism, a movement of love, which brings him back to God.

Sunday of the Last Judgment (Meat Fare)

On Saturday, preceding this Sunday, the *Typikon* prescribes the universal commemoration of all the departed members of the Church. In the Church we all depend on each other, we belong to each other, we are united by the love of Christ. (Therefore no service in the Church can be "private".) Our repentance would not be complete without this act of love

towards all those, who have preceded us in death, for what is repentance if not also the recovery of the spirit of love, which is the spirit of the Church. Liturgically this commemoration includes Friday Vespers, Matins and Divine Liturgy on Saturday.

The Sunday Gospel (Mt 25:31-46) reminds us of the third theme of repentance: preparation for the last judgment. A Christian lives under Christ's judgment. He will judge us on how seriously we took His presence in the world, His identification with every man, His gift of love. *I was in prison, I was naked...* All our actions, attitudes, judgments and especially relations with other people must be referred to Christ, and to call ourselves "Christians" means that we accept life as *service* and *ministry*. The parable of the Last Judgment gives us "terms of reference" for our self-evaluation.

On the week following this Sunday a *limited fasting* is prescribed. We must prepare and train ourselves for the great effort of Lent. Wednesday and Friday are (usually) *non-liturgical days* with Lenten services. On Saturday of this week (Cheesefare Saturday) the Church commemorates all men and women who were "illuminated through fasting," i.e., the Holy Ascetics or Fasters. They are the patterns we must follow, our guides in the difficult "art" of fasting and repentance.

Sunday of Forgiveness (Cheese Fare)

This is the last day before Lent. Its liturgy develops three themes: (a) the *expulsion of Adam from the Paradise of Bliss*. Man was created for Paradise, i.e., for communion with God, for life with Him. He has lost this life and his existence on earth is an exile. Christ has opened to every one the doors of Paradise and the Church guides us to our heavenly fatherland. (b) Our fast must not be hypocritical, a show

off. We must *appear not unto men to fast, but unto our Father who is in secret* (Sunday Gospel, Mt. 6:14-21), and (c) its condition is that we *forgive* each other as God has forgiven us—*If ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you.*

The evening of that day, at Vespers, Lent is inaugurated by the Great Prokimenon: *Turn not away Thy face from Thy servant, for I am in trouble; hear me speedily. Attend to my soul and deliver it.* After this service, the rite of forgiveness takes place and the Church begins its pilgrimage towards the glorious day of Easter.

THE CANON OF ST. ANDREW OF CRETE

On the first four days of Lent—Monday through Thursday—the Typikon prescribes the reading at Great Compline (i.e., after Vespers) of the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete, divided in four parts. This canon is entirely devoted to repentance and constitutes, so to say, the “inauguration of Lent.” It is repeated in its complete form at Matins on Thursday of the fifth week of Lent.

LENT WEEKDAYS

Lent consists of six weeks or forty days. It begins on Monday after the Cheese Fare Sunday and ends on Friday evening before Palm Sunday. The Saturday of Lazarus’ resurrection, the Palm Sunday and the Holy Week form a special liturgical cycle not analyzed in this article.

The Lenten weekdays (Monday through Friday) have a liturgical structure very different from that of Saturdays and Sundays. We will deal with these two days in a special paragraph.

The Lenten weekday cycle, although it consists of the same services, as prescribed for the whole year (Vespers, Compline, Midnight, Matins, Hours) has nevertheless some important particularities:

(a) It has its own liturgical book—the *Triodion*. Throughout the year, the changing elements of the daily services—*troparia*, *stichira*, *canons*—are taken from the *Octoechos* (the book of the week) and the *Menaion* (the book of the month, giving the office of the Saint of the day). The basic rule of Lent is that the *Octoechos* is not used on weekdays but replaced by the *Triodion*, which supplies us each day with:

- (i) at Vespers, a set of *stichiras* (three for *Lord, I have cried* and three for the *aposticha*) and two readings or *parimias* from the Old Testament;
- (ii) at Matins, two groups of *cathismata* (short hymns sung after the reading of the Psalter), a canon of three odes (or “*Triodion*” which gave its name to the whole book)

and three *stichiras* at the *Praises*, i.e., sung at the end of the regular morning psalms 148, 149, 150—at the Sixth Hour—a *parimia* from the Book of Isaiah;

(iii) the commemoration of the Saint of the day (*Menaion*) is not omitted, but combined with the texts of the *Triodion*. The latter are mainly, if not exclusively, penitential in their content. Especially deep and beautiful are the *idiornela stichira* of each day (one at Vespers and one at Matins).

(b) The use of the Psalter is doubled. Normally the Psalter, divided in 20 *cathismata* is read once every week: (one *cathisma* at Vespers, two at Matins). During Lent it is read twice (one at Vespers, three at Matins, one at the third, sixth, and ninth Hours). This is done of course mainly in monasteries, yet to know that the Church considers the psalms to be an essential “spiritual food” for the Lenten season is important.

(c) The Lenten rubrics put an emphasis on prostrations. They are prescribed at the end of each service with the Lenten prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian, *O Lord and Master of my life*, and also after each of the special Lenten troparia at Vespers. They express the spirit of repentance as *breaking down* our pride and self-satisfaction. They also make our body partake of the effort of prayer.



(d) The Spirit of Lent is also expressed in the liturgical music. Special Lenten “tones” or melodies are used for the responses at litanies and the “Alleluias” which replace at Matins the solemn singing of the *God is the Lord and has revealed Himself unto us.*

(e) A characteristic feature of Lenten services is the use of the Old Testament, normally absent from the daily cycle. Three books are read daily throughout Lent: Genesis with Parables at Vespers and the Book of Isaiah at the sixth Hour. Genesis tells us the story of Creation, Fall and the beginnings of the history of salvation. Parables is the book of Wisdom, which leads us to God and to His precepts, and Isaiah is the prophet of redemption, salvation and the Messianic Kingdom.

(f) The liturgical vestments to be used on weekdays of Lent are dark, theoretically purple.

The order for the weekday Lenten services is to be found in the *Triodion* (“Monday of the first week of Lent”). Of special importance are the regulations concerning the singing of the Canon. Lent is the only season of the liturgical year that has preserved the use of the nine biblical odes, which formed the original framework of the Canon.

NON-LITURGICAL DAYS

THE LITURGY OF THE PRESANCTIFIED GIFTS

On weekdays (Monday through Friday) the celebration of the Divine Liturgy is strictly forbidden. They are non-liturgical days, with only one possible exception – the Feast of Annunciation (then the Liturgy of St. Chrysostom is prescribed after Vespers). The reason for this rule is that the Eucharist is by its very nature a festal celebration, the joyful commemoration of Christ's Resurrection and presence among His disciples. But at least twice a week, on Wednesdays and Fridays, the Church prescribes the celebration of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts. It consists of solemn Great Vespers and communion with the Holy Gifts consecrated on the previous Sunday. These days being days of strict fasting (theoretically complete abstinence) are "crowned" with the partaking of the Bread of Life, the ultimate fulfillment of all our efforts.

One must acknowledge the tragic neglect of these rules in many American parishes. The celebration of the so called "requiem liturgies" on non-liturgical days constitutes a flagrant violation of the universal tradition of Orthodoxy and cannot be justified from either theological or pastoral points of view. They are remnants of "uniatism" in our Church and are in contradiction with both the Orthodox doctrine of the commemoration of the dead and the Orthodox doctrine of Eucharist and its function in the Church. Everything must be done in order to restore the real liturgical principles of Lent.

SATURDAYS OF LENT

Lenten Saturdays, with the exception of the first—dedicated to the memory of the Holy Martyr Theodore Tyron, and the fifth—the Saturday of the *Acathistos*, are days of commemoration of the departed. And, instead of multiplying the "private requiem liturgies" on days when they are forbidden, it would be good to restore this practice of one weekly universal commemoration of all Orthodox Christians departed this life, of their integration in the Eucharist, which is always offered *on behalf of all and for all*.

The Acathistos Saturday is the annual commemoration of the deliverance of Constantinople in 620. The "Acathist," a beautiful hymn to the Mother of God, is sung usually at Matins.

SUNDAYS OF LENT

Each Sunday in Lent, although it keeps its character of the weekly feast of Resurrection, has its specific theme, and the *Triodion* is combined with the *Octoechos*.

1st Sunday: Triumph of Orthodoxy, commemorates the victory of the Church over the Iconoclasm heresy (842).

2nd Sunday: dedicated to the memory of St. Gregory Palamas, a great Byzantine theologian, canonized in 1366.

3rd Sunday: Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross; at Matins the Cross is brought in a solemn procession from the sanctuary and put in the center of the Church where it will remain for the whole week. This ceremony announces

the approaching of the Holy Week and the commemoration of Christ's passion. At the end of each service takes place a special veneration of the Cross.

4th Sunday: St. John the Ladder, one of the greatest Ascetics, who in his "Spiritual Ladder" described the basic principles of Christian spirituality.

5th Sunday: St. Mary of Egypt, the most wonderful example of repentance.

On Saturdays and Sundays, days of Eucharistic celebration, the dark vestments are replaced by light ones, the Lenten melodies are not used, and the prayer of St. Ephraim with prostrations is omitted. The order of the services is not of the Lenten type, yet fasting remains a rule and cannot be broken. Each Sunday night, Great Vespers with a special Great Prokimenon is prescribed.

At the conclusion of this brief description of the liturgical structure of Lent, let me emphasize once more that Lenten worship constitutes one of the deepest, the most beautiful and the most essential elements of our Orthodox liturgical tradition. Its restoration in the life of the Church, its understanding by Orthodox Christians, constitute one of the urgent tasks of our time.

† † †

From the Editor: In the Greek Orthodox tradition, on the first four Fridays of Lent, the Service of the Salutations to the Theotokos is chanted. In the evening, the Small Compline is read through the Creed, and then the Canon of the Akathist is chanted, in each ode, doing six troparia. The entire Akathist is chanted in its entirety on the fifth Friday evening.

The four sections into which the Akathist is divided correspond to the themes of the Annunciation, Nativity, Christ, and the Theotokos herself. The hymn itself forms an alphabetical acrostic—that is, each *oikos* (house) begins with a letter of the Greek alphabet, in order—and it consists of twelve long and twelve short *oikoi*. Each of the long *oikoi* include a seven-line *stanza* followed by six couplets, employing rhyme, assonance, and alliteration, beginning with the word *Chaire* (translated as either "Hail!" or "Rejoice!") and ending with the refrain, "Hail, Bride without bridegroom!" In the short *oikoi*, the seven-line *stanza* is followed by the refrain, *Alleluia!*

The Salutations to the Theotokos service is most often known by its Greek name *Chairetismoi* (from the *Chaire* so often used in the hymn).



Don't hesitate [to come to confession]. Don't be ashamed. Whatever you may have done, even the greatest of sins, the spiritual father has power from the Lord Himself and from the Apostles, to forgive you with his stole.

Blessed Elder Iakovos of Evia (+1991)

SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY: THE FIRST SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT

A sermon by Archbishop Averky of blessed memory, Sunday of Orthodoxy 1971.

This is the Apostolic faith, this is the faith of the Fathers, this is the Orthodox faith!



Beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, you will hear these solemn and significant words in the Rite of Orthodoxy which the Holy Church has established to be served on this day. The first week of Holy and Great Lent has ended a week of intensified prayer and ascetic repentance. Now the Holy Church, desiring to encourage and console us, has established for us in this first week of Great Lent, on its first

Sunday, a spiritual celebration, one most dear and close to our hearts—The Triumph of Orthodoxy.

This celebration was first performed in 842 in Constantinople in the presence of the Blessed Empress Theodora by His Holiness Patriarch Methodius, in memory of the overthrow of the last terrible heresy to shake Christ's Church, the heresy of iconoclasm. But in this celebration the Holy Church marks the triumph of the holy Orthodox faith in general, her victory over all impious heresies, false teachings and schisms.

Our Lord Jesus Christ the Saviour founded His Church on earth so that all belonging to her could be saved, could elude the nets of the devil and enter into the Heavenly Kingdom prepared for them.

The devil exerted all his strength to overthrow and destroy the Church of Christ and, through this, to hinder the salvation of men. At first he raised up terrible persecutions against the Church on the part of the Jews and pagans. For almost three centuries, the blood of Christian martyrs flowed without ceasing. But the devil did not succeed in his task. The blood of the martyrs, according to the apt statement of the Christian apologist Tertullian, became the seeds of Christians. Christianity triumphed over its persecutors. The meek lambs of Christ's flock transformed the wolf-like rage of their persecutors into lamb-like meekness.

But the devil did not resist after the defeat he suffered at the hands of the martyrs. When the Church of Christ triumphed in the world, he raised up a new, even more dangerous persecution against her: from within the Church, as the Holy Apostle Paul had foretold in his conversation with the Ephesian presbyters: *men arose speaking perverse things. Paul called such men grievous wolves.* [Acts 20:29,30]. These were so-called heretics who tried to pervert the true teaching of Christ concerning faith and piety in order to make this teaching ineffective for men.

When this happened, the Holy Church, in the person of its best servants, took up arms against these heretics in order to defend its true, undistorted teaching. There began to be convoked first local and then ecumenical councils. Bishops came together from all the corners of the earth and through the Holy Spirit they gave voice to the pure and undistorted Truth, following the example of the First Apostolic Council of Jerusalem [Acts 15:6-29]. They also cut off heretics from the Church and anathematized them.

This was in accordance with the clear commandment of Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself who said, *If he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.* [Mt 18:17]. And in accordance with the commandment of the Holy Apostle Paul, that great apostle to the nations who said, *But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.* [Gal 1:8]. And in another place he states: *If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema Maranatha.* [I Cor 16:22].

Thus our moving, majestic and solemn Rite of *Holy Orthodoxy* takes its beginning from our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and from his great Apostle, called by Him to be the apostle to the nations, i.e. of the whole pagan world. From the ninth century on the Holy Church has established that this rite should be served on the first Sunday of Holy Great Lent and that it be named Orthodox Sunday. The rite, brothers and sisters, is particularly important and significant in the evil times we are experiencing, times in which the Orthodox faith is wavering and shaking.

This wavering and shaking of the Orthodox faith is due to those very persons who ought to be strengthening and supporting it in the souls of the faithful. Those who should be pillars of *Holy Orthodoxy* high ranking hierarchs, including the heads of certain Local Churches, are departing from the Truth of *Holy Orthodoxy*. It is terrible to have to say that even the head of the Church of Constantinople, which is known as the Ecumenical Church, the man considered to be the first hierarch of all Orthodoxy, has set out this path! On all of this there undoubtedly lies the print of the Apostasy about which the Holy Apostle Paul foretold [II Thess 2:3] the apostasy of Christians from Christ: *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.*

We are now face to face with this Apostasy. The major threat to true Christian faith, the Orthodox faith, is the so called "Ecumenical Movement," headed by what is known as the "World Council of Churches," a body which denies the doctrine of the unity and infallibility of the True Church of Christ. This "Council" is attempting to create from all the presently existing and faith-distorting "branches" of faith, a new false Church which, from our point of view, will without any doubt be the Church of Antichrist, that false church

which the Antichrist, whose coming is now being rapidly prepared in the world, will head.

From the teaching of the Word of God and the Holy Fathers of the Church we know that the Antichrist will be both the religious and political leader of all humanity: he will stand at the head of a new universal false church which the Antichrist, whose coming is now being rapidly prepared in the world, will head. He will also be the director of one new world government and will attempt to submit all to his absolute power.

Our *Holy Orthodox* faith is the one and only faith of the Apostles, the faith of the Fathers; it is that faith which the Apostolic Fathers, the direct disciples of the Holy Apostles, and the Holy Fathers and Teachers of the Church and their lawful successors, established by the Holy Spirit, interpreted for us in their marvellous and inspired writings. Brothers and sisters, we must hold this faith steadfastly if we desire eternal salvation!

Now we shall perform with you this deeply instructive, moving and highly solemn rite which consists of two parts: the first part is the prayer of the Holy Church for all those who have gone astray or fallen away from the true Orthodox faith; in the second part the Holy Church pronounces dread anathema against all false teachers, heretics and schismatics who have grown stubborn in their malice and who do not wish to reunite with the true Church of Christ but instead struggle against her.

Then we shall sing Eternal Memory for all departed defenders of Holy Orthodoxy and Many Years for those defenders of the Holy Orthodox faith and Church who are still among the living. Amen.



Have you not heard that God is Judge of the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Heb 4:2)? What does our Lord say? *He who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.* (Mt 5:28). Do you see how he who looks at someone's face with lust is judged as an adulterer? Know then for sure, O man, that he who is ruled by lust of money is judged covetous, even though he possesses nothing at all. He who lusts after many costly dishes is a glutton, even though he on account of poverty feeds on nothing but bread and water. He is a whoremonger who attaches himself to his imaginations and so is defiled, even though he has never seen the face of anyone. So too he who says in his heart, "This has been badly done, and has not turned out right," and "Why has this and that happened," and "Why did that not happen?"—let him not deceive himself. He is a slanderer and will be judged as one who condemns, even though he utters not a word with his tongue and no one hears his voice.

St. Symeon the New Theologian

BID FAREWELL TO THE THINGS OF THE WORLD

By St. Cyril of Alexandria, from his "Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke."

No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. For just as the husbandman, who has begun to break up his land by the plough, if he grow weary, and leave his labour half done, sees not his field thick set with ears, nor his threshing-floor full of sheaves, and suffers of course the loss which is the natural result of idleness; the absence, I mean, of produce, and the consequent penury, and incurs also the ridicule of those that see him: *so he who wishes to cleave unto Christ, but does not bid farewell to the things of the world, and abandon all love of the flesh, and even deny his earthly relatives, is not fit for the kingdom of God.* One who cannot attain to this resolution, because his mind is fettered with indolence, is not acceptable unto Christ, nor fit for His Company, and necessarily is refused permission to be with Him.

Such were those of whom Christ spake, when forming that similitude in the Gospels. For He said, *A rich man made a banquet for his son; and sent therefore his servants to call them that were bidden, saying, My oxen and my failings are killed, and every thing is ready: come to the banquet. But they, it says, would not come: but one said, I have bought a field, and I cannot come. And another, I have bought a yoke of oxen: and another, I have taken a wife, hold me excused.*

Thou seest that they were called, and while it was in their power to partake of the feast, they excused themselves, and gave themselves up without restraint to those temporal and earthly matters, which rapidly fade, and the possession of which must quickly be abandoned. And yet surely it was their duty rather to have understood, that a wife and lands, and those other possessions, are but finite pleasures, short in duration, and fleeting like the shadows, and, as it were, a bitterness mingled with honey. But to be members of the church of God, from which they, I know not how, foolishly fled, would have procured for them an eternal and unchanging joy. *Whoever would follow Christ, let him be thoroughly constant, and intent solely upon this end; let him not be divided; let him not be possessed by timidity and slothfulness; let him be free from all carnal lust, and prefer nothing to his love unto Him.* But if he be not so disposed, nor so affected in his will, even if he do draw near, he will not be accepted.



If but ten among us lead a holy life, we shall kindle a fire which shall light up the entire city.

St. John Chrysostom

ON THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT

By Metropolitan Philaret (of blessed memory), on the Fourth Sunday of Great and Holy Lent.



More than once, brethren, the fact has been mentioned that on each Sunday in the Great and Holy Lent, there are other commemorations besides that of the Resurrection. Thus, on this day, the Church glorifies the righteous John of the Ladder, one of the greatest ascetics, which the Church, in speaking of them, calls *earthly angels and Heavenly men*.

These great ascetics were extraordinary people. They commanded the elements; wild beasts willingly and readily obeyed them. For them, there were no maladies they could not cure. They walked on the waters as on dry land; all the elements of the world were subject to them, because they lived in God and had the power of grace to overcome the laws of terrestrial nature. One such ascetic was St. John of the Ladder.

He was surnamed “of the Ladder” (Climacus) because he wrote an immortal work, the “Ladder of Divine Ascent.” In this work, we see how, by means of thirty steps, the Christian gradually ascends from below to the heights of supreme spiritual perfection. We see how one virtue leads to another, as a man rises higher and higher and finally attains to that height where there abides the crown of the virtues, which is called *Christian love*.

Saint John wrote his immortal work especially for the monastics, but in the past his “Ladder” was always favorite reading for anyone zealous to live piously, though he were not a monk. Therein the Saint clearly demonstrates how a man passes from one step to the next. Remember, Christian soul, that this ascent on high is indispensable for anyone who wishes to save his soul unto eternity.

When we throw a stone up, it ascends until the moment when the propelling force ceases to be effectual. So long as this force acts, the stone travels higher and higher in its ascent, overcoming the force of the earth’s gravity. But when this force is spent and ceases to act, then, as you know, the stone does not remain suspended in the air. Immediately, it begins to fall, and the further it falls the greater the speed of its fall. This, solely according to the physical laws of terrestrial gravity.

So it is also in the spiritual life. As a Christian gradually ascends, the force of spiritual and ascetic labours lifts him on high. Our Lord Jesus Christ said: *Strive to enter in through the narrow gate*. That is, the Christian ought to be an ascetic. Not only the monastic, but every Christian. He must take pains for his soul and his life. He must direct his life on the Christian path, and purge his soul of all filth and impurity.

Now, if the Christian, who is ascending upon this ladder of spiritual perfection by his struggles and ascetic labours, ceases from this work and ascetic toil, his soul will not remain in its former condition; but, like the stone, it will fall to the earth. More and more quickly will it drop until, finally, if the man does not come to his senses, it will cast him down into the very abyss of Hell.

It is necessary to remember this. People forget that the path of Christianity is indeed an ascetic labour. Last Sunday, we heard how the Lord said: *He that would come after Me, let him take up his cross, deny himself, and follow Me*. The Lord said this with the greatest emphasis. Therefore, the Christian must be one who takes up his cross, and his life, likewise, must be an ascetic labour of bearing that cross. Whatever the outward circumstance of his life, be he monk or layman, it is of no consequence. In either case, if he does not force himself to mount upwards, then, of a certainty, he will fall lower and lower.

And in this regard, alas, people have confused thoughts. For example, a clergyman drops by a home during a fast. Cordially and thoughtfully, they offer him fasting food (i.e., food prepared according to the rules of the Fast), and say: “For you, fast food, of course!” To this, one of our hierarchs customarily replies: “Yes, I am Orthodox. But who gave you permission not to keep the fasts?”

All the fasts of the Church, all the ordinances, are mandatory for every Orthodox person. Speaking of monastics, such ascetics as St. John of the Ladder and those like him fasted much more rigorously than the Church prescribes; but this was a matter of their spiritual ardour, an instance of their personal ascetic labour. This the Church does not require of everyone, because it is not in accord with everyone’s strength. But the Church DOES require of every Orthodox the keeping of those fasts which She has established.

Oftentimes have I quoted the words of St. Seraphim, and once again shall I mention them. Once there came to him a mother who was concerned about how she might arrange the best possible marriage for her young daughter. When she came to the saint for advice, he said to her: “Before all else, ensure that he, whom your daughter chooses as her companion for life, keeps the fasts. If he does not, then he is not a Christian, whatever he may consider himself to be.” You see how this great saint, St. Seraphim of Sarov, a man who, better than we, knew what Orthodoxy is, spoke concerning the fasts?

Let us remember this. St. John Climacus has described the ladder of spiritual ascent: then let us not forget that each Christian must ascend thereon. The great ascetics ascended like swiftly-flying eagles; we scarcely ascend at all. Nonetheless, let us not forget that, unless we employ our efforts in correcting ourselves and our lives, we shall cease our ascent, and, most assuredly, we shall begin to fall. Amen.

THE STEADFASTNESS OF HOLY ORTHODOXY

By St. Theophan the Recluse; a sermon given on Dec. 29th, 1863.



It reached my ears that, as it seems, you consider my sermons very strict and believe that today no one should think this way, no one should be living this way and therefore, no one should be teaching this way. “Times have changed!”

How glad I was to hear this. This means that you listen carefully to what I say, and not only do you listen, but you are also

willing to abide by it. What more could we hope for, we who preach as we were ordered and as much we were ordered?

Despite all this, in no way can I agree with your views on this important matter. I even consider it my duty to comment on it and to correct it, since—even though it perhaps goes against your desire and conviction—it comes from something sinful; this modernist position is stipulated as though Christianity could alter its doctrines, its canons, its sanctifying ceremonies to answer to the spirit of each age and adjust itself to the changing tastes of the sons of this century, as though it could add or subtract something.

Yet, it is not so. Christianity must remain eternally unchanging, in no way being dependent on or guided by the spirit of each age. Instead, Christianity is meant to govern and direct the spirit of the age for anyone who obeys its teachings. To convince you of this, I will put forward some thoughts for you to consider.

Some said that my teaching is strict. First of all, my teaching is not my own, nor should it ever be. In this sacred office nobody should, nor even can, preach his own teaching. If I or someone else ever dare to do so, you must force us outside the Church.

We preach the teachings of our Lord, God and Saviour Jesus Christ, of the Holy Apostles, and the Holy Church, which is guided by the Holy Spirit. At the same time, we make sure to do everything possible to keep these teachings whole and inviolate in your minds and hearts. Every thought we present and every word we use, we do so very carefully, so as not to overshadow this brilliant and divine teaching in any way. Nobody can act differently.

Such a law that calls for each man’s preaching in the Church to be “God-sent,” was established at the creation of the world, and should thus remain valid until the end of the world. The Prophet Moses, after the delivery of the commandments from God Himself to the people of Israel, concluded: *Ye shall*

not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you. (Deut 4:2).

This law of constancy is so unalterable that the Lord and Savior Himself, when He was teaching the people on the mountain, said: *Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.* (Mt 5:17-18).

Then He gave the same validity to his teaching, before interpreting the commandments in the spirit of the gospel, by adding: *Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.* (Mt 5:19).

This means that anyone who wrongly interprets the commandments of God and lessens their validity, will be an outcast in the future life. This is what He said at the beginning of His preaching. He assured the same thing to Saint John the Theologian, the beholder of ineffable revelations, to whom He described the final judgement of the world and the Church, indicating in the Apocalypse (Book of Revelations): *For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.* (Rev 22:18-19).

From the time of His first appearance in the world until the Second Coming, Christ has given the Holy Apostles and their successors the following law: *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations... teaching them to observe all that I commanded you.* (Mt 28:19-20). That means *for you to teach, not what anyone else could possibly imagine, but what I ordered, and this to the end of the world.* And He adds: *And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.*” (Mt 28:20).

The Apostles received this law and sacrificed their lives in order to keep it. And to those who wanted to keep them from preaching what it was they preached under the threat of punishment and death, they replied: *Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.* (Acts 4:19-20).

This clear law was delivered by the apostles to their successors, was accepted by them, and has timeless effect in the Church of God. Because of this law, the Church is the pillar and the ground of truth. Can you see then what an inviolable steadfastness it has? After that, who would be so bold as to stubbornly disturb or move anything in Christian doctrine and law?

Next listen to what is said of the Prophet Ezekiel who for seven days was in the ecstasy of prayer and after seven days heard the word of the Lord: *Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me* (Ezek 3:17), and he declared to the people: Here is the law for you! If you see a wicked person committing iniquity and you do not tell him: leave your iniquity and change your way, *that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand.* (Ezek 3:18). Conversely, *if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul.* (Ezek 3:19-21)

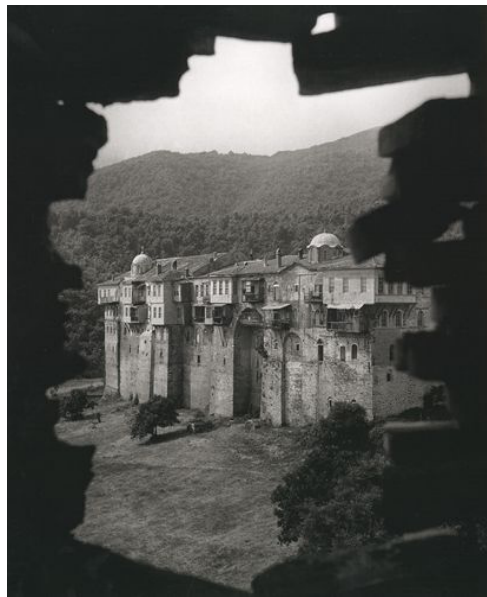
What a strict law! And though it sounds in the consciences of all pastors during their election and consecration, when a heavy yoke is put on them, namely the instruction of the flock of Christ that He entrusted to them, big or small, not only to guide it but also to preserve it. How could anyone be so bold, to pervert everything in the law of Christ, when this involves the destruction of both pastors and flock?

If the saving power of this teaching depended on our opinion of it and our consent to it, it would make sense for someone to imagine rebuilding Christianity according to human weaknesses or the claims of the age and adapt it according to the sinful desires of his heart. But the saving power of Christian law does not at all depend on us, but on the will of God, by the fact that God Himself established precisely the exact path of salvation. Beyond this there is no other way, nor could it exist. Therefore, anyone who teaches in any other way, is deviating from the true path and is destroying himself and you. What logic is there in that?

Notice how strict judgment was mentioned when something similar happened to the nation of Israel during the difficult years of their captivity. Some prophets out of pity for the suffering and sick talked to the people, not as the Lord had ordered, but as their heart dictated. Concerning them the Lord gave the following commands to Ezekiel: *And you, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people, who*

prophesy out of their own minds. Prophecy against them and say, Thus says the Lord God: Woe to the women who sew magic bands upon all wrists, and make veils for the heads of persons of every stature, in the hunt for souls. (Ezek 13:17-18)

This means: Woe to those who order any kind of special treatment and suggest such leniency, so no one feels the slightest displeasure, either from those on top or those at the bottom, not caring whether this is for their salvation or destruction, whether it is pleasing to God, or repulsive. Woe to them, because *thus says the Lord God... your pillows and veils, namely your candied and comforting teaching, upon which there you are perverting souls, I will tear from your arms and I will let their souls that you are perverting, go away...* (Ezek 13:20-21) from this teaching of yours and I will destroy you corrupters.



This is the benefit of this special treatment and leniency, such as you want to hear from preachers! When you put all this deep in your heart, it is not right for you to want us to make any concessions in Christian doctrine, having the wrong desire to be pleased by us. On the contrary, you are obliged to persistently demand from us to remain true to doctrine, as strictly and firmly as possible.

Have you ever heard of the indulgences of the Pope of Rome? Here is what they are: special treatment and leniency, which he gives defying the law of Christ. And what is the result? From all of this, the West is corrupt in faith and in their way of life, and is

now getting lost in its disbelief and in the unrestrained life with its indulgences.

The Pope changed many doctrines, spoiled all the sacraments, nullified the canons concerning the regulation of the Church and the correction of morals. Everything has begun going contrary to the will of the Lord, and has become worse and worse.

Then came along Luther, a smart man, but stubborn. He said, "The Pope changed everything as he wanted, why shouldn't I do the same?" He started to modify and re-modify everything in his own way, and in this way established the new Lutheran faith, which only slightly resembles what the Lord had commanded and the Holy Apostles delivered to us.

After Luther came the philosophers. And they in turn said, "Luther has established himself a new faith, supposedly based on the Gospel, though in reality based on his own way of thinking. Why, then, don't we also compose doctrines based on our own way of thinking, completely ignoring the Gos-

pel?” They then started rationalizing, and speculating about God, the world, and man, each in his own way. And they mixed up so many doctrines, that one gets dizzy just counting them.

Now the Westerners have the following views: Believe what you think best, live as you like, satisfy whatever captivates your soul. This is why they do not recognize any law or restriction and they do not abide by God’s word. Their road is wide, all obstacles displaced. Their way is broad, all the obstacles taken out. But the broad road leads to perdition, according to what the Lord says. This is where leniency in teaching has led!

Lord, save us from this broad way! But it is better to love each difficulty that the Lord has appointed for our salvation. Let us love Christian doctrines and let us compel our mind with them, pushing it not to think otherwise. Let us love Christian morals and let us compel our will in them, forcing it to lift the light yoke of the Lord humbly and patiently. Let us love all Christian rituals and services which guide us, correct us, and sanctify us. Let us compel our heart with them, encouraging it to convey its desires from the earthly and perishable, to the heavenly and imperishable.

Let us confine ourselves as though in a cage. Or better, let us drag ourselves, as if we were passing through a narrow passage. Let it be narrow, so no one can deviate neither to the right left, nor the left. Yet undoubtedly, through this narrow way we will obtain the kingdom of the heavens in return. For as you know, this kingdom is the kingdom of the Lord. The Lord laid this narrow way and said, *Follow exactly this route and you will obtain the kingdom of heaven.*

Could anyone then doubt whether the traveler will get to his destination? And what mind would one have who starts wanting all kinds of annulment of the commandments, when by doing this he would immediately lose his way and be lost?

Once you have fully understood this assertion, do not worry if something in our teaching seems to be strict. The only thing you should strive for is to carefully make sure if it is from the Lord. And after you have made sure it is from the Lord, accept it with all your heart, no matter how strict or obliging it may be. And not only avoid wanting special treatment and leniency with doctrine and the ethics, but even flee from all these, as though fleeing from the fire of Gehenna. Those who cannot escape from this are those who think up such things and with them lure those who are spiritually weak to follow them. Amen.



Shaking a stick at dogs provokes their fury; forcing oneself to pray in purity provokes the fury of the demons.

Ilias the Presbyter

ON MASONIC ECUMENISM

By his Eminence Russian Bishop Pitirim Volochkov of Syktyvkar and Vorkuta.

“**M**asonic ecumenism promotes a ‘religion’ of ‘ecumenical meetings’, a ‘mere Christianity’, as it were. It’s a new ecumenical Baha’ism, seemingly quite innocuous, yet each of these religious practices has a goal and purpose. They are to pave the way for a federal world government or world superstate, a Supreme Tribunal and an international executive body, with a future ‘deified’ leader, to suppress any country, community, or individual who dares to resist it,” according to a post of Vladyki Pitirim entitled МАСОНСКИЙ ЭКУМЕНИЗМ (Masonic ecumenism) on the official diocesan website.

“Misguided Christian ecumenists embrace outright enemies of the Church such as the Freemasons; they say ‘nice’ things rather than accuse their interlocutors of paganism and ignorant heresy. All of them parrot groundless expressions not found in Holy Scripture or the Fathers, such as, ‘As they are imprisoned in a ghetto, (Orthodox) society suffers from a lack of tolerance (relativism, etc)’... ‘Ecumenism is the spiritual foundation of tolerance’... ‘We suffer from spiritual illiteracy’. For example, the ecumenist KK Ivanov (a PhD who has wormed his way into the Church) said, ‘Get out of here with that point of view’... ‘Diversity in confession is our treasure’... ‘The most poisonous sorts (those who call themselves Orthodox) say there is only one truth’... ‘Their faith is a dangerous addiction’... ‘Everything that they talk about is a catastrophe’... ‘Catholics and Protestants have achieved such success that we have even not dreamed of’... ‘What unites us is greater than what divides us’... ‘I did not use reason when I came to Orthodoxy’... ‘The church is just a different kind of family’... ‘When we speak of our faith, we mustn’t put Christ at the centre of it all’”.

As another example of ecumenism, Vladyki Pitirim cited a statement of Archpriest Georgi Mitrofanov. Fr Georgi said, “This is Christianity at its core... it’s a choice between godlessness and religiosity. When an Orthodox priest attacks sectarianism from the pulpit, he betrays the memory of the recent persecution of all Christians in our country. I do not understand the inferiority complex of the Orthodox who think that they are succeeding when they denounce non-believers”.

In response to all of these remarks, Vladyki Pitirim said, “Are they saying the Holy Great Martyr George the all-Victorious had an inferiority complex? Up to his death, he never ceased to denounce the pagans. Thus, ecumenists preach in all human sincerity, but not the truth. **The only ecumenism that we can practice is one that stresses the oneness of Orthodoxy, for good reason, without any sort of common prayer. Heathens and heretics must repent of their separateness (this includes all the denominations), as the Holy Fathers of the Church taught us**”.

LOVE OF GOD

By Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov (+1867).



Saint Ignatius was a prominent Orthodox spiritual writer of nineteenth century Russia. Born of a noble family, he completed an education in engineering in St. Petersburg under the patronage of Emperor Nicholas I and was destined for a brilliant worldly career. Later, as an officer, he chose instead to follow the spiritual yearning of his soul and receive the monastic tonsure, as a disciple of the

famous Elder Lev of Optina Hermitage.

*Well grounded in the ascetic writings of the Holy Fathers, Bishop Ignatius captured the spirit of the ancient patristic and monastic traditions of the Orthodox Church in his own works, written in the most eloquent language of the time. His best known work, *The Arena (An Offering to Contemporary Monasticism)*, which comprises the fifth volume of his *Ascetical Works*, is an indispensable treasure for seekers of spiritual life today.*

† † †

Love God as he commanded you to love Him, and not as self-deluded daydreamers think they love Him.

Do not fabricate raptures for yourself, do not excite your nerves, do not inflame yourself with a material fire, with the fire of your blood. The sacrifice pleasing to God is humility of heart, contrition of spirit. With wrath does God turn away from sacrifices offered with self-confident presumption, with a proud opinion of oneself, though the sacrifice be a whole burnt offering.

Pride excites the nerves, heats the blood, arouses daydreaming, enlivens the life of the fall; humility calms the nerves, subdues the motion of the blood, eliminates daydreaming, mortifies falls, enlivens the life in Jesus Christ.

Obedience before the Lord is greater than good sacrifice, and submission than the fat of rams, said the Prophet to the Israelite king who had dared to offer to God a wrong sacrifice (1 Sam 15:22). When you wish to offer to God the sacrifice of love, do not offer it self-willfully, from a thoughtless impulse; offer it with humility, in that time and that place which the Lord commanded

The spiritual place on which alone spiritual sacrifices are commanded to be offered is humility. (Saying by St. Poimen the Great, from the "Alphabetical Patericon").

The Lord marked the one who loves and the one who does not love by true and exact signs: *If a man love Me, he will keep My word. He that loveth Me not keepeth not My sayings.* (Jn 14:23-24).

Do you wish to learn the love of God? Shun every deed, word, thought, and feeling forbidden by the Gospel. By your

enmity towards sin which is so hated by All-holy God, you will show and prove your love for God. When due to weakness it happens that you fall into transgressions, heal them at once by repentance. But it is better to strive not to allow yourself even these transgressions, by strict watchfulness over yourself.

Do you wish to learn the love of God? Assiduously learn the commandments of the Lord in the Gospel, and strive to fulfill them in very deed. Strive to turn the Gospel virtues into habits, into your qualities. For a person who loves, it is natural to fulfill the will of the beloved with exactness.

I have loved Thy commandments more than gold and topaz: therefore, I directed myself toward all Thy commandments; every path of unrighteousness have I hated, says the Prophet (Pss 118:127, 128). Such conduct is indispensable for maintaining fidelity to God. Fidelity is the unalterable condition of love. Without this condition, love is dissolved.

By the constant shunning of evil and fulfilling of the Gospel virtues—which comprises the whole Gospel moral teaching—we attain the love of God. And by this same means do we abide in the love of God: *If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love,* said the Savior (Jn 15:10).

The perfection of love consists in union with God; advancing in love is joined with inexpressible spiritual consolation, delight, and enlightenment. But in the beginning of the struggle, the disciple of love must undergo a violent warfare with himself, with his own deeply damaged nature: evil, which through the fall became innate to our nature, has become for it a law, warring and revolting against the Law of God, against the law of holy love.

Love of God is founded on love of one's neighbor. When the remembrance of wrongs is obliterated in you: then you are close to love. When your heart is overshadowed by holy, grace-given peace towards all humanity: then you are at the very doors of love. But these doors are opened by the Holy Spirit alone. Love of God is a gift from God in a person who has prepared himself to receive this gift by purity of heart, mind, and body. The degree of the gift is according to the degree of preparation: because God, even in His mercy, is just.

Love of God is entirely spiritual: *that which is born of the Spirit is spirit; that which is born of the flesh is flesh.* (Jn 3:6). Carnal love, as something born of flesh and blood, has material, corrupt properties. It is inconstant, changeable; its fire is completely dependent on matter.

Hearing from Scripture that our *God is a fire* (Heb 12:29), that love is a fire, and feeling in yourself a fire of natural love, do not think that this is one and the same fire. No! These fires are at enmity with one another and are swallowed up by one another (Ladder, steps 3 and 15). *Let us serve in a manner well-pleasing to God, with reverence and fear; for our God is a consuming fire.* (Heb 12:28-29).

Natural love, i.e. fallen love, heats a person's blood, excites his nerves, and arouses daydreaming; holy love cools the blood, calms both soul and body, draws the inner man towards prayerful silence, and immerses him in rapture through humility and spiritual delight. Many ascetics, having taken natural love for Divine love, excited their blood, and excited their daydreams also. The condition of excitement passed very easily into a condition of frenzy. Many took those who were in a state of excitement and frenzy for persons filled with grace and holiness, while they were actually unfortunate victims of self-delusion.

There were many such ascetics in the Western Church from the time it fell into heresy, in which Divine properties are blasphemously ascribed to a man, and veneration which is due and fitting to God alone is given to a man; many of these ascetics wrote books from their excited condition in which frenzied self-delusion seemed to them to be divine love, in which their disordered imagination painted for them a multitude of visions which flattered their self-love and pride.

Son of the Eastern Church! Shun the reading of such books, avoid following the precepts of those who are self-deluded. Guided by the Gospel and the holy Fathers of the true Church, ascend with humility to the spiritual height of Divine love by the means of fulfilling Christ's commandments in deed.

Know firmly that love for God is the highest gift of the Holy Spirit, and a person can only prepare himself, through purity and humility, for the receiving of this great gift, through which mind and heart and body are changed.

In vain is the labor, fruitless is it and harmful, when we seek to discover in ourselves high spiritual gifts prematurely: merciful God gives them in His own time, to the constant, patient, humble fulfillers of the Gospel commandments. Amen.



Let us love the humble disposition, my child, and if the Lord pities our nakedness and sends us some ability to pray and clothes our soul with some divine garment, we must be cautious lest we soil it out of carelessness: that is, through pride, criticism, negligence, disobedience, etc. But let us make a greater effort to whiten it through good works, especially through humble-mindedness and self-reproach. God is pleased more with these than with great works done with vainglory.

Always have perfect obedience. Obedience is the offspring of humility. Whereas back talk, quarrels, and disobedience are the offspring of pride, which a monk must hate as the cause of his soul's defilement.

Elder Ephraim
"Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

SALVATION OF THE SOUL

By John Moschos, from his "Leimonarion" (The Spiritual Meadow).



One of the fathers who had gone to Constantinople to attend to some necessary business said to me: While I was sitting in the church, a man who was illustrious in the worldly sense but also a great lover of Christ came in; and when he saw me, he sat down. He then began asking about the salvation of the soul. I told him that the heavenly life is given to

those who live life the earthly life in a seemingly way.

"You have spoken well, father," he said. "Blessed is the man whose hope is in God and who presents himself as an offering to God. I am the son of a man who is very distinguished by the standards of the world. My father was very compassionate and distributed huge sums among the poor. One day he called me; showing me all his money, he said to me: 'Son, which do you prefer; that I leave you my money, or that I give you Christ as your guardian?' Grasping the point he was making, I said I would rather have Christ; for everything that is here today shall be gone tomorrow. Christ remains forever. So from the moment he heard me say that, he gave without sparing, leaving very little for me when he died. So I was left a poor man and I lived simply, putting my hope in the God whom he bequeathed to me."

"There was another rich man, one of the leading citizens, who had a wife who loved Christ and feared God; and he had one daughter, his only child. The wife said to the husband: 'We have only this one daughter, yet the Lord has endowed us with so many goods. What does she lack? If we seek to give her in marriage to somebody of our own rank whose way of life is not praiseworthy, it shall be a continual source of affliction to her. Let us rather look for a lowly man who fears God; one who will love her and cherish her according to God's holy law.' He said to her, 'This is good advice. Go to church and pray fervently. Sit there, and whoever comes in first, he it is whom the Lord has sent.'"

"This she did. When she had prayed, she sat down and it was I who came in at that moment. She sent a servant to call me straightaway and she began asking me where I was from. I told her that I was from this city, the son of such-and-such a man. She said, 'He who was so generous to the poor? And have you a wife?' I said I had not. I told her what my father had said to me and what I had said to him. She glorified the Lord and said, 'Behold, the Good Guardian whom you chose has sent you a bride—and riches, so that you may enjoy both in the fear of God.' I thus pray that I might follow in my father's footsteps to the end of my days."

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία καὶ ἡ Πνευματικὴ Ἀντίσταση ἐπὶ Τουρκοκρατίας

Τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Χολέβα, πολιτικοῦ ἐπιστήμονος.

Κατὰ τὴν διάρκεια τῆς Τουρκοκρατίας, ὁ ὑπόδουλος Ἑλληνισμός, ἡ πονεμένη Ρωμηοσύνη, ὅπως τὴν χαρακτηρίζει ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου, ἀντιστάθηκε καὶ μὲ τὸ ντουφέκι καὶ μὲ τὸ φιλότιμο. Στὴν πρώτη μορφή ἀντιστάσεως, τὶς ἔνοπλες ἐξεγέρσεις, πρωτοστατοῦσαν οἱ κλεφταρματολοί, ἀλλὰ σημαντικὸς ἦταν καὶ ὁ ρόλος τῶν Ἐπισκόπων καὶ τῶν ἀπλῶν ἱερέων. Στὴν δευτέρη μορφή ἀντιστάσεως, τὴν πνευματικὴ καὶ ἠθικὴ, ἡ Ἐκκλησία ὑπῆρξε ὁ ἀδιαμφισβήτητος ἡγέτης καὶ καθοδηγητής. Τοῦτο ὁμολογοῦν καὶ οἱ ἀγωνιστὲς τοῦ 1821 ποὺ ἐξῆσαν τὰ γεγονότα ἀπὸ κοντά.

Χαρακτηριστικὰ ὁ Δυτικομακεδῶν ὀπλαρχηγὸς Νικόλαος Κασομούλης γράφει στὰ «Ἐνθυμήματα Στρατιωτικά» καὶ τὰ ἐξῆς ἐνδιαφέροντα: «Ἀπὸ τὰ διάφορα ἱστορικὰ καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικὰ συγγράμματα καὶ ἀπὸ αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα γνωρίζοντες ὅτι ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα, ὁ χαρακτήρ καὶ τὰ ἔθιμα τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ λαοῦ, μετὰ τὴν πτώσιν τοῦ Βασιλείου μας, ἐδιατηρήθησαν ὑπὸ τὴν ἐπαγρύπνησιν τοῦ Κλήρου μας καὶ τῶν διαφόρων πεπαιδευμένων τοῦ ἔθνους μας, καὶ διὰ τῆς κοινῆς εὐλαβείας πρὸς τὴν ἁγίαν ἡμῶν Θρησκείαν...».

Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ ἔντιμος Βρεταννὸς Βυζαντινολόγος, ὁ προσφάτως ἀποθανὼν Στῆβεν Ράνσιμαν, στὸν Ἐπίλογο τοῦ βιβλίου του «Ἡ Μεγάλῃ Ἐκκλησία ἐν Αἰχμαλωσίᾳ» ἐπισημαίνει: «Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία ἦταν ἡ δύναμις ποὺ διετήρησε τὸν Ἑλληνισμὸ κατὰ τὴν διάρκεια τῶν σκοτεινῶν αἰώνων...».

Ἡ πνευματικὴ αὐτὴ ἀντίσταση τοῦ Γένους καὶ ὁ ἔθναρχικὸς ρόλος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας κατὰ τὴν περίοδο ἐκείνη ἀναδεικνύονται κυρίως στοὺς ἐξῆς τομεῖς:

Ἡ Διαφύλαξη τῆς Πίστεως καὶ τῆς Ἐθνικῆς Συνειδήσεως

Κατὰ τὴν διάρκεια τῆς δουλείας οἱ ἔννοιες Ὁρθόδοξος καὶ Ρωμηὸς ἦσαν σχεδόν ταυτόσημες.

Ἐθναρχῆς (Μιλλέτ-Μπασι) ὄλων τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων τῆς Ὁθωμανικῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας ἦταν ὁ Πατριάρχης, ἡ δὲ ἀπώλεια τῆς θρησκευτικῆς ταυτότητος σήμαινε αὐτομάτως καὶ τὴν ἀπώλεια τῆς ἐθνικῆς ταυτότητος. Ὅποιος ἄλλαξε τὴν Πίστην του, εἴτε ἀκουσίως εἴτε ἐκούσιως, τούρκευε ἢ φράγκευε, χανόταν γιὰ τὸν Ἑλληνισμό.

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἀγωνίσθηκε γιὰ νὰ σταματήσουν οἱ προσχωρήσεις Ὁρθοδόξων στὸ Ἰσλάμ. Ὁ Νεκτάριος Τέρπος καὶ ὁ Ἅγιος Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλὸς εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὰ παραδείγματα μοναχῶν ποὺ ἔδωσαν τὴν πνευματικὴ μάχη γιὰ νὰ ἀποτρέψουν

τὸν ἐξισλαμισμὸ τῶν ταλαιπώρων Ρωμηῶν καὶ γιὰ νὰ διατηρήσουν τὴν Ἑλληνικότητα τῆς γλώσσας καὶ τῆς ἐθνικῆς συνειδήσεως.

Πρέπει νὰ τονισθῇ ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησία διεφύλαξε τὴν ἐθνικὴ συνείδηση ἀκόμη καὶ σὲ ἐκείνους τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς ποὺ ἔχαναν τὴν γλῶσσα. Οἱ τουρκόφωνοι Καππαδόκες στὴν Μικρὰ Ἀσία κράτησαν τὴν ἐθνικὴ τους ταυτότητα, διότι παρέμειναν πιστὰ μέλη τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας. Ἀντιθέτως, οἱ Βαλαάδες τῆς Δυτικῆς Μακεδονίας, κράτησαν τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα, ἀλλὰ προσεχώρησαν στὸ Ἰσλάμ γιὰ νὰ ἀποκτήσουν προνόμια. Γρήγορα τούρκευε ἡ συνειδήσή τους καὶ χάθηκαν γιὰ τὸν Ἑλληνισμό.

Μιὰ ἄλλη ὁμάδα Χριστιανῶν ποὺ ἐξισλαμίσθηκε βιαίως τὸν 17^ο αἰῶνα εἶναι οἱ Τσαμηδες στὴν Θεσπρωτία. Ἡ ἀλλαγὴ τῆς Πίστεως ὀδήγησε σὲ ἀπότομη ἀλλαγὴ τῆς ἐθνικῆς συνειδήσεώς τους. Ἔγιναν φανατικοὶ τουρκαλβανοὶ καὶ διώκτες τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ μέχρι καὶ τὴν περίοδο τοῦ Β' Παγκοσμίου Πολέμου!

Οἱ μεγαλύτεροι ἀντιστασιακοὶ κατὰ τοῦ κατακτητῆ εἶναι οἱ Ἑλληνες Νεομαρτύρες. Τὸ παράδειγμα τῆς αὐτοθυσίας τους στερέωνε τὴν Πίστη τῶν ὑποδούλων καὶ περιορίζε τὸς ἐξισλαμισμοὺς.

Ὁ π. Γεώργιος Μεταλληνὸς στὸ βιβλίο του «Τουρκοκρατία» (ἐκδ. Ἀκρίτας, Ἀθήνα 1998) γράφει χαρακτηριστικὰ: «Τὸ μαρτύριο τῶν Νεομαρτύρων δείχνει καὶ τὴν συμμετοχὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας στὴν ἀντίσταση καὶ τὴν ἐνότητα τοῦ Γένους ἐναντι τοῦ τυράννου. Στὴν ἐπιστροφὴ καὶ ὁμολογία τῶν Νεομαρτύρων συνέβαλλαν ἀποφασιστικὰ οἱ Γέροντες-Πνευματικοὶ τους. Σ' αὐτοὺς κατέφευγαν, κυρίως στὰ ἁγιορεϊτικὰ μοναστήρια, γιὰ νὰ μετανοήσουν καὶ νὰ εἰσαχθοῦν στὴν πνευματικὴ ζωὴ. Τὰ ἀσκητήρια ἔγιναν ἔτσι προμαχῶνες μπροστὰ στὰ κύματα τοῦ μουσουλμανισμοῦ...».

Ἡ Παιδεία, Κρυφὴ καὶ Φανερὴ

Πολλοὶ διερωτῶνται σήμερα: Ἦσαν οἱ Ὁθωμανοὶ ἀνεκτικοὶ ἢ καταπιεστικοὶ στὸ ζήτημα τῆς παιδείας τῶν ὑποδούλων; Τὴν ἀπάντησιν μᾶς δίδει χωρὶς προκαταλήψεις ὁ προαναφερθεὶς Στῆβεν Ράνσιμαν στὸ περισπούδαστο ἔργο του «Ἡ Μεγάλῃ Ἐκκλησία ἐν Αἰχμαλωσίᾳ». Ἐκεῖ ἐξηγεῖ ὅτι ὁ Σουλτάνος στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη δὲν εἶχε ἐκδώσει ποτὲ φιρμάνι ποὺ νὰ ἀπαγορεύῃ τὴν ἐκπαίδευση τῶν Ρωμηῶν, ἀλλὰ οἱ τοπικοὶ Ὁθωμανοὶ ἡγεμόνες ἦσαν ἀνεξέλεγκτοι στὸ θέμα αὐτὸ καὶ πολλάκις αὐθαιρετοῦσαν κατὰ τῶν ὑποδούλων.

Ὅταν οἱ Ρωμηοὶ κατόρθωναν νὰ φιλοδωρήσουν τὸν τοπικὸ μπέη, τότε λειτουργοῦσε σχολεῖο ἐλεύθερο, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸ γιὰ λίγα χρόνια. Στὴν συνέχεια ἐδημεύετο τὸ κτίριο καὶ τὰ παιδιὰ ἐστέλλοντο στὸ σπῆτι τους. Καὶ καταλήγει ὁ Ράνσιμαν: «Γιὰ τοὺς πῶ πολλοὺς Τούρκους ἡ παιδεία τῶν ὑποδούλων φυλῶν

ήταν κάτι τελείως ανεπιθύμητο». Γι' αυτές, λοιπόν, τις δύσκολες περιπτώσεις, και ιδίως για τους δύο πρώτους και υπέρ-σκοτεινούς αιώνες της Τουρκοκρατίας χρειάστηκε να λειτουργήσουν και τα Κρυφά Σχολεία. Ο παπᾶς ἢ ὁ καλόγερος, λαμβάνοντας τις κατάλληλες προφυλάξεις, δίδασκαν στὰ παιδιά τοῦ χωριοῦ τὰ «κολληβογράμματα» μὲ διδακτικὰ ἐγχειρίδια τὸ Ψαλτήρι καὶ τὴν Ὀκτώηχο.

Στὴν ἐποχὴ μας ἐμφανίσθηκαν ὀρισμένοι ἐρευνητές, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἀμφισβήτησαν τὴν ὑπαρξὴ Κρυφοῦ Σχολειοῦ. Ἀφοῦ λειτούργησαν ὀνομαστὰ Ἑλληνικὰ Σχολεία ἐπὶ Τουρκοκρατίας, λένε, τὶ ἀνάγκη ὑπῆρχε γιὰ κρυφὴ ἐκπαίδευση;

Προφανῶς λησμονοῦν τὴν παρατήρηση τοῦ Ράνσιμαν, ὅπως ἐπίσης θέλουν νὰ ἀγνοοῦν τὸ γεγονός ὅτι τὰ γνωστὰ σχολεία τοῦ Γένους λειτούργησαν κυρίως μετὰ τὸ 1650. Στους δύο πρώτους αἰώνες τί γινόταν; Τους διαφεύδουν ἐπίσης τὰ πάμπολλα τοπωνύμια σὲ διάφορα μέρη τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ ποὺ ἀναφέρονται στὸ Κρυφὸ Σχολειό. Στὰ Γιάννενα, στὴν Ἀρκαδία, στὴ Μάνη, στὴν Ἰο, στὴν Κρήτη, στὴν Βοιωτία καὶ ἄλλοι, ἀκόμη καὶ σήμερα δείχνουν οἱ ντόπιοι μοναστήρια ἢ σπηλιές μὲ τὸ ὄνομα Κρυφὸ Σχολειό.

Τι συνέβη ἄραγε; Ἔπαθαν ὀμαδικὴ παράκρουση οἱ κάτοικοι ὅλων αὐτῶν τῶν τόπων καὶ προσεχώρησαν σὲ ἓνα «μῦθο» ποὺ καλλιεργεῖ ἡ Ἐκκλησία; Ἀλλὰ τὴν πιδ ἀποστομωτικὴ ἀπάντηση στοὺς ἀρνητὲς τοῦ Κρυφοῦ Σχολειοῦ δίδει ὁ Γάλλος δημοσιογράφος Ρενὲ Πυὼ στὸ βιβλίο του «Δυστυχημένη Βόρειος Ἡπειρος» (Ἑλληνικὴ μετάφραση Ἀγόρως Λαζάρου, ἐκδ. Τροχαλία).

Ὁ Πυὼ ἐπεσκέφθη τὸ Ἀργυρόκαστρο τὸ 1913, μόλις εἶχε ἐλευθερωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἑλληνικὸ Στρατό. Ἐκεῖ λοιπὸν γνώρισε δεκάδες Ἑλληνόπουλα, τὰ ὁποῖα τοῦ ὁμολόγησαν ὅτι ἔκαναν κρυφὰ μαθήματα ἐπειδὴ οἱ Τοῦρκοι ἀπηγόρευαν τὴν διδασκαλία τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Ἱστορίας! Τοῦτο γινόταν στὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ 20^{οῦ} αἰῶνος. Σκεφθῆτε τί γινόταν σὲ πολὺ πιδ δύσκολα χρόνια.

Ἄλλωστε ἡ Ἐκκλησία δὲν ἔχει ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ «κατασκευασμένους μῦθους» γιὰ νὰ τονίσῃ τὴν προσφορὰ τῆς στὴν παιδεία τοῦ ὑποδούλου Γένους, διότι καὶ σὲ ὅσα φανερὰ καὶ δημόσια σχολεῖα λειτουργοῦσαν, ἡ παρουσία τῆς ἦταν ἐμφανὴς καὶ καθοδηγητικὴ.

Ὁ Ἀπόστολος Βακαλόπουλος στὸ βιβλίο του «Νέα Ἑλληνικὴ Ἱστορία 1204-1985» (ἐκδ. Βάνιας, 16^η

ἔκδοση, Θεσσαλονίκη 1999) παρατηρεῖ: «Ἐνα ὀρόσημο στὴν ἱστορία τῆς παιδείας ἐπὶ τουρκοκρατίας ἀποτελεῖ ἡ ἴδρυση τῆς Πατριαρχικῆς Σχολῆς, τῆς γνωστῆς ἀργότερα Πατριαρχικῆς Ἀκαδημίας ἢ Μεγάλῆς τοῦ Γένους Σχολῆς, ἀπὸ τὸν πρῶτο Πατριάρχη μετὰ τὴν Ἄλωση, τὸν Γεννάδιο, στὰ 1454».

Πρέπει νὰ θυμίσουμε ἐπίσης τὴν δράση τοῦ Ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ ὑπὲρ τῆς ἰδρύσεως Ἑλληνικῶν σχολειῶν καθὼς καὶ τὴν ἴδρυση τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Σχολῆς στὴν Κύπρο, στὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ 19^{οῦ} αἰῶνος ἀπὸ τὸν Ἀρχιεπίσκοπο καὶ μετέπειτα Ἐθνομάρτυρα Κυπριανό. Πρόκειται γιὰ τὸ σημερινὸ Παγκύπριο Γυμνάσιο.

Ἀλλὰ καὶ μόνο ἡ παρακολούθηση τῆς Θείας Λειτουργίας ἀπὸ τοὺς πιστοὺς ἦταν ἓνα συνεχὲς μάθημα Ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσας, ἐνῶ τὰ κηρύγματα τῶν κληρικῶν μετέδιδαν μήνυμα ἐλπίδας καὶ Ἀναστάσεως. Ἡ ρίζα τῆς Μεγάλῆς Ἰδέας δὲν βρίσκεται μόνον στὰ δημοτικὰ ἄσματα, στοὺς θρούλους καὶ στὶς παραδόσεις. Βρίσκεται καὶ στὴν εὐχὴ «Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη, ἡ Ἑλλὰς Ἀνέστη» ποὺ ἀκουγόταν ὅταν γιόρταζαν τὸ Πάσχα οἱ ὑπόδουλοι Ἑλληνες.

Τὸ Κοινοτικὸ Σύστημα

Στὴν διάρκεια τῆς τουρκοκρατίας οἱ αὐτοδιοικούμενες κοινότητες τῶν Ρωμηῶν ἀπετέλεσαν τὸν αὐτοφυῆ πολιτικὸ θεσμὸ τοῦ Γένους, καλλιέργησαν τὸ δημοκρατικὸ φρόνημα, καὶ βοήθησαν τοὺς ὑποδούλους νὰ ἀποφύγουν τὴν μεγάλη ἀνάμιξη τῶν Ὀθωμανῶν στὰ ἐσωτερικά τους. Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία ἔβαλε ἔντονη τὴν σφραγίδα τῆς στὸν θεσμὸ.

Στὴν πράξη ἡ κοινότητα ἀποτελεῖ συνέχεια καὶ προέκταση τῆς Ἐνορίας. Μετὰ τὴν Θεία Λειτουργία τῆς Κυριακῆς, οἱ Χριστιανοί, ἔχοντας ἐπικεφαλῆς τὸν Ἐπίσκοπο ἢ τὸν ἱερέα, συγκεντρώνονται στὸν αὐλόγυρο τοῦ Ναοῦ καὶ συζητοῦν, ἀποφασίζουν, ψηφίζουν. Οἱ κοινότητες ἐκφράζουν τὴν δημοκρατικὴ παράδοση τῆς ἀρχαίας Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Δήμου, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῦ Συνοδικοῦ συστήματος, τὸ ὁποῖο τηρεῖ ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία.

Ἦδη, ὑπὸ τὴν ἐπίδραση τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας ἀρχίζει ἡ ἀποκέντρωση μὲ θεσμοὺς τοπικῆς αὐτοδιοικήσεως (μητροκομῖα) στὰ χρόνια τῆς Ρωμανίας/Βυζαντίου, ὅπως φαίνεται καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν νομοθεσία τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Πορφυρογεννήτου. Τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτὸ βρῖσκει ἐφαρμογὴ στὶς κοινότητες τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐπὶ Τουρκοκρατίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὶς συντεχνίες ποὺ ἄνθησαν κατὰ τὴν περίοδο



ἐκείνη. Είναι χαρακτηριστικό ότι στο καταστατικό της συντεχνίας των Ἀμπελακίων Θεσσαλίας ὑπάρχουν συνεχεῖς ἀναφορὲς στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, ἐνῶ ὡς συντάκτης ὑπογράφει ὁ Ἐπίσκοπος Πλαταμῶνος καὶ Λυκοστομίου Διονύσιος.

Καὶ σὲ αὐτὸ τὸ θέμα κάποιοι ἀμφισβητίες προσπάθησαν νὰ μειώσουν τὸν ρόλο τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας καὶ παραδόσεως. Ἰσχυρίζονται ὅτι ὁ κοινοτικὸς θεσμὸς εἶναι ἔμπνευση τῶν Ὁθωμανῶν Τούρκων γιὰ νὰ συλλέγουν εὐκολώτερα τοὺς φόρους. Τότε, ὅμως, πῶς ἐξηγεῖται ἡ ἐπιτυχὴς λειτουργία τοῦ θεσμοῦ στοὺς Ἀποδήμιους Ἑλληνας τῆς Δυτικῆς καὶ Ἀνατολικῆς Εὐρώπης; Ἐκεῖ δὲν ὑπῆρχαν Τούρκοι γιὰ νὰ ζητοῦν φόρους.

Κι ὅμως, οἱ κοινότητες τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀνθήσαν μὲ ἐπίκεντρο πάντα τὸν Ὁρθόδοξο Ναὸ καὶ τὸν ἱερέα. Στὴν Βιέννη, στὴν Βενετία, στὴν Τεργέστη, στὸ Λιβόρνο, στὴν Ὀδησσό, στὴν Νίτζνα Οὐκρανίας, στὸ τότε αὐστριακὸ Σεμλίνο-Ζέμουν (σήμερα προάστιο τοῦ Βελιγραδίου) καὶ σὲ πολλὰ ἄλλα μέρη τῆς ξηνητιάς οἱ Ἑλληνας λόγιοι καὶ πρραματευτάδες συγκεντρώνονται γύρω ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία τους, ἰδρύουν κοινοτικὸς θεσμοὺς ὅπως καὶ οἱ ὑπόδουλοι ἀδελφοὶ τους, διαβάζουν πατριωτικὰ κείμενα καὶ προετοιμάζουν μὲ τὸν τρόπο τους τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Γένους.

Καθ' ὅλην τὴν διάρκεια τῆς δουλείας ὑπὸ τοὺς Ὁθωμανοὺς Τούρκους ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία ὑπῆρξε ἕνα μεγάλο καὶ διαρκὲς σχολεῖο ἐλπίδας, ὑπομονῆς, πνευματικῆς ἀντιστάσεως, ἠθικῆς ἐλευθερίας καὶ ἐθνικῆς ἀφυπνίσεως. Μόνον ἔτσι μποροῦσε νὰ ἐπιτευχθῆ ἡ Παλιγγενεσία, καὶ μόνον ἔτσι ἐξηγεῖται ἡ βαθεῖα Πίστη τῶν πρωταγωνιστῶν τοῦ 1821.

«Μάχου ὑπὲρ Πίστεως καὶ Πατρίδος» ξεκινᾷ ἡ προκήρυξη τοῦ Ἀλ. Ὑψηλάντη τὸν Φεβρουάριο τοῦ 1821. «Ὅταν πήραμε τὰ ὄπλα εἶπαμε πρῶτα ὑπὲρ Πίστεως καὶ ὕστερα ὑπὲρ Πατρίδος» βροντοφώναξε ὁ Γέρος τοῦ Μωριά, ὁ Θεόδωρος Κολοκοτρώνης, στοὺς μαθητὲς τοῦ πρῶτου Γυμνασίου τῆς ἀπελευθερωμένης Ἀθήνας. Ἡ δὲ προκήρυξη τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου Σαλῶνων Ἡσαΐα καὶ τοῦ Ἀθανασίου Διάκου ἔγραφε ὅτι ἀγωνίζονται «γιὰ τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ γιὰ τὸν Λεωνίδα»!

Ἐπὶ τέσσερις ἢ καὶ πέντε αἰῶνες ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία ἦταν γιὰ τοὺς ὑποδούλους «τὸ πνευματικὸ πλαίσιο μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ ὁποῖο ἐκφραζόταν ἡ ἐθνικὴ τους συνείδηση, ὁλόκληρος ὁ κόσμος τους, πὸ ἐκλεινε μέσα του τὸ ἐνδοξο παρελθόν καὶ τὶς ἐλπίδες ἀπολυτρώσεως» γράφει ὁ Ἀπ. Βακαλόπουλος.

Γι' αὐτὰ βασανίσθηκαν καὶ γι' αὐτὰ ἀγωνίσθηκαν οἱ πρόγονοί μας. Ἐμεῖς οἱ νεώτεροι ὀφείλουμε νὰ μὴν τοὺς διαψεύσουμε.

Ὁ Ἀθῶος Κατηγορούμενος

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Ἡ Εὐχή Μέσα στὸν Κόσμο», Πρωτοπ. Στεφάνου Ἀναγνωστοπούλου.

Πρὶν πολλὰ χρόνια καὶ μετὰ τὴν λήξη τοῦ ἐμφυλίου ὁσπαραγμοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀδελφοκτόνου πολέμου, σὲ κάποιο χωριό, ἔγινε ἕνας φόνος, γιὰ πολιτικοὺς μᾶλλον λόγους καὶ ἐξαιτίας τοῦ μεγάλου φανατισμοῦ, πὸ ἐπικρατοῦσε ἐκείνη τὴν ἐποχὴ.

Κατηγορήθηκε, λοιπόν, κάποιος χωριανός, ὁ Πέτρος Γ., καὶ μὲ τὶς μαρτυρίες πέντε συγχωριανῶν τοῦ δικάστηκε καὶ καταδικάστηκε σὲ 30 χρόνια φυλάκιση. Ὁ κατηγορούμενος ὅμως ἰσχυρίζετο συνεχῶς ὅτι ἦτο ἀθῶος. Κλείστηκε σὲ ἀγροτικὲς φυλακὲς, ἀλλὰ μέρηνύχτα διαλαλοῦσε καὶ μονολογοῦσε ὅτι ἦτο ἀθῶος.

Σ' αὐτὲς τὶς φυλακὲς πῆγαινε μία φορὰ τὸν μήνα ἕνας εὐλαβέστατος ἱερεὺς καὶ λειτουργοῦσε στὸ ἐκκλησάκι πὸ ὑπῆρχε καὶ κατόπιν ἐδέχετο γιὰ ἐξομολόγηση ὄσους ἐκ τῶν φυλακισμένων τὸ ἐπιθυμοῦσαν. Ὑστερα ἀπὸ 5-6 μῆνες, πῆγε καὶ ὁ ἐν λόγῳ χωριανὸς στὸν εὐλαβὴ ἐκείνον ἱερέα καὶ ἐξομολόγο, καὶ ἐνώπιον τοῦ Ἁγίου Θεοῦ καὶ μπροστὰ στὸ πετραχίλι τοῦ Πνευματικοῦ, βεβαίωνε μὲ ὄρκους ὅτι ἦταν ἀθῶος.

Ἀπὸ τότε πὸ ἐξομολογήθηκε μέσα στὶς φυλακὲς ὁ Πέτρος Γ. ἄλλαξε τελείως διαγωγή καὶ ἔγινε ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς προσευχῆς καὶ τῆς μελέτης τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, πὸ τοῦ δώρησε ἐκεῖνος ὁ καλὸς ἱερεὺς. Μέσα σ' ἕναν χρόνο ἀλλοιώθηκε τόσο πολὺ, πὸ ὅλοι οἱ συγκρατούμενοί του καὶ βαρυνοῖντες ἄρχισαν νὰ τὸν σέβονται καὶ νὰ τοῦ φέρονται φιλικά. Καὶ μὲ τὴν Χάρι καὶ τὸν φωτισμὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ γρήγορα πείσθηκε ὁ εὐλαβὴς ἱερεὺς γιὰ τὴν ἀθώωσή του, ὥστε τοῦ ἐπέτρεπε νὰ κοινωνῆ κάθε φορὰ πὸν λειτουργοῦσε στὶς φυλακὲς.

Ὁ ἱερεὺς προσπάθησε κάτι νὰ κάμῃ μέσω κάποιων δικηγόρων, ἀλλὰ οἱ μάρτυρες ἦσαν ἀπολύτως κατηγορηματικοί, γιατί ἦσαν δῆθεν παρόντες στὸν φόνο. Παρὰ ταῦτα ὁ Ἐξομολόγος πίστευε ὅτι ὄντως ἦτο ἀθῶος καὶ θύμα σκευωρίας. Ὁ Πέτρος Γ. ὄχι μόνον προσήχετο μὲ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, πὸν τὸ ἔμαθε ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Οἱ περιπέτειες ἐνὸς προσκυνητοῦ», ἀλλὰ μελετοῦσε τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο καὶ κοινοῦσε τῶν ἀχράντων Μυστηρίων, σκορπώντας σὲ ὄλους τοὺς συγκρατούμενους του πολλὴ καλωσύνη. Συγχωροῦσε δὲ μὲ ὅλη του τὴν καρδιά καὶ τοὺς κατηγοροῦς του καὶ αὐτὸν ἀκόμα τὸν ἄγνωστο φονιά. Δὲν φταῖνε, οἱ καημένοι, ἔλεγε. Φταῖνε τὸ πολιτικὸ καὶ ἰδεολογικὸ πάθος, φταῖνε καὶ ὁ διάβολος πὸν τοὺς σκοτεῖνιασε τὸ μυαλὸ κι ἔτσι κρύψανε τὴν ἀλήθεια. Θεέ μου, συγχώρεσέ τους, καὶ ἀπὸ μένα νὰ 'ναὶ συγχωρεμένοι, καὶ χάρισέ τους πλοῦτη καὶ ἀγαθὰ πολλὰ, ἀλλὰ χάρισέ τους προπαντὸς καὶ ἰδιαίτερος φωτισμὸ καὶ ὑγεία.

Ἔτσι πέρασαν 19 χρόνια. Κατόπιν, λόγω τῆς καλῆς καὶ ἀρίστης διαγωγῆς καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἔκανε καὶ στίς τότε ἀγροτικὲς φυλακές, ὅπου ἐμειώοντο ἡ ποινή, ἀποφυλακίσθηκε. Ἦτο πλέον 50 ἐτῶν. Στὸ χωριὸ ὅμως δὲν ἔγινε δεκτός, ἐπειδὴ τὸν πίστευαν ὅλοι γιὰ φονιά καὶ κυρίως οἱ συγγενεῖς τοῦ φονευμένου. Ἔτσι, μετακόμισε σὲ μία γειτονικὴ πόλι καὶ ἔκαμε τὸν ἐργάτη, τὸν οἰκοδόμο καὶ κυρίως τὸν μαραγκό, δουλειὰ πού τὴν ἔμαθε στὴν φυλακὴ. Ἡ ζωὴ του ὅμως ἐξακολουθοῦσε νὰ εἶναι ζωὴ ἐνὸς ἀληθινοῦ χριστιανοῦ, μὲ τὴν ἀκριβῆ συμμετοχὴ στὰ Μυστήρια, μὲ τὴν σωστὴ τήρηση τῶν εὐαγγελικῶν ἐντολῶν καὶ ἰδιαίτερος μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ. Ἡ προσευχὴ ἦταν τὸ ὀξυγόνο τῆς ζωῆς του. Ἡ Εὐχὴ καὶ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο ἦσαν γι' αὐτὸν «ἄρτος ζωῆς» καὶ «ὔδωρ ζῶν».

Μία κοπέλα 42 ἐτῶν, θεολόγος σὲ κάποιον Γυμνάσιο τῆς περιοχῆς, πληροφορήθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν Πνευματικὸ τῶν φυλακῶν, πού ἦτο καὶ δικός της Πνευματικός, τὰ πάντα γιὰ τὸν Πέτρο Γ. καὶ ἰδιαίτερος γιὰ τὸ πόσο ἦτο ἀφοσιωμένος στὸν Χριστὸ καὶ στὴν Ἐκκλησία Του. Πῆγε, τὸν βρῆκε καὶ κατόπιν τὸν ζήτησε ἢ ἴδια σὲ γάμο! Ἀπὸ τὸν εὐλογημένο αὐτὸ γάμο προήλθαν δυὸ παιδιά, ὑγιέστατα.

Ἔστερα ἀπὸ μερικὰ χρόνια, στὸ χωριὸ πού ἔγινε ὁ φόνος, κάποιος ἀρρώστησε βαρεῖα μὲ ἀνεξήγητους φοβεροὺς πόνους σὲ ὅλο του τὸ σῶμα. Ἡ ἐπιστήμη μὲ τοὺς γιατροὺς καὶ τίς κλινικὲς ἐξετάσεις, πού ἦσαν προηγμένες, στάθηκαν ἀδύνατον νὰ τὸν βοηθήσουν!!! Οὔτε κὰν τὴν αἰτία δὲν μπόρεσαν νὰ ἐντοπίσουν!

Ἔτσι, μιὰ βραδυὰ στὸ σπίτι του, ἀφοῦ ἐπέστρεψε ἀπὸ τὸ νοσοκομεῖο, σ' αὐτὴν τὴν φοβερὴ κατάστασι, ἄρχισε νὰ κραυγάζει μέσα στοὺς φοβεροὺς του πόνους ὅτι αὐτὸς ἦτο ὁ φονιάς καὶ μὲ τοὺς 4 ψευδομάρτυρες, τοὺς ὁποίους ἐξηγόρασε μὲ μεγάλα χρηματικὰ ποσά, κατηγοροῦσαν τὸν Πέτρο Γ., πού συμπτωματικὰ περνοῦσε ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνο τὸ σταυροδρόμι, τὴν ὥρα πού ἔγινε ὁ φόνος.

Φώναξαν τὸν ἀστυνόμο τοῦ τμήματος τοῦ χωριοῦ, ὑπέγραψε τὴν ὁμολογία του κατονομάζοντας καὶ τοὺς 4 ψευδομάρτυρες καὶ συνεργοὺς του. Ποιὰ νομικὴ διαδικασία ἀκολουθήθηκε μετὰ, δὲν γνωρίζω. Ἡ ὁμολογία του ὅμως ἔκανε κρότο στὸ χωριό, προκαλώντας σύγχυσι, ταραχὲς καὶ πολλὲς κατάρες, οἱ ὁποῖες βάραιναν τὸν φονιά. Παρὰ ταῦτα, ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ φονιά δὲν ἔφυγε. Κι αὐτὸς ἐξακολουθοῦσε νὰ τσιρίζη καὶ νὰ κραυγάζη.

Ὁ Πέτρος Γ., ὅπως ἦτο ἐπόμενον, τὸ ἔμαθε. Δὲν κίνησε ὅμως καμιά διαδικασία γιὰ τὴν ἀποκατάστασι τῆς

τιμῆς του μὲ ἀναθεώρησι τῆς δίκης, μὲ μηνύσεις κατὰ τῶν ἐνόχων καὶ ἄλλων ἐνδίκων νομίμων μέσων. Ἀλλὰ τί ἔκανε; Πῆγε στὸ σπίτι τοῦ φονιά!

Οἱ πάντες πάγωσαν. Οἱ περισσότεροὶ χωρικοί, ὅταν τὸν εἶδαν νὰ περνᾷ μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ χωριό, ἀπὸ τὴν ντροπὴ τους κρύφθηκαν. Πάγωσε καὶ ὁ φονιάς ὅταν τὸν ἀντίκρυσε, καὶ μὲ γουρλωμένα τὰ μάτια ἀπὸ τὴν ἔκπληξι καὶ τὴν φρίκη, τὸν ἄκουσε νὰ τοῦ λέη: Γιῶργο, σὲ συγχωρῶ μὲ ὅλη μου τὴν καρδιά. Καὶ σ' εὐχαριστῶ, γιατί ἦσουν ἡ αἰτία νὰ γνωρίσω τὸν Χριστὸ μὲ τὴν Ἐκκλησία Του καὶ τὰ ἅγια Μυστήριά της. Εὐχόμαι νὰ Τὸν γνωρίσεις κι ἐσύ, μὲ μετάνοια καὶ προσευχὴ!

Τὸν ἀγκάλιασε, τὸν φίλησε καὶ ἔφυγε, ἐνῶ κάποια δάκρυα κρυφὰ ἔτρεχαν ἀπὸ τὰ μάτια του.

Ὁ θρίαμβος τῆς δικαιοσύνης τοῦ Θεοῦ ἦλθε, ὕστερα ἀπὸ 35 χρόνια! Ἀλλὰ ὑπῆρξε καὶ θρίαμβος τῆς ἐμπιστοσύνης, τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἀδιαλείπτου προσευχῆς τοῦ ἀδικημένου Πέτρο Γ. στὴν πρόνοια τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ ταυτόχρονα στέφανος δόξης στὴν ὑπομονὴ καὶ μακροθυμία, πού ἔδειξε τόσα χρόνια. Εὐλογήθηκε ἢ μετέπειτα ζωὴ του, ὅπως προείπαμε, μ' ἓναν χριστιανικὸ γάμο καὶ μὲ οἰκογένεια πού ἦτο «κατ' οἶκον ἐκκλησία» καὶ μὲ δυὸ τρισευλογημένα παιδιά. Καὶ μάλιστα, μετὰ τὴν ὀλοκάρδια συγχώρησι πού ἔδωσε καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη πού ἔδειξε πρὸς ὅλους, πολλαπλασιάσθηκε ἡ εὐλογία

τοῦ Θεοῦ στὸ σπιτικό του. Εἶχε τὴν Χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ πάνω του, τὴν εὐλογία τῆς Παναγίας, τὴν προστασία τῶν Ἁγίων καὶ τὴν συμπαράστασι τῶν Ἀγγέλων.

Ἐκοιμήθη ὁσιακῶς σὲ ἡλικία 80 ἐτῶν, τὸ 1999. Παρὼν στὴν κοίμησί του ἦτο καὶ ὁ ἐννενηντάχρονος ἱερεὺς τῶν φυλακῶν, πού μοῦ διηγήθηκε αὐτὸ τὸ γεγονός, γιὰ νὰ μὲ διαβεβαιώσῃ ὅτι λίγο πρὶν τὸ τέλος τοῦ Πέτρο Γ., Ἄγγελιοι καὶ Ἀρχάγγελοι πλημμύρισαν τὸ δωμάτιό του, τοὺς ὁποίους ἔβλεπε ὄχι μόνον ὁ ψυχορραγὼν μὲ τὰ μάτια του, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ ἐν λόγῳ ἱερεὺς. Αὐτοὶ καὶ παρέλαβαν τὴν ψυχὴ του, μετὰ τὸ τελευταῖο σημεῖον τοῦ σταυροῦ πού ἔκανε ὁ Πέτρος Γ., λέγοντας:

- Ἄγγελέ μου! Ἄγγελέ μου, δὲν τὴν ἀξίζω αὐτὴ τὴν τιμὴ. Καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν, ἐκοιμήθη!

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος αὐτός, παρ' ὅλο πού ἦταν ἔγγαμος καὶ ζοῦσε μέσα στὸν σημερινὸ κόσμον, μετὰ ἀπὸ τὴν τεράστια καὶ ἀδικὴ δοκιμασία καὶ ταλαιπωρία του στὴν φυλακὴ, μαζὶ μὲ βαρυνοινίτες, εἶχε καρποὺς τῆς Εὐχῆς, τῆς θείας Κοινωνίας καὶ τῆς εὐαγγελικῆς ζωῆς. Ἡ ἔγγαμη ζωὴ του δὲν τὸν ἐμπόδισε νὰ λέγη μέρανύχτα τὴν Εὐχὴ, ὅπως τὴν ἔμαθε ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον «Οἱ Περιπέτειες ἐνὸς Προσκυνητοῦ».



Ὁ Ἰούδας Ξαναζει

Τοῦ κ. Μιχαήλ Ε. Μιχαηλίδη, θεολόγου.

Ἐὰν ὑπάρχει καὶ ἐπιζει μιὰ ἀπαίσια καὶ τραγικὴ μορφή στὴν ἱστορία τοῦ κόσμου, αὐτὴ ἢ τρομακτικὴ μορφή εἶναι σίγουρα, ὁ Ἰούδας ὁ Ἰσκαριώτης.

Ἰούδας! Ὅνομα συνώνυμο τῆς προδοσίας. τὸ ἀρχέτυπο τῆς πιδ ἐπαίσχυντης πράξης στὶς ἀνθρώπινες κοινωνίες. Ἡ πιδ προσβλητικὴ λέξι στα στόματα τῶν ἀνθρώπων—κι αὐτῶν ἀκόμα τῶν παιδιῶν—ὅταν προφέρεται σάν ὕβρις: «Ἰούδα!» Ὅνομα καὶ πρόσωπο, ποὺ προκαλεῖ ἀποστροφή καὶ ἀπέχθεια.

Κι αὐτοὶ ἀκόμα οἱ ἱεροὶ εὐαγγελιστές, δὲν ἀσχολοῦνται καθόλου μὲ τὸ πρόσωπό του. Ἀκόμα καὶ γιὰ τὴν προδοσία του, σημειώνουν πολὺ λίγες λέξεις. Ὁ μὲν Ματθαῖος γράφει: *Τότε πορευθεὶς εἰς τῶν δώδεκα, ὁ λεγόμενος Ἰούδας Ἰσκαριώτης, πρὸς τοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς εἶπε: τί θέλετέ μοι δοῦναι, καὶ ἐγὼ ὑμᾶς παραδώσω αὐτόν; Οἱ δὲ ἔστησαν αὐτῷ τριάκοντα ἀργύρια. καὶ ἀπὸ τότε ἐζητεῖ εὐκαιρίαν ἵνα αὐτὸν παραδῶ.* (Ματθ. 16:14-16). Ὁ δὲ Ἰωάννης, τὸν ἀναφέρει μόνο σ' ἓνα στίχο: *Καὶ δείχνου γενομένου, τοῦ διαβόλου ἡδη βεβληκός εἰς τὴν καρδίαν Ἰούδα Σίμωνος Ἰσκαριώτου ἵνα αὐτὸν παραδῶ...* (Ἰω. 13:2).

Τις μεγάλες καὶ ἄξιες μορφές τῆς ἱστορίας καὶ τῆς ἀγιότητας, ὅσο περισσότερα λές, τόσο καὶ σὲ διδάσκουν. Ἀλλὰ μορφές σκοτεινές καὶ ὄργανα τοῦ διαβόλου, ποὺ πρὸδωσαν πρῶτα, τόσο βέβηλα, τὸν ἑαυτὸ τους, δὲν ἔχεις δύναμη καὶ κουράγιο ν' ἀσχολεῖσαι ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν νὰ πεῖς: «Ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος στρέψει τὸ πρόσωπό του στὸ Θεό, ὅλοι οἱ δρόμοι ὁδηγοῦν σ' Αὐτόν. Ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀποστρέψει τὸ πρόσωπό του ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό, ὅλοι οἱ δρόμοι ὁδηγοῦν στὴν καταστροφή», στοχάζεσαι ὁ ἅγιος Νικόλαος Βελμύροβιτς.

Ὅσο ὁ Ἰούδας ἦταν κοντὰ στὸν Ἰησοῦ—ἀπόστολος καὶ μαθητὴς του—σίγουρα καὶ θαύματα ἔκανε, καὶ βίωνε μιὰ καινούργια ζωὴ. Προδίδοντας ὅμως, καὶ ἐγκαταλείποντας τὸν Ἰησοῦ, ὁδηγήθηκε στὸ θάνατο καὶ τὴν καταστροφή. Ἐνα θάνατο ἀπαίσιο καὶ μιὰ ἀπώλεια ἀτέρμονη. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἔλαβε τὴν ἐπωνυμία **υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας**. Ἐνα μοναδικὸ χαρακτηρισμὸ ἀισχύνης καὶ καταισχύνης, γιὰ τὴν πράξη του, ποὺ μόνο ὁ Ἀντίχριστος θὰ τὸν ἔχει. Κατὰ τὸ λόγο τοῦ ἀπ. Παύλου, προτοῦ ἔλθει ὁ Ἀντίχριστος, *ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀμαρτίας, ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀπωλείας, ὁ ἀντικείμενος καὶ ὑπεραιρόμενος ἐπὶ πάντα λεγόμενον θεόν ἢ σέβασμα*, θὰ προηγηθεῖ ἢ ἀποστασία (Β' Θεσ. 2:3-4).

Ὁ προδότης—εἴτε εἶναι Ἰούδας, εἴτε Ἀντίχριστος—ἦταν παιδιὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποὺ ἔγιναν μὲ τὴ θέλησή τους, τέκνα καὶ ὄργανα τοῦ Διαβόλου. Γιατί, καὶ ὁ Ἀντίχριστος δὲν εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Διάβολος, ἀλλ' ὁ

κατεξοχὴν φορέας τοῦ Διαβόλου. Πόσο φοβερὸ πρᾶγμα εἶναι ἡ ἀμαρτία! Τὸν ἄνθρωπο τὸν κάμνει διάβολο. τὸ παιδί τοῦ Θεοῦ τὸν μεταβάλλει σὲ «υἱὸ τῆς ἀπωλείας». Τὸν ἤρωα τὸν κάμνει λιποτάκτη. Τὸν ἅγιο τὸν ἀπεργάζεται σὲ διαφθορέα. Τὸν πιστὸ τὸν ὁδηγεῖ στὴν ἀπιστία. Τὸν εὐσεβῆ τὸν διαστρέφει καὶ τὸν μετατρέπει σὲ βλάσφημο καὶ ὕβριστή...

«Ὁ Θεὸς καὶ ἡ ἀμαρτία κείτονται σὲ δύο ἀντίθετες πλευρές. Κανεὶς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ γυρίσει τὸ πρόσωπο πρὸς τὸν Θεό, ἐάν πρῶτα δὲν γυρίσει τὴν πλάτη στὴν ἀμαρτία. Κανεὶς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀγαπήσει τὸν Θεό, ἐάν πρῶτα δὲν μισήσει τὴν ἀμαρτία», παρατηρεῖ ὁ ἅγιος Νικόλαος Βελμύροβιτς. Βέβαια, λέγοντας πῶς, ἡ ἀμαρτία τὸν ἄνθρωπο τὸν κάμνει διάβολο, ἐννοοῦμε τὴ συνειδητὴ καὶ δίχως μετάνοια, ἀμαρτία. Διότι, κατὰ τὸν ἅγ. Ἰωάννη τὸν Θεολόγο, ὑπάρχουν «ἀμαρτίαι μὴ πρὸς θάνατον», σ' ἀντίθεση μὲ αὐτές, ποὺ δὲν ὑπάρχει περιθώριο μετάνοιας.

Στὶς μέρες μας ξαναζει ἡ προδοσία. Ξαναζει ἢ ἀποστασία καὶ ἡ διαφθορὰ τῆς Ρώμης, τῆς Νινευί, τῆς Βαβυλώνας... Ξαναζει τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἢ προδοσία στὰ πρόσωπα «ἐχθίστων ἀποστατῶν», κι ἄς μὴ ἔχουν τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Ἰούδα. Ἔχουν, ὡστόσο, τὴ γνώμη καὶ τὴν πρόθεση τοῦ Ἰούδα. Ἡ προδοσία τοῦ Ἰούδα ξαναζει στὰ πρόσωπα τῶν αἰρετικῶν, τῶν ὕβριστῶν τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τῶν ἀρνητῶν τῆς θεότητός Του, τῶν ἀπίστων καὶ ἀθέων, τῶν ἀποκρυφιστῶν, τῶν ψευδοδιδασκάλων, τῶν πονηρῶν καὶ ἀσεβῶν, τῶν θεομάχων καὶ ἐκκλησιομάχων, τῶν πονηρῶν καὶ ὑποκριτῶν, τῶν βλάσφημων καὶ εἰκονοκλαστῶν, τῶν μάγων καὶ σατανιστῶν, τῶν ἀκόλαστων καὶ ἀμετανόητων σοδομιτῶν, τῶν περιφρονητῶν τοῦ Σταυροῦ καὶ ἐκείνων, ποὺ ξανασταυρῶνουν τὸν Κύριο, τῶν νεοειδωλολατρῶν καὶ παγανιστῶν, τῶν ἱερόσυλων καὶ ἐμπρηστῶν ἱερῶν ναῶν, τῶν κλεπτῶν ἱερῶν εἰκόνων καὶ κειμηλίων, τῶν ἀρνητῶν καὶ πολεμίων τοῦ ἱεροῦ Κλήρου καὶ κάθε ἐκκλησιαστικῆς παρουσίας καὶ τελετῆς...

Οὔτε ἀριθμοῦνται, οὔτε ταξινομοῦνται οἱ προδότες τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῆς πίστεως. Εἶναι τόσοι, ὅσοι εἶναι καὶ οἱ γλιαροὶ, τοὺς ὁποίους «ἐμέσει» κάποτε, ὁ Θεός. Εἶναι οἱ ἀνεπιθύμητοι. Οἱ δικοὶ Του θὰ εἶναι, γιὰ πάντα λίγοι. Ἀλλὰ, *μὴ φοβοῦ τὸ μικρὸν ποίμνιον*. Οἱ ἐκλεκτοὶ γράφουν τὴν ὠραιότερη ἱστορία τοῦ κόσμου.

Ὅσοι Τὸν ὁμολογοῦν, θὰ τοὺς ὁμολογήσει καὶ θὰ τοὺς δώσει τὴν αἰώνια δόξα. *Ὁ τὸ πρόπον μὴ προδιδούς, οὐδεπώποτε ὑπὸ τῆς θείας συμμαχίας προδοθήσεται*, λέγει ὁ ἅγιος Ἰσίδωρος ὁ Πηλουσιώτης. Οὐδέποτε θὰ προδοθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴ θεία δικαιοσύνη, ἐκεῖνος ποὺ δὲν πρὸδωσε ἐκεῖνα ποὺ πιστεύει. Ἀσφαλῶς. Γιατὶ τὰ βραβεῖα ἀνήκουν στοὺς νικητές. Στοὺς **πιστοὺς ἄχρι θανάτου**. Ποτὲ στοὺς λιποτάκτες καὶ ἀρνητές!...

Καθαρθώμεν τὰς Αἰσθήσεις καὶ Ὁψόμεθα

Φώτη Κόντογλου.

Στὸ ἀποκαλυπτικὸ αὐτὸ κείμενο τοῦ Κόντογλου γίνεται λόγος ὄχι μόνο γιὰ τὴ δύναμη τοῦ Ἀναστάσιου Χριστοῦ ποὺ διὰ τοῦ θεοῦ φωτὸς του καθαρίζει καὶ ἀγιάζει τὰ πνευματικὰ μας αἰσθητήρια, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ τὴν αἰτία ποὺ κάποιοι πολεμοῦν καὶ καταφρονοῦν τὴν ἀγία ὀρθόδοξη παράδοση.



† † †
Ὁρθόδοξοι Χριστιανοί, σήμερα μᾶς κράζει ὁ θεόγλωσσος ὑμνωδός, ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Δαμασκηνός λέγοντας **Καθαρθώμεν τὰς αἰσθήσεις καὶ ὀψόμεθα τῷ ἀπροσίτῳ φωτὶ τῆς Ἀναστάσεως Χριστοῦν ἐξαστράπτοντα καὶ χαίρετε φάσκοντα τρανῶς ἀκουσόμεθα, ἐπινίκιον ἄδοντες.**

Μᾶς κράζει λοιπὸν νὰ καθαρίσουμε τὴν αἰσθήσεις μας, γιὰ νὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ δοῦμε τὸν Χριστὸ τὸν ἀναστημένο ἀπὸ τὸν τάφο. Νὰ καθαρίσουμε τὴν αἰσθήσεις μας, γιὰτὶ εἶναι ἀκάθαρτες, βρωμισμένες, ἐπειδὴ τὴν μεταχειριζόμαστε γιὰ σαρκικὰ καὶ ὑλικὰ πράγματα.

Καὶ πῶς ἄραγε καθαρίζονται οἱ αἰσθήσεις μας καὶ θὰ γίνουμε ἀπὸ σαρκικὴς, πνευματικὴς; Ὁ ὑμνωδὸς τὸ λέγει αὐτὸ γιὰτὶ τὸ διδάχθηκε ἀπὸ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Κύριο καὶ Σωτῆρα του ποὺ εἶπε στοὺς Μακαρισμοὺς: **Μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν Θεὸν ὄψονται.** Κι' ἂν καθαρίσουμε τὴν αἰσθήσεις μας, λέγει πῶς θὰ δοῦμε τὸν Χριστὸν ἐξαστράπτοντα μὲ ἀστραπή, ὄχι θαμπά, ἀλλὰ καθαρῶτατα, ἀστραφτερὸν ἀπὸ τὸ ἀζύγωτο φῶς τῆς Ἀναστάσεως, **τῷ ἀπροσίτῳ φωτὶ τῆς Ἀναστάσεως.** Κι' ὄχι μονάχα θὰ τὸν δοῦμε τηλαυγῶς, ἀλλὰ καὶ θὰ τὸν ἀκούσουμε κιόλας (γι' αὐτὸ πρέπει νὰναι καθαρὴς ὅλες οἱ αἰσθήσεις μας). Κι' ἡ φωνὴ του δὲν θάρχεται ἀπὸ μακρῶς, νὰ ἀμφιβάλουμε ἂν τὸν ἀκούσαμε ἢ δὲν τὸν ἀκούσαμε, ἀλλὰ τρανῶς, δυνατὰ.

Τὴν αἰσθήσεις μας δὲν τὴν μολεύουμε μονάχα σάν κάνουμε μ' αὐτὴν σαρκικὰ ἔργα κι' ἐνέργειες, δηλαδὴ σάν τὴν μεταχειριζόμαστε γιὰ τὴν ἀπολαύσεις τοῦ κορμιοῦ, ἀλλὰ κι' ὅταν τὴν μεταχειριζόμαστε γιὰ κάποια ἔργα ποὺ τὰ λέγει ὁ κόσμος «πνευματικὰ», ἐνῶ εἶναι κι' αὐτὰ σαρκικά, καὶ μάλιστα αὐτὰ εἶναι συχνὰ πὺ πονηρὰ ἀπὸ τὰλλα ποὺ φαίνονται φανερὰ πῶς εἶναι σαρκικά. Αὐτὰ τὰ λεγόμενα πνευματικὰ ἔργα εἶναι οἱ πονηρὴς σκέψεις ποὺ κάνει ὁ νοῦς μας ψάχνοντας τὰ θεϊκὰ πράγματα, καὶ ποὺ εἶναι ἀσεβέστατες καὶ σ' αὐτὴν μᾶς σπρώχνει ἡ ὑπερηφάνειά μας καὶ ἡ ἀφοβία μας μπροστὰ στὸν Θεό, γιὰτὶ δίνουνε τροφή στὴν ματαιοδοξία μας, ἐπειδὴ φαινόμαστε πολὺξεροὶ στοὺς ἄλλους, ἐνῶ ὁ σοφὸς Σολομών εἶπε: **Ἀρχὴ τῆς**

σοφίας (δηλ. τῆς κατὰ Θεὸν σοφίας) εἶναι ὁ φόβος τοῦ Κυρίου.

Μ' αὐτὰ τὰ ψαξίματα καὶ μὲ τὴν φιλοσοφίαν, ὁ χριστιανὸς ἀληθινὰ μολύνει τὴν αἰσθήσεις του, τὴν στομώνει καὶ ἀντὶ νὰ τὴν κάνει πνευματικὴς, τὴν κάνει ὄργανο χονδροειδῆ, ἀφοῦ μ' αὐτὴν ἐρευνᾷ χονδροειδῆ, ὑλικὰ πράγματα, καὶ ὄχι πνευματικὰ. Γιατὶ, ὅπως εἶπα πρὶν, μὲ ὅλο ποὺ αὐτὴν οἱ ἐνέργειες φαίνονται πνευματικὴς, σ' ἀληθινὰ εἶναι σαρκικὴς, κατὰ τὸν ἀπόστολο Παῦλο ποὺ λέγει πῶς τὴν κάνει ὁ νοῦς τῆς σαρκὸς, γράφοντας στοὺς Κολοσσαεῖς: **Μηδεὶς ὑμᾶς καταβραβευέτω θέλων ἐν ταπεινοφροσύνῃ καὶ θρησκείᾳ τῶν Ἀγγέλων, ἃ μὴ ἐώρακεν ἐμβατεῦν, εἰκὴ φυσιοῦμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ νοῦς τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ.** (Κολοσ. 2:18). Καὶ στοὺς Ἐφεσίους γράφει: **Τοῦτο οὖν λέγω καὶ μαρτύρομαι ἐν Κυρίῳ, μηκέτι ὑμᾶς περιπατεῖν καθὼς καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ ἔθνη περιπατεῖν ἐν ματαιότητι τοῦ νοῦς αὐτῶν, ἐσκοτισμένοι τῇ διανοίᾳ, ὄντες ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ διὰ τὴν ἄγνοιαν τὴν οὖσαν ἐν αὐτοῖς διὰ τὴν πώρωσιν τῆς καρδίας αὐτῶν.** (Ἐφ. 4:18). Ποιὰ λοιπὸν λέγει ματαιότητα τοῦ νοῦς τῶν ἐθνῶν; Δὲν λέγει τὰ μάταια ψαξίματα ποὺ κάνανε οἱ φιλόσοφοι, ἃς ἦτανε κι ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ φαινότανε οἱ πὺ πνευματικοί; Αὐτὰ ποὺ λέγανε ἦτανε σάρξ, (γιατὶ τὸ ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς σάρξ ἐστὶ) ἀφοῦ ὅ,τι κάνανε τὸ κάνανε ὄντας ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ, δηλαδὴ τὸ κάνανε μὲ πνεῦμα σαρκικό.

Ὅποιος ψάχνει κι' ἐρευνᾷ μ' αὐτὸ τὸ σαρκικὸ πνεῦμα, πρῶτα χάνει τὴν παρθενικὴ ἀπλότητα τῆς διάνοιας, γιὰ τὴν ὁποία πρωτομακάρισε (αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ πρῶτος μακαρισμός) ὁ γλυκύτατος Χριστὸς μας ἐκεῖνους ποὺ τὴν ἔχουνε, λέγοντας μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι. Ὑστερα, αὐτὸς ποὺ σκαλίζει μὲ τὸ μυαλό του τὰ θεῖα, πειράζει τὸν Θεὸ ποὺ κρύβεται ἀπὸ τὴν ἀδιάκριτες διάνοιες καὶ χώνεται μέσα στὸ γνόφο, κι' αὐτὸ τὸ φανερώνει μὲ τὸ στόμα τοῦ προφήτη Ἡσαΐα, λέγοντας: **Φανερὸς ἔγινε σὲ ἐκεῖνους ποὺ δὲ μὲ ρωτᾶνε, καὶ γνωρίσθηκα ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνους ποὺ δὲν μὲ ζητᾶνε μὲ πονηρία.**

Ὁ ἅγιος Κύριλλος Ἀλεξανδρείας λέγει: **Πίστις οὐκ ἐστὶ τὸ ζητούμενον ὄν τρόπον γὰρ ἐλπίς βλεπομένη οὐκ ἔχουσα τὸ ἀζήτητον, πίστις οὐκ εἶη, κατὰ τὸν ἴσον τῇ ἐλπίδι λόγον.** Κι' ὁ μέγας Βασίλειος λέγει: **Τὸ ἀπλοῦν τῆς πίστεως ἰσχυρότερον ἐστὶ τῶν λογικῶν ἀποδείξεων.**

Καὶ μολταῦτα, πλῆθος χριστιανοὶ καταγίνονται ἀκόμα σήμερα, καὶ πὺ πολὺ μάλιστα, μὲ τέτοιου εἴδους ψαξίματα καὶ ἐρευνες, ἀπηλλοτριωμένοι τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ ὅπως ἔλεγε ὁ Παῦλος γιὰ τοὺς ἐθνικούς, κι' ἀνακατεύουνε μὲ τὴν πίστη, ποὺ δὲν γνωρίσανε οἱ δυστυχεῖς τὴν λογὴν πράγμα εἶναι, τὴν ἐπιστῆμες καὶ τὴν

φιλοσοφίες και μ' αὐτὰ ποὺ λένε, ψυχραίνουνε τὴν πίστη τῶν πολλῶν, κι' ἐνῶ ὁ μάταιος λογισμὸς τους καταγίνεται μὲ μάταια και ψευδῆ, καταρροῦνε ἀπὸ ἀλαζονεία κι' ἀπὸ κουφότητα τὴν ἀγία Παράδοση τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, ὥστε ὁ χριστιανισμὸς νὰ καταντῆσει ἓνα σύστημα ἐπίγειας ζωῆς, χωρὶς ἀποκαλύψει Ἀθανασίας, δηλαδή χωρὶς Χριστό. Κι' αὐτοὶ θέλουνε νὰ διδάξουνε τὰ ἀπλοϊκὰ κι' ἀθῶα πρόβατα τοῦ Χριστοῦ ποὺ τὰ μακάρισε ὁ ἴδιος σ' ὄλους τοὺς Μακαρισμοὺς, μὰ ἰδιαίτερα στὸν πρῶτο και στὸν ὄγδοο.

Τοῦτοι λοιπὸν οἱ ἄνθρωποι πῶς γιορτάζουνε Χριστὸν Ἀναστάντα ἐκ νεκρῶν; Ξένον και παράδοξον! Φιλοσοφοῦντες και ἐπιστημοῦντες πιστεύουν; Μὰ ποιὸς πίστεψε ποτὲ φιλοσοφῶντας; Ρωτῶ νὰ μάθω.

Μὲ τὸν Χριστό, ἡ φιλοσοφία τελείωσε και θάφτηκε γιὰ ὅποιον πίστεψε σ' Αὐτόν. Ἄς ἀκούσουμε τὸν Παῦλο ποὺ φωνάζει τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρήλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονε καινὰ τὰ πάντα. Φωνὴ ἐλπιδοφόρα τοῦ εὐλογημένου Παύλου, ποὺ ξαναλέγει στὴν καρδιά μας, ὅ,τι λέγει και τὸ χαίρετε ποὺ εἶπε ὁ Ἀναστημένος Κύριός του και Κύριός μας!

Νά, τὰ πάντα γινήκανε καινούρια! Γινήκανε καινούρια γιὰτὶ εἶναι καινὸν και ξένον ἡ Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, κι' αὐτὸ τὸ καινούριο τὰ ἔκανε ὅλα καινούρια, ἐπειδὴ κατήργησε τὰ παλιά. Κατήργησε τὰ παλιά ὁ καταργήσας τὸν θάνατον, γιὰτὶ ὅπου δὲν βρῖσκεται ὁ ἀρχηγὸς τῆς Ζωῆς βασιλεύει ὁ θάνατος. Κατήργησε τὴν κατάρα τῆς σαρκός, κι' ἔφερε τὴν εὐλογία τοῦ Πνεύματος. Κατήργησε τὴ γνῶση κι' ἔφερε τὴν Πίστη (Δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται).

Τὸ παλιὸ ἦταν ἡ Γνώση, τὸ ψάξιμο, τὸ νὰ ψηλαφεῖ ὁ ἄνθρωπος στὰ τυφλὰ και νὰ μὴ βρῖσκει τίποτα. Τὸ καινούριο εἶναι ἡ Πίστη ποὺ ἀνοίγει τὰ πνευματικὰ μάτια τοῦ ἀνθρώπου και βλέπει τὸν Ἥλιο τῆς Δικαιοσύνης Χριστὸν ἐξαστράπτοντα τῷ ἀπροσίτῳ φωτὶ τῆς Ἀναστάσεως. Ἐκεῖνος φτάνει γιὰ ὅλα, δὲν χρειάζεται πιά διόλου νὰ ψάχνει τὸ μυαλό μας σάν τῶν ἐθνικῶν φιλοσόφων, ἀφοῦ βρέθηκε ἡ ὁδός, δηλαδή Ἐκεῖνος ποὺ εἶπε καθαρὰ και σύντομα: Πάντα μοι παρεδόθη ὑπὸ τοῦ Πατρός μου και οὐδεὶς ἐπιγινώσκει τὸν Υἱὸν εἰμὴ ὁ Πατήρ, οὐδὲ τὸν Πατέρα τις ἐπιγινώσκει εἰμὴ ὁ Υἱός, και ὃ ἐάν βούληται ὁ Υἱὸς ἀποκαλύψαι. (Μαθ. 11:27).

Ἐάν βούληται ὁ Υἱὸς ἀποκαλύψαι, σ' ὅποιον θέλει ὁ Υἱὸς νὰ φανερώσει, νὰ γνωρίσει τὸν Πατέρα. Ποῦ πᾶς, λοιπὸν, χριστιανέ, νὰ γνωρίσεις τὸν Θεὸν και τὸν Χριστὸν ἐσύ, ὁ τυφλός, ὁ ἀδύνατος, ὁ ἀκάθαρτος, μὲ τὴ δική σου δύναμη, ἐνῶ ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Κύριός μας εἶπε πῶς μονάχα ὁ Πατέρας φωτίζει τὴ διάνοιά σου γιὰ νὰ γνωρίσεις τὸν Χριστό, κι' ὁ Χριστὸς γιὰ νὰ γνωρίσεις τὸν Πατέρα; Καὶ δὲν πέφτεις σὲ προσευχὴ νὰ τὸν παρακαλέσεις νὰ σὲ φωτίσει, ἀλλὰ καταγίνεσαι μὲ

ἀσεβῆ ψαξίματα, ὅπως ἐκεῖνοι οἱ ἀρχαῖοι ποὺ δὲν εἶχαν ἀκούσει ἀκόμα τὸν Χριστό νὰ λέγει μὲ ἐξουσία αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια; Κι' ἄλλοῦ ποὺ λέγει Ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἡ θύρα, ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἡ ὁδός, ἐγὼ εἶμαι ὁ καθηγητής, ἐγὼ εἶμαι τὸ φῶς, ἐγὼ εἶμαι ὁ γιατρός, ὁ μεσίτης (Τιμ. Α' 2:2), ὁ ποιμὴν, ὁ ραββί. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ πρωτότοκος τῆς καινῆς κτίσεως, ποὺ ἔκανε καινὰ τὰ πάντα κι' ἔκανε και καινοὺς ἀνθρώπους, τοῖς ἐν τοῖς μνήμασι ζῶν ἡ χαρισάμενος.

Ναί, μὲ τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὅλα γινήκανε καινούρια. Γι' αὐτὸ κι' ὁ ὑμνωδὸς λέγει μὲ χαρὰ και ἀγαλλίαση: Δεῦτε πόμα πῖωμεν καινὸν οὐκ ἐκ πέτρας ἀγόνου (τῆς φιλοσοφίας) τερατουργούμενον, ἀλλ' ἀφθαρείας πηγὴν ἐκ τάφου ὀμβρήσαντος Χριστοῦ, ἐν ᾧ στερεούμεθα, και Δεῦτε τοῦ καινοῦ τῆς ἀμπέλου γεννήματος τῆς θείας εὐφροσύνης ἐν τῇ εὐσήμερῃ ἡμέρᾳ τῆς ἐγέρσεως, βασιλείας τε Χριστοῦ κοινωνήσωμεν, ὑμνοῦντες Αὐτὸν ὡς Θεὸν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας.

Ἀδελφοί μου Χριστιανοὶ ἐσεῖς ποὺ καταγινόσαστε μὲ τὶς ἐπιστήμες και μὲ τὶς φιλοσοφίες, ἀκούστε τὸν Κύριο ποὺ λέγει μὲ τὸ στόμα τοῦ προφήτη. Ἐμένα μὲ ἀφήσανε, ποὺ εἶμαι πηγὴ τῆς ζωῆς, και σκάψανε κάποιους ξερόλακκους ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν νερό. Καὶ ποὺ λέγει μὲ τὸ δικό του στόμα τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο ὅποιος βάλει τὸ χέρι του στὸ ἀλέτρι μου και βλέπει πίσω, δηλ. δὲν ἀπαρνήθηκε τὴν κοσμικὴ γνῶση ποὺ καταγινόταν οἱ ἄνθρωποι πρὶν νὰ ἔλθω ἐγὼ στὸν κόσμιο, δὲν εἶναι δεκτὸς στὴ Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ. (Λουκ. 9:62). Καὶ ποὺ εἶπε πάλι ἄλλη φορὰ: Δὲν βάζουνε καινούριο κρασὶ σὲ παλιὰ ἀσκιά.

Ἄς καθαρίσουμε λοιπὸν τὴ διάνοιά μας ἀπὸ τὴν θολούρα τῆς πολύπλοκης γνώσεως, γιὰτὶ ἀλλοιῶς δὲν θὰ δοῦμε τὸ Χριστό ἐξαστράπτοντα τῷ ἀπροσίτῳ φωτὶ τῆς Ἀναστάσεως, κι' οὔτε θὰ τὸν ἀκούσουμε νὰ λέγει τρανώς τὸ Χαίρετε. Μάτια νὰ τὸν δοῦμε κι' αὐτὰ νὰ τὸν ἀκούσουμε δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ μᾶς δώσει μὲ κανένα τρόπο ἡ γνῶση, ἡ καινὴ ἀπάτη, ἀλλὰ μονάχα ἡ εὐλογημένη Πίστη στὸν Κύριο και Σωτῆρα μας Ἰησοῦ Χριστό, ποὺ εἶναι δοξασμένος στοὺς ἀτελεύτητους αἰῶνες τῶν αἰῶνων. Ἀμήν.



Οἱ νηστεῖες, τὰ δάκρυα και οἱ προσευχῆς τῆς Ἁγίας Μόνικας χάρισαν στὴν Ἐκκλησία, ἓνα Ἅγιο Αὐγουστῖνο! Οἱ σημερινὲς μητέρες ζοῦν ἐν Κυρίῳ; Νηστεύουν και προσεύχονται; Πῶς περριμένουν τότε, χωρὶς νὰ ἀγωνίζονται οἱ ἴδιες μὲ τὰ ὄπλα αὐτὰ, νὰ εὐδοκμήσουν τὰ παιδιὰ τους στὴν πνευματικὴ ζωή;

Γέρων Γερμανὸς Σταυροβουνιώτης (+1982)

Πρὸς Φιλοπαπικούς Ἀρχιερεῖς

Τοῦ Μοναχοῦ Βλασίου, Βίγλα Ἁγίου Ὁρους.

Ορθόδοξοι Ἀρχιερεῖς βγαίνουν σήμερα καὶ διακηρύττουν, ἀπροκάλυπτα καὶ δημόσια, ὅτι ὁ Πάπας Ρώμης εἶναι κανονικὸς Ἐπίσκοπος καὶ οἱ Ρωμαιοκαθολικοὶ ἀποτελοῦν κανονικὴν Ἐκκλησία, σκανδαλίζοντας ἔτσι τὰ Ὁρθόδοξα ποίμνια.

Γιὰ νὰ δοῦμε καὶ βροῦμε ἂν πράγματι ἔτσι ἔχουν τὰ πράγματα καὶ ἂν ἔχουν δίκιο οἱ μερικοὶ αὐτοὶ ἀρχιερεῖς, πρέπει νὰ ψάξουμε τίς Θείες Γραφές καὶ τοὺς ἁγίους Πατέρες τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας μας.

Βρίσκουμε λοιπὸν σ' αὐτὲς ὅτι: «Οἱ ἐν αἰρέσεσι περιπεσόντες καὶ μένοντες ἐν αὐταῖς τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἐξοστρακίζονται, ὡς ταύτης ἀλλότριον», ὡς συνοψίζει καὶ ὁ Ζωναράς.

Καὶ οἱ ἅγιοι Πατέρες, ἰδοὺ τί λέγουν, γιὰ τοὺς Λατίνους καὶ Καθολικούς:

(α) «Ὁ παπισμὸς εἶναι ἀσέβεια». (Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς).

(β) «Φεύγετε ἀπὸ τοὺς Παπικούς, ὅπως φεύγετε ἀπὸ τὰ δηλητηριώδη φίδια». (Ἅγιος Μάρκος ὁ Εὐγενικός).

(γ) «Ὁ Πάπας εἶναι ἀντίχριστος». Καὶ «τόν Πάπα νὰ καταρᾶσθε, διότι αὐτὸς θάνατο ἢ αἰτία». (Ἅγιος Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλός).

(δ) «Ὅτι οἱ Λατῖνοι εἶναι αἰρετικοὶ δὲν εἶναι καμμία χρεία ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος νὰ κάμωμεν καμμίαν ἀπόδειξιν» (Ὅσιος Νικόδημος ὁ Ἁγιορείτης).

(ε) «Ὁμολογουμένως, ἀναμφιβόλως, ἀναντιρρήτως, οἱ Λατῖνοι εἶναι ἀδόκμοι, ἀπόβλητοι, ἐχθροὶ καὶ ἀλλότριον τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τῶν ἁγίων Αὐτοῦ» (Ὅσιος Ἀθανάσιος Πάριος).

(στ) «Διὰ τοῦ δόγματος τοῦ ἀλαθήτου, ἡ Δυτικὴ Ἐκκλησία ἀπώλεσε τὴν πνευματικὴν τῆς ἐλευθερίαν, ἀπώλεσε τὸν στολισμὸν αὐτῆς, ἐκλονίσθη ἐκ βάθρων, ἐστερήθη τοῦ πλούτου τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος». (Ἅγιος Νεκτάριος Πενταπόλεως).

(ζ) «Διότι καμμία αἵρεσις δὲν ἐξηγέρθη τόσο ριζοσπαστικῶς καὶ τόσο ὀλοκληρωτικῶς κατὰ τοῦ Θεανθρώπου Χριστοῦ καὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας του, ὡς ἐπράξε τοῦτο ὁ Παπισμὸς διὰ τοῦ δόγματος περὶ τοῦ ἀλαθήτου τοῦ Πάπα-ἀνθρώπου». (Ὅσιος Ἰουστίνος Πόποβιτς).

Διὰ τοὺς Ἀρχιερεῖς λοιπὸν αὐτοὺς, τοὺς φιλοπαπικούς καὶ Οἰκουμενιστὲς ἀρμόζει τὸ τοῦ ἁγίου Ἀθανασίου Ἀλεξανδρείας τοῦ Μεγάλου λόγιον: «Ἐάν ὁ ἐπίσκοπος ἢ ὁ πρεσβύτερος οἱ ὄντες ὀφθαλμοὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας κακῶς ἀναστρέφονται καὶ σκανδαλίζωσι τὸν λαὸν χρὴ αὐτοὺς ἐκβάλλεσθαι. Συμφέρον γὰρ ἄνευ αὐτῶν συναθροίξεσθε εἰς εὐκτῆριον οἶκον, παρὰ μετ' αὐτῶν ἐμβληθῆναι μετὰ Ἄννα καὶ Καϊάφα εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός».

Ἡ Μεταστροφή Ἐνὸς Ἄθεου!

Ἀπὸ τὸ «Συνοδοιπόρος», Νοέμβριος 2010.

Τὸν Ἀπρίλιο τοῦ 2009, ἀπεβίωσε σὲ ἡλικία 87 ἐτῶν ὁ διάσημος Ἀγγλὸς φιλόσοφος Antony Flew. Ὁ Flew, γιὸς Μεθοδιστῆ ἱερέα, καθιερώθηκε σὰν ἄθεος διανοητῆς μετὰ ἀπὸ μία σύντομη ὁμιλία του στὴ Σωκρατικὴ λέσχη τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου τῆς Ὁξφορδης, κατὰ τὰ μέσα τοῦ 1950, μὲ τίτλο «Θεολογία καὶ Ἑλεγχος τοῦ Ἐσφαλμένου» (Theology and Falsification).

Πολλοὶ εἶπαν ὅτι ἡ ὁμιλία του αὐτὴ ἦταν ἀκατανίκητη ἀπόδειξη περὶ τῆς μὴ ὑπάρξεως Θεοῦ. Ἐκτοτε ἔγραψε πολλὰ βιβλία, ὅπως «Ἡ Ἠθικὴ τῆς Ἐξέλιξης», «Ψυχικὰ Φαινόμενα», κ.ἄ. Ἐπιβλήθηκε ὡστόσο κυρίως μὲ τὰ βιβλία του περὶ τῆς μὴ ὑπάρξεως τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Τὸ 2004, ἔπειτα ἀπὸ 50 χρόνια ἔντονης ἀθεϊστικῆς δράσης, ἄφησε ἀναυδους τοὺς πάντες, κυκλοφορώντας ἓνα DVD μὲ τίτλο «Ἔχει Ἀνακαλύψει ἡ Ἐπιστήμη τὸν Θεό;» Σὲ αὐτὸ ἀνακοίνωσε ὅτι οἱ σύγχρονες ἀνακαλύψεις καὶ οἱ πολλὲς ἀσυνέπειες στὴν θεωρία τῆς ἐξέλιξης τὸν ἀνάγκασαν νὰ ἐπανεξετάσει τίς ἀπόψεις του περὶ ἀθεϊσμοῦ. «Ἡ ἀπίστευτη πολυπλοκότητα τῶν διατάξεων ποὺ ἀπαιτοῦνται γιὰ νὰ δημιουργηθεῖ ὁ κόσμος δείχνει ὅτι ὑπάρχει ἄμεση ἀναγκὴ γιὰ μία ἄπειρη νοημοσύνη στὴ δημιουργία τῆς ζωῆς».

Ζητοῦσε ἐπὶ πλέον συγγνώμη γιὰ τὴν παραπλάνηση τόσων ψυχῶν. Τρία χρόνια ἀργότερα, τὸ 2007, κυκλοφόρησε τὸ τελευταῖο του βιβλίο: «Υπάρχει Θεός; Πῶς ὁ Πιὸ Διάσημος Ἄθεος Ἄλλαξε Γνώμη».

Ἡ μεταστροφή τοῦ Flew προκάλεσε ὄχι μόνο... σὸκ ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν μὴν τῶν ἄθεων διανοητῶν. Οἱ Times τῆς Ν. Ὑόρκης δημοσίευσαν ἓνα καυστικὸ ἄρθρο, στὸ ὁποῖο ἀπέδιδαν τὴ μεταστροφή του σὲ γεροντικὴ ἄνοια, καὶ σὲ ἄγνοιά του γιὰ τὸ πῶς λειτουργεῖ ἡ ἐπιστήμη, κ.ο.κ. Καὶ ἡ ἀπάντησι τοῦ Flew: «Ὅταν δὲν μπορεῖς νὰ ἀντικρούσεις τὰ ἐπιχειρήματα, τότε προσπάθησε νὰ ἀπαξιώσεις αὐτὸν ποὺ τὰ λέει».

Ὁ Flew εἶχε δηλώσει ὅτι πάντοτε ἀκολουθοῦσε τὴν ἀρχὴ τοῦ Σώκρατη: «Πηγαίνω ὅπου μὲ ὀδηγεῖ ἡ ἀλήθεια». Καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια τὸν ὀδήγησε στὰ χνάρια τοῦ Θεοῦ...



Γιὰ νὰ εἶναι ἡ προσευχὴ τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ τέλεια καὶ εὐάρεστη στὸν Θεό, πρέπει νὰ μὴν εἶναι ἀποκλειστικὴ. Νὰ μὴν περιορίζεται μόνο στὸν ἑαυτό του. Πρέπει νὰ εἶναι γενικὴ. Νὰ ἐπεκτείνεται καὶ στοὺς ἄλλους.

Πρ. Εὐσέβιος Μαθόπουλος

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

By Mrs. Helene Kontzevitch, translated from "Russkaya Zhizn," Sept. 20, 1955.

In the spring of 1909 I turned 16. That same year a priest was assigned to the church built by my parents near their estate. Before his arrival we were informed of his appointment by the provincial archpriest who wrote to us the following words: "We hear that an archangel-like bear is coming your way."

We sent the sleigh to the station to pick up Fr. Simeon (our new priest). From the window I saw them arrive. There were three figures in the sleigh, all wrapped in thick, red blankets: Fr. Simeon, his matushka Eulalia Stepanovna, and their faithful servant Paula. When first I set eyes on Fr. Simeon after he had come into the house, I was quite taken aback; his unsightly, rather sickly appearance was almost frightening. The features of his narrow face were ill-proportioned and very homely. "Really," I thought, "just who is this they sent!"

We sat down to dinner. Batiushka was anxious to see the church, so I ran off to have the sleigh readied. The stables and other out-buildings were located a short distance from the house. Batiushka accompanied me. As we were walking, my first impression vanished without a trace. I don't remember now what it was we talked about along the way—it may have been very insignificant but to my amazement, as soon as this rather ugly man began to speak, his uncomeliness simply disappeared. Before me stood a man of enormous strength of spirit and an equally great power of love. He could conquer anyone. The charm of his meek personality was irresistible. He could do with each of his parishioners whatever he wanted—in spite of the spiritually uncultivated nature of those who surrounded him.

Fr. Simeon lived with us for about two years. He found our new church very much to his liking, but thought that the interior was rather poorly furnished. There began to arrive—heaven only knows from where—all sorts of donations for the church. We barely had time to bring a cart-load of crates from the station when another shipment arrived: candlestands, censor, a set of service books, rizas, a silver set of vessels, a shroud.

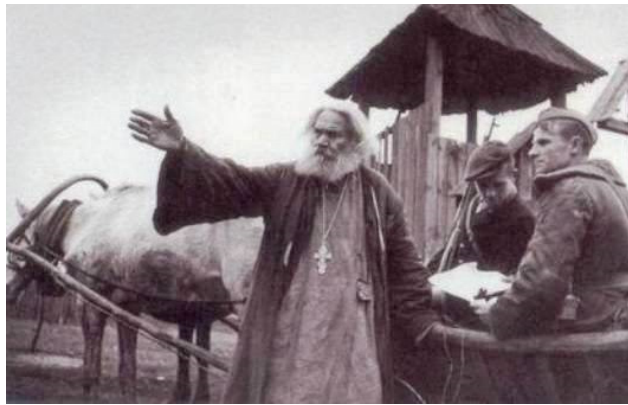
Not a year had passed and Fr. Simeon engaged a group of artists who covered the interior with frescoes depicting scenes from the Gospel. Batiushka also intended to purchase a better quality set of bells, but his untimely death

cut short his plans. Where did all these gifts to our church come from?

It turned out that Fr. Simeon was known by many in Russia as a man of prayer. For example, I remember he once received a hundred roubles with the request to pray for a certain Ivan. And such requests were numerous. But Batiushka was very reticent on this subject. Our job was simply to send the horses to the station for the boxes. Soon the church interior was transformed beyond recognition.

Fr. Simeon used to travel around the border posts where there lived officers and soldiers of the border guard (we lived near the German border). For the military men and their families, his arrival was a joyous occasion. Even the Germans in the neighboring town took part in the general celebration by sending masses of flowers to decorate the makeshift church. In these border towns Fr. Simeon left cups affixed with signs which read: "For the church." These cups soon returned to him filled with the soldiers' pennies.

With the death of Fr. Simeon all this came to an end.



Fr. Simeon's family consisted of four souls: first—his matushka, Eulalia Stepanovna, a tall, dignified older lady. She had a northern accent with its very pronounced, rounded "o's". The eldest son we nicknamed Absalom, because of his thick crop of hair and his endless quarrels with his father. He was a university student and related to his father with a distinct feeling of

his own superiority. The second son was a surveyor, and there was a daughter who was a student. All of them loved their father dearly, but little did they understand him.

To say that Fr. Simeon lived humbly would be an understatement; he cut his own wood, he engaged in carpentry work, he wore homespun cassocks which came from Archangelsk; these were of a nondescript color, sometimes lined with fustian. On his head he wore a broad rimmed hat, also handmade. This outfit gave him a very unique, rather odd appearance. Yes, here was a man from another, a very special world, who had nothing in common with the mediocre, prosaic aspects of the daily provincial life which surrounded us. He was the son of the far north whose beauty, forever impressed in the depths of his soul, enhanced his poetic nature. His sermons were never contrived; rather, they flowed from his heart, conveying a spirit of life and never tiring the listener.

How fascinating it was of an evening to hear Fr. Simeon describe his travels on the White Sea or the majestic beauty of his homeland, wondrous pictures of the northern landscape. Those playing whist threw down their cards and everyone

formed a tight circle around Fr. Simeon. Among other things, he described how the bishop who had ordained him invited him, his young protege, for tea, during which he gave him a lesson in manners: how to use the sugar tongs, what was proper and what was not. This bishop was clairvoyant and foretold that Fr. Simeon would fall ill three times and that the third illness would be fatal. Everything came to pass just as the hierarch had said.

I remember the story Fr. Simeon told about meeting Eulalia Stepanovna. Having finished seminary and desiring to become a priest, he had to find himself a wife. He didn't know any eligible girls and didn't trust matchmakers. So, he decided to travel about as a menial laborer. He came to the home of a priest who had five daughters, and was engaged as a workman. One of the daughters was his future matushka. Without suspecting the new workman to be an eligible husband, she showed herself to be very warm and possessed of a kind and good character. Convinced of her positive spiritual qualities, Fr. Simeon revealed his true identity and made her a proposal of marriage. In this way he found himself a good wife.

Souls thirsted for contact with him. Even non-Orthodox—Jews and Catholics—came to him for consolation in their sorrows. I, too, loved to visit him. It happened that you'd go to him with some kind of heaviness on your soul. But after sitting with him in his cozy dining room, without even saying a word about yourself, about what was troubling you, you left as if you had wings, as though your burdens had simply disappeared into thin air.

Fr. Simeon's best and closest friends, however, were the local children. It was a common sight to see Fr. Simeon walking around the village square surrounded by children. Some hung on to his fingers with both their hands, one of the older ones carried his briefcase and walking stick. The little Jewish boys would take off their caps, bow deeply and run on ahead. When Batiushka caught up with them this performance would be repeated. And again they would run ahead and again stop to bow. They, poor things, could express their love only from a distance.

Once the schoolchildren noticed that in winter Batiushka's hands got very cold. They made a collection amongst themselves and together purchased some gloves.

In the school Fr. Simeon gave catechism lessons. Once there was a Polish Catholic holiday and school was cancelled. As a new arrival, Fr. Simeon was unaware of this. The children met him as usual and led him to the classroom. The lesson went on, and on. "Why isn't there a bell?" Asked Fr. Simeon, puzzled. "Batiushka! Forgive us, we tricked you! Today there is no school," replied the children.

When vacations came the children begged Fr. Simeon not to interrupt the lessons. One boy came more than nine miles on foot to attend the class. They all gathered in church. Even

we older ones, almost adults, came. Fr. Simeon was a talented and inspiring teacher. What he communicated was both ancient and eternally fresh and new. It captivated both heart and mind. We listened to the Gospel stories and parables as if hearing them for the first time in our lives.

Of all the children, Batiushka's favorite was a little three-year-old girl, Mary Prilutskaya. One Saturday evening there was the usual vigil. The Gospel reading was from St. John: "Jesus saith unto her, Mary; she turned herself, and saith unto Him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master." The service ended, the lamps were extinguished, and everyone dispersed. Fr. Simeon was detained in the altar. The children had run home long ago for dinner. But for little Mary there was no greater happiness than to be in the presence of Batiushka, to accompany him on his way home, during which time she enjoyed her special privilege of holding his hand. Batiushka knew this, he knew that she was patiently waiting for him there in the growing darkness of the church. "Mary," he called out to her. "Master," came the little voice of his faithful disciple.

Once, in winter, I drove Fr. Simeon home in the sleigh. I myself sat at the reins and together we rode over the snow-covered fields. Evening was approaching. All that remained of the setting sun was a faint strip of light glowing far away on the horizon. I turned to Fr. Simeon: "Batiushka, what do you think?"

Suppose that a person loves God but has no fear of belittling his brother. If we seriously thought about how closely and inseparably the first and second Gospel commandments are bound together, think how much easier life would be!" It was a moment before Batiushka said anything. "You, at least, have understood me. But little do my own children understand me—let alone anyone else." This was not quite true. Everyone loved him without exception. Those who were unable at the time to fully grasp what it was he was after, understood this later. Some years afterwards Fr. Simeon's daughter wrote to me about her older brother and said how much his character had come to remind them of their father's.

Fr. Simeon was not with us for long. He was soon struck by a cruel illness: cancer. His physical sufferings were intense. When I came to see him he would hold me by the hand and tell me how much my visit meant to him, because I understood him. Obviously, during the last days of his earthly life the awareness of his spiritual loneliness grieved him terribly.

Pascha came. By this time another priest was serving in the church. On Holy Night Fr. Simeon sat at home on the windowsill of his apartment, listening to the ringing of the bells, the tears running down his cheeks.

Soon the sick one was taken to the medical facility nearest us, a hospital in the German town of Konigsberg. There they tried to save him with an operation, but in vain. He died

on May 19, 1911. Two days later a whole crowd of us went to meet his body. All the local inhabitants came, Russian and non-Russian, Orthodox and non-Orthodox. On the day of his funeral there were just as many people crowding the church. His body arrived in a closed coffin, but because everyone was so anxious to see once more their beloved pastor, the coffin was opened. In spite of the fact that the body had been transported 13 miles in a zinc coffin through the sweltering heat, there wasn't the least sign of decay. Fr. Simeon lay there, peaceful and majestic; his marble-like face reflected a spiritual beauty not of this world. He was buried behind the altar in the church yard. On his gravestone appeared the following inscription: *Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth: You conquered our hearts through meekness and love.*

Nearly a year went by. Again it was Pascha. I arrived at the church before the beginning of Matins and decided to sit for a while on the bench at Batiushka's grave. As I approached I heard a strange sound. Peering into the darkness, I saw a group of school children; they were huddled by the grave, sobbing. The children had not forgotten their meek and kindly Batiushka. And I think that wherever life led them, the image of Fr. Simeon remained in the heart of each and every one of them as a brightly guiding star.



You have to struggle to increase your zeal for God. It should become for you a daily way of life. Struggle for perfection. If you can't gain a drachma, gain at least a tenth of a drachma. Virtues are not acquired easily. There is need of struggling. And know: if we acquire virtue quickly, we shall lose it quickly. Whereas if we acquire it with labor, it doesn't go away.

Have zeal. Stubbornness is one thing, and zeal is another. Stubbornness is a fault. But if it is transformed to zeal for spiritual things, then it becomes virtue. Try to gain this divine zeal. If you do not have persistence and zeal in the spiritual realm, you will quickly be brought to your knees; and—at the first difficulties you encounter—you will give up.

The path of man has more thorns than flowers. You have to be very strong, so that nothing will be able to shake you. Even if all are shaken, and all oppose you: if you have zeal for God, if you are strong and have Christ in you, fear not. It is only from ourselves that we are in danger, not from anyone else.

Elder Ieronymos of Aigina (+1966)

SAINT GREGORY PALAMAS: ORTHODOXY'S WARRIOR

Excerpts from the book "Saint Gregory Palamas as a Hagiorite," by Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos of Naupaktos.



The great significance of St. Gregory's teaching for Orthodoxy can be seen on the important question of epistemology. When we say epistemology we mean the knowledge of God and, to be precise, we mean the way which we pursue in order to attain knowledge of God.

The situation in St. Gregory's time was that Orthodoxy was being debased; it was becoming worldly and being changed into either pantheism or agnosticism. Pantheism believed and taught that God in his essence was to be found in all nature, and so when we look at nature we can acquire knowledge of God. Agnosticism believed and taught that it was utterly impossible for us to know God, just because He is God and man is limited, and therefore man was completely incapable of attaining a real knowledge of God.

In the face of this great danger St. Gregory Palamas developed the fundamental teaching of the Church concerning the great mystery of the indivisible distinction between the essence and energy of God. We must underline that **this is not the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas alone, but of the Orthodox Church, and therefore this theology cannot be called Palamism** (as some distraught souls have incorrectly and blasphemously called it). Many fathers have referred to the distinction between essence and energy. We find it in the Bible, in the first Apostolic Fathers, in the Cappadocian Fathers, and especially in St. Basil the Great and that great dogmatic theologian of the Church, St. John of Damascus. St. Gregory Palamas, with his outstanding theological ability, developed further this already existing teaching and put forward its practical consequences and dimensions.

It is very characteristic that this distinction began to be noted in discussions about the Holy Spirit. The Calabrian philosopher Barlaam maintained that we could not know just what the Holy Spirit is, especially His procession and His being sent by the Son. In the face of the danger of agnosticism, St. Gregory Palamas taught that the actual procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father is a different thing from His being sent by the Son. Thus, while we do not know the essence of the Holy Spirit, we do know His energy.

All spiritual life is a result and fruit of the energy of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the saint taught, we cannot participate in

God’s essence, but we can know and participate in His energies. As the great dogmatic theologian St. John of Damascus teaches, we can see His three unions: **union in essence, of the Persons of the Holy Trinity; union in substance, in the Person of Christ between the divine and human natures; and union in energy, between God and man.**

In this way St. Gregory preserves the true teaching of the Church. If in the time of Athanasios the Great, men doubted the divinity of Christ, in St. Gregory’s time they had doubts about God’s energies. They said that His energies are created. Therefore in the dismissal hymn of the saint we chant: *Illuminator of Orthodoxy, supporter and teacher of the Church, spiritual beauty of the monastics, irrefutable champion of the theologians...*

The common mind of the Church recognizes St. Gregory Palamas, the Hagiorite saint, as a great Father of the Church, an Ecumenical teacher, and includes him with the Three Hierarchs and the three great theologians of the Church. The characterization of theologian which has been given to him, has made him an elect member of the company of the Holy Fathers. St. Gregory is truly *an invincible champion of the theologians.*

But also synodically the Church has characterized him as an unerring father, teacher and theologian. The Synodal Tome of 1347 refers to this great Hagiorite saint, saying: “But also if anyone else at all is ever caught either thinking or saying or writing against the said most worthy priestmonk Gregory Palamas and the monks with him, or rather against the holy theologians and this Church, we both vote against him for these things and put him under this condemnation, whether he be of the hierarchy or the laity. We have many times proclaimed most worthy this respected priestmonk Gregory Palamas and the monks agreeing with him. They neither write nor think anything that differs from the divine words, having examined them and understood them exactly. And they champion the divine words, or rather our common devotion and tradition in all ways, as is proper, defending them as in every respect higher than what not only they but also the Church of God and the former synodal volume regard as sophistries. And we also declare them to be very safe defenders of the Church and its faith, and its champions and helpers.”

This synodal text highlights the three following truths which all Christians should recognize.

First, St. Gregory Palamas is characterized as a simple and safe teacher of the Church.

Second, the teaching of St. Gregory about the distinction of essence and energy, about man’s participation in the uncreated energy of God and about the hesychastic way of life is a teaching of the Church and a canon of godliness and life.

Third, anyone who denies and undervalues St. Gregory Palamas, as well as the hesychastic life which he lived and taught, is excommunicated from the Orthodox Church.

All these things show the great value of St. Gregory, but also the value of the Holy Mountain, with its hesychastic tradition, which is preserved to this day by the Hagiorite Fathers. This tradition of hesychasm is the greatest treasure of the Holy Mountain, a hope for the world and a true life for Christians. Rejection of the Holy Mountain and the hesychastic tradition is in reality a denial of the Orthodox Tradition and a departure from the *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.*

† † †

Apolytikion

Light of Orthodoxy, pillar and teacher of the Church, adornment of monastics, invincible champion of theologians, O Gregory, wonderworker, boast of Thessalonica, herald of grace: ever pray that our souls be saved.

Kontakion

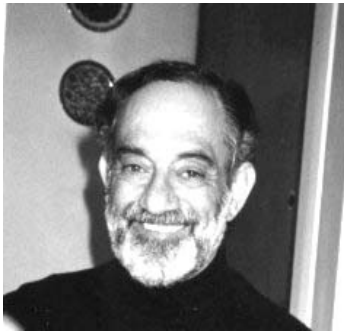
With one accord, we praise you as the sacred and divine vessel of wisdom and clear trumpet of theology, O our righteous Father Gregory of divine speech. As a mind that stands now before the Primal Mind, do you ever guide aright and lead our mind to Him, that we all may cry: Hail, O herald of grace divine.



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THE LIFE IN CHRIST

By Protopresbyter John Romanides, one of Orthodoxy's most prominent 20th century priest, theologian, and writer (+2001).



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 beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the 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* (I 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 de-

struction 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* (I 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* (I 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 (I Thes 4:4). 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 your victory? ... Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* (I 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* (ibid. 2:15), as well as among the just ones who have died before (I 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* (I 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 17:21), while the center and the source of this unity is the Eucharist: *Since there is one bread, we who are several, are one body, because we are all part of one Bread.* (I Cor 6:19-20). Baptism and Chrismation 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* (I 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, 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. *I tell you the truth, whenever you have done these things to one of these, my brethren, it is to me that you have done them.* (Mt 15:20).

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 Today 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, 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* (I 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. *Whoever denies me before men I will deny also before my Father 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.



A man once came to my Kalyvi and at some point said to me about something, “God should not have made it this way.” “Can you keep a pebble suspended in mid-air?” I asked him. “Those stars you see up there are not sparkling beads! They are huge masses in space that move with dizzying speed and yet will not collide.” He insisted, “But in my opinion, God should not have arranged it that way.”

Can you believe the man? Are we the ones to judge God? Logic is everywhere and trust in God is nowhere to be found. And if you try to talk sense to these people, they will say, “Excuse me, all I did is to give my opinion; don’t I have a right to do that?”

The things that God hears from us! Fortunately, He does not take us at our word.

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

A LITTLE GIRL’S DREAM

By Galina Deinitzina.

What could be done with little Natasha? Aunt Katia was worried. The little girl refused to listen to anyone. Since the moment her mother was taken to the hospital everything had been going wrong. The little girl was not the same; she no longer said her prayers; she had become selfish and unkind.

At first, Aunt Katia thought the reason for the change was the child’s longing for her mother, but on the last visit to the hospital she had refused even to go along. When Aunt Katia talked to her, she closed her eyes, clenched her fists, and just sat there refusing all help, muttering under her breath,

“You just wait. I’ll show you.”

“Whom was she threatening?” Wondered Aunt Katia helplessly.

“I won’t pray, I won’t,” muttered Natasha to herself.

Why should she? When Mother was carried out on that horrible stretcher by those men in white suits, she had prayed all night for her to come back well and smiling. Why should such a kind, lovable mother be so sick? Why did God let it happen? Mother had always prayed to Him. She too had prayed hard to her heavenly Father and her Guardian Angel. She had asked them to help her mother, but no help came.

It was now more than a month since her mother had been taken away, her eyes closed and her face so pale. At first she had been told that she had heart trouble; afterwards they discovered a terrible lump in her breast and cut her with sharp, cruel knives. After that Natasha stopped praying.

She felt she was old enough, at seven, to know what is right and just. No one could help her, since God and her Guardian Angel had done nothing. She now looked reproachfully at the icons put up by her own dear mother. There was one of Jesus, one of the Mother of God with the Child in her arms, and a tiny one of her Guardian Angel. Natasha shut her eyes tightly,

“No, I won’t pray to you. I won’t,” she whispered.

Natasha, it’s bedtime,” coaxed Aunt Katia. “Now be a good little girl. Say your prayers and go to bed.”

But Natasha just threw off her clothes, slipped into bed, and turned defiantly toward the wall.

“Natasha, darling,” pleaded Aunt Katia. “Why is my little girl behaving so? You are making your Guardian Angel very unhappy. Help your mother get well by praying for her. Please!”

Aunt Katia took the tiny icon and tried to turn Natasha toward herself in order to bless her with it, but the child fought back and knocked the icon out of her hand. It fell to the floor.

“Oh, dear,” cried Aunt Katia, frightened and sad. She picked up the icon, wiped it with her clean white apron, and kissed it.

“Well, Natasha,” her voice was severe, “if you won’t pray, I shall have to pray for you. It is a great offense to throw an icon on the floor.” With that she went out, closing the door.

Curled up in bed in a small tight ball, Natasha felt her heart beating fast. Her cheeks were burning.

“I didn’t want to do that. Really I didn’t.”

She felt heavy inside, frightened and cold. Something was going to happen now, she knew it, for offending her Guardian Angel so!

Suddenly Natasha saw herself not in her own room but in a large beautiful garden. The sun shone brightly, the sky was very blue, and soft melodious singing could be heard. About her were many flowers, growing in separate flower beds. They were all different. There were some white lilies, anemones, lilies of the valley, transparent narcissuses, tulips, simple corn flowers, daisies, and glorious roses. Some flowers stood up straight, holding their heads high toward the warm caressing sun. Others looked weak and sickly, with their heads bent to the ground and their leaves shrivelled and wan. Some were almost hidden by stifling weeds. Some beds were completely filled with brambles, thorns, and weeds.

Then Natasha noticed walking towards her a Woman of wondrous beauty, dressed in a pale blue gown.

“Did you come to look at our garden, Natasha?” she asked kindly. “Come, I shall show it to you.”

Where am I?” asked Natasha shyly.

“This is Our Father’s Garden,” answered the Lady in blue. “The flowers which you see represent human souls. The beautiful ones represent souls that love Our Father and try to please and help Him in His kind deeds. Those that look sick and wilted are souls who have lost faith in prayer. And now they have no strength to lift their heads. But Our Father in His infinite mercy will help them. Those with weeds and creepers around their stems represent people who, in their unkind deeds, have forgotten Our Father and refuse His love. But their Guardian Angels may still help them if they allow them to untwine the choking sticky creepers. They still may be led to safety and light.”

Then Natasha noticed angels with white wings and radiant garments walking around each flower bed, watering each flower with clear sparkling water from crystal vessels. Others were carefully trying to smooth out the crumpled leaves and free the sickly flowers from clinging creepers and weeds.

“Where is my flower?” whispered Natasha.

The Lady with the kind face took the little girl by the hand and led her toward a tiny, doubled-up white daisy. Its stem was choked by brambles and creepers, gray and horrible, so that no sunlight could reach the poor flower. Near it stood an angel with his head covered by his white wings, weeping.

“Why are you crying?” Inquired the Lady.

As the Angel raised his face, Natasha recognized her Guardian Angel from her tiny icon. His face was very sad now, and

his forehead was marked by a dreadful red bruise, as if from a blow.

“I am crying,” answered the angel in a soft sad voice, “because Our Father gave me a little girl to watch over, who was such a good little girl that I was happy to watch her grow; happy to watch her in prayer, each morning and night. She always asked me to guard her. But lately she has changed.

Our Father, in His mercy, wanted to save her mother, who had a dangerous growth in her breast unknown to anyone. Therefore He sent her a slight illness so that the danger could be discovered and removed in time. The woman is safe now, but the little girl, instead of being grateful, has been reproaching me and even Our Father for her mother’s sickness. She stopped praying, and even pushed me away.”

The Angel touched the ugly mark on his forehead. “You see, she even hit me! Look at the thorns about her soul! What will happen now? What shall I tell Our Father? He may punish her, you know, and I pity her. I would like to help her but she turns away. That is the reason for my tears.” And the Angel started to cry again, covering his head with his wings.

The Lady in blue looked sadly at Natasha. Natasha was trembling and sobbing bitterly. She wanted to cry out, “I shall never do anything like that again, Guardian Angel. I will be kind. I shall pray to Our Father, and always be grateful for everything.” But her tongue would not move. She could only whimper.

Then she woke up. The sun was pouring in through the nursery window, bright and warm. Aunt Katia was bending over her.

“Why have you been crying in your sleep, Natasha, my child?” Her voice was anxious.

Natasha rose quickly to her knees, made the sign of the Cross, then kissed her aunt tenderly.

“Aunty, dear, I will never be such a nasty little girl any more. Please, please forgive me. I was bad and cruel. Let’s go to church today. I want to pray for my darling mother and ask forgiveness. I understand it all now. My Guardian Angel will never have cause to cry because of me.”

She took down the tiny icon of her Guardian Angel and pressed it to her cheek. From the icons the eyes of Christ looked down at the little girl with infinite tenderness. Aunt Katia with tears of gratitude in her eyes gently stroked Natasha’s curly head.



People today are unrestrained. Laity and clergy, like unbridled horses, run to sin. They do not take into account God, death, the Judgment, repayment—nothing, nothing. They are only interested in the material world—in the body, in pleasures, in honors. There are very few who are truly interested, and perhaps—for these few—God spares the world.

Blessed Elder Philotheos of Paros (+1980)

THOUGHTS CONCERNING THE CHURCH

By New Martyr Patriarch Tikhon.

And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains ... and all nations shall flow unto it ... and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks ... neither shall they learn war anymore. But they shall sit every man under his vine; and none shall make them afraid...

(Is 2:2, 4; Mic 4:3-4)



This kingdom of peace on earth, foretold by the Old Testament prophets, is the Church of Christ, and it is in her that one must seek peace. It is here that a man is given peace with God, for it is through the Holy Mysteries that he is cleansed of sin and becomes a beloved child of the Lord. Here in the Divine services, in the Mysteries, in the life of the Church, a Christian acquires peace and joy and tranquility for his soul; his nature is regenerated, renewed, and in this meek, gentle, submissive, merciful and loving soul, there comes to abide the God of peace and love. And then the Christian experiences the highest degree of blessedness, which surpasses any and every earthly good. Nothing, no suffering can cloud this blessed peace within the Christian soul. On the contrary, we know from the history of the Church that holy people even rejoiced in sufferings and boasted of their trials, of being bound and imprisoned. In deserts and in caves and in the face of all manner of deprivation they were as content and serene as perhaps never are people who live with all manner of comfort and sufficiency. Even death did not frighten them; they serenely anticipated its approach and in peace departed to the Lord.

In Christ's Church peace is spread abroad. Here we pray for the peace of the whole world, for the union of all; here everyone calls one another brother, they help one another. Christians are called to love everyone; they even forgive their enemies and do good to them. And when Christians are obedient to the voice of the Church and live according to its precepts, then they truly experience peace and love. Let us only recall the first Christians, who had *one heart, one soul, who even owned what they had in common* (Acts 4:32). By contrast, when people distance themselves from the Holy Church and live according to their own will, then there reigns self-love, divisions, discord, wars.

Ought we not to rejoice and thank the Lord that He, in His merciful kindness, regards His Church and preserves her unharmed and invincible even to this very day? After all, it

was not only in the first centuries of her history that Christ's Church endured various troubles and was subject to persecutions, and it was not only during the time of the Ecumenical Councils that she was attacked by false teachers, who elevated their minds above the mind of God. From the first days of its existence and to the end of time she will be like a ship with passengers, sailing upon a tempestuous sea that is ready at any minute to capsize the ship and swallow its cargo. And it seems that the further the ship sails, the more fiercely the waves lash against it.

In the early centuries the Christians endured persecution from without, from the pagans. But when the Church proved victorious over them, an even greater danger arose, this time from another side: while troubles from the pagans ceased, there arose troubles from her own, troubles from false brothers, attacks from within. From within the bosom of Christianity itself there appeared one heresy and schism after another. Of course, the truth of God vanquished human falsehood, but members of the Church can never retire their weapons. They must wage war no longer against ancient heretics, but against new enemies: against unbelievers, against those who deny the truth, against those who pretend to be representatives of a powerful science. And we cannot say that with the passage of time this war has abated; no sooner does the Church manage to conquer one foe, than she is confronted with a new antagonist. Evil is like some hydra; as one head is decapitated, another appears in its place.

In the last times, evil will intensify all its forces and in the person of Antichrist it will engage the Church of God in the most violent battle. In those days there will be a *great tribulation* for the Church, *such as never was since the world began* (Mt 24:21). And just as in the past some flourishing and formerly renowned local Churches became impoverished and desolate, before the end there will be an even greater falling away. But there never was a time, and we believe, in accordance with the word of the Lord, that there will never come a time when the entire universal Church of Christ will disappear from the face of the earth. No: *the foundation of God standeth sure* (II Tim 2:19). Christ's Church is *founded upon an immovable rock, and the gates of hell will not prevail against her* (Mt 16:18). The more furiously the waves beat against this immovable rock, the farther they recoil from it.

At times, the enemies of Christ's Church are ready to celebrate a complete victory over her; it seems to them that they have put an end to her. But what do they discover? Just as swelling waves beat against a ship only to fall back into the sea to merge and become indistinguishable from other waves, so, too, the enemies of Christ, having launched an attack against the Church, again return to that nothingness from which they emerged, while the ship of the Church continues as before to advance in its victorious voyage. Every year that passes serves to affirm the certainty that the truth of the Lord

abideth forever, and that even *the gates of hell will not prevail against Christ's Church.*

How can we not rejoice on seeing that Christ's Church—a kingdom not of this world, a kingdom that has no worldly means at its disposal, no earthly enticements; a kingdom that is despised, persecuted, powerless—has not only not perished in this world, but has grown and has conquered the world. How can we not rejoice at the thought that in spite of all manner of coercion, attacks, and opposition, the Orthodox Church has preserved the faith of Christ as a precious treasure, in its original purity and entirety, unharmed, so that our faith is the faith of the apostles, the faith of the fathers, the Orthodox faith.

The holy Apostle Paul wisely compares the Church of Christ to a body. Now, in a body there is *not just one member but many* (I Cor 12:14), and *these members do not all have the same function* (Rom. 12:4), but each has its own: the eye has its function, the hand its function, and each member is necessary and cannot manage without the other; they *all contribute to the good of one another, and there is no division within the body* (I Cor 12:25-26). *Even so are you, brothers, the body of Christ and members in particular* (v. 27). *Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ* (Eph. 4:7) for the perfecting of the saints, *for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ* (v. 12). Therefore, do you all with unfeigned love grow up into Him, *From Whom the whole body fitly joined together by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love* (v. 16).

Again, Saint John Chrysostom said, *Do not cast all responsibility upon the religious; you yourselves are capable of a great deal, you know one another better than we...* Therefore, brethren, edify one another, *warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men* (I Thess 5:14-15). *And the God of all grace, ... make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you. To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen* (I Pet 5:10-11).



When a non-believer asks you why you fast, don't tell him it is because of the Lord's suffering, or because of His Cross. We do not fast for the Passion or the Cross, but for OUR SINS, because we are preparing to approach the Holy Mysteries. The Passion of Christ is not a reason for fasting or mourning, but for joy and exultation! We fast and mourn, not for the Cross or for Christ's sufferings, but because of our own sins.

St. John Chrysostom

THE POWER OF PRAYER

Source: Palladius, Historia Lausiaca.

There was a presbyter 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 ashamed, 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 the 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.

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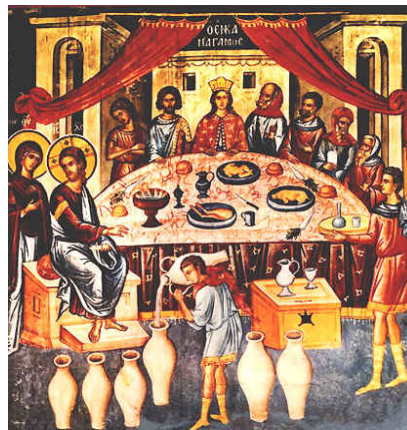
THE TWO-FOLD GREAT MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church. (Eph 5:32)

Great is the mystery when a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife. The apostle himself, who was raised to the third heaven and who saw many mysteries of heaven, calls the physical union of men and women in marriage on earth a *great mystery*. That is, the mystery of love and life and only the mystery of Christ's bond with His Church is greater.

Christ is called the Bridegroom and the Church, the Bride. Christ loves His Church so much that, because of Her, He left His heavenly Father—remaining with Him, of course, in unity of substance and divinity—and descended to earth and attached Himself to His Church and suffered for Her so that, by His Blood, cleanse Her from every sin and spot and make Her worthy to be called His Bride. With His love He warms the Church, with His Blood He feeds the Church, and by His Holy Spirit He causes the Church to live, and sanctifies and adorns Her.



What a husband is to a wife, so Christ is to the Church. Man is the head of a woman and Christ is the Head of the Church. A husband loves his wife as his own body. A woman listens to her husband and the Church listens to Christ. A husband loves his wife as he loves his own body and Christ loves the Church as His own Body. A husband loves his wife as he loves himself and a wife reveres her husband, and Christ loves the Church as He loves Himself and the Church reveres Christ.

Since no one hates his own flesh but rather warms and nourishes it so also Christ warms and feeds the Church as His own Body. And every individual human soul is the bride of Christ the Bridegroom and the assembly of all the faithful is the bride of Christ the Bridegroom. The kind of relationship of a believing man toward Christ also is the relationship of the entire Church toward Christ. Christ is the Head of that great Body which is called the Church, and which is in part visible and in part invisible.

O my brethren, this is a great mystery! It is revealed to us according to the measure of our love toward Christ and of our fear of Christ's judgment.

O Lord, Gentle Savior, cleanse us, save us and adorn our souls that we may be worthy of the immortal and indescribable unity with You in time and in eternity.

To You be glory and thanks always. Amen.

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

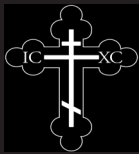
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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ON THE APPEARANCE OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST

By Pouplios Lantoulos & St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite.

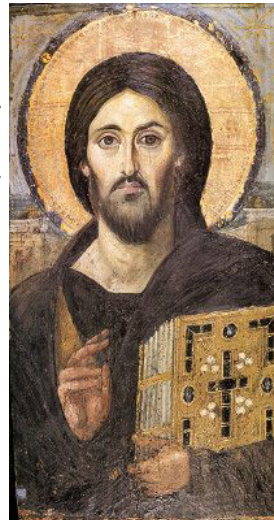
From the Editor: The subject article is one that we published in our first issue, back in January, 2003. We consider its content to be of immense value for all of us who quite often, succumbing to the weaknesses of our fallen nature, wonder what our Lord and Savior truly looked like and what his contemporaries thought of Him. Our readership has significantly changed over that last eight years and as such, we take the liberty of re-publishing this intriguing article on the appearance of our Lord and Savior.



Concerning the God-man, the Son and Logos of God, the Evangelists and Apostles wrote about His works in the world in the Divine Gospels. They recorded the accounts of His transfiguration, His crucifixion, His resurrection and His ascension up to heaven. But there were many other private individuals of that period, not followers of Christ, who wrote a more detailed account concerning the life of the Lord. One who wrote about the character, appearances, form and figure of Christ which is worthy of mention, is the Roman Pouplios Lantoulos, who lived during the days of our Lord, residing in Jerusalem at that time. He wrote a letter to the Roman senate which is as follows:

“In those days there appeared a young man, who is still living, a youth that has great power and whose name is Jesus Christ. His populace calls Him a strong

prophet and His disciples call Him Son of God. He raised the dead to life; and cures the sick of every type of disease. The youth is tall but well proportioned. The countenance of His face is both serious and active, so that those who look at Him love Him, and yet in another way, they are afraid of Him. The hair on His head is the color of wine down to the beginning of His ears, lacking brilliance. It is smooth from the beginning of His ears to His shoulders, then twisted and brilliant from the shoulders down, where it hangs divided according to the custom of the Nazarenes. His forehead is smooth and clean, His face, without blemish, decorated with a light pink color. His appearance is polite and joyful, His nose and mouth are altogether blameless. His beard is thick being of the same color as His hair, and is also divided in two, while His eyes are blue and filled with extreme brilliance. When He scolds He is fearful; when He teaches and advises, He is attractive



and beloved. Wonder is the grace of His face and dignified. Not once was He seen laughing, but He was often seen crying. According to the height of His body, His hands being very straight and His arms graceful, and according to His generation, **He is the nicest of all men.**”

St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, in “A Handbook of Spiritual Counsel, the Classics of Western Spirituality Proper Delights of the Mind,” addresses the great delight of envisioning the physical appearance of Christ.

“Let me say this too. Even the mere envision of the physical appearance and the beauty of the divine face of Jesus brings inexpressible delight so that you

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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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will want to say enthusiastically: *You are all sweetness, O Savior; You are all desire and appeal; You are all insatiate; You are all beauty irresistible.* Also you will want to say: *You have attracted me with desire, O Christ, and You have transfigured me with your divine love.* Moreover, you will want to say with St. Paul: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?* (Rom 8:35) Also you will want to ask the question of the bride: *Have you seen him whom my soul loves?* (Cant 3:3) And you will want to say many other words of love.

Think of those most pure eyes of Jesus, so calm, so sweet; the straightness of His nose; the somewhat chestnut-colored and at the same time golden hair and beard of His; His great and joyous forehead; the blended color of His calm and royal face; His fine, long fingers and his perfectly shaped hands; His moderate stature, and simply all of the other symmetry and grace, which shone in all His members. Jesus was so beautiful that, as Lentulus, that officer who had seen the Lord with his own eyes in Jerusalem, wrote to the senate in Rome, **there has never appeared on earth another person more beautiful than Jesus.** Foreseeing this beauty, prophet David wrote: *You are the most beautiful of the sons of men.* (Pss 45:2). Aquila rendered this line, *You are adorned with beauty by the sons of men.* Symmachus rendered it: *Among the sons of men You are good in beauty.* The bride in the Song speaks lovingly to Him: *Behold, You are beautiful, my beloved, truly lovely* (Cant 1:16) This is why the people could not be satisfied when looking upon Him, nor did they want to take their attention away from Him.

St. John Chrysostom explaining this passage *When Jesus saw great crowds around Him* (Mt 8:18), wrote: *"The people were really attracted to Him and they loved Him and marveled at Him, desiring always to be looking upon Him. Who would*

want to leave while He was doing these marvelous deeds? Who would not want to simply get a glance at the face and the mouth that as saying such wonderful things? He was not so wonderful only when He was doing wonders, but even when He was just looked upon, simply He was just full of grace. This is what the prophet David meant when he said that *He was the most beautiful among the sons of man.*

Now if the physical body of sweetest Jesus was so beautiful then when He was bearing a corruptible body, how much more beautiful is it now that it has become incorruptible and glorified and His divine face is shining in heaven infinitely more brightly than the sun? This is why St. John Chrysostom has sought with his eloquent homilies to move us to do everything we can so that we may achieve and enjoy the most sweet vision of the glorified and most beautiful and most desired divine face of Jesus. For if one is to be deprived of the vision of that most beautiful and most desired face of Jesus, this is truly a worse calamity than a thousand hells. For as St. John Chrysostom wrote:

Even if we experience a thousand hells, none of these will be anything like the experience of seeing the calm face of Jesus and His serene eyes turn away from us as being unable to endure looking upon us."



A man may seem to be silent, but if his heart is condemn-
ing others, he is babbling ceaselessly. But there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent, that is, he says nothing that is not profitable.

Abba Poimen the(+450)

THE SECOND COMING AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE RESURRECTED BODIES

From the book "Saint Symeon, the New Theologian" by Niketas Stethatos.

One day, while he (Saint Symeon) was saying his prayers with a pure heart and conversing with God, he noticed that the air began to illuminate his mind; although he remained in his cell, he began to feel as though he was somehow transported within an open space. It was dark outside, the night was already at hand, when a radiance suddenly began to glow from up high, just like the morning light at dawn. What a truly scary vision befell the poor man! And his living quarters—along with everything in them—vanished completely from sight, making him believe that he was not inside his cell.

He was absolutely overwhelmed by a divine ecstasy, and was fully aware of that light with his mind, as it approached him. The light grew steadily stronger, and made the air seem even brighter than before, and he felt that his entire self—along with his body—had now gone beyond all worldly things.

But, because that light continued to shine more and more, making it seem like a sun shining at mid-day, he felt as though he were actually standing inside that light, and that his entire being, together with his body, was filled with joy and tears, that were generated by the sweetness of that light's presence. He also observed that the same light, in some wondrous kind of way, came in contact with his body, and gradually permeated its members. The surprise brought about by this vision drew him away from the previous state of theory and left him feeling only this exquisite sensation that was taking place inside him. He watched as that light slowly penetrated his entire body, his heart and his inner most depths, making his whole existence like a fire and light.

And just as with his living quarters, so did he now lose every sense of form, of place, of weight and of bodily shape, and his tears ceased to fall. Then he heard a voice from within the light, saying to him: *It has been decided, that in this same manner shall the Saints be transformed, who will be living and will still be here, during the hour of the final trumpet, and thus transformed, they will be taken up to the heavens, just as the Apostle Paul says.*

After remaining in this state for many hours, the blessed Symeon in his secret and incessant praise to the Lord, and fully comprehending the glory that had enfolded him, as well as the eternal bliss that was to be bestowed on the Saints, began to wonder and ask himself: "Will I ever return to the previous condition of my body, or shall I live like this continuously?" No sooner had he made this thought, than he immediately began to feel that he was moving

about with his body like a shadow or a spirit. He realized that he had become (as we said, with his body as well) a light without a form; something entirely incorporeal. He continued to feel that he possessed a body, yet without its material dimensions, and more like a spiritual one. In other words, he felt as though he lacked all weight or mass whatsoever, and was amazed, how he could have a body and yet seem bodiless.

And the light that spoke inside him, said to him once again: *Thus will all the Saints be enrobed without the flesh after the resurrection, in the future age, with spiritual bodies that are either lighter and finer and more ethereal, or, denser and heavier and more earthen, which will be the determining factor for each one with regard to their stance, their order and their closeness to God.*

After hearing these things, and having seen the inexpressible divine light, the God-sighting and God-possessed Symeon thanked God, Who glorified our species and made it to partake of divinity and His kingdom, and returned once again to his former state, and found himself again inside his cell, in his previous, human condition. However, he reassured with oaths all those whom he trusted to reveal his secrets, that "for many days after, I could still feel that lightness of body, without feeling any exertion, or hunger, or thirst."

Given that he partook of these things in the Spirit and was filled with the divine charismas of the Spirit (and of course having fully cleared his mind of all impurities), he was given to see such visions and breathtaking revelations by the Lord, as had the Prophets of old.

Thus, with his apostolic mindset (because his existence was guided and moved by the divine Spirit) he was also given the orator's charisma, hence whenever words came forth from his mouth—albeit illiterate—he also theologized. With his divinely inspired writings, he teaches the faithful the precision of the pious lifestyle. Having reached spiritual heights such as these, he began to compose ascetic essays, set out in chapters according to the various virtues and the vices that contravened them, by drawing from his own personal ascetic life and the divine knowledge that was bestowed on him, and describing in detail the monastic life for those who practice it, thus becoming to the Israelite nation of monkhood a river of God, full of spiritual waters.

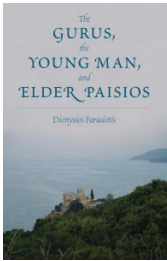


Being slain for the sake of one's brethren is the best possible weapon for delivering them from servitude to the traducer, the devil, and preparing their souls to accept God, Who desires the salvation of all.

Righteous Elder Sophrony of Essex (+1993)

EXPERIENCING GOD

From the book *"The Gurus, the Young Man, and Elder Paisios,"* by Dionysios Farasiotis.



Once I had the great honor and blessing to transport elder Paisios somewhere with my car. In the presence of his great simplicity and humility, I would forget myself and be swayed into an improper familiarity. I could see before me my father and would forget that God permanently dwelt within him. I would forget that he had realized to the uttermost degree the capabilities of human nature and that he had become a god-bearer. I would forget that through his words, he would chase out the demons; that with one word from him, incurable illnesses disappeared; that his face shone like the sun before my eyes; that with unending gifts, he had been honored and adorned by the Holy Spirit, the Grace of God.

I know well all these things, these amazing memories, and I guard them deeply within the depths of my soul and ask God with agony and tears to not ever let my raging enemy, the Devil, steal them from me. And nevertheless, when I was with the elder, many times his simple and unpretentious behavior, full of kindness and humor, would sway me to impolite familiarity; from such familiarity I would slide down to rudeness and audacity, and I thus open my mouth with all my senselessness and my stupidity. And once, during such a moment, I asked him.

“Elder, tell me about God, speak to me, how is he?”

The elder did not speak and I continued to drive, on curvy roads further down on the mountain.

My God! I began suddenly feeling God everywhere. In the car, outside on the mountains, far in the distant galaxies. He was everywhere, He filled everything, but He was nothing of all of these things. An Essence which pierced through all the other ones, without getting mixed up or being confused with these. A Power present everywhere, which nevertheless no one perceives, outside of every viewpoint. Someone cannot discover It with his own ... haughty effort. A Power which only is self revealed. All these mountains, stars, trees, people, existed and were maintained alive thanks to His power. He could in one moment annihilate them, for them to cease existing without noise or thunder or resistance. Just as we turn the switch and in one moment the light disappears.

He’s so almighty and nevertheless so courteous. He does not pressure anyone with his Almightyness or his Presence. He is so near us and so invisible simultaneously, so that we do not feel any burden, some obligation from His presence alone. So that He does not burden us at all, to not create any obligation to us, to leave us completely free, to do whatever

we want. Not for us to be forced by His beauty to some degree. He could easily impose His love, not with fears and power and strength, but simply with the sweetness of His presence, which no one could resist. Yet, He does not do it, out of an infinite..., incomprehensible respect for man’s freedom. He does not do it, out of love for man. He loves us so much, He desires us so strongly that His innards are burned, out of desire and love for us. For this reason He limits Himself, He disappears from our perception and tries in a thousand ways, with infinite wisdom with dreadful attention and interest, as a “raging” lover to draw us to His love. To wake us up, to motivate our interest, to make us understand and love Him.

He sits and occupies Himself with each one of us personally, and simultaneously with the whole universe, the infinitely powerful one. And because He has interest for this infinite universe, the love and interest He has for each one of us personally is not lessened not even to the slightest degree, does not subside even in thought.

God wants our love. He does not demand it. Love is an emotion which is born and lives only in the air of freedom; outside of such freedom, it ceases to exist, it is perverted, altered, it dies. For this reason, God leaves us completely free to gain our love, which can be born only in this freedom.

What is that we have which “makes” God love us? Some beauty, some immense intelligence, some power, some virtue? Nothing of this sort! We are non-existent before Him and His gifts. And not only do we not have anything worthy of such love, but we also have so many things which reek an offensive odor, push away and strongly urge all to turn away from us and to dislike us. We are fainthearted to His generosity. We are of very slight intelligence before His vast intellect. Wicked before His goodness. Grabbers, at the moment when He wholeheartedly offers. That which He grants us richly, overflowing, we rush to grab. We respond to His kindness with grabbing and mockery. Ungrateful to His benefactions. Haughty in behavior before His Almightyness. Sly and insufficient before His Wisdom.

He wants to grant us His Grace, He wants to give us beauty, life, wisdom, power. We do not want to take them as gifts. Our ego destroys them, our pride makes them filthy. We cannot keep any of His gifts due to our evil disposition. And if a reminiscence of these holy gifts remains in our soul, we immediately get puffed up from pride, as if we obtained them on our own and through our miserable existence and value, as if it is not a gift, without toil. We lift up our eyebrow and look down upon our neighbor. The gift is lifted up and reeks a foul odor from our soul. God opposes the prideful, while to the humble He gives grace: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.* (Jas 1:17).

What more can I say? Where should I stop? A big bunch of horribleness we are. Our fallen human nature, which voluntarily remains fallen and sunk in the filth of the passions, only regurgitation and asphyxiation it calls forth from its filth.

As the prophet Isaiah says (Isa 1:5-6), ... *the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.* It refers to man's wound which is rotting, the deep wound which man has wholly, from his head to his fingernails; he is one continuous wound. Where and how should one apply a gauze? Where is the medicine? Only through God Himself. Christ was needed to restore us to our beginnings, through His birth and Holy Passion; he restored our nature which voluntarily and with rage was destroyed through our own free will. He arrived in this world, out of kindness and pure love to reform us back to our beginning.

This is human nature today. It was not thus always. We were not created thus, we ended up thus. Our choices formulated us accordingly. We constantly choose evil and thus destroy ourselves. And whereas we were created beautiful, bright, almighty, wise and honored, dominating the material world, immortal, we ended up today mortal, dark, subject to the needs of material life, to pain, to illness, to affliction, to corruption, to death. We do not have knowledge, we do not have wisdom; as blind people we go about in the world, we rip and fall and are wounded and don't know where we tripped. Our ancient enemy ensures we fall; he puts up obstacles to trip us and he tries to throw us into wild valleys and to kill us, so that he can laugh mockingly and celebrate in his wickedness. He is the man hater, the inventor of wickedness, the father of falsehood, the ancient dragon, our very ancient enemy, the devil.

And God loves us. He still loves us. With a love which burns, with a love which trembles with longing, with a love which overlooks the pain which we cause Him, with a love which accepts to enter into our toil, which accepts to suffer from the craziness of our evil. O my God! How much pain do we cause you! God loved us so much, that He accepted to become a man. He moderated His majesty in our humility. He accepted to ascend on the Cross. He accepted to leave the devil with his sly plots to put Him up on the Cross and there, to crush the head of the snake. Henceforth we can

defeat the devil whenever we want. And all these for our sake. For me and for you.

I continued feeling God and comprehending Him with my heart. A deep calmness flooded my existence. Every fear was annihilated. Since the Almighty God exists, since He knows everything, since He is so good, since He is so wise, since He loves me so much, what should I fear? I am in His embrace! I am in His palm. Who can do anything to me? I was certain of the beginning, the course of man's existence, and the end of the world. I rejoiced, because in the end, as always, He will be the victor, and His kindness and holiness will triumph.

God is Spirit! The world is matter. The spirit surpasses matter, supports it in existence, brings it into existence, maintains it in existence, however it is completely different from matter. Matter is destined to disappear. The spirit always exists. Time is a result, a qualitative characteristic of matter. In the matter the spirit exists and time does not exist. Eternity is the manner of existence of the Spirit. Past and future coincide in a vast present. It is simultaneously everywhere from the infinite universe and in my car.

He is very simple in nature, however so mysterious. How deeply my soul was satisfied! How much I rejoiced! How much I was comforted! How much do I want to re-live it again! I rejoice in the thought that when I die I will begin, I hope, to live near Him. So much that... I long to die. I would like to die today, if I knew that I would meet Him. I fear my sin, my evil deeds, that they might separate me from Him. And I remember from the writings of Saint John Damascene:

We believe in one God, immaterial, unlimited, infinite, without beginning, eternal, almighty, immortal, timeless, noetic light... (St. John Damascene, "Precise Exposition of the Orthodox Faith").

I don't think that this state lasted a long time. If I judge from the length of road that the car had traveled, I would say it was approximately 3-4 kilometers, albeit I was moving somewhat slowly due to the many curves.

I certainly was not the same before, as I am now that I am writing this passage. I had suffered a change... a very distinct change. Man is altered from many things. From alcohol, from narcotics, from pleasure, from the climate, from water, from pain, affliction, fear, however... this alteration... does not have its match. It is unique. I lived in a form of... ecstasy, a type of intoxication, without however having lost my senses



and my contact with the material world. A *vigilant intoxication* as the ancient ascetics and saints characterize it in their writings. It is as if someone pulled away a curtain from my mind, from my soul, and I began living in the same world on the one hand, but in the whole world, whereas first I lived in only a small part of it.

Imagine a deaf person who suddenly begins hearing. He lived in the same world, but without the sounds. Now he hears too. Imagine a blind person who suddenly begins seeing. The same world now has images and colors too.

So thus I had also lived in the same world before those apocalyptic moments; it is that I had just felt God, and within Him many deep, important, and beautiful things. I was suddenly a partaker of the material and of the spiritual world.

I imagine that this how people must have been in the old days; Adam and Eve in Paradise must have been even much better, because, as the Holy Scriptures inform us, they saw, heard and spoke with God. Human nature had not yet suffered the destruction which I have today. The sensorial spiritual instruments worked well. My own "spiritual eyes" no longer see. They are covered with the thick scales of my evil thoughts and deeds. "My spiritual ears" no longer hear. They are plugged up through the mud of my sin. "My spiritual language" is paralyzed through the sloth of my soul. I am wholly buried within the abundant filth of my passions.

Someone, the holy elder, took me out of this fallen state for just a moment, and I was able to live like a true human. Now, I have again returned to the life of a filthy and sick man, who is deaf, blind and senseless.

Do I truly desire, I wonder, to live in this upper, blessed state? If it was granted to me again, I would accept it joyfully. But now I also know the path to go there on my own. However, if I do not walk on this righteous path, then no one is at fault outside of me and my slothful nature. I know well, that, if I work in the vineyard of my Lord Jesus Christ, I will certainly arrive there. And is my job and task alone to keep His commandments. The keeping of the commandments produces a spiritual path. The soul must apply the needed effort and maintain the required discipline. Through the keeping of our Lord's the commandments, our soul learns many things and simultaneously is cleansed and the spiritual instruments begin to slowly function, bit by bit.

Unfortunately I am incapable of doing that which you might do. And it is for this reason that I am worthy of immense shame and responsible before the whole of humanity; for a great treasure was granted to me and I do not utilize it. This makes me a useless and ungrateful person. The only thing that remains for me to do is to ascertain it, to admit it, to confess it. I do not despair however, because I know of His mercy and love. I hope that one day I will honor his immense love ... perhaps a bit... sometime... with His help.

If I were truly a man with love of honor, with good disposition, I would be struggling now with fervor and zeal, as the elder does. Take note of something else, too. Did you pay attention to the generosity of the elder, who imitates God, our Lord Jesus Christ? What did I ask of him? A few words... How did he respond to my request? With a wholehearted fiery prayer, which moved God, and I the wretched one lived this incalculable experience. What wealth! What generosity! My God, please forgive me! How much must the elder love me to pray so fervently for me?

All these things I write without much toil, without much thought. I am not sitting to carefully construct my thoughts, or create "soap bubbles" of the mind without any meaningful content. Usually the people of our age work with their head. They sit, they think and think, pressure their mind, to produce thoughts and gain ideas and new knowledge.

Because they think the instrument of their knowledge is only their logic. And as they press their brains and logic, they become mixed up, compromised; some to a lesser extend, others much more; and then they run to the psychiatrists, seeking clarity and cures of the mind.

This is all the result of our ignorance and darkness; we are ignorant not only of the outer world but also of the inner world, of our own self. Within each one of us resides another instrument of knowledge: our faith. Through faith one lives many things. He lives them and does not think of them. Afterwards comes the mind, logic to arrange them, to make them thoughts, words, letters, whichever of these can become thoughts and words. Most things cannot be "translated" into human language. The soul is much more wealthy, deeply, penetrating and sensing than any words, in any language.

I pray that all of you will want to live these things. To not just read them, to think of them, to discuss them, to criticize them and to consume them. I pray that you will seek them in your life, as others seek money and glory. If you toil more than a merchant, if you show the same persistence as an athlete or dancer, I believe that you will all achieve them.

The Holy Mountain is a very good door to enter into Orthodoxy; but there also exist "Athonites" outside of the Holy Mountain, great spiritual fathers, people with gifts and love. And, equally, there exist non-Athonites, people outside of the Haghioritic Tradition, inside the Holy Mountain. Prayer, discernment and desire of the divine will be our guides: *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* (Mt 7:7).

I get frustrated and grieve that I cannot describe this experience of mine in its true essence. I read what I wrote in these pages and it does not present even closely the reality I was blessed to experience; not even one-thousandth! How can I describe it? How can I say how true, how deep, how intense, how calm it truly was? It was so joyous, so satisfying, so heal-

ing, so very tender and warm, friendly while also protective, life-giving and joyous and so many other things that words lose the ability to describe... I remember phrases from Christian ancient texts. *God becomes all things for those who love Him: he becomes nourishment, garment, comfort, consolation, knowledge, power... all things.*

Some moments later, I began telling the Elder these things that I was feeling. He was not speaking. And he did not want me to speak of them. He did not want me to realize that he was the cause. What was I, the lost and miserable soul, telling him? Come, dear father, let me to show you your vineyards?

Very slowly, little by little, it went out, it was lost, it pulled back... or rather my perception closed. The gift ended... they were gone... What was left behind? Gratitude, deep satisfaction, but also un-healable thirst for Him. How can a person simultaneously feel deeply satisfied but also grieve His absence? To be so joyous that he met Him, but also saddened that he lost Him?

How poor the yogis and the Gurus seem! How false! How wretched! Sunk in the most basic ignorance, deceived in false imaginations, they praise themselves and get puffed up for these things they know... for their experiences! But if you don't know God, then what do you know? If you don't possess the most basic, the most central thing, then what do you possess? They resemble those gypsies who dress themselves with flashy colors, with loud jewelry, in an ever-obnoxious manner, far from any type of color coordination and fashion. And once they dress so, they move around within their pseudo-aristocratic atmosphere, seeking praise, without any realization of the humiliation and shame they bring upon their own presence.

We have a God Who is a true aristocrat. We have a God Who gave us the right to call him Father. We have a God Who calls us His children. We have a God Who became Man for us, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is not ashamed not to call us, but to become our brother.

The poor yogis and the Gurus have nothing... Just false and lifeless idols, thousands of imaginary deities, theories and practices, which do not lead anywhere. They turn in the emptiness and don't encounter anything except the false sense and the delusion with which the devil keeps them imprisoned. Until he destroys them or makes them his instruments... both resulting in their eternal damnation...



Our words are nothing other than images of what is going on in our souls.

Saint Gregory the Wonderworker

THE GRACE OF HOLY ORTHODOX PRIESTHOOD

Orthodox holy fathers discussing that grace acts take place even through unworthy priests.

Grace always belongs to God, and the Sacrament belongs to God, while to man (the performer of the Sacrament) belongs the ministry alone. If he is good, then he is in accord with God and acts with God; if he is bad, then through him God performs the visible form of the Sacrament, while He Himself grants the invisible grace. Think not that the Divine Sacraments depend on the morals of men and their actions: they are holy because of Him to Whom they belong.

Blessed Augustine

It happens that laymen live in piety, while priests live in unrighteousness, and therefore, if grace were to seek everywhere only the worthy, neither Baptism nor the offering of the Body of Christ ought to be performed through them. But now the Lord usually acts even through the unworthy, and the grace of Baptism is not in the least injured by the life of the priest. I say this so that anyone strictly examining the life of a priest would not begin to be tempted, reasoning about what he performs in the Sacraments. For a man does not introduce anything from himself, but all this is the work of God's power, and God sanctifies you in the Sacraments.

Saint John Chrysostom

Worthy of faith is every [priest] (called) to purify thee, if only he be of the number of those who have received authority for this, who are not manifestly condemned and not alienated from the Church. Thou, who requirest treatment, judge not the judges, look not into the worthiness of those cleansing thee, make not a selection, looking at the parents. Even if one is better and another lower, still every one is higher than thee. Reason thus: there are two rings—one of gold and one of iron—and on both is engraved one and the same royal countenance, and by both are wax seals made. In what way does one seal differ from the other? In no way.

Identify the material on the wax, if thou art wiser than everyone; tell which impression is from the iron ring and which from the gold ring? And why are they identical? For although the material is different, but there is no difference in the seals. So too may every [priest] be a baptizer for thee, for even though one surpasses another by his life, but the force of Baptism is equal, and every [priest] who is instructed in the same faith can equally bring thee to perfection.

Saint Gregory the Theologian

THE ASCENSION OF OUR LORD

By Fr. Victor Potapov, St. John the Baptist Russian Orthodox cathedral, Washington, DC.



Throughout the 40 days following the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ, Paschal chants sound within our churches and in the hearts of the faithful. The Risen Christ spent that period of time on earth, demonstrating to His disciples the reality of His Resurrection. But lo, that 40-day period draws to a close, and, the “leave-taking,” as it were, of the Feast of Pascha approaches.

In the vocabulary of the Church, the day of leave-taking is known as the *Apodosis of Pascha*. The service for the *Apodosis of Pascha* is celebrated in the brilliant white of Paschal vestments, illuminated by the light of the Paschal sun, with that same fullness of joy as on the first day of Pascha. And the Feast of the Ascension approaches; that day enters our lives as a spiritual reality: the day on which the Apostles and the Mother of God gathered around the Risen Savior for the last time, on the Mount of Olives; the day on which, while blessing them, He began his departure from the earth, and as St. Luke the Apostle tells us in the Acts of the Apostles, *and a cloud received Him out of their sight*.

Ordinary human consciousness, drawing only on the experience of earthly existence and its physical laws, can no more comprehend Christ's Ascension than it could His Incarnation or His Glorious Resurrection from the dead. Even the disciples who saw the empty Tomb, who saw the Risen Christ, who witnessed His Ascension, had mixed feelings about everything they had seen. They vacillated between exaltation over the miracles they had witnessed and misunderstanding and doubt. Toward the end of the Gospel according to Matthew, we read that the 11 Disciples saw the Risen One in Galilee, *and when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted*. The laconic words of the Gospel say nothing about the nature of their doubts. But the Apostles' doubt makes their state close to that feeling familiar to anyone striving to find a conscious and faith grounded in understanding.

The true, religious order, beyond wisdom, reveals itself to us in response to our effort to touch it, but only with the assistance of the grace of God, which heals the infirmities and fills what is growing scant. Only with the miracle of Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles that took place ten days after the Savior's Ascension, were the Apostles

completely freed from their doubts. We see them as fearless and untiring witnesses to, and preachers of, the Word, fearless even in the face of persecution and martyrdom. From a human perspective, they could have been expected to mourn upon their being parted from the Lord. Yet, in the Gospels it says that they *returned to Jerusalem with joy*.

Why did Christ, the Miracle Worker Who had conquered death, not remain on earth to lead and rule over His people? The reply is found in the Gospel according to John, which records for us Christ's talk with His disciples before His Passion, and His High-priestly prayer to His Father. In speaking to his disciples about his coming departure from them, he had in mind not only His Passion and death on the Cross, but His Ascension to Heaven that was to follow.

As long as Christ was still on earth, the work of the salvation of man and all creation had not been accomplished. For Christ came so that those who are on earth might be united to the heavens and that end of that *podvig* (spiritual struggle, Ed.), which is for us unto salvation, is His Ascension. In it our human existence, having gone through the crucible of suffering, and shown that it is more powerful than death, is brought into the fullness of divine life; in His Ascension, Christ did not become dis-Embodied, dis-Incarnate. He remains forever, perfect God and perfect Man. By His earthly path in obedience to that Truth He had revealed to us, we can unite our life with His perfect and eternal existence, and thereby enter into the Kingdom of Glory which He revealed to us.

In His Ascension, Christ left the world different from what it was when the miracle of His entry into the world, His birth of the Most-pure Virgin Mary, took place. Most of the human race then remained in darkness, and only individual select prophets lived in hope and anticipation of the coming of the Savior and Messiah into the world. Now it was a different world, and a new people of God. That earth had witnessed the miracle of the birth in Bethlehem, had seen Christ's Transfiguration, and had been illumined by the light of His Resurrection from the dead. It was for that reason that Christ ascended, blessing that earth which He was leaving for a time, but from which He was henceforth to be eternally inseparable. Parting from Christ at His Ascension is at the same time a joyous anticipation of His victorious Second Coming!



Everything is beautiful in a person when he turns toward God, and everything is ugly when it is turned away from God.

Fr. Pavel Florensky (+1937)

THE WIDOW'S OFFERING

Source: "Elder Cleopa of Sibastria: In the tradition of St. Paisius Velichkovsky," by Ioanichie Balan.

Emperor Nicephorus (Botaniates) of Constantinople reigned from 1078 until 1081. He had decided to build a cathedral that would be almost as grand as St. Sophia. When it was ready, the patriarch of Jerusalem, the patriarch of Alexandria as well as the patriarch of Constantinople were all invited to consecrate the beautiful new church built by the emperor. Announcements had been made about the consecration for several months in advance so that everyone would have time to travel to the great city of Constantinople; remember that during that time there were no cars, planes or trains. Everyone had to travel either in carts pulled by oxen, horses or donkeys, and those from great distances had to cross the sea in boats.

When Nicephorus' cathedral was ready to be consecrated there were three patriarchs, forty metropolitans, and thousands of priests present, since this was an imperial cathedral. Thousands of carts and wagons converged on the city as the faithful came from all around. Everyone brought something for the new cathedral: rugs, barrels of wine, oil, flour, candles, etc. Each person wanted to offer something!

At that time there was a widow named Anastasia who lived in Constantinople. For fifty years she had lived faithfully, going to church regularly and praying to God. She lived on the edge of the city, right along the road on which all the carts and wagons of people had to travel to reach the new church. But Anastasia was very poor. Her house was a dilapidated shack, she had no money, no oil, no flour, nothing that she could offer to the new church. As she saw so many oxen pulling wagons of people toward the new church, she decided to give an armful of grass to the poor animals, since she did possess a small sickle and a pitchfork.

The widow was poor in material things, but very rich in faith! During the winter months she would spin flax and wool for the people of the town, and in the summer she would take her sickle and glean in the fields after the harvesters had left, then she would wrap the wheat in a rug and beat it to make a little flour for herself. Thus, little by little, she was able to provide herself with some flour for her own meager needs. That is how poor this widow, Anastasia, was!

Poor though she was, she had a very merciful heart! What went through her mind as she saw the oxen pulling such heavy loads of goods for the celebration of the new church?

-I don't have any money, or rugs, or oil, nothing. But I can give the animals a little grass.

Still, she was afraid because she did not own land, so where would she get the grass without doing something wrong?

She took a big sack and went into a field where there was a kind of wild grass growing, called "couch-grass" (a perennial

grass that many consider a weed, Ed). She cut a lot of this grass, being careful not to damage the other crops that were growing, and put it into her sack, saying to herself,

- I will give the oxen some grass, even if it is not from my own land.

She took a walking stick and set off with the sack of grass toward the area near the church where many people had gathered. She found a pair of oxen who had finished eating the little bit of feed that had been set out for them; they were looking about for more food, still hungry, but there was none that they could reach.

Anastasia opened her sack of grass and put it in front of the oxen, saying,

-Lord, accept this bit of grass, and forgive me, for I have nothing to bring to the church consecration, and even this is not from my own land!

She wept as she said these words; then when the oxen had finished eating, she also went to the church for the consecration.

She was astounded at what she saw in the church: so many people and such rich adornments for the new temple! The church was prepared like a bride for a wedding with all the embellishments ready for the consecration that was to take place the following day. Anastasia went to an icon in the rear of the church, where women generally would stand; there the poor old woman, her face wrinkled with age, an old scarf on her head, the poorest of sandals on her feet and wearing a raggedy dress, knelt and prayed to the Lord, saying,

- Lord, forgive me, for I have not brought any kind of offering for the church! I have nothing. The emperor is a king on earth and will be great in heaven, but I am so poor and have no money, nothing to offer.

And as she prayed, her tears dropped to the ground.

Then Emperor Nicephorus, with all his entourage and servants, came into the church. His chief minister, Peter was his name, pointed to the dedication plaque—since in churches and monasteries that are historical monuments there are dedication plaques over the doors—and drew the emperor's attention to it. The plaque was made of marble and the golden inscription read "To the glory of the all holy Trinity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, this holy church was built and provided for by me, the Emperor Nicephorus." The emperor fully approved of the way the inscription had been executed, since he was the one who had ordered it.

Thus, the emperor, empress and a crowd of generals and other officials went into the church to see how it was prepared for the big event of consecration the following day. Everything was in order: beautiful frescoes on the walls, icons with golden risas, fine covers for the icon stands and curtains at the royal doors, gold-embroidered vestments, chandeliers, holy vessels for the altar, Gospel book, everything was in perfect order.

While the dignitaries were inspecting everything in the church, the elderly widow Anastasia, who had given an armful of grass to the oxen, was weeping before the icons in the rear of the church. As she prayed, the angel of the Lord changed the inscription on the dedication plaque. The inscription, even more beautifully executed now read, "To the glory of the all holy Trinity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, this holy church was built and provided for by me, the widow Anastasia."

The people in the rear of the church saw the inscription and froze with fear. Before they had clearly read the emperor's name on the inscription. There were people all around, no scaffolding was in the church for someone to reach the plaque and change the writing; thus, no one could explain how this change had happened. The men read the inscription and began to talk among themselves.

- What! What does that say?

- What's there?

- Look, it says that a widow built this church!

- But just a moment ago when the emperor came in, it had his name on it.

- What will the emperor say when he sees this?

Those present were afraid to tell the emperor, so they called the head minister, Peter, and showed the inscription to him. Peter read the inscription and said,

- But this is a miracle! It's all right. I will tell the emperor!

The emperor listened to Peter. What a sight it was: the emperor and empress both had shining gold crowns on their heads and were dressed in all their royal garments, surrounded by soldiers.

- Your Majesty, come into the vestibule a moment.

The emperor came and looked at the plaque in amazement.

- But, when we came into the church, it was my inscription.

- I know that it was yours, Your Majesty. Everyone knows it was yours. But look at what is written there now!

- Oh! What a sinner I am! This is a great miracle! No one could have done this except God Himself! This is a wonderful miracle. I lost the church because I made it in my own pride. Now it has been given to a widow!

The emperor then called all his chief servants and told them,—This church is not to be consecrated until we find this widow! Once she is found, we will do the consecration in her name because she is greater before God than I am.

Then he gave the order to search throughout his entire empire for the widow Anastasia.

Now, it was God's will to reveal this mystery quickly, and He did so through another widow who was about the same age as the blessed Anastasia. This woman was in the crowd, but was not aware that Anastasia was also there. In all the commotion that was going on in the rear of the church, she asked

- What is the matter?

When someone told her that they were looking for a widow by the name of Anastasia, she said,

- I know Anastasia. She lives at the edge of town.

- What! You know her! Come here to the emperor!

The old woman told the emperor where the widow Anastasia lived, and he then immediately sent servants to find her and bring her to the church.

Servants, riders and horses quickly headed off to the edge of Constantinople to find Anastasia and bring her to the emperor. When they reached the place that the old woman had told them, they found some children playing.

- Do you children know where an old woman by the name of Anastasia lives?

One of the older children pointed and said,

- Anastasia lives over there, near the garden.

The men went to the house in the untilled garden. What did they find at the widow Anastasia's door? No lock. No bolts. No latch. When someone has nothing, they are not afraid of thieves. The door was held shut by a string tied onto a nail. It was obvious that the old woman was not home. The few belongings that she had were in plain sight, but there was nothing worth stealing. She had gone to the church for the consecration. The servants said to the children,

- The old woman, Anastasia, is not home.

- No. Anastasia left with an armful of grass to the farm market, the children answered, not knowing that she had gone to the church.

The generals and other men all returned to give their report to the emperor.

- Your Majesty, we went and found the small house on the edge of town. There were some children playing and they said that Anastasia is here, in this crowd, somewhere.

Someone who knew Anastasia heard this and said that she was in the church,

- She is praying to the Savior!

- If she is in church, tell her not to be afraid, since she has never met me, said the emperor. Send some elderly women to her to tell her that at the consecration of the church the emperor is going to make a gift of a cow to all the old women.

Following the emperor's order, they found the elderly Anastasia and brought her before the emperor who said, 'Don't be afraid, Anastasia. You have been found worthy of a great blessing from God! What offering did you bring this morning for the consecration of the church?'

- I did not bring anything, Your Majesty, because I am so poor! She did not consider the armful of grass that she'd given the oxen as any kind of offering.

- 'Please, think, dear Anastasia. You must have brought a great gift because my church has been given to you!'

- I didn't bring any gift because I have no money. I have nothing! All I have is a sickle and a pitchfork. During the winter

I spin wool for people, and in the summer I use the sickle to glean after the harvesters. I manage to get a little wheat from what I glean. Aside from that, I have nothing.

- This is an imperial church and I spent a fortune from my own gold and silver to build it; but look at the inscription that says it was made by Anastasia! What did you give to this church?

- I didn't give anything except for an armful of grass to a yoke of oxen.

- Don't be afraid, Anastasia. The inscription was done by God, not you. God Himself wrote that this church is yours!

And there it was on the inscription, To the glory of the all holy Trinity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, this holy church was built and provided for by me, the widow Anastasia. The men had to read it to her, since she was illiterate.

- You see, dear woman, you say that you did not bring anything, but remember that you did bring an armful of grass!

- I did bring that, but it was not a real offering from me since I cut it from someone else's field.

- Look, Anastasia, your armful of grass was more precious than all the treasures that I gave. See, the angel of the Lord has put the church in your name and it will remain yours forever. We will consecrate the church with all these patriarchs, with all the pomp and celebration as we planned, but the church will be Anastasia's forever. The church will be consecrated with your name since the angel has written that both in heaven and here.

The poor widow was astounded and exclaimed,

- What a miracle!

When the blessed Anastasia from Constantinople died, the emperor buried her in the holy altar, with an inscription above her tomb, **Here, in the church that God miraculously gave her, is buried the widow Anastasia.**

An armful of grass, given in the name of the Lord with humility and a sorrowful heart far surpasses all the wealth of the Emperor Nicephorus. That is what God desires!

St. Ephraim the Syrian says, *God does not look upon the quantity of offerings that you make, but the heart with which you bring these offerings.* However small your offering may be, give it with humility and a sorrowful heart that you cannot offer more. That is true almsgiving.



When holy peace reigns in my soul, then surely the King of Peace dwells within me, the Lord Jesus Christ, with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, and then especially I ought to be full of feelings of gratitude to the Lord of Peace, and endeavor with all my strength to preserve this peace within me by means of fervent prayer and by abstaining from every sin, both inward and outward.

Saint John of Kronstadt

LET US HELP THE YOUTH TO FOLLOW THEIR CALLING

By Blessed Elder Paisios the Athonite, from "Family Life."

The Good God created man free. He is nobly unimposing. He respects man's freedom, freely leaving each person to follow that path which brings him or her comfort. He does not force everyone to stand in the same line with military discipline. For that reason, we should leave youths to themselves, without restraint, in the spiritual realm of their God-given freedom. They are not helped by constant questioning about which life (i.e., married or monastic) they will follow. This is a topic in which they should not be influenced by anyone. Each person has his or her calling.

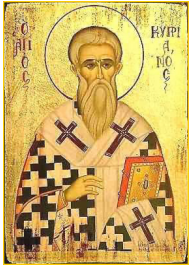
Again, the parents, the spiritual fathers, the educators, should help youths to choose whichever life is most suitable for them, and to follow that path to which they are truly called, without influencing or hindering their calling. Their choice should be their own. The rest of us should only express our humble opinions. Our only right is to help these souls find their path.

Sometimes when I speak with youths who are troubled by this topic, although I see towards which path the scale tilts I don't tell them, so as not to influence them. I only try, as much as I am able, to do that which helps them find the right path and inner peace. I take away anything harmful from whatever it is they enjoy and find rest within—thus leaving them only with that which is beneficial and holy, in order to live their lives joyously with God, and in the next life even more joyously. Whichever life a young person I know may choose to follow, I will sincerely rejoice, and will always have the same interest for their salvation. It is enough that he is close to Christ and His Church.

Naturally, I especially rejoice in those youths who follow the monastic life. He who follows the angelic life is truly wise, for he flees the hook of the devil who uses the world as a lure. But you can't put all people into the same mold. Christ, you see, did not give Monasticism as a commandment—as much as it is the path of perfection—because He did not want to place this weighty calling on everyone. When the young man asked Him how to be saved, Christ answered him *keep the Commandments*. And when he said that he did keep them and asked *what lack I yet*, Christ said to him, *One thing thou lackest: If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and come and follow me.* In other words, if He found someone with any *flotimo*, then He spoke to him of perfection. He didn't come to cast a noose upon people. He did not even teach Monasticism, for this would have "started a fire" and perhaps many would have run without discernment to become monastics, with bad results. He only threw a spark and, when the suitable time arrived, Monasticism sprang forth.

THE HOLY SACRAMENT OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

By Saint Cyprian of Carthage, from a letter written to a new convert, around 246 A.D.



I promise to share with you the grace God in His great mercy has shown me, and to tell you as simply as I can what I have experienced since I was baptized. Until that time, I was still living in the dark, knowing nothing of my true life. I was completely involved in this world's affairs, influenced by all its changing moods and troubles, and exiled from the light of truth.

I had indeed been told that God offered men and women a second birth, by which we could be saved, but I very much doubted that I could change the kind of life I was then living. Frankly, I could not see how a person could cast off his fallen nature, and be changed in heart and soul while he still lived in the same body as before. How was it possible, I asked myself, to change the habits of a lifetime instantaneously.

How can one suddenly rid oneself of accumulated guilt and break with sin that has become so deeply rooted in one's life? Can a man whose life has been characterized by feasting and luxury, learn frugality and simplicity in a single moment? A person who craves public distinction and honor cannot bear to be passed over and unnoticed.

Another who is accustomed to throngs of flattering attendance, takes it a terrible penance to be left alone. Is every species of temptation suddenly to lose its force? Should we no longer feel the enticement of wine and good living, where pride no longer swells our heads or anger blazes our breasts? Shall we no longer be troubled by covetousness or cruelty or ambition or lust?

These were my thoughts. My past life was so burdened with so many sins, that I saw no way ever to be rid of, that I had grown accustomed to giving way to my weakness. I despaired of ever being any better. Consequently, I simply humored my evil inclinations, and made no attempt to combat them.

But at last I made up my mind to ask for Baptism. I went down into those life-giving waters, and all the stains of my past were washed away. I committed my life to the Lord. He cleansed my heart and filled me with His Holy Spirit. I was born again, a new man.

And then in a most marvelous way, all my doubts cleared up, I could now see what had been hidden from me before. I found that I could do things that had previously been impossible. I saw that as long as I had been living according to my lower nature, I was at the mercy of sin, and my course was set for death. But that by living according to my

new birth in the Holy Spirit, I had already begun to share God's eternal life.

You know, as well as I do, what sins I died to at that moment, just as you know the gifts the Holy Spirit gave me with my new life. I have no desire to boast, but it is surely right to thank God for His free gift. It was through faith in Him, that I received the power to break with the sins into which my own folly had led me.

We have received the seal of the Holy Spirit. Our task now is to preserve the integrity of what we have received by living a truly Christian life. We must give time to prayer, and to the study of scripture. Now speaking to God; now listening to His word to us, and letting His teaching mold us. He has enriched us with a treasure no one can take away.

We have eaten and drunk at His heavenly banquet, and can never again know the pinch of poverty.



I want you to know this, that Jesus Christ our Lord is Himself the true Mind of the Father. By Him all the fullness of every rational nature is made in the image of His image, and He Himself is the head of all creation, and of His body the Church: *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.* (Col 1:15-18).

Therefore *we are all members one of another* (Eph 4:25), and the body of Christ, and the head cannot say to the feet, "I have no need of you;" and if one member suffers, the whole body is moved and suffers with it. But if a member is estranged from the body, and has no communication with the head, but is delighted by the passions of its own body, this means that its wound is incurable, and it has forgotten its beginning and its end.

And therefore the Father of creatures, moved with compassion towards this our wound, which could not be healed by any of the creatures, but only by the goodness of the Father, sent forth to us His Only-begotten, who because of our bondage took upon Himself the form of a bondservant, and gave Himself up for our sins; for our iniquities humbled Him, and by His wound we are all healed. And He gathered us out of all regions, till He should make resurrection of our hearts from the earth, and teach us that we are all of one substance, and members one of another.

Therefore we ought greatly to love one another. For he who loves his neighbor, loves God: and he who loves God, loves his own soul.

St. Anthony the Great (+356)

Σταυρωταί και Άνασταυρωταί του Χριστού

Τοῦ κ. Νικολάου Ἰω. Σωτηροπούλου.

Ἡ σταύρωσι τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀπὸ τὴν πλευρὰ τοῦ ἰδίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔγινε ἀπὸ ὑπερβάλλουσα ἀγάπη πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους γιὰ τὴν ἄφεσι τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν τους καὶ τὴ σωτηρία τους. Διότι ὁ Χριστὸς εἶνε Θεός, δημιουργὸς τῶν ἀνθρώπων, καὶ πάντας ἀνθρώπους θέλει σωθῆναι. (Α΄ Τιμ. β΄ 4).

Ἡ σταύρωσι τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔγινεν ἐκουσίως. Ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλός, ὁ ἰδεώδης, εἶχε πεῖ: *Ἐγὼ τίθῃμι τὴν ψυχὴν μου, ἵνα πάλιν λάβω αὐτήν. Οὐδεὶς αἶρει αὐτήν ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τίθῃμι αὐτήν ἀπ' ἐμαυτοῦ.* (Ἰωάν. ι' 17-18). Ἐγὼ θυσιάζω τὴ ζωὴ μου, καὶ θὰ τὴν λάβω πάλι. Κανεὶς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ τὴν ἀφαιρέσῃ ἀπὸ μένα, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τὴ θυσιάζω μὲ τὴ θέλησί μου. Ἡ σταύρωσι τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἦταν θυσία, ἡ ὑπερτάτη θυσία.

Ἄλλ' ἀπὸ τὴν πλευρὰ ὠρισμένων ἀνθρώπων ἡ σταύρωσι τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἔγινεν ἀπὸ ἔλλειψι ἀγάπης καὶ περισσευμα κακίας, καὶ ἦταν ἔγκλημα, τὸ μεγαλύτερο ὅλων τῶν ἐγκλημάτων, ἀφοῦ ὁ σταυρωθεὶς εἶνε ἀπολύτως ἀναμάρτητος καὶ ἅγιος, καὶ ὄχι ἀπλῶς ἀνθρώπος, ἀλλὰ Θεάνθρωπος.

Καὶ ποῖοι οἱ ἔνοχοι τοῦ μεγίστου ἐγκλήματος; Ἄνθρωποι, πὸν δὲν περίμενε κανεὶς νὰ προβοῦν σὲ ἔγκλημα κατὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ.

Ἐγκληματίας ἔγινε πρόσωπο, πὸν ἦταν ἐγγιστα στὸν Ἰησοῦ, μαθητὴς, ἀπόστολος καὶ ὁμοτράπεζός του, ὁ Ἰούδας ὁ Ἰσκαριώτης. Ἐπὶ τρία ἔτη ὁ Ἰούδας κοντὰ στὸ Χριστὸ ἄκουσε τὰ ὠραιότερα λόγια, εἶδε τὰ μεγαλύτερα θαύματα, εἶδε καὶ τὴν ἀγιώτερη ζωὴ. Ὁ Χριστὸς ἔδωσε καὶ σ' αὐτὸν τὴν ἐξουσία νὰ κηρύττῃ καὶ νὰ θαυματουργῇ. Καὶ ὅμως τίποτε ἀπ' αὐτὰ δὲν τὸν συγκίνησε. Ἐνα τὸν συγκινοῦσε, τὸ χρῆμα. Τὸ πάθος τῆς φιλαργυρίας τὸν εἶχεν ὑποδουλώσει τελείως. Καὶ γιὰ τριάκοντα ἀργύρια ὁ δοῦλος καὶ δόλιος πρόδωσε τὸ Χριστό, τὸν Κύριο καὶ Διδάσκαλο.

Ἐγκληματίες κατὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἔγιναν οἱ θρησκευτικοὶ ἄρχοντες τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ, οἱ συγκροτοῦντες τὸ Μέγα Συνέδριο, τὴν Ἱερὰ Σύνοδο τῶν Ἑβραίων, θὰ λέγαμε, οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς, οἱ πρεσβύτεροι καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς. Ἐξαίρεσι ἀποτελέσαν δύο μόνο μέλη τοῦ Συνεδρίου, ὁ Ἰωσήφ ὁ Ἀρριμαθαῖος καὶ ὁ Νικόδημος. Οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς Ἄννας, Καϊάφας καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ φορεῖς τοῦ ἀρχιερατικοῦ ἀξιώματος, οἱ ὁποῖοι πρῶτοι ἔπρεπε νὰ ἐγκολληθοῦν τὸν Ἰησοῦ ὡς Μεσσία καὶ Θεὸς τους, ὅπως προφητευόταν στὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη καὶ ἀποδεικνυόταν ἀπὸ τὰ λόγια, τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὴν ὅλη ζωὴ του, πρῶτοι τὸν ἀποδοκίμασαν, καὶ μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους καὶ τοὺς γραμματεῖς τὸν καταδίκασαν σὲ θάνατο, καὶ μάλιστα στὸ σκληρότερο καὶ ἐξευτελιστικώτερο ὅλων τῶν θανάτων, τὴ σταύρωσι.

Καὶ γιὰ τὴν οἱ ἄρχοντες τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καταδίκασαν τὸν Μεσσία, καὶ διὰ χειρῶν εἰδωλολατρῶν, τῶν Ῥωμαίων, ἐσταύρωσαν τὸν Κύριον τῆς δόξης; (Α΄ Κορ. β΄ 8). Δὲν διάβαζαν τὶς μεσσιτικὲς προφητεῖες τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης; Διάβαζαν, ἀλλὰ τοὺς τύφλωναν τὰ πάθη καὶ τὶς παρερμηνεύσαν. Δὲν γνώριζαν, ὅτι ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἦταν πρωτοφανὲς φαινόμενο σοφίας λόγων καὶ τελέσεως θαυμάτων; Δὲν ἄκουσαν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀπεσταλμένους των, γιὰ νὰ συλλάβουν τὸν Ἰησοῦ ὅτι οὐδέποτε οὕτως ἐλάλησεν ἀνθρώπος, ὡς οὗτος ὁ ἀνθρώπος; (Ἰωάν. ζ' 46). Δὲν ἄκουσαν τὴν κρίσι ἀνθρώπων τοῦ λαοῦ ὅτι οὐδέποτε ἐφάνη οὕτως ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ; (Ματθ. θ' 33). Δὲν ἤξεραν ὅτι ὁ Ἰησοῦς θεράπευε ὅλες τὶς ἀσθένειες, ἄνοιξε τὰ μάτια τυφλοῦ ἐκ γενετῆς, ἐξέβαλλε δαμιόνια, ἀνέστεινε νεκρούς, καὶ πρὸ ἡμερῶν ἀνέστησεν ἓνα ὀδωδὸς πτώμα, τὸν τετραήμερο νεκρὸ Λάζαρο; Βεβαίως δὲν ἀγνοοῦσαν τὴν πρωτοφανῆ σὲ ὕψος διδασκαλία τοῦ Ναζωραίου, καὶ τὴν πρωτοφανῆ σὲ δύναμι θαυματουργία του. Ἀλλὰ τὰ πάθη τους δὲν τοὺς ἄφηναν νὰ τὸν παραδεχθοῦν, καὶ τοὺς ἐξώθησαν στὴ θανάτωσί του. Προπάντων κυριάρχησαν σ' αὐτοὺς τὰ πάθη τῆς ὑπερηφανείας καὶ αὐταρεσκείας, τῆς φιλαργυρίας, τοῦ φθόνου καὶ τοῦ μίσους.

Οἱ ἐν λόγῳ Ἰουδαῖοι, ὑπερήφανα ὄντα, θεωροῦσαν τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς των ἀγίους, καὶ δὲν ὑπέφεραν τὸν ἔλεγχον, πὸν ἀσκούσε κατ' αὐτῶν ὁ Ἰησοῦς. Ἰδίως δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ ὑποφέρουν ἐκεῖνα τὰ δριμύτατα καὶ καυστικώτατα *Ὅσα ὑμῖν, γραμματεῖς καὶ Φαρισαῖοι ὑποκριταί...* (Ματθ. κγ' 13 καὶ ἐξῆς). Ἐπίσης, φιλάργυρα ὄντα, ἐξανίσταντο, διότι ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἤλεγχε τὴ φιλαργυρία τους, καὶ ἐπανειλημμένως ὑψωσε φραγγέλλιο καὶ ἐκδίωξε τοὺς ἐμπόρους ἀπὸ τὸ ναό, τὸν ὁποῖον ὁ Ἄννας, ὁ Καϊάφας καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ εἶχαν καταστήσει ἀνώνυμη ἑταιρεία, καὶ πλοῦτιζαν καὶ θησαύριζαν.

Ὁ Ἰησοῦς δὲν σταυρώθηκε στὴ Γαλιλαία, ὅπου ἔλεγε, *Ἐμβλέψατε εἰς τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ καταμάθετε τὰ κρίνα τοῦ ἀγροῦ.* (Ματθ. στ' 26 καὶ 28). Ὁ Ἰησοῦς σταυρώθηκε στὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ, ὅπου ἔθιξεν ὑλικά συμφέροντα. Ἐπίσης οἱ θρησκευτικοὶ ἡγέτες τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ἀπὸ φθόνου καὶ μῖσος, πὸν γεννᾷ ὁ φθόνος, καταδίκασαν τὸν Ἰησοῦ, διότι δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ ὑποφέρουν, ὅτι ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἦταν ἀνώτερός των. Αἰσθάνονταν ὅτι, ἀφ' ὅτου ἐφανίσθηκε ὁ Ἰησοῦς, αὐτοὶ «ἐξώφλησαν». Δὲν ὑπέφεραν τὴν ὑπεροχὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ!

Ὁ Πιλάτος κατάλαβε ὅτι ἀπὸ φθόνου οἱ θρησκευτικοὶ ἡγέτες τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ παρέδωσαν σ' αὐτὸν τὸν Ἰησοῦ (Ματθ. κζ' 18, Μάρκ. ιε' 10). Σταυρωτὴς τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶνε καὶ ὁ λαός.

Καίτοι ὁ Ἰησοῦς γέμισε τὴν Παλαιστίνη μὲ τὴν ὑψηλὴ διδασκαλία, τὰ θαύματα καὶ τὶς εὐεργεσίες

του, ἀποδεικνύοντας ἔτσι τὴ μεσσιανικὴ ιδιότητά του καὶ τὴ θεότητά του· καίτοι ἐπίσης καὶ ὁ Πιλάτος καὶ ὁ Ἡρώδης δὲν βρῆκαν στὸν Ἰησοῦ καμμία αἰτία θανάτου, ἐν τούτοις ὁ λαὸς δὲν πίστευσε στὸν Ἰησοῦ, ἀλλὰ πείσθηκε στοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς, καὶ ζήτησε ἀπὸ τὸν Πιλάτο νὰ ἀπολυθῇ ὁ κακοῦργος Βαραββᾶς, ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς νὰ σταυρωθῇ. Κραύγαζε ὁ λαὸς νὰ σταυρωθῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ φώναξε, τὸ αἷμα του νὰ εἶνε ἐπάνω τους καὶ ἐπάνω στὰ παιδιά τους (Ματθ. κζ' 20, 22, 23, 24, Μάρκ. ιε' 8, 11, 13, 14, Λουκ. κγ' 13-15, 18, 21, 23, Ἰωάν. ιθ' 6, 12, 14-15, Πράξ. β' 22-23, 36, Α' Θεσ. β' 14-16).

Κακῶς ὁ Πάπας τὴ σταύρωσι τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἀποδίδει μόνο στὴν ἀριστοκρατία τοῦ ναοῦ, καὶ ἀμνηστεύει τὸ λαό, γιὰ νὰ «τὰ ἔχη καλὰ» μὲ τοὺς Ἑβραίους. Κακῶς ἐπίσης κάποιοι ἀπὸ τὸν Ἐπιτάφιο Θρῆνο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀπάλειψαν λόγια, ποὺ χαρακτηρίζουν τοὺς Ἑβραίους γιὰ τὴν κακὴ συμπεριφορὰ τους πρὸς τὸ Χριστό.

Δὲν μισοῦμε τοὺς Ἑβραίους ὡς ἀνθρώπους. Ὁ Χριστὸς μᾶς δίδαξε ν' ἀγαποῦμε ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Κακίζουμε ὅμως τὴν κακὴ συμπεριφορὰ τους καὶ τὸ Σιωνισμό, ὁ ὁποῖος ἐπιδιώκει τὴν ὑποταγὴ ὄλων τῶν ἐθνῶν στὸ Ἰσραήλ.

Ἀκουέτωσαν ταῦτα πικροὶ ἐπικριταί, ἀπὸ τὴν πολιτικὴ καὶ τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἡγεσία, τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Πειραιῶς κ. Σεραφεῖμ, ἀνδρὸς μὲ τὸ θάρρος νὰ ἐλέγχει τὸ Σιωνισμό, καὶ ἄλλες σκοτεινὲς δυνάμεις, καὶ μὲ τὴν παρρησία του νὰ προκαλῆ σεισμὸ σ' ἐνόχους παγκοσμίως.

Σταυρωτῆς τοῦ Ἰησοῦ εἶνε καὶ ὁ Πιλάτος. Ὁ Ρωμαῖος ἡγεμὼν καὶ δικαστῆς ἦταν ἀνώτερος ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἐχθροὺς τοῦ Ἰησοῦ. Ἀναγνώριζε τὴν ἀθρότητα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, καὶ ἔκανε ἐπανειλημμένες ἀπεγνωσμένες προσπάθειες, γιὰ νὰ διασώσῃ τὸν Ἰησοῦ ἀπὸ τὴ μανία τῶν Ἰουδαίων. Ὁ Πιλάτος εἶχεν ἀπέναντι τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἀγαθὴ πρόθεσι. Ἄλλ' ἡ ἀγαθὴ πρόθεσι δὲν ἦταν ἀρκετὴ, διότι δὲν συνωδεύθηκε ἀπὸ ἀγαθὴ πρᾶξι. Καλῶς ἐλέγχθη, ὅτι ὁ δρόμος πρὸς τὴν κόλασι εἶνε στρωμένος μὲ ἀγαθὲς προθέσεις. Ὁ Ρωμαῖος ἡγεμὼν καὶ δικαστῆς κάμφθηκε ἀπὸ τὶς πιέσεις τῶν Ἰουδαίων καὶ τελικῶς ὑπέγραψε τὴν καταδίκη τοῦ Ἰησοῦ. Καὶ τοῦτο γιὰ νὰ μὴ διακινδυνεύσῃ τὴ θέσι του. Τυπτόμενος δὲ ἀπὸ τὴ συνείδησί του, λαβὼν ὕδωρ ἀπενίψατο τὰς χεῖρας ἀπέναντι τοῦ ὄχλου λέγων ἀθῶός εἰμι ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ δικαίου τούτου. (Ματθ. κζ' 24).

Ἐνιψε τὰ χεῖρα του ὁ Πιλάτος, ἀλλὰ δὲν καθαρίσθησαν, διότι ὑπέγραψε τὴν ἀδικὴ ἀπόφασι. Ὁ Χριστὸς προγνώριζε τὴν ἀπόφασι καὶ προεῖπε στὸν Πιλάτο τὴν ἁμαρτία του, μικρότερη μὲν ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία τοῦ Καϊάφα καὶ τοῦ Συνεδρίου, ὅπως δὲ ὅποτε ὅμως ἀσυγκρίτως σοβαρώτερη ἀπὸ τὶς ἁμαρτίες ὄλων

τῶν ἄλλων ἀδίκων δικαστικῶν ἀποφάσεων. Ἀφ' ὅτου δὲ ὁ Καϊάφας μὲ τὸ Συνέδριον καὶ ὁ Πιλάτος καταδίκασαν τὸ Χριστό, αἰώνιο στίγμα ἐγκολάφηκε στὸ πρόσωπο τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης δικαιοσύνης.

Ἀγαπητοὶ ἀναγνώστες! Δὲν ὑπῆρξαν μόνο σταυρωταὶ τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου. Ὑπάρχουν καὶ ἀνασταυρωταὶ τοῦ σὲ κάθε ἐποχῆ, καὶ ἰδίως στὴ δική μας ἐποχῆ τῆς μεγάλης ἀποστασίας, ἀπιστίας, διαφθορᾶς, διαστροφῆς καὶ ἐγκληματικότητος. Ὑπάρχουν οἱ ἀνασταυροῦντες ἑαυτοῖς τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ παραδειγματίζοντες. (Ἑβρ. στ' 6). Ἄνθρωποι, οἱ ὁποῖοι ξανασταυρώνουν ὅσον ἐξαρτᾶται ἀπ' αὐτοὺς καὶ διαπομπεύουν τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ὅσοι μὲ τὶς αἰρέσεις, καὶ ἰδίως μὲ τὴν παναίρεσι καὶ πανθηρησκεία τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ, προδίδουν τὴν πίστι, προδίδουν ἔτσι τὸν ἀρχηγὸν τῆς πίστεως (Ἑβρ. ιβ' 2) καὶ ὁμοιάζουν μὲ τὸν προδότη καὶ σταυρωτὴ Ἰούδα. Εἶνε σύγχρονοι Ἰουδες.

Ὅσοι ἀρχιερεῖς λαμβάνουν τὸ ἀρχιερατικὸ ἀξίωμα ἀναξίως, χωρὶς πραγματικῶς νὰ πιστεύουν, καὶ ἀντιπαθοῦν καὶ μισοῦν καὶ διώκουν πιστοὺς ἀνθρώπους, κληρικοὺς καὶ λαϊκοὺς, ὁμοιάζουν μὲ τοὺς σταυρωτὰς Ἄννα καὶ Καϊάφα. Εἶνε σύγχρονοι Ἄννες καὶ Καϊάφες.

Ὅσος λαὸς φρονεῖ καὶ ζῆ ἀντιθέτως πρὸς τὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁμοιάζει μὲ τὸν Ἰουδαϊκὸ λαό, ποὺ ἀπίστησε στὸ Χριστὸ καὶ ζήτησε τὴ σταύρωσί του. Ἰδιαιτέρως ἐπισημαίνουμε καὶ ὑπογραμμίζουμε, ὅτι, ὅσοι μὲ τὶς ἐκτρώσεις καὶ τὸ νόμο ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐκτρώσεων φονεύουν καὶ κατακρεουργοῦν τὰ ἀθῶα παιδιά, αὐτοὶ ὁμοιάζουν μὲ τοὺς Ἰουδαίους, οἱ ὁποῖοι σταύρωσαν τὸ Χριστό. Ὅποιος φονεύει ἓνα παιδί, εἶπεν ὁ Ντοστογιέφσκυ, φονεύει τὸ Χριστό.

Ὅσοι ἐπίσης δικασταὶ τῆς Πολιτείας καὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας γιὰ διάφορες σκοπιμότητες καταπατοῦν τὴ συνείδησί τους καὶ δικάζουν ἀδίκως καὶ καταδικάζουν ἀθῶους, αὐτοὶ ὁμοιάζουν μὲ τὸν Πιλάτο. Εἶνε σύγχρονοι Πιλάτοι.

Γέμισε ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη κοινωνία ἀπὸ ἀνασταυρωτὰς τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου! Καὶ τί νὰ εἶπῃ κανεὶς γι' αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἐξ αἰτίας τῶν ὁποίων σείεται ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη κοινωνία καὶ σκοτίζεται ὁ ἥλιος τῆς καλωσύνης, ὅπως σείσθηκε ἡ γῆ καὶ σκοτίσθηκε ὁ ἥλιος κατὰ τὴ σταύρωσι τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ Σωτῆρος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἓνα νὰ εἰποῦμε: Ὅσοι δὲν ἔχουν διαστραφῆ ὅπως οἱ δαίμονες καὶ μποροῦν νὰ μετανοήσουν, ἄς μετανοήσουν, γιὰ νὰ μὴν ἔχουν τοῦ Ἰούδα, τοῦ Καϊάφα, τοῦ Πιλάτου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων σταυρωτῶν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ τὸ τέλος καὶ τὴν ἄνευ τέλους δυστυχία, ἀλλὰ νὰ τύχουν ἐλέους καὶ σωτηρίας ἀπὸ τὸν Ἐσταυρωμένο.

Sir Steven Ransiman – (1903-2000)

Άρθρο της Κατερίνας Λυμπεροπούλου από το «ΒΗΜΑ».

«Χαίρομαι με τη σκέψη ότι στα επόμενα 100 χρόνια η Ὁρθοδοξία θα είναι η μόνη ιστορική Ἐκκλησία που θα ύφίσταται...»

«Τὸ ποσοστὸ τῶν Ἀμερικανῶν Προέδρων, ποὺ ἔχουν δολοφονηθεῖ εἶναι πολὺ μεγαλύτερο—σε σχέση μετὰ τὰ χρόνια ὑπαρξῆς τῶν ΗΠΑ—ἀπὸ τὸ ποσοστὸ τῶν δολοφονημένων Βυζαντινῶν αὐτοκρατόρων κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας.»

Σεῖρ Στίβεν Ράνσιμαν

† † †



Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ κατάφερε σὲ μεγάλο βαθμὸ νὰ ἀπαλλάξει τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ Βυζαντίου ἀπὸ τὸ στίγμα, ποὺ τὴν ἐννοοῦσε ὡς περίοδο παρακμῆς, διαφθορᾶς καὶ δολοπλοκίας, ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ συσχέτισε τὴ μεσαιωνικὴ ἔκφανση τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ μετὰ τὴ σύγχρονη Ἑλλάδα («δὲ νομίζω ὅτι οἱ σημερινοὶ Ἕλληνες εἶναι περισσότερο Ἕλληνες ἀπὸ τοὺς Βυζαντινούς!»), ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ κέρδισε παγκόσμια φήμη παρουσιάζοντάς τους, μέχρι πρότινος «ἰππότες», Σταυροφόρους ὡς «βαρβάρους», ποὺ ληητάτησαν τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, ἦταν Βρετανός.

Ὁ ἱστορικός, συγγραφέας, ἀκούραστος περιηγητὴς καὶ σαγηνευτικὸς ἀφηγητὴς σὲρ Στίβεν Ράνσιμαν γεννήθηκε στὶς 7 Ἰουλίου τοῦ 1903 στὴ Βόρεια Ἀγγλία καὶ ἔζησε 97 χρόνια, γιὰ νὰ συνδεθεῖ καὶ νὰ ἀγαπήσει ὅσοι λίγοι τὴ χώρα μας. Μία ἀπὸ τὶς πρώτες εἰκόνας, ποὺ θυμᾶται, ἦταν ὅταν εἶδε ἀπὸ τὴ θαλαμηγὸ τοῦ παπποῦ του τὸν βράχο τῆς Μονεμβασίας νὰ ἀναδύεται ἀπὸ τὴ θάλασσα μετὰ τὸ Βυζαντινὸ κάστρο στὴν κορυφὴ του. Ἦταν τότε 21 ἐτῶν, σπουδαστὴς στὸ Κέμπριτζ, ἤδη γνώστης τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς, τὴν ὁποία διδάχθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν ἡλικία τῶν ἐπτὰ χρόνων καὶ ἀφοῦ εἶχε μάθει γαλλικὰ καὶ λατινικὰ.

Ὁ γιὸς τῶν Φιλελεύθερων νομικῶν με ἐντονὴ πολιτικὴ δραστηριότητα (οἱ γονεῖς του ἦταν τὸ πρῶτο ζευγάρι ποὺ κάθισε μαζὶ στὴ Βουλὴ τῶν Κοινοτήτων) σὲ καμιά περίπτωση δὲν ἦταν ἓνα συνηθισμένο ἀγόρι. Γλωσσομαθὴς, γοητευτικὸς, με κοινωνικὲς γνωριμίες, ὁ νεαρὸς Στίβεν γινόταν τὸ ἐπίκεντρο τῆς προσοχῆς κάθε συντροφιάς. Προτοῦ κλείσει τὰ 30 του χρόνια ἦταν ἤδη καθηγητὴς Πανεπιστημίου στὸ Κέμπριτζ ὡς Βυζαντινολόγος. Ἡ καρδιά του ὅμως ἦταν στὰ ταξίδια καὶ στὴν ἔρευνα. Ὡς «περιπλανώμενος λόγιος»

ἀρχίζει τὰ ταξίδια σὲ ὅλο τὸν κόσμο, σὲ μιὰ ἐποχὴ ποὺ ὁ τουρισμὸς δὲν ἔχει ἀκόμη ἐφευρεθεῖ καὶ συναντᾶ ἀνθρώπους μυθικούς: ἀπὸ τὸν Ἐλευθέριο Βενιζέλο ὡς τὸν Πού Γί, τὸν τελευταῖο αὐτοκράτορα τῆς Κίνας.

Ὅταν ξεσπᾷ ὁ Β΄ Παγκόσμιος Πόλεμος τοποθετεῖται ἀκόλουθος Τύπου στὴ Σόφια, φυγαδεύεται ἐν συνεχείᾳ στὸ Κάιρο, μεταβαίνει στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα, καὶ ὕστερα ἀπὸ πρόσκληση τῆς Τουρκίας πηγαίνει στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Σὲ συνέντευξή του στὸ «Βῆμα» τὸ 1997 διηγήθηκε, πῶς βρέθηκε στὴ πόλη τῶν μελετῶν του. «Ὁ πρόεδρος Ἰνονοῦ περπατοῦσε στὴν πόλη καὶ ρωτοῦσε γιὰ διάφορα κτίρια, ποὺ ἔβλεπε καὶ οὐδεὶς γνώριζε νὰ τοῦ πεῖ τίποτε περισσότερο πέραν τοῦ ὅτι ἦταν Βυζαντινά. Πρόσταξε, λοιπόν, νὰ τοῦ βροῦν ἀμέσως ἓναν καθηγητὴ. Ὁ ἄγγλος πρόξενος στὴν Τουρκία ἔτυχε νὰ εἶναι μαθητὴς μου καὶ ἔτσι βρέθηκε νὰ ὀργανώσω ἔδρα Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν στὸ Πανεπιστήμιο τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης».

Τρία χρόνια ἀπὸ τὸ 1942 ὡς τὸ 1945 ὁ Στίβεν Ράνσιμαν διδάσκει στὸ λίκνο τοῦ μεσαιωνικοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ Βυζαντινὴ Ἱστορία καὶ Τέχνη. Τὸ 1945 ἔρχεται στὴν Ἑλλάδα, γιὰ νὰ διευθύνει δυὸ χρόνια τὸ Βρετανικὸ Συμβούλιο καὶ νὰ γνωρίσει, μεταξὺ ἄλλων, τὸν Γιώργο Σεφέρη, τὸν Ἄγγελο Σικελιανὸ καὶ τὸν Δημήτρη Χόρν.

Ὁ Στίβεν Ράνσιμαν χριζεται ἰππότης τὸ 1958 ἀπὸ τὴ βασίλισσα Ἐλισάβετ καὶ δίνει διαλέξεις σὲ ὅλα τὰ μεγάλα πανεπιστημιακὰ ἰδρύματα τοῦ κόσμου. Ὅσοι εἶχαν τὴν τύχη νὰ τὸν ἀκούσουν, συμφωνοῦν, ὅτι ἦταν ἓνας ἀξέχαστος ὁμιλητὴς, ὅπως γιὰ παράδειγμα ὅταν διηγοῦνταν μετὰ μελαγχολία ἀλλὰ καὶ σπαραγμὸ τὶς τελευταῖες στιγμὲς μίας χιλιόχρονης αὐτοκρατορίας, καταδικασμένης νὰ χαθεῖ, ἀλλὰ πολὺ περήφανη γιὰ νὰ παραδοθεῖ. Συνεργάζεται ἐπίσης μετὰ τὸ Βρετανικὸ Μουσεῖο, τὸ Μουσεῖο Βικτόρια καὶ Ἄλμπερτ, τὴ Βιβλιοθήκη τοῦ Λονδίνου καὶ τιμᾶται μετὰ πολυάριθμα πανεπιστημιακὰ διπλώματα, ἐνῶ καὶ ἡ Ἑλλάδα τοῦ ἀναγνωρίζει τὴ συμβολὴ του στὴ μετάδοση μίας εἰκόνας θετικῆς γιὰ τὴν, ἀπὸ πολλοὺς παραγνωρισμένη, περίοδο τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς ἱστορίας: ὁ ἴδιος ἔχει τιμηθεῖ μετὰ τὸ χρυσοῦ μετᾶλλιο τῆς πόλης τῶν Ἀθηνῶν (1990), δρόμοι στὸν Μυστρά καὶ στὴ Μονεμβασίᾳ φέρουν τὸ ὄνομά του, ἐνῶ στὴν ἀπονομὴ τῶν βραβείων Ὠνάση τὸ 1997, ὁ σὲρ Στίβεν Ράνσιμαν μοιράζεται τὸ βραβεῖο γιὰ τὸν Πολιτισμὸ μετὰ τὴν κυρία Ντόλυ Γουλανδρῆ. Καὶ μετὰ μία κίνηση συμβολικὴ διαθέτει τὸ χρηματικὸ ἔπαθλο, ποὺ τὸ συνοδεύει, γιὰ τὴν ἀναστήλωση τοῦ Βυζαντινοῦ πύργου τοῦ Πρωτάτου στὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος.

Ὁ «προπαγανδιστὴς» αὐτοῦ τοῦ κομβικοῦ μέρους τῆς ἱστορίας μας ἦταν πολυγραφότατος. Τὴν ἐκπληκτικὴ μονογραφία του γιὰ τὸν «Αὐτοκράτορα

Ρωμανὸ Λεκαπηνὸ καὶ τὴ Βασιλεία του» (1929) ἀκολούθησαν, μεταξύ ἄλλων, «Τὸ Πρῶτο Βουλγαρικὸ Κράτος» (1930), «Βυζαντινὸς Πολιτισμὸς» (1933) καὶ ἡ τρίτομη «Ἱστορία τῶν Σταυροφοριῶν» (1951-1954), τὸ γνωστότερο ἔργο του, ποὺ ἄλλαξε τὴν ἀντίληψη τοῦ δυτικοῦ κόσμου γιὰ τὶς Σταυροφορίες, κλίνοντας «σαφῶς πρὸς τὴν πλευρὰ τοῦ Βυζαντίου ἔναντι τῆς μισαλλοδοξίας καὶ τοῦ πλιάτσικου στὸ ὁποῖο ἐπιδιδόταν ἡ Δύση», ὅπως ἔγραψε ἡ ἑφημερίδα «The Times». Σημαντικὰ ἔργα τοῦ ἐπίσης εἶναι «Ἡ Ἄλωση τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως» (1965), «Βυζαντινὴ Θεοκρατία» (1977) καὶ ἄλλα.

Ὁ σὲρ Στίβεν Ράνσιμαν δὲν παντρεύτηκε ποτὲ καὶ ἔφυγε πλήρης ἡμερῶν τὸ φθινόπωρο τοῦ 2000. Ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ κύλησε περίπου ὅπως ὁ ἴδιος ὄρισε τὴν ἱστορία. «Δὲν εἶναι μία σειρὰ λιμνοῦλες μὲ στάσιμα νερά, ἀλλὰ ἓνας ποταμὸς ποὺ τρέχει ἀσταμάτητα καὶ ὀρμητικά». Αἰωνία του ἡ μνημη!



Μιλοῦσε ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ἀδέλφιος, Ἐπίσκοπος Νειλουπόλεως μὲ τὸν Ἀββᾶ Σισώη, γιὰ τὸ θέλημα τὸ ἀνθρώπινο καὶ τὸ κατὰ Θεόν. Καὶ ὅταν ὁ λόγος ἔφθασε στὸ θέμα τῆς δόξας, ὁ Ἀββᾶς Σισώης εἶπε: «Ἄν ὁ Θεὸς δὲν δοξάσῃ ἄνθρωπον, ἡ δόξα τῶν ἀνθρώπων τίποτε δὲν εἶναι». Ἄς τὸ ἀκούσουμε καὶ ἂς τὸ καταλάβουμε καὶ κυρίως ἂς τὸ ἀκολουθήσουμε σὰν κανόνα ζωῆς, ὅλοι ἡμεῖς, ποὺ νοιαζόμαστε γιὰ τὸ τί λένε οἱ ἄλλοι γιὰ μᾶς. Ἡ γνώμη τοῦ κόσμου εἶναι ἓνα τίποτε, ἓνα μηδενικό, μπροστὰ στὴν γνώμη τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ ἡ γνώμη τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀποτελεῖ τὴν ἀληθινὴ καὶ αἰώνια δόξα γιὰ τὸν πιστὸν ἄνθρωπον.

Ρώτησαν κάποτε τὸν Μέγα Ἀντώνιο γιὰ τοὺς πολέμους, ποὺ ἀντιμετωπίζουν οἱ ἀσκητὲς στὴν ἔρημον, ὅπου ζοῦν. Καὶ ἐκεῖνος ἀποκρίθηκε: «Ὅποιος κάθεται στὴν ἔρημο καὶ ἡσυχάζει, ἀπὸ τρεῖς πολέμους εἶναι ἀπαλλαγμένος: τὸν πόλεμο τῆς ἀκοῆς, τὸν πόλεμο τῆς ὀμιλίας καὶ τὸν πόλεμο τῆς ὀράσεως. Καὶ ἔχει μόνον ἓνα πόλεμον, τὸν πόλεμον τῆς καρδιάς». Ἄρα, ἡμεῖς, ποὺ ζοῦμε μέσα στὸν κόσμο ἔχουμε τέσσερους πολέμους μαζί.

Πῆγε κάποτε ὁ Ἀββᾶς Σισώης καὶ ἐπισκέφθηκε τὸν Ἀββᾶ Ἰωρ καὶ τὸν παρεκάλεσε: «Πῆς μου κάτι ὠφέλιμο». Καὶ ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ἰωρ τὸν ρώτησε: «Ἐχεις ἐμπιστοσύνη σὲ μένα;». Τοῦ ἀποκρίθηκε, ναί. Καὶ ὁ Ἀββᾶς τοῦ εἶπε: «Πήγαινε καὶ ὅ,τι μὲ εἶδες νὰ κάνω, κάμε το κι ἐσύ». Καὶ ξαναρώτησε ὁ Ἀββᾶς Σισώης: «Τί βλέπω, πάτερ, σὲ σένα;». Καὶ ὁ Γέροντας τοῦ ἐξήγησε: «Ὁ λογισμὸς μου μὲ θέτει πιδὸ κάτω ἀπὸ ὄλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους». Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ δρόμος τῶν Ἁγίων.

Ὁ Θρήνος τῆς Πόλης (29^η Μαΐου, 1453)

«Γιοβάνη», Μεγάλῃ ἐγκυκλοπαίδεια, ἔκδ. 1982, τόμ. 1^{ος}, σελ. 95-96).

Τὸ δημοτικὸ αὐτὸ τραγούδι εἶναι ὁ παλαιότερος Θρήνος γιὰ τὴν κατάληψη τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως. Πιθανὸν νὰ προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὴν Κρήτη. Βρέθηκε σὲ χειρόγραφο τοῦ 15^{ου} αἰώνα. Ὁ τίτλος ἦταν: «Ἀνακάλημα τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως». Ἀνήκει στὴ δευτέρη περίοδο (1453-1821) τῆς Νεοελληνικῆς Λογοτεχνίας καὶ στὸ ἱστορικὸ εἶδος.

Στὴν παρακάτω μορφή του δημοσιεύτηκε τὸ 1914 ἀπὸ τὸ Ν. Πολίτη στὴν συλλογὴ του «Ἐκλογαὶ ἀπὸ τὰ τραγούδια τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Λαοῦ». Γιὰ τὴν σύνθεσή του ὁ Ν. Πολίτης χρησιμοποίησε τὴν παραλλαγὴ ποὺ δημοσίευσε ὁ Φωρῆλ καὶ ἄλλοι εἴκοσι τέσσερις. Ὅμως, μόνον ὁ 4ος καὶ 18ος στίχος ἔχουν παρθεῖ αὐτούσιοι ἀπὸ τὴν ἐργασία τοῦ Φωρῆλ.

† † †

Σημαίνει ὁ Θεός, σημαίνει ἡ γῆς, σημαίνουν τὰ ἐπουράνια, σημαίνει κι ἡ Ἁγία Σοφία, τὸ μέγα μοναστήρι, μὲ τετρακόσια σήμαντρα κι ἐξήντα δυὸ καμπάνες.

Κάθε καμπάνα καὶ παπάς, κάθε παπάς καὶ διάκος. Ψάλλει ξεροβὰ ὁ βασιλιάς, δεξιὰ ὁ πατριάρχης, κι ἀπ' τὴν πολλὴ τὴν ψαλιμουδιὰ ἐσειόντανε οἱ κολόνες. Νὰ μποῦνε στὸ Χειρουβικό καὶ νὰ βγεῖ ὁ βασιλέας, φωνὴ τοὺς ἤρθε ἐξ οὐρανοῦ κι ἀπ' ἀρχαγγέλου στόμα: «Πάψατε τὸ Χειρουβικό κι ἂς χαμηλώσουν τ' ἅγια, παπάδες πάρτε τὰ ἱερά, καὶ σεῖς κεριὰ σβηστήτε, γιατί εἶναι θέλημα Θεοῦ ἡ Πόλη νὰ τουρκέψη. Μόν' στεῖλτε λόγο στὴ Φραγκιά, νὰ ῥθοῦν τρία καράβια, τὸ 'να νὰ πάρει τὸ Σταυρὸ καὶ τ' ἄλλο τὸ Βαγγέλιο, τὸ τρίτο τὸ καλύτερο, τὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζά μας, μὴ μᾶς τὴν πάρουν τὰ σκυλιὰ καὶ μᾶς τὴ μαγαρίσουν.»

Ἡ Δέσποινα ταράχτηκε καὶ δάκρυσαν οἱ εἰκόνες.

Σώπασε, κυρὰ Δέσποινα, καὶ μὴ πολυδακρῦζης, πάλι μὲ χρόνους, μὲ καιρούς, πάλι δικὰ μας εἶναι.



Τὰ παιδιὰ παίρνουν τὰ πρῶτα πνευματικὰ κρυολογήματα ἀπὸ τὰ ἀνοικτὰ παράθυρα τῶν αἰσθήσεων τῶν γονέων. Περισσότερο τὰ κρυολογεῖ ἡ μητέρα, ὅταν δὲν εἶναι ντυμένη μὲ τὴν σεμνότητα, καὶ προσπαθεῖ ἀκόμη νὰ «μαδάη» καὶ τὰ παιδιὰ της. Τὰ «πουλάκια» προστατεύονται ἀπὸ τὴν φιλόστοργη μάνα, ποὺ ἔχει φτερὰ σεμνότητας, καὶ τὰ θερμαίνει μὲ τὴν εὐλάβεια καὶ τὸν φόβο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὅταν ὅμως εἶναι «μαδημένη», τὰ ξεπαγιάζει.

Γέροντας Παΐσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης

Άλεξ. Παπαδιαμάντης: Ὁ Εὖσμος καὶ Πάναγος Σκιαθίτης

Ἐκατὸ χρόνια ἀπὸ τὸν θάνατόν του (1851-1911). Τοῦ κ. Δημητρίου Κ. Κουτσουλέλου.

**«Στὰ Γράμματά μας τὰ φτωχά,
μοναδικὸ διαμάντι,
γενιὲς γενιῶν θὰ σ' εὐλογοῦν,
σεμνὲ Παπαδιαμάντη»**

Γ. Βερίτης

Συμπληρώνονται ἐφέτος 100 χρόνια ἀπὸ τὸ θάνατο τοῦ Ἀλέξανδρου Παπαδιαμάντη, ποὺ πάντοτε μᾶς ἀφυπνίζει, μὲ τὸν καθοδηγητικὸ λόγο του, μᾶς ἀνυψώνει, μὲ τοὺς ὑψηλοὺς στοχασμοὺς του καὶ μᾶς διδάσκει μὲ τὸ ὑπέροχο ἦθος του.

Γιὸς ταπεινοῦ ἐφημερίου, ξεκινᾷ ἀπ' τὸ ὠραῖο νησί του, καὶ ὑψώνεται, μέσα στὴ δοκιμασία καὶ στὸν πόνο, στὴ στέρωση καὶ στὴ πικρία, σὲ ἰδεολόγο ἀγωνιστὴ τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν Γραμμάτων. Ἡ ζωὴ του ὀλόκληρη εἶναι ἓνα λαμπρὸ παράδειγμα ἀγνότητος καὶ ταπεινοφροσύνης, αὐτοπειθαρχίας καὶ συνέπειας. Ἀγαποῦσε καὶ νοσταλγοῦσε τὴν ἀγνότητα τῆς θρησκευτικῆς ζωῆς, γιατί μέσα του ζοῦσε ἡ αὐστηρὴ παράδοση.

Ἰδιόμορφος στὸ χαρακτήρα, στὸν τρόπο τῆς ζωῆς καὶ στὴν ἕκ φραση τῆς τέχνης του, ζοῦσε πάντοτε σ' ἓνα φτωχικὸ καὶ ἡρεμο περιβάλλον ποὺ τὸ ἀγίαζαν ἡ ἀγαθότητα καὶ ἡ πίστη, ὁ σεβασμὸς καὶ ἡ νοσταλγία, τὸ θρησκευτικὸ δέος καὶ ἡ καλωσύνη. Μὲ τὶς ὑψηλὲς τάσεις στὴν ἠθικὴ πληρότητα τῆς ζωῆς, τὴν ἐνοραματικὴ δύναμη καὶ τὸ δημιουργικὸ πνεῦμα του, ἔγινε ὁ ὑπέροχος ἐκφραστὴς τῆς νεοελληνικῆς πεζογραφίας καὶ ὁ ἀσύγκριτος συγγραφέας τοῦ νεώτερου Ἑλληνισμοῦ. Μὲ τὴ μεγάλη λυρικὴ πνοὴ καὶ τὸ ἔξοχο παράδειγμά του, ἔγινε ὁ μεγάλος ὀδηγὸς τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς γενιάς. Νοσταλγὸς τῶν ἐρημοκκλησιῶν καὶ πιστὸς τηρητὴς τῆς οὐσίας τῆς Χριστιανικῆς Θρησκείας, ἀφιέρωσε ὀλόκληρη τὴ ζωὴ του στὴν ὑπηρεσία τοῦ πνεύματος καὶ τῶν ὑψηλῶν ὀραματισμῶν του.

**Καὶ πάλι κίνησα νὰ ῥθῶ,
Χριστέ μου, στὴν αὐλή σου,
νὰ σκύψω στὰ κατώφλια σου,
στά τρισαγαπημένα,
ὅπου, μὲ πόθο ἀχόρταγο,
τὸ λαχταρᾷ ἡ ψυχὴ μου.**

Ἡ ζωὴ του μοιράζεται ἀνάμεσα στὴν Σκιαθὸ καὶ στὴν Ἀθήνα. «Ἡ ψυχὴ μου—γράφει—ἦταν πάντοτε πρὸς τὰ μέρη Ἐκεῖνα τῆς Σκιαθου, ἂν καὶ τὸ πλεῖστον χρόνον ἀπεδημιῶν σωματικῶς...». Θυέλλες καὶ καταιγίδες τὸν συνοδεύουν, ὅπως ἀφρίζει ἡ θάλασσα στοὺς βράχους τοῦ Κάστρου.

Οἱ χωρισμοί, ἡ ξενιτιά, τὰ ναυάγια, ἡ φτώχεια, οἱ θάνατοι, ἡ ἀθωότητα, ἡ νοσταλγία, ἡ πίστη

στοιχειοθετοῦν τὸν ἀγαπημένο καὶ οἰκεῖο βιόκοσμο καὶ μᾶς ἀφυπνίζουν τὴ συγκίνηση καὶ τὴ συμμετοχὴ στὴν καρτερία καὶ στὴν ὀδύνη του. Ποτὲ δὲν ἀπομακρύνθηκε ἀπ' τὴ πραγματικότητα τῆς ζωῆς. Ἡ μνήμη του μεταφέρεται διαδοχικὰ ἀπ' τὰ ἔγκατα τῶν ψυχῶν τῶν Σκιαθιτῶν στὶς φτωχογειτονιὲς τῆς Ἀθήνας. Ἀπ' τὸ σκιόφυτο τοῦ ἐξωκκλησιοῦ στὸ δροσερὸν ὑπόγειο τοῦ καπηλιοῦ.

Εἶναι ὁ μεγάλος καημὸς του, ἡ μεγάλη δύναμή του γιὰ τὴν ἐνατένιση τῆς ζωῆς καὶ τὸν τίμιο ἀγώνα γιὰ τὰ δίκαια καὶ τὰ ἀληθινά. Ἐκατὸ μέτρα ἀπὸ τὴν παραλία βρῖσκεται τὸ σπίτι τοῦ Παπαδιαμάντη, χωρὶς ἰδιαίτερο ἀρχιτεκτονικὸ ἐνδιαφέρον, πού, τὸ 1965, κηρύχθηκε διατηρητέο μνημεῖο καὶ λειτουργεῖ ὡς Μουσεῖο. Ἡ ἐπίσκεψη σ' αὐτὸ φέρνει πολλὲς συγκινήσεις. Ἐδῶ ἔμεινε, τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια τῆς ζωῆς του. Ὁ ἐπισκέπτης νομίζει ὅτι θὰ δεῖ τὸν «Κοσμοκαλόγερο», σκυμμένο, μὲ πλεγμένα τὰ χέρια του μπροστὰ καὶ τριμένο παλτό του, καὶ τὶς τέσσερες ἀδελφές του: τὴ Χαρίκλεια, τὴ Σοφούλα, τὴν Κυρατσούλα καὶ τὴν Οὐρανία, πρόθυμες νὰ τὸν φιλέσουν καρῦδι καὶ φασκόμηλο. Ἐδῶ, «μετ' στοργῆς, ἐξωγράφιζε τὰ γνήσια ἑλληνικὰ ἦθη, τὴ Σκιαθίτικη φύση καί, μετὰ λατρείας, ὑμνοῦσε τὸν Χριστὸν του», ψάλλοντας τὰ «τραγοῦδια τοῦ Θεοῦ», μὲ τὴν κατανυκτικὴ γλυκεῖα φωνή του.

Μέσα στοὺς δύσκολους καὶ ταραγμένους καιροὺς μας, ἡ ζωὴ μας εἶναι προβληματικὴ, ἀνάμεσα σὲ ἀγωνίες καὶ θλίψεις, στεναγμοὺς καὶ πόνους, δοκιμασίες καὶ ἀχαριστίες. Ὁ ψαλμωδὸς τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἐλισαίου μᾶς δείχνει τὸ δρόμο, ποὺ ὀφείλουμε ν' ἀκολουθήσουμε. Εἶναι μεγάλος, σὰν τὸ πνευματικὸ ἀνάστημά του. Ἴσως σὰν τὴν ἀκαμπτη ζωὴ του. Λευκός, σὰν τὴν εὖσομη καὶ πάναγνη πορεία του. τὸν βλέπουμε μπροστὰ μας, σὲ κάθε βῆμα μας, ρακένδυτο καὶ περιφρονημένο, λιθοβολημένο καὶ αὐ τοεξόριστο, εὐαίσθητο καὶ ἄμωμο. Ἐμπνεόμαστε ἀπ' τὸ ἰσχυρὸ πνεῦμα του, ποὺ ἐνσαρκώνει τὸ ἔργο του, ἐπάνω ἀπὸ ἐποχὲς καὶ τεχνοτροπίες.

«Πόσοι ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς νιώθουμε—γράφει ὁ Τ.Κ. Παπατσώνης—πὼς ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης εἶναι καὶ μένει ὁ Συνέκδημὸς μας καὶ ὁ ὑπογραμμὸς τῆς ἐθνικῆς καὶ ἠθικῆς ζωῆς μας. Χωρὶς Σολωμό, Κάλβο, Μακρυγιάννη, κινδυνεύουμε νὰ ρίξουμε στὴ λήθη τὶς μνήμες τῆς Λευτεριάς μας. Χωρὶς τὸν Παπαδιαμάντη, χάνουμε τὶς ρίζες τοῦ νέου μας ἐθνισμοῦ, παύουμε νὰ εἴμαστε Ἕλληνες. Μᾶς προτίθεται ἡ ἐκλογή. Ἀλλὰ δὲν πρέπει ὅμως νὰ μᾶς λείψει ἡ συνείδηση, πὼς θεληματικά, ἀποξενωμένοι ἀπ' τὴ ζωντανὴ φλέβα τῆς ἐθνικῆς μας ζωῆς, τραβοῦμε γιὰ περιπέτειες τυχοδιωκτικῆς, σὲ κόσμους, ποὺ δὲν εἶναι δικοί μας.

Ὅταν ἔχει ἓνας Λαὸς κάτι πολῦτιμο, δὲν τὸ ἀπορρίπτει. Καὶ τὸ ἀγνὸ δίδαγμα τοῦ Σκιαθίτη εἶναι πολὺ τίμιο καὶ ἀνεπανάληπτο».

Ὁ Ἡσαῦ καὶ οἱ Νεοέλληνες

Τοῦ Ἀρχιμ. Μελετίου Ἀπ. Βαδραχάνη.

Περιεργος φαίνεται ἐκ πρώτης ὄψεως ὁ τίτλος τοῦ παρόντος ἀρθρου. Τί σχέση μπορεῖ νὰ ἔχει ὁ Ἡσαῦ μὲ τοὺς Ἑλληνας καὶ μάλιστα ὄχι τοὺς ἀρχαίους ἀλλὰ τοὺς Νεοέλληνες;

Γνωρίζουμε ἀπὸ τὴ Γραφή ὅτι ὁ Ἡσαῦ ἦταν υἱὸς πρωτότοκος τοῦ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ ἡ γενιά του καὶ ἡ ράτσα του καταγόταν ἀπὸ τοὺς Σημίτες, ἐνῶ ἡ δική μας γενιά προέρχεται ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἰαφεθίτες, τοὺς γνωστοὺς ὡς Ἰνδοευρωπαίους. Σῆμ καὶ Ἰάφεθ ἦταν δύο ἀπὸ τὰ παιδιά τοῦ Νῶε. Λοιπὸν τί σχέση μπορεῖ νὰ ὑπάρχει; Ποιὸ εἶναι τὸ κοινὸ σημεῖο; Τί ὁμοιότητες ὑπάρχουν μεταξύ τῶν Νεοελλήνων καὶ τοῦ πρωτοτόκου υἱοῦ τοῦ Ἰσαὰκ;

Κι ὅμως ὑπάρχουν ὁμοιότητες. Καὶ μάλιστα τέτοιου εἶδους, ποὺ μπορούμε νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι ἐμεῖς οἱ Νεοέλληνες εἴμαστε οἱ πνευματικοὶ ἀπόγονοι τοῦ Ἡσαῦ. ἔχουμε τὴ νοοτροπία καὶ τὰ φρονήματά του· τὸ πιστεύω του καὶ τὸν χαρακτήρα του. Αὐτὸ φαίνεται ξεκάθαρα στὴ βιβλική ἱστορία. Ἄς τὴ μελετήσουμε γιὰ νὰ τὸ διαπιστώσουμε.

Λέγει ἡ Γραφή (Γέν. 25:27-34) ὅτι ὁ Ἰσαὰκ μετὰ ἀπὸ προσευχὴς εἴκοσι ἐτῶν ἀπέκτησε δύο δίδυμα τέκνα. Τὸ πρῶτο ποὺ ἐξήλθε ἀπὸ τὴ κοιλία τῆς μητέρας του ἦταν ὁ Ἡσαῦ καὶ ἀκολούθησε ὁ Ἰακώβ. Ὁ Ἡσαῦ ὅταν μεγάλωσε ἔγινε ἄνθρωπος, ποὺ ἀγαποῦσε νὰ τριγυρίζε ἔξω καὶ νὰ ἀσχολεῖται μὲ τὸ κυνήγι. Ρωμαλέος, δυνατός, σκληραγωγημένος, μὲ περιπετειώδη διάθεση καὶ σὺν τοῖς ἄλλοις πρωτότοκος ἀπέσπασε τὴν εὐνοία καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ πατέρα του, ὁ ὁποῖος τὸν καμάρωνε καὶ ἦταν περήφανος γιὰ τὸ διάδοχό του.

Ὁ Ἡσαῦ, σύμφωνα μὲ τὰ ἔθιμα τῆς ἐποχῆς, ἦταν ὁ κύριος κληρονόμος τῆς πατρικῆς περιουσίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ κληρονόμος τῆς πνευματικῆς δωρεᾶς, τῆς εὐλογίας τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποὺ εἶχε πάρει ὁ παπποῦς του ὁ Ἀβραὰμ καὶ ὁ πατέρας τοῦ Ἰσαὰκ, ὅτι ἀπὸ τὸ σπέρμα τους θὰ βγεῖ ἓνα μεγάλο ἔθνος εὐλογημένο ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ καὶ διὰ μέσου τοῦ ἔθνους αὐτοῦ θὰ εὐλογηθοῦν ὅλα τὰ ἔθνη τῆς γῆς. Τὴν εὐλογία αὐτὴν μαζὶ μὲ τὴν ὑλική του περιουσία τὴν μετέδωσε ὁ Ἀβραὰμ στὸν Ἰσαὰκ καὶ ὁ Ἰσαὰκ θὰ τὴν μετέδιδε στὸν Ἡσαῦ τὸν πρωτότοκο υἱό του.

Μιὰ μέρα ὁ Ἰακώβ, ποὺ ἦταν ἄνθρωπος τοῦ σπιτιοῦ καὶ ἀγαποῦσε τὶς οἰκιακὲς ἀσχολίες, μαγεῖρεψε μιὰ ὥραία καὶ νόστιμη φακὴ. Ἔρχεται τότε ὁ Ἡσαῦ ἀπὸ τὴν ἐξοχὴ κουρασμένος καὶ ξελιγωμένος ἀπὸ τὴν πείνα. Στὴ θέα τῆς φακῆς λέγει στὸν Ἰακώβ· «μοῦ δίνεις νὰ

φάω, ἀπ' αὐτὸ τὸ κόκκινο φαγητὸ, ποὺ μαγεῖρεψες, πεθαίνω τῆς πείνας»; Γι' αὐτὸ ὀνομάσθηκε καὶ «Ἐδώμ», δηλαδὴ κόκκινος, ἐπειδὴ ἐπιθύμησε τὶς φακὲς, ποὺ ὅταν βράζουν ἔχουν χρῶμα κόκκινο.

Καὶ ὁ Ἰακώβ, ποὺ ἔβλεπε τὸν ἀδελφό του νὰ ἀσχολεῖται μὲ ἔργα κοσμικὰ καὶ νὰ μὴ ἐνδιαφέρεται γιὰ τὴν εὐλογία τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὴν ὁποία αὐτὸς ἐπίμονα ἐπιζητοῦσε καὶ διακαῶς ἐπιθυμοῦσε, τοῦ λέγει· «πούλησέ μου τὰ πρωτοτόκια σου κι ἐγὼ θὰ σοῦ δώσω τὴ φακὴ».

«Βρὲ ποιὰ πρωτοτόκια μοῦ λές, ποὺ ἐγὼ πεθαίνω στὴν πείνα». Ἀπάντησε ὁ Ἡσαῦ.

Ἀλλὰ ὁ Ἰακώβ ἐπέμενε· «ὀρκίσου ὅτι θὰ μοῦ τὰ δώσεις σήμερα».

«Βάλε μου νὰ φάω καὶ σοῦ ὀρκίζομαι νὰ στὰ δώσω» ἀπάντησε ὁ Ἡσαῦ.

Ἔτσι ὁ Ἡσαῦ περιφρόνησε τὴν εὐλογία τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ ἓνα πιάτο φακῆ· γιὰ μιὰ στιγμὴ σωματικοῦ κορεσμοῦ. Κι ὁ Θεός, ποὺ εἶδε αὐτὴ τὴν περιφρόνηση, τὸν ἀπέκλεισε τοῦ ἐπιγείου σχεδίου του γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τοῦ κόσμου.

Ἀπὸ ὅτι φαίνεται στὴ Γραφή, ὁ Ἰακώβ δὲν πῆρε ἀπὸ τὸν ἀδελφό του τὴν ὑλικὴ περιουσία ποὺ τοῦ ἀνῆκε, λόγω τῶν πρωτοτοκίων του. Πῆρε μόνο τὴν πνευματικὴ εὐλογία, γιὰ τὴν ὁποία ἐκεῖνος καθόλου δὲν ἐνδιαφέρονταν. Συνεπῶς δὲν τὸν ἀδίκησε ὁ ἀδελφός του μὲ τὸ τέχνασμα τοῦ ἀπλῶς ἐκεῖνος ἀδίκησε πνευματικὰ

καὶ αἰώνια τὸν ἑαυτό του.

Ὁ Ἡσαῦ μαζὶ μὲ τὸν Κάιν εἶναι ἀπὸ τὰ ἀπεχθῆ πρόσωπα τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης, ποὺ χάριν ἐλάχιστης ὑλικῆς ὠφελείας πούλησαν τὰ πνευματικὰ τους δικαιώματα στὸν διάβολο καὶ προεικονίζουν τὸν Ἰούδα τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης, ποὺ πούλησε τὸ Χριστὸ γιὰ τριάκοντα ἀργύρια.

Ἄς ἔρθουμε ὅμως στοὺς Νεοέλληνες καὶ ἄς δοῦμε σὲ τί μοιάζουν μὲ τὸν Ἡσαῦ. Εἶναι ἀπόγονοι Χριστιανῶν προγόνων. Προγόνων ποὺ ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς τους δοκιμάσθηκε σκληρότατα τὰ χρόνια τῆς τουρκοκρατίας. ἔχουν κι αὐτοὶ συνεπῶς ἐπάνω τους τὴν εὐλογία τῶν Χριστιανῶν ἀπογόνων καὶ εἶναι φορεῖς καὶ θὰ πρέπει νὰ εἶναι καὶ συνεχιστὲς τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας. Καὶ φαινομενικὰ αὐτὸ συμβαίνει. Εἶναι μέλη τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, συμμετέχουν στὰ μυστήρια της καὶ στὸν ἐκ κλησιασμό, ἔστω καὶ κατὰ ἄρραϊὰ χρονικὰ διαστήματα, καὶ δηλώνουν ὡς θρησκευτὰ τους τὸν Χριστιανισμό.

Κι ὅμως, ἂν παρατηρήσει προσεκτικὰ κανεὶς, θὰ διαπιστώσει ὅτι ἡ ἐπαφή μας μὲ τὸν Χριστιανισμό εἶναι τυπικὴ, ἐπιφανειακὴ καὶ σχετικὴ. Κι αὐτὴ ἡ προσέλευση τῶν Χριστιανῶν στὰ μυστήρια καὶ στίς



μεγάλες γιορτές γίνεται από έθιμο και συνήθεια, χωρίς καμμία ψυχοσωματική προετοιμασία και μετοχή στα όσα τελούνται. Κλασικό παράδειγμα ή νύχτα του Πάσχα, ή νύχτα της Αναστάσεως, ή «έορτη των έορτών και πανήγυρις των πανηγύρεων».

Βγαίνουμε έξω και μόλις πει ό ιερέας τó «Χριστός άνέστη», σκάμε μερικά βαρελότα, τσουγκρίζουμε τó αυγό, ανταλλάσσουμε άσπασμούς και φεύγουμε. Που πάμε; Που πάμε; Στο σπίτι να φάμε μαγειρίτσα! 1 ώρα ή 1 ½ ώρα νωρίτερα. Και ό Χριστός μέσα στην Έκκλησία μās έτοιμάσε τραπέζι κι έμεις του γυρίζουμε τις πλάτες μας...

Ό Ι. Χρυσόστομος εις τόν «Κατηχητικόν του Λόγον» φωνάζει: «Ουκοῦν εισέλθετε πάντες εις την χαράν του Κυρίου ήμών... Η τράπεζα γέμει, τρυφήσατε πάντες. Ό μόσχος πολύς, μηδεις έξέληθ πεινών. Πάντες απολαύσατε του συμποσίου της πίστεως. Πάντες απολαύσατε του πλούτου της χρηστότητος».

Κ' έμεις—σάν τόν Ησαῦ—πουλούμε τη Θεία Κοινωνία, τη χαρά της αναστάσεως, τη νίκη κατά του θανάτου για ένα πιάτο μαγειρίτσα. Λατρεύουμε την κοιλία μας πάνω από τόν Θεό. Δεν δεχόμαστε να περιμένει ούτε μία ώρα.

Στά διάφορα γλέντια μας και στις κοσμικές μας διασκεδάσεις θέλουμε να υπερηφανευόμαστε ότι ξεφυγήσαμε μέχρι των προινών ώρων. Έδώ όμως άδημονούμε πότε να φύγουμε. Κι όμως λεγόμαστε και ισχυριζόμαστε ότι είμαστε Χριστιανοί!

Δεν υπάρχει φοβερότερο άμάρτημα άπ' αυτό που γίνεται τη νύχτα της Αναστάσεως, φοβερότερη βλασφημία, φοβερότερη άσέ βεια. Λέει ό Χριστός στο 10^{ον} κεφάλαιον του κατά Ματθαίου Ευαγγελίου, ότι όποιος δεν δεχθεί τούς άποστόλους, θα κριθεί φοβερότερα των Σοδόμων και της Γομόρρας. Έπως θα κριθούμε έμεις οι πνευματικοί άπόγονοι του Ησαῦ, όταν γυρίζουμε τις πλάτες στον αναστημένο Χριστό;



Γενικώς ή διάκρισις είναι και γίνεται γνωστή, ως ή άσφαλής κατανόησις του θείου θελήματος σε κάθε χρόνον και τόπον και πραγματικώς υπάρχει μόνον σ' εκείνους, που είναι καθαροί στην καρδιά και στο σώμα και στο στόμα.

Άγιος Ιωάννης ό Σιναΐτης

Γνώση και Γνώση

Του κ. Αριστοτέλους Παύλου.

Η πρώτη οικοδομει στο καλό. Μās βοηθει να γνωρίσουμε, τι είμαστε, που πάσχουμε, ποιες οι αδυναμίες μας, ποια τα προτερήματά μας. Μās αφυπνίζει αυτή ή γνώση. Μās βοηθει να αναθεωρήσουμε άπόψεις. Αυτή οδηγεί στην έρευνα, στην πολυμαθεια, στο να γνωρίσουμε τα μυστήρια του Θεού. Τέτοια γνώση, σέβεται τó ανεξερεύνητο. Παραδέχεται, ότι ή λογική, δεν ήμπορει να τó πλησιάσει, τó δέχεται όμως, ότι υπάρχει. Αυτό (τó ανεξερεύνητο) τó έρευνά ή πίστις.

Αυτή ή γνώση όπλίζει με φιλόμωρα αισθήματα, μαθαίνει να δεχόμαστε ευχαρίστως τόν έλεγχο των συνανθρώπων μας, γιατί οικοδομει στο καλό. τó «έν οίδα ότι ουδέν οίδα» αυτή ή γνώση τó διαλαλει. Διδάσκει δηλαδή την ταπεινώση. Όδηγει και στην περιφρόνηση της υγείας. Ένεργοποιει τις έσωτερικές δυνάμεις (τις πνευματικές), ώστε σε ώρες κινδύνου, να προβλέπουν τις τρικυμίες της ζωής, τα άπροόπτα, και έτσι να μη αϊφνιδιάζεται ό άνθρωπος. Γνώση που δέ σιωπά στα μεγάλα κοινωνικά προβλήματα. Έκφράζεται θαρραλέα προς όλες τις κατευθύνσεις. Γνώση με ήθικη και θείο άρωμα.

Η άλλη γνώση είναι ή γνώση που μās φορτώνει με περιττά (μās άδειάζει την τσέπη). Τίνος γέννημα είναι τó άγχος, ή άνησυχία, ή ανασφάλεια, ή δουλεία στις μηχανές; Της τεχνικής εξέλιξεως παιδι και αυτό—αυτής της γνώσεως—της άψυχης!

Γνώση αυτή που παράγει συνεχώς και νέα όπλα, άκριβώς για να καταστρέφονται περιουσίες, να αφανίζονται ανθρώπινες ψυχές. Γνώση, ή όποια χαιρέται να βλέπει αίματα, πείνα, δυστυχία στη γη. Έξυπνη—πανούργα γνώση—έπιστήμη, ή όποια να κατασκευάζει έξυπνα όπλα - βόμβες, ώστε να μη ήμπορει να κρυφθεί κανεις (να άποφύγει τόν θάνατο). Αυτή ή γνώση γέμισε τόν άέρα με καρκινογόνα μικρόβια. Γνώση αυτή, ή όποια ύψώνει τόν έαυτό της σε Θεό. Ό έγωϊσμός εδώ στο έπακρο. Έωσφορική - Σατανική γνώση.

Τι να περιμένει ή ανθρωπότητα από μία τέτοια άθεη γνώση; Ήδη ή φύση μās έκδικείται, και ή αιτία είναι αυτή. Τιμωρει προκλητικά όλην την ανθρωπότητα, χωρίς και να έντρέπεται. Άνήθικη γνώση. Γνώση, που φάσκει και αντιφάσκει. Ούτε ζητει συγγνώμη για τις επί χρόνια άθλιότητες της στη γη και στο διάστημα. Πώς να τó πράξει, άφου οδηγεί στην τυφλώση και οδηγείται (πορεύεται στα τυφλά, άφου λείπει ή θεία φώτιση;).

Ποιός θα σώσει την ανθρωπότητα από μία τέτοια, άκρως επικίνδυνη-δαμονική γνώση;

Τὸ Χτίσιμο τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Ναοῦ τῆς Ἁγίας τοῦ Θεοῦ Σοφίας

Θρακικὸς θρύλος ἀπὸ το βιβλίον τοῦ Κ. Ρωμαίου «ΕΛΛΑΣ, Λαογραφία-Γεωγραφία-Ἱστορία», τόμ. 2ος, σελ. 653.



Ενας νεοελληνικὸς θρύλος ἀπὸ τῆς Θράκης μᾶς πληροφορεῖ γιὰ τὸ πῶς χτίσθηκε ἡ Ἁγία Σοφία στὴν Πόλη ἀπὸ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Ἰουστινιανὸ μετὰ τὸ 530 π.Χ.

Αὐτὴ λοιπόν, ἡ σχετικὴ παράδοση ἀπὸ τῆς Θράκης μᾶς περιγράφει καὶ μᾶς ἐξηγεῖ ὅτι τὸ σχέδιο, γιὰ νὰ κτισθῆ ἡ Ἁγία Σοφία, ἔγινε γνωστὸ μὲ ἓναν τελειῶς διαφορετικὸν τρόπο ἀπὸ αὐτὸν ποὺ μάθαμε ἀπὸ τὴν ἱστορία.

Ἄξιζε νὰ προσέξουμε ἰδιαίτερα τὴν παράδοση αὐτή, γιατί δὲν εἶναι γνωστὴ ἀπὸ ἄλλους τόπους παρὰ σχεδὸν μόνον ἀπὸ τῆς Θράκης. Τὴ διηγούντουσαν στὴ Βιζύη τῆς Θράκης κατὰ τὸν περασμένον αἰῶνα, καὶ ἐκεῖ, στὴν ἰδιαίτερη πατρίδα του, τὴν ἔμαθε μικρὸ παιδί ὁ ποιητὴς Γεώργιος Βιζυηνός. Καὶ σώζοντάς τὴν ἀπὸ τὴν λησμονιὰ καὶ τὸν βέβαιο ἀφανισμό, τὴν περιέγραψε ἔμμετρα τὸ 1884 μέσα στὴν ποιητικὴ συλλογὴ του «Ἀτθίδες Αὔραι». Ἄς δοῦμε λοιπὸν αὐτὸν τὸν ἴδιον τὸ Θρακικὸν θρύλον.

«Ἦταν ὁ καιρὸς ποὺ ὁ βασιλεὺς στὴν Πόλη εἶχε ἀποφασίσει νὰ χτίσει τὴν Ἁγία Σοφία. Εἶχε καλέσει τὸν πρωτομάστορα, καὶ ὁ τελευταῖος εἶχε κάμει ἓνα, καὶ ἕστερα ἄλλο, καὶ ἕστερα ἄλλα σχέδια, πῶς νὰ χτιστῆ ἡ μεγάλη ἐκκλησιά. Κανένα ὅμως δὲν εὐχαριστοῦσε τὸ βασιλιά. Ἦθελε κάτι ἄλλο, πολὺ πιὸ σπουδαῖο. Καὶ ὁ πρωτομάστορας ὅλο καὶ σκεφτόταν τί νέο σχέδιο νὰ φτιάσῃ.

Μιὰ Κυριακὴ, τὴν ὥρα ποὺ τελείωνε ἡ λειτουργία, ζύγωσε πρῶτος ὁ βασιλεὺς νὰ πάρῃ τὸ ἀντίδωρο, ἐκεῖνο ὅμως τοῦ ξεφεύγει ἀπὸ τὸ χερὶ καὶ πέφτει χάμω. Μιὰ στιγμὴ ἀργότερα παρουσιάζεται μιὰ μέλισσα ποὺ φτεροκοποῦσε πρὸς τὸ ἀνοιχτὸ παράθυρο, κρατώντας τὸ πεσμένον ἀντίδωρο τοῦ βασιλιά. Βγάνει ἀμέσως διαταγὴ ὁ βασιλεὺς, ὅσοι ἔχουν μέλισσα νὰ τ' ἀνοίξουν καὶ νὰ ψάξουν, γιὰ νὰ βρεθῆ.

Ψάχνει καὶ ὁ πρωτομάστορας στὰ δικά του τὰ μελλίσσια καὶ τί βλέπει; Εἶχανε κάτσει οἱ μέλισσες μέρες πρὶν καὶ εἶχανε φτιάξῃ μὲ τὸ κερὶ μέσα στὴν κυψέλη μιὰν ἐκκλησιὰ πανέμορφη καὶ σκαλιστὴ καὶ μεγαλόπρεπη, ποὺ δὲν εἶχε τὴν ὁμοιὰ τῆς σ' ὀλόκληρη τὴν Οἰκουμένη. Ὅλες οἱ λεπτομέρειες εἶχανε γίνῃ στὴν ἐντέλεια, μέσα κι' ἔξω στὴν ἐκκλησιὰ. Ἡ πόρτα

τῆς ἀνοιχτῆ, ὁ τροῦλος ἔτοιμος, οἱ κολῶνες στὴ θέση τους, ὡς καὶ ἡ Ἁγία Τράπεζα τελειωμένη. Τὴν εἶχαν ἀποτελειώσει σ' ὅλα τῆς τὴν ἐκκλησιὰ, καὶ ἀπάνω στὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζα τῆς εἶχε φέρε ἑκεῖνη ἡ μέλισσα καὶ εἶχε ἀποθέσει τὸ ἀντίδωρο τοῦ βασιλιά.

Εἶδε τὴν ἐκκλησιὰ ὁ πρωτομάστορας καὶ θάμαξε μὲ τὸ τέλειον σχέδιόν τῆς. Τὴν εἶδε κατόπι καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ ἔγινε ὅλος χαρὰ. Τὸ σχέδιο, ποὺ εἶχανε φτιάξῃ οἱ μέλισσες, ἔγινε τὸ σχέδιο ποὺ χτίστηκε ἡ Ἁγία Σοφία!!!».

† † †

ΠΑΝΕΛΛΗΝΙΟΙ ΘΡΥΛΟΙ ΤΗΣ ΑΓΙΑ-ΣΟΦΙΑΣ

Ὁ Μαρμαρωμένος Βασιλεὺς

Ὅταν μπῆκαν οἱ Τούρκοι στὴν Πόλη, ἄγγελος Κυρίου ἄρπαξε τὸ βασιλεῖο καὶ τὸν πῆγε σὲ μιὰ σπηλιὰ βαθιὰ στὴ γῆ κάτω, κοντὰ στὴ Χρυσόπορτα. Ἐκεῖ μένει μαρμαρωμένος ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ καρτερεῖ νὰ κατεβῆ ὁ ἄγγελος στὴ σπηλιὰ, νὰ τὸν ξεμαρμαρώσει. Καὶ θὰ σηκωθῆ πάλι ὁ βασιλεὺς καὶ θὰ μπεῖ στὴν Πόλη καὶ θὰ διώξῃ τοὺς Τούρκους ὡς τὴν Κόκκινη Μηλιά.

Ὁ Παπὰς τῆς Ἁγία-Σοφίας

Τὴν ὥρα ποὺ μπῆκαν οἱ Τούρκοι στὴν Ἁγία-Σοφία δὲν εἶχε τελειώσῃ ἀκόμα ἡ λειτουργία. Ὁ παπὰς ποὺ ἔκανε τὴ λειτουργία πῆρε ἀμέσως τὸ Ἅγιο Δισκοπότηρο, ἀνέβηκε στὰ κατηχούμενα, ἐμπῆκε σὲ μιὰ θύρα καὶ ἡ θύρα ἔκλεισε ἀμέσως. Εἶναι θέλημα Θεοῦ ν' ἀνοίξῃ μόνη τῆς ἡ θύρα, ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἡ ὥρα, καὶ θὰ βγῆ ἀπὸ κεῖ ὁ παπὰς, νὰ τελειώσῃ τὴ λειτουργία στὴν Ἁγία-Σοφία, ὅταν θὰ πάρουμε πίσω τὴν Πόλη.

Ἡ Ἁγία Τράπεζα τῆς Ἁγία-Σοφίας

Τὴν μέρα ποὺ ἀρῆθηκε ἡ Πόλη, ἔβαλαν σ' ἓνα καράβι τὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζα τῆς Ἁγία-Σοφίας, νὰ τὴν πάει στὴν Φραγκιά, γιὰ νὰ μὴν πέσει στὰ χερῖα τῶν Τούρκων. Ἐκεῖ ὅμως στὴ θάλασσα τοῦ Μαρμαρὰ ἀνοίξε τὸ καράβι καὶ ἡ Ἁγία Τράπεζα ἐβούλιαξε στὸν πάτο. Στὸ μέρος ἐκεῖνο ἡ θάλασσα εἶναι λάδι, ὅση θαλασσοταραχὴ καὶ κύματα κι' ἂν εἶναι γύρω. Καὶ τὸ γνωρίζουν τὸ μέρος αὐτὸ ἀπὸ τὴ γαλήνη, ποὺ εἶναι πάντα ἐκεῖ, καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν εὐωδία ποὺ βγαίνει. Πολλοὶ μάλιστα ἀξιώθηκαν νὰ τὴν ἰδοῦν στὰ βάθη τῆς θάλασσας.

Τὰ Ψάρια τοῦ Μπαλουκλή

Τὴν ἡμέρα ποὺ ἔπεσε ἡ Πόλη ἓνας γέροντας τηγάνιζε ψάρια, καὶ ὅταν τοῦ εἶπαν «Ἐάλω ἡ Πόλις», εἶπε πῶς γιὰ νὰ πιστέψῃ πῶς ἔπεσε ἡ Πόλη, ἔπρεπε νὰ βγοῦν τὰ ψάρια ἀπὸ τὸ τηγάνι. Καὶ Ὡ! τοῦ θαύματος, ἔτσι ἔγινε. Πότε ἄραγε θὰ ὀλοκληρωθῆ τὸ τηγάνισμα τῶν ψαριῶν ποῦ εἶναι τηγανισμένα μόνον ἀπὸ τὴν μία τους πλευρά;

ON THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST

By Rassophore-monk Inok Vsevolod, translated from Russian by Ms. Mary Mansur.

I have an opinion as to this number [666], though I do not know for certain, for many names have been found in this number when it is expressed in writing. Still we say that perhaps the scription of this same seal will give us the word "I deny." ... Of such kind, in the time of that hater of all good, will be the seal, the tenor of which will be this: "I deny the Maker of heaven and earth, I deny the baptism, I deny my (former) service and attach myself to thee, and I believe in thee." ... Truly those who are engrossed in the affairs of life, and with the lust of this world, will be easily brought over to the accuser [Antichrist] then, and sealed by him. St. Hippolytus of Rome, "Discourse on the End of the World and on Antichrist."

† † †

In the Apocalypse, the holy Apostle John the Theologian indicated the number of Antichrist in these words: *And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their forehead... Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred threescore and six.* (Rev 13:16, 18). Ever since then, there have been many interpretations of this number. In their exegeses (explanations, *Ed.*) the Holy Fathers have proceeded from the fact that the number of the beast [i.e., Antichrist] is the number of his name, as it says in verse 17: *...the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.* During the time of Antichrist, everyone will be offered to receive the mark of the beast, and therefore Christians ought to know the essence of what this means and just what this number signifies.

On this subject, a majority of Christians today fall into one of two basic categories. To the first belong those who are altogether indifferent to this question, who consider it to be of little import and who even laugh at those who are interested in it. It would appear that such apathy, such a lukewarm attitude, reflects a shallow, superficial faith. In the second group are those Christians who, possessing "zeal without knowledge," are led astray by the enemy into overly literal interpretations, finding the number of Antichrist in trademarks, in documents and on currency—an extreme approach that frequently leads to the development of a pharisaical-sectarian spirit.

What is the genuinely Orthodox approach to this subject? We shall try to explain. The Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church allow various explanations of the number of the beast. Most often the name is sought in the correspondence between the number of the beast and the sum of letters of this or that name. Thereby people have arrived at many descriptive and even proper names of Antichrist, and likewise his title. They have deduced such names as "Wicked Leader,"

"Ancient Envier," "Truly Malicious," "Unrighteous Lamb," and others.

Doubtless, any descriptive names corresponding to the number 666 can, of course, be applied to Antichrist. However, we must direct our attention not to an external search for names, but to ascertaining the inner meaning of the name of the beast. After all, the Apostle John the Theologian indicated specifically that in order to comprehend the name of the beast it was essential to have wisdom, i.e., Christian love of wisdom, and not simply an arithmetical formula.

We know that Divine names as, for example, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, and others, can contain a condensed form of the entire Christian confession. The hesychast fathers often point this out in speaking about the Jesus Prayer. Antichrist, in seeking to counterfeit Christ in all respects, will also have a name that expresses, in condensed form, his entire false teaching. The name of Antichrist will be a kind of brief but precise symbol of the antichristian faith. It will contain in itself all the fundamental theses of this false teaching. Only in this way can one explain how the acceptance of the inscription of this name, the mark of the beast, will be a denial of Christ and His Church.

It is this denial of true Christianity that constitutes the principal reason for setting the seal of Antichrist. Clearly, then, the acceptance of this seal is not connected to any trademarks or commercial marks on documents, money or even on the flesh (for example, prisoners in labor camps wear numbers on their clothing, and slaves used to be branded). This is not the seal of Antichrist. **The acceptance of the mark must be joined with a conscious denial of Christ and the acceptance of the law of Antichrist.**

It is interesting to trace how, over thousands of years, Satan has been preparing mankind to accept his religion. Many pagan cults confess some kind of divine triad. The ancient Romans had Jupiter, Juno and Minerva; the Hindus have Brahma, Siva and Visnu; in the Egyptian religion one finds the trinitarian group of Osiris, Isis, and Horus. The concept of a trinity also exists in Buddhism and among the ancient Slavs and Celts. In the Graeco-Roman religious cults this idea was reflected in the veneration of the three-bodied goddess Hecate, the three-headed Scylla, the triune divinities of the Cabiri. At the gate of Hades stood guard the fiendish, three-headed dog, Cerberus. Numerous divine triads have been revered by pagan tribes of the Americas and Africa. The cult of voodoo, which is related to modern satanism and still practiced today, believes in some anti-trinity.

These confessions may be said to contain fragments of true revelation. If Satan did not exist, one could say that these pagan peoples revered the true God-in-Trinity, even though their concepts of just Who this is were in many ways distorted. But because the world of dark spirituality is in fact a distorted representation of the Divine world, and the devil

in his actions imitates God in a distorted fashion, it follows that the distorted divinity of the pagans is a false god, endeavoring to pass for the true God. Through the lips of the Prophet David, the Church warns us that *all the gods of the heathen are devils*. (Pss 95:5). It is evident that, under the guise of these pagan “trinities,” Satan himself is concealed together with his minions.

This is iconographically supported: in the Christian art of Europe and Abyssinia one finds three-headed, three-faced or three-horned depictions of Satan, symbols of the satanic false trinity. Two thousand years ago, as Christianity spread throughout the world, it disarmed and bound the religion of Satan, as this was manifest in numerous pagan cults. In the time of Antichrist this religion of evil will again, in one form or another, come to dominate the world.

In what will the religion of Antichrist consist? It is enigmatically expressed for us by the Apostle as the number 666. As we see, this number is composed of three sixes: six hundreds, six tens and six ones. If we turn to Holy Scripture, we see that the number six rarely figures in either the Old or New Testaments, whereas the number seven is used in the Bible as a symbol of completeness, of fulfillment, of perfection, of wholeness (often in the sense of absolute perfection). In Christ, humanity is shown an example of *the fullness of the Godhead* (Col 2:9). The Antichrist, by contrast, will unite in himself all incompleteness, all imperfection, and deficiency. The symbol of imperfection—that seeks to appear as perfection—is none other than the number six. In the number of the beast this imperfection is raised to its extreme: it is not merely six, but six hundred, sixty-six!

If the Son of God co-exists indivisibly and in unconfused union with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the son of perdition, Antichrist, exists in the closest possible union with Satan and his false prophet. The three of them together represent a false trinity, as it were: the spirit of malice, the beast, and the second beast. These three deficient persons, one in their spiritual essence, are united in a single incompleteness, whose symbol is 666. And so, the number of the name of the beast contains in condensed form the entire diabolical confession of the false religion of the Antichrist. Herein lies the evil power of this bestial name.

The “moral” teaching of Satan can also be expressed as a type of triune evil: evil reasoning, evil feelings, and evil will. This anti-moral teaching can also be symbolically expressed

by the name of the beast, more precisely, by the tripartite number of this name. For this reason, the acceptance of this name of Antichrist in the form of some seal will in fact be a denial of Christ and His Church.

The son of perdition, the Antichrist, inasmuch as he is a man, will give the devil the possibility—through him—to act openly in the world, and, with the help of the false prophet, to deceive and destroy people. The greater part of humanity will gladly accept this proud message of the man-god, whose principal postulates will be: “Man! Know that your ‘I’ is a part of the divinity. You are truly a god! You are a law unto yourself. No one has any authority over your ‘I.’ An example for you is your messiah [Antichrist], a great man, who knows that he is a god!”



The false religion of Antichrist can thus best be characterized as a humanist religion, in the sense that it is not divine; it is vain, transitory. This is why the number of the beast is called in the Apocalypse, *the number of a man*. (Rev. 13:18). The number of a man is the name of the man-Antichrist, who will reveal himself to be a god, but who in essence will be merely a **pathetic slave of the fallen angel**.

Let us say now a few words about that close unity of the three persons of the false-trinity. According to the teaching of the Orthodox Church, the whole life and activity of Antichrist will be connected in one way or another to Satan, to whom he will be in conscious and voluntary submission. Antichrist will be close to the devil as no other person in the history of the world. He will be a real instrument of Satan. In turn, the false prophet, who is called in the Scriptures the second beast, will be Antichrist’s closest ally. Through Antichrist, Satan will give enormous power and authority to the false prophet, who will act with all the authority of the first beast, and will compel all the earth and all those living upon the earth to bow down before him. Through the miracles that the beast will grant the false prophet to perform, the latter will deceive many, telling them to make an image to the beast: *And he will be given power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should all be killed*. (Rev 13:11-12, 14-15).

From the second verse of the nineteenth chapter of the Book of Revelation, one can conclude that it is precisely thanks to the false prophet that many people will accept the mark of the beast. However, three and a half years later the reign of

lawlessness will come to an end, for the Lord Jesus Christ will appear in glory and overwhelm all the enemies of God. *And the devil will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.* (Rev 20:10).

Many people think that the seal of the Antichrist will be something like a stamp or brand, or an electronic chip implanted under the skin. The basis for such thinking lies in the fantastically rapid development of science and technology in this direction. Most likely, however, this scientific development is designed to distract mankind's attention from the real mark of Antichrist, which will have nothing to do with the advances of science, technology or medicine. At a time when people's suspicions and anxieties are fixed upon some innovation of progress—the implantation of computer chips in humans, for example—the real seal of Antichrist will be imprinted quietly, without any particular commotion.

In a spiritual sense, this satanic mystery—the imprinting of the mark of Antichrist—will be the antithesis of the Christian Mystery of Chrismation, which, we recall, is the placing of the seal of the Holy Spirit, while imitating its external form. Just as in the Mystery of Chrismation, the priest anoints the newly-illuminated on the forehead and hands, so, too, in the placing of the mark of Antichrist, his servants may well anoint people with some kind of “sacred” oil, which will symbolize the voluntary acceptance of Antichrist and his religion.

The iconographic tradition of the Orthodox Church supports this supposition. In the iconographic sketch, illustrating the pouring out of *God's wrath upon those bearing the mark of the beast*—that is, the seal of Antichrist (Rev. 16:1,2)—we see Satan wearing a fiery three-horned crown (symbolizing the trinity of evil); he is signing people on the forehead with the mark of the beast—the seal of Antichrist. Moreover, he is using a brush, dipping into a vial that he is holding in his other hand (The Illuminated Bible, 1914). Why is it that the illustration depicts Satan himself placing the mark? Because it symbolizes his spiritual presence among those numerous servants of the religion of Antichrist, who will actually place the mark upon the peoples of the earth.

Of course, the sign of Antichrist may be placed by means other than a brush—by some other “sacred” instrument or simply by the hand of a servant of the universal (Antichrist's) religion. Whatever the actual means, the aim is to induce people to renounce Christ.

Let us return now to the two groups of people whom we mentioned at the beginning of this article, and see how they will react to the mark of the beast. It is very likely that both those who are indifferent to the question of accepting the stamp and those who zealously study marks on currency, documents and manufactured goods, endeavoring to detect the mark of Antichrist—both groups will be found outside Christ's Church. The first because, even in accepting the mark of Antichrist, they will console themselves with the thought

that this is merely some innocuous, ecumenical rite. And the second, because even before the placing of the marks (or even before the coming of Antichrist), they will accuse the earthly part of Christ's Church with having accepted the mark of Antichrist, although in fact this will be simply some credit card or new type of personal document. Furthermore, such zealots “not according to knowledge” will proclaim that their group alone—which has rejected these “marks” (cards, documents, products with certain symbols, etc.)—is the true Church. Clearly, this will be nothing but a new schism or sect. Already now we find many sad examples of such splinter groups, and they will only increase in the last times.

The salvific Royal Path consists in, first: not accepting (only) those innovations of civilization that are clearly connected with the renunciation of Christ, and, secondly, not participating in any non-Orthodox rituals, for this path leads to Satan's principal ritual—the acceptance of the seal of Antichrist, i.e., the renunciation of Christ, under the guise of an outwardly innocuous, symbolical act. One must also remember that **an important sign of the mark of Antichrist is that it will be made upon everyone throughout the whole world.** This allows us to draw two conclusions: 1. whatever registration methods are used by individual governments are not the actual mark of Antichrist (although they may be preparatory), and 2. we must be very vigilant towards registration methods of a worldwide scale, if they in any way concern a confession of faith. Such an approach will guard us from falling into fatal extremes.

To some it may appear that keeping oneself from accepting the stamp of the Antichrist will be easy. We should not forget the warning in Scripture that, in the last times, even many of the chosen will be deceived, that is, many Orthodox Christians. How is this possible? It is important to understand that the principal danger lies not in the fact that this stamp will be masked and presented in the form of some technological innovation, but rather in the fact that modern, “civilized” man will be ashamed, he will be embarrassed not to accept it.

This will be the greatest temptation to overcome, and many will not. Just listen to the logic: “Why do you refuse to take part in this measure that involves all of humanity, that is being instituted worldwide? After all, it symbolizes unity and the brotherly love of all peoples. It is a symbol of our unity under the aegis of a lawful global authority that has been given to all men from above. Are you against peace and order? Do you want a reign of chaos and enmity? If you are people of good will, you must take part in these cultural enactments that concern all mankind.” Of course, it will turn out that one such “innocent” enactment will be, in fact, the rite of bowing down before the God-hating Antichrist. Only a discerning vigilance, illumined by the grace of God, will be able to preserve us from such subtle deception of the last times. What will be the consequences of accepting the mark

of Antichrist? They will be truly horrific, destroying human souls. The fruit of denying God is always dreadful, for life without God is death.

Will one be able to repent after having accepted the mark of the beast? On the one hand, there is little hope that a person who does not have enough faith and spiritual strength to refuse the mark will be able to repudiate it once he has voluntarily accepted it. On the other hand, our attitude towards the mark of the beast must be free of all unorthodox fatalism and fetishism, for no seal or mark, in and of itself, can have any power over a man. The powers of evil behind this mark have power only over those who personally submit to them, who deny Christ. According to the Orthodox teaching, the power of Christian repentance is stronger than the power of evil. The history of the Church knows numerous examples of people who accepted the spiritual seal of Satan himself, people who signed a pact with the devil, voluntarily entrusting their souls to him. And here we have a testimony of God's love for mankind: even some of these apostates repented and became saints. The Lord, by His authority, annulled their pact with Satan. We have only to recall the life of Saint Cyprian, a formidable satanist who became a saint after repenting and turning to Christ.

The Orthodox Church teaches us that, up to the time of his physical death, each person, by God's mercy, has the possibility to repent. Therefore, we would deny God's mercy were we to say that people who accept the mark of Antichrist will have no further possibility of repentance. While they are still alive, this possibility will be available to them. Desiring their repentance, the Lord will send down upon them dreadful pestilences, as final, decisive measures for their spiritual restoration. (cf. St. Andrew of Caesarea, "Commentary on the Apocalypse").

But, alas, **Sacred Scripture clearly states that those who consciously accept the mark of Antichrist will no longer have any desire to repent.** They will bite their tongues from pain, but even so they will not cease *blaspheming God and they will not repent of their deeds.* (Rev. 16:10-11). If, among those who bow down before the beast, there should be some isolated cases of repentance, this conversion and repentance can be regarded only as a miracle of God. The conscious acceptance of the soul-destroying stamp under the assumption that one can later repent is a terrible and unforgivable sin in the eyes of God.

Therefore, while there is yet time, let us prepare ourselves for the coming trials. Such preparation consists in fulfilling all the soul-saving precepts and ordinances of our Mother, the Orthodox Church. While we still have the opportunity and spiritual strength, let us tirelessly entreat the Merciful God with the words of the Lord's Prayer, as the Savior intentionally ordained: *Our Father ... lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.*

ABBA SERAPION [COMMEMORATED MAY 14TH]

Source: Palladius, *Lausiac History*

The fathers used to tell how Abba Serapion sold himself to some Greek actors in one of the towns for twenty coins. He wrapped up the coins and kept them on himself. He stayed with the actors who had bought him for a long time, until he had made them Christians, and then withdrew from the theater, taking nothing but bread and water. Nor did his mouth ever cease from discussing the Scriptures.

After some time the actor was seized with compassion, then the actress, then their whole family. It was said that for as long as they did not recognize him, he would even wash the feet of both of them. In any case, both were baptized and gave up performing on the stage. They led a holy and pious life, and they had the highest respect for him and told him, "Come, brother, let us set you free, since you freed us from our shameful slavery."

He said to them, "Since God worked grace in your souls and saved you, I may tell you the secrets of my business. I had compassion on your souls. I am a free man, and an Egyptian ascetic, and I sold myself for your sakes so that you might be saved. Now since God brought this about and your souls have been saved through my debasement, take your money so that I may go and help others." They entreated him and gave their assurance that "we will have you as our own father and master; only stay with us!" Still they could not persuade him. Then they told him, "Give the money to the poor, for it is our first pledge of salvation. But at least visit us once a year."

Another brother visited Abba Serapion and the old man invited him to say a prayer. But the other, calling himself a sinner and unworthy of the monastic habit, did not obey. Next, Abba Serapion wanted to wash his feet, but using the same words again, the visitor prevented him. Then Abba Serapion made him eat and he began to eat with him. Then Abba Serapion admonished him saying, "My son, if you want to make progress, stay in your cell and pay attention to yourself and your manual work; going out is not so profitable for you as remaining at home."

When he heard these words, the visitor was offended and his expression changed so much that the old man could not but notice it. So he said to him, "Up to now you have called yourself a sinner and accused yourself of being unworthy to live, but when I admonished you lovingly, you were extremely put out. If you want to be humble, learn to bear generously what others unfairly inflict upon you, and do not harbor empty words in your heart." Hearing this, the brother asked the old man's forgiveness and went away greatly edified.

THE STRAIT AND NARROW WAY

By Saint Theophan the Recluse.



One frequently hears people say: “The Lord, having created man, led him into Paradise and provided him with everything for his enjoyment. After the fall, although man was expelled from Paradise, his capacity for pleasure and the means for pleasure remained: flowers offered the delight of smell, fruits—taste, the starry sky—sight, the singing of

birds—hearing. Later, along the same lines, man invented music. Everything in nature speaks of the goodness of the Creator. There are those, however, who, in spite of God’s good will, want to place restraints everywhere, limitations. They violate nature; they misrepresent God, holding forth a very distorted image.”

A sad state of affairs indeed! And I, having written you in my last letter that even laymen should not shrink from monastic strictness if they want to be genuine Christians, thought that I had convinced everyone and that all your perplexities had been resolved. But what a muddle we have here! Why on earth have you put yourself in such a quandary—as if truth is on their side. You should say to them: “Go ahead, my friends, have fun, amuse yourselves, open wide all the gates of pleasure and delight, and revel at the banquet of this life... No one is holding you back, no one will place any barriers in your way. Live as you want. You are told only, in the words of the Lord, that there are two paths for the sons of men: the narrow path and the broad path, and that the first leads to life, while the latter leads to perdition.

Read it for yourself, if you will. Here it is straight from the Gospel: *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.* (Mt 7:13-14).

If you want to hear, then hear, but if you don’t want to hear, then do as you like. This is not some human invention; it is a command of the Lord, nothing less. *Strive to enter in at the strait gate*, says the Lord on another occasion, *for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.* (Lk 13:24) “Strive,” i.e., hasten, as if you are racing, competing with others to enter this strait and narrow gate, disregarding others, snatching it away from others: Let me in, let me in! As if fearful that these gates might close.

Why this is so is not for us to judge. The Lord ordained it this way, and that’s that! Yes, and what Lord is this? He, Who, for our salvation, Himself went ahead of us along this narrow path and, after all manner of suffering, gave His soul

to God from the Cross, saying to the crucified thief, *This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.*

He is, after all, our Saviour! All those who wish to be saved must follow after Him. And to follow after Him is possible only by carrying one’s cross: *Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.* (Mk 8:34). This is the way of all those who desired salvation: apostles, martyrs, hierarchs, saints, and all those who attained salvation and who now inhabit God’s city, the heavenly Jerusalem.

So, what’s to be done? Certainly, one cannot be saved otherwise when, among those that are saved, there is not one who attained eternal blessedness by any other path. Is it not better to submit to this necessity, even though it may not be that sweet? After all, to suffer eternally is worse. Let those who wish to be saved somehow constrain themselves, and not seek excuses. It is hard, but what can you do? Not without reason is life called a struggle, a podvig. As Saint Paul says, *Fight the good fight of faith.* (1 Tim 6:12). As for those who do not wish to submit, they will do as they please. They should know, however, that the various rules and constraints are not man’s invention; they are commands of God.

A word of explanation might be added here. Why is it that this or that constraint is necessary? Why, for example, do we need to fast, why solitude, why so much prayer, etc.? However, I won’t go into this. Those who follow the salvific path know how necessary all this is, while those who shun this path would rather not hear about it. Concerning those skewed interpretations of Scripture that you had in your letter, I think I’ve already written to you.

In Paradise, it’s true, there were many things that brought man enjoyment, but these constituted but an external adornment of paradisiacal life; they were secondary elements. Man’s primary purpose was not to delight in these but to be in communion with God through the voluntary fulfillment of God’s will. If Paradise had remained man’s dwelling-place, people would certainly have taken pleasure in these externals as well, but they would not have thought anything of it; it would not have been a concern as it would have been a natural adjunct, a shadow of a God-pleasing life.

So you see, even in Paradise, they didn’t discuss or fuss about pleasures, while we, who have lost Paradise, want to set pleasure as the principal goal of life. If delights could lawfully have been the lot of fallen man, the Lord would not have expelled our forefathers from Paradise. By expelling them, He showed that a life of ease and pleasure does not befit fallen man. As you know, through the fall the entire order of things was changed. To man’s life was added a brief period of earthly existence, full of sorrows and troubles designed to enlighten, correct, and cleanse man, to make him worthy of eternal enjoyment in a different, eternal paradise. Man’s true life comes after the grave, or, more precisely, after his

resurrection; while the present life is merely a threshold, a preparation for that future life. It is in the nature of this present life, as ordained by God, to have various external sorrows and misfortunes, and He prescribed for it various strictures as means of cleansing.

Martyrs were flayed with iron claws, and thereby prepared for Paradise. This is an image of man's present life, in which, through these cleansing restrictions or constraints, like scourges, he is prepared for a blessed eternity! If you can get a man to understand well and to take to heart the brevity of this present life and how much benefit there is in its restrictions and confinements for the future, unending life, he will not only cease to shun them but, on the contrary, he will ask for them and strive for them as after something good and positive. This is how all those proceed who properly understand the meaning of this present life.

The fact that, after his expulsion from Paradise, man was not deprived of all means of pleasure, does not mean that there is no place for constraints in the order of the present life. In reaching for an explanation of this point, there come to mind the words of my dear teacher, Y. K. Amphiteatrov.

One day I was walking with him through a grove, and I asked him in passing, "Why are there such disparities in nature? Here is a lovely flower, and next to it is a stinging nettle or jimsonweed. And the sky: sometimes it's clear and sometimes it's overcast and dreary."

"Silly fellow," he replied. "These disparities are no trifling matter in the economy of God's providence concerning our salvation. The merciful God thereby says to you: It is only right that the sweat never leave your brow; it is your lot to be wearied by toil; but I sometimes give you to taste the sweetness of life, I allow your eyes to fill with light, your brow to be smoothed of furrows, and a smile to play upon your lips, so that you not lose hope and fall into despair. It is only right that the earth bring forth thorns and thistles for you, but I have ordained that it sometimes produce for an abundance of delights so that you might not lose the assurance that there still exists the possibility of recovering the lost blessedness. It is only right that in the air above your head and all around you should be nothing but storms, thunder, lightning; but you often see bright sun and enjoy the pleasant coolness of morning and the delightful tranquility of evening—so that you would remember that heaven is not altogether closed for you, that My embrace is always open towards you, and that I am ready to receive you into the heavenly habitations."

This, then, is the reason why certain enjoyments remain in nature, and not so that we might make these crumbs into a life-long party, or build out of these fragments a temple of happiness on earth! But our pleasure-seekers think otherwise. In their opinion, every constraint, every barrier to enjoyment is a violation of man's nature and is contrary to God's will. I have already said that this is not so, that God Himself

ordained that man walk the narrow path. That this is in no way a violation of human nature may be understood from the following.

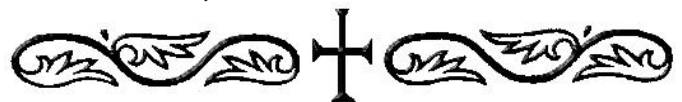
When man fell, he not only fell below his dignity, he also accepted internally some principles foreign to his proper nature, the seeds, as it were, of every kind of evil. Consequently, in fallen man we must differentiate what is proper to his nature and what is alien to it, although this, too, is found in man. All constraining rules and measures, prescribed and established by God, are exclusively aimed against these alien and evil seeds, in order to crush them, to suffocate them, and thereby to set at liberty man's true nature.

So, constraints are not a violation of nature but are like beneficial tools or means. They are what an operation is for the surgical removal of a malignancy, or a plaster for the drawing out of harmful matter. Our nature is in bondage. By placing various restraints upon us, the Lord wants to free our nature. But we resist: "Don't touch! Don't hedge us in with rules!" And thereby, instead of defending we calumniate ourselves.

Pleasure-seekers are lost souls. It's not to say that there is no place in life for pleasure; we should accept everything from the hands of God with thanksgiving. At the same time, we should not strive after enjoyments, nor, all the more, rebel against all kinds of restraining precepts. This is not why the Lord Himself prescribed them. Such rebelliousness manifests not only a lack of understanding of the matter in question, but even a militant antitheism.

You see where it all leads! But they think lightly of it. For the present they may be all right, but what will they find in the next world? Straitness and, against their will, a bitter and wretched straitness, for then it will be of no benefit.

Lord, have mercy and save us!



Struggle, my child, as much as you can to become forceful; force yourself in everything, especially in silence and in mournful tears. When silence is practiced with knowledge and maintained with tears, the foundation stone of monasticism is set, on which the secure house will be built wherein the soul will find spiritual warmth and comfort.

It is a bad omen for the soul's future if silence is not kept, since one who is not silent scatters whatever he gathers; for a monk who is free with his mouth will be disorderly in everything. When we are silent, we have the time for interior prayer, which brings full assurance, and the time for luminous thoughts, which fill the intellect and heart with light. Therefore, my child, compel yourself in everything, for the good beginning is praised, but the negligent beginning is censured, for its end is most lamentable.

Elder Ephraim
"Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

ON MIRACLES

By Professor Ivan M. Andreyev.

Some scientists (insufficiently educated in philosophy) categorically reject the possibility of miracles and regard a miracle as contradictory to the laws of nature. Very often such scholars assert that miracles appear to be either a fiction, a fraud, or such a phenomenon which science cannot at present explain, but will certainly be explained scientifically later on. What is unintelligible today might be intelligible and explainable tomorrow.

Science, setting for itself the problem of an exact, objective proof of phenomena investigated experimentally, is fully correct in approaching miraculous phenomena in an attempt at scientific enlightenment. It is without doubt true that often so called miraculous phenomena prove to be not at all miraculous. A fiction or deceit in such cases is lawfully revealed through a scientific method of verification. It is also undoubtedly true that many phenomena, not understood at the present time, may be scientifically explained at some future time. But the problem of a miracle is not fully explained by this.

It is necessary, therefore, first of all, to define what in religion is called a miracle. A miracle is a phenomenon which is unexplainable not only at the present time but, in general, can never be fully explained merely from a scientific point of view. The philosophical problem of a miracle, therefore, arrives at the question: Is a miracle possible? In other words, is such a phenomenon possible which cannot be explained from the point of view of science?

Very often, atheistically and materialistically inclined scholars say that every phenomenon of nature and every event occurring in the world can be explained by the laws of nature alone, without the help of God or of miracles. This is not correct. At least two cases are unexplainable by the laws of nature alone: 1) The very existence of the world or nature, and 2) the laws of nature themselves. Therefore, the existence of the world and its laws are miracles.

Who created the world and the laws of nature? There are not and there cannot be any logical obstacles for the belief that the cause of the world and its laws is God.

The English philosopher Berkeley (1685-1753) gave this reasoning concerning, the above. The laws of nature, said he, are those means through which God governs the world, and the actions of these laws of nature are actions of God Himself. As a result, where God finds it necessary according to His

intentions or plans, He can change these constant methods of His activity in the world so that a phenomenon will occur which is unexplainable by the laws of nature alone; that is, an actual miracle will occur. Almighty God, whenever He chooses, can even change “the order of nature.”

Very often we may happen to hear it said that a miracle contradicts the laws of nature, but the word “contradicts” is out of place here. We will try to analyze this question carefully.

Let us suppose that on the earth everything exists except man and his consciousness. In such a world can a steam engine appear? Of course, it is impossible! But why? All the component parts of the steam engine exist in the world of steel, copper, iron, wood, water, etc. Is it possible that by accidental motion of the particles of which a steam engine is composed, during a long period of time, millions of years, that a steam engine could fabricate itself just by chance? No, this is impossible. Actually, for a steam engine to put in an appearance, the intelligence of the man who designed and

made it is a necessity. Without the aid of consciousness, the steam engine is a miracle, even though all its components exist in nature.

As it is, this miracle—the appearance of an engine—does not contradict the laws of nature. All the laws of nature remain inviolate. But they—the laws of inert unconscious nature—are overcome by a new factor, consciousness. In order to explain the miracle of mechanics, a recognition of a “higher factor,” consciousness, is necessary.

Now we turn to consciousness itself. Can consciousness be explained by inert, unconscious laws of nature?

If these laws could not create a steam engine, even less chance would they have to create something incomparably more complicated—consciousness. (Such nonsense is assumed only by materialists who regard consciousness as a product of evolving matter.) Even consciousness cannot explain itself. Consciousness can create a steam engine, but it cannot create itself. It follows, then that consciousness is also a miracle. To explain this miracle it is necessary to accept even a more complicated, higher and more complete principle, which causes such phenomena like consciousness. This higher cause of consciousness (a higher Intellect) is God, faith in Whom is not impeded by anything found in science or philosophy.

If man’s consciousness, meddling with inert and unconscious nature and overcoming it, can make such things (miracles) like steam engines, then the higher, divine Intellect,



having created man's consciousness and inert nature, directly intervening in inert nature and overcoming it (by powers unknown to us of His creative, divine Intellect), can create phenomena even more greatly complicated; for instance, to transform water into wine or to resurrect the dead. In these phenomena the laws of nature are not violated; a miracle does not contradict the laws of nature but overcomes them by higher forces unknown to us.

When scholars came to Newton and expressed perplexity in regard to his belief in the future resurrection of bodies, he answered in the following manner: Taking a pile of copper and steel filings and mixing them together, he offered to separate the steel from the copper. Then he took a large magnet and with its help he quickly separated the steel filings from the copper. The Lord God evidently has forces which are more complicated and unknown to us (special magnets), with the help of which He can perform a resurrection of the bodies of all the dead at the future fearful Judgment. Nothing interfered with Newton's belief in this.



Why do we not see miracles? Let him who can, answer otherwise, but to me it seems that we are of necessity brought to this answer: We do not see miracles, or we see them rarely, either because they are invisible to us as unworthy of trust, or because they are not even accomplished, through unbelief or want of faith.

How can miracles be accomplished in us by prayer, when our prayer is short, cold, inattentive, and offered up, not so much in faith and filial love to God, as in a sort of involuntary submission to His law?

How can a spiritual word work miracles in us, when our heart, like a field wild with tares, is thickly sown with idle words, and overgrown by carnal desires and unlawful thoughts?

How can the Holy Mysteries work miracles in us, if we approach them but from absolute necessity, without a careful previous purification, without an ardent aspiration to be united to God?

Let us, my brethren, call upon the Lord Who is unceasingly working miracles unto our salvation, and both each for all and all for each, let us cry to Him with the Apostles, *Lord, increase our faith.* (Lk. 17:5).

Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow (+1867)



Christ the Lord called that Church the Catholic Church which maintains the true and saving confession of the faith.

St. Maximus the Confessor

A SAINTLY MAN OF OUR DAYS

From the book "Elder Porphyrios (+1991): Testimonies and Experiences," by Klitos Ioannides. The subject article is a discussion between the author and Fr. George C. Evthimiou, a professor at the Theological School of the University of Athens.

K.I.: Father George, you lived by the Elder for many years, and the fact that you are with us today to talk about this holy man of our times gives us great pleasure.

Fr. G.E.: I thank you very much Mr. Ioannides for I was made worthy to have Elder Porphyrios as spiritual father and guide during a decisive period in my life. The Elder truly played an important role in the development of my personality. I owe much of what I have today to him. Because of that I keep him as a guide in my pastoral ministry which God has made me fortunate to practice.

Elder Porphyrios was a genuine human being created in the image of God. As we know from what he himself told us, burning with the love of God, he secretly left his home in Evia and went to Mt. Athos to the area of Kavsokalyvia. There he became the disciple of two elders, to whom, as he himself told us, he gave absolute obedience. He really was very obedient; whatever the fathers told him to do, he immediately hurried to fulfill the request.

His obedience was an act of freedom, an exceptionally powerful act, that actually frees a man from the passions, faults and weaknesses that dominate him. Through this he was in Christ and lived the freedom of God's children. You could see concentrated in Elder Porphyrios all the personality characteristics which we see in the saints of our Church; love, humility, simplicity and discernment. Precisely because of his complete devotion to God, he was made worthy to receive great spiritual gifts, such as foresight and discernment. As a result of this, he became an outstanding spiritual father, who literally guided the lives of many.

Even in the twilight of his life, in pain, in bed, and suffering from various illnesses, even then, he continued his pastoral duties by phone. Day and night, literally twenty-four hours a day, thousands of people, from the length and breadth of the planet, phoned him for his help, advice and prayers.

Elder Porphyrios had all those features, that made him lovable, desirable and able to attract people like a magnet. This didn't happen in a magical way, but because he had all those characteristics that everyone longs for. He had all those reminders of our divinely created image and of the purpose for which we were created. Let us recall here the teaching of our Church. God, out of His love, and only out of His love, created man for one sole purpose; to make him a partaker of his own happiness. God creates man to make him happy, whole and to live in the fullness of the communion of God.

Elder Porphyrios, like the whole of humanity, received a calling from God. Everyone is called to salvation since this

is the very purpose of our existence. The distinguishing mark of the Elder, as with all the saints of the Church, was that he responded to this calling. He made his choice early on and said, "I want to be with Christ and to live according to Christ." Then he followed Christ; as the Lord says, *Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself take up his cross and follow Me.* (Mk 8:34).

His life was full of turmoil and upset, like all the saints of the Church, in the words of the Lord, *Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way.* (Mt 7:14) that leads to the kingdom of God. Elder Porphyrios also had a life full of ups and downs, with many trials, temptations and thorns in the flesh. He went through the furnace of suffering and sorrow, by which Man is purified of all the passions within him and is offered to God clean and whole. He battled throughout his whole life against that evil serpent the devil, who is *like a roaring lion seeking his prey.* (I Pet 5:8) He also struggled against that other enemy, the old Adam and the world subject to sin. His weapons were vigil, fasting and prayer, through which he was deemed worthy of heavenly gifts.

He was also made a spiritual father by the Metropolitan of Karystia, Panteleimon, at the very young age of twenty-one. Large numbers of people flocked to the monastery of St. Charalambos in Evia, where he was then living. They sought release from their sins, unburdening them upon him.

K.I.: How were these special characteristics of Elder Porphyrios expressed?

Fr. G.E.: We see in Elder Porphyrios' life all the characteristics of a saint of the Church. At the same time we can see certain distinct characteristics, which bring to mind the consistent teaching of our Church, that the grace of God overshadows Man, enlightens him and directs him, but it does not overwhelm him. That is to say, each saint of the Church retains the unique characteristics of his personality.

I can attest to the love that Elder Porphyrios had, both towards God and towards people, from my own personal experience. His love towards God was wholehearted. He loved Him with all his being and he truly devoted his whole life to him. This love of his towards God, a love that had wounded his heart, sprang forth towards his fellow man. I often witnessed this touching love of his. I remember with how much love and affection he understood and sympathized with our problems when we were in difficult situations. He took these problems upon himself, prayed considerably and struggled alongside us to find the solution.

I will never forget some of the typical phone calls that he made during really critical and difficult moments for me. As I already mentioned, he carried out his pastoral work by phone. He would phone me up at the most unusual hours—once it

was six in the morning! I hadn't even told him my trouble, and yet, he would ask me about that particular problem and give me meaningful advice.

Another attribute of Elder Porphyrios was his extreme humility. So, although he had that wisdom which comes from above, he would always say to us, "You have diplomas, you know things. I am illiterate." He was both self-abasing and self-reproachful, characteristics of a humble man. Something which we come across in the saints of our Church.

Yet another attribute of Elder Porphyrios, of which one was always aware, was his simplicity. He lived extremely frugally in humble surroundings. He was very simple in his dealings with people. He received everyone and refused no one. This was an attribute of his that truly broke the ice and created just the right atmosphere so that people could get close to him, could confess their sins, could tell him their problems and receive answers to them.

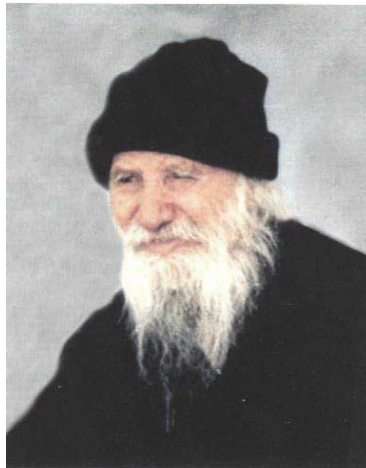
Another of his main attributes was his discernment, which according to the Fathers is *the greatest of all virtues.* Discernment is connected to the principle of individualization. Thus, for Elder Porphyrios, each person as a child of God had absolute worth. He saw each individual as a unique and unrepeatable personality. He confronted each problem of theirs, with its own particular characteristics.

That is why, Elder Porphyrios said different things to different people who may have appeared, at first sight, to have had the same problem. There were different presuppositions in each case, and each person needed different medicine to overcome his problem.

It was for this reason that he often said to us "Don't tell other people what I am now telling you. This is suitable medicine for you, for your situation. Another person, even if his external symptoms are the same, won't get the same beneficial results."

I was often amazed, despite his heavenly wisdom, at the answers of unmarried Elder Porphyrios on matters of marriage, marital relations and childbearing etc. His answers weren't 'cliche,' inflexible, harsh, rigid and 'objective.' They were answers full of truth, love, affection and discernment, corresponding to the situation, the need and the receptiveness of each person, at that particular time. As a man full of the Holy Spirit he guided each person according to the will of Christ, giving to *each according to his measure.* (Eph 4:7) for the welfare of the soul.

At this point I would like to mention an incident which testifies to both the discerning and individual way in which Elder Porphyrios did his pastoral work and the freedom and breadth of his spirit. One day, he had gone for a walk in the adjoining forest with one of his spiritual children. In the



meantime, a young couple wearing shorts had entered the church to pray. When the Elder returned from the forest he met them just as they were leaving by the metal courtyard door. He greeted them and stood there for a long while, talking lovingly and affectionately with them. I didn't hear what he said to them, but the respectful way in which they kissed his hand was a persuasive testimony of the impact he had on them with his words and his demeanor.

K.I.: You referred, at some point in our conversation, to the Elder's gift of discernment. Fr. George, may we have your testimony about this gift of his, which you have naturally already mentioned when talking about certain telephone calls he made?

Fr. G.E.: This gift of his was very apparent. You could see it with the naked eye. Elder Porphyrios always surprised us telling us things even before we had a chance to confess them.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding I would like to point out the following. Elder Porphyrios, like all the saints of the Church, was rendered worthy of these gifts by God. Our saints are not illumined in themselves but reflect divine light. God possesses everything and it is God who adorns and favors his elected servants with these gifts. These gifts are revocable and at the same time a cross. The retention of these spiritual gifts requires a life of permanent vigilance and intense spiritual struggle, with lots of trials and temptations. There is always a danger of falling from favor, falling because of arrogance and pride.

Elder Porphyrios never used all those gifts that God gave him to impress people or to draw particular benefits from them. On the contrary, he used them with discrimination and according to the particular circumstances. He only had one end in mind, people's salvation and the glory of God.

Elder Porphyrios was a man who lived the truth of the Church. He clearly knew that a human is a psychosomatic being with both spiritual and material needs. He always helped people in this way—neither underestimating one thing nor the other. This fact has great significance because it is an area where most people have conflict. If many so-called "spiritual" people don't fall into the trap of materialism, it is because it is visible to the naked eye and easily avoided. Many however fall into the trap of dissolute spiritualism, and in turn devalue an individual's material or bodily needs, resulting in terrifying problems for the entire person.

We know that all people are composed of both body and soul. We know of the mutual influence, that they have on one another and we know that bodily problems affect the

soul and vice-versa. Thus, Elder Porphyrios, with characteristic discernment, confronted the entire person and his problems. He devalued no one but gave appropriate advice to everyone.

K.I.: Could you give us, Fr. George, some of the typical examples about him that you describe so well?

Fr. G.E.: Well, he would advise us, for example, where to build our house, in which direction it should face, so that it would have sunlight all day, how to regulate the heating, etc. He also advised us on diet and nutrition. Extremely characteristic was the way in which he dealt with people who suffered from various illnesses and sought his help. At first, he would "X-ray" them with his gift of discernment. After making the diagnosis, he would advise them accordingly. To others he would say, "Eh, you've got nothing physically wrong, its psychological." And he would then recommend the spiritual regimen needed to heal the problem. When he diagnosed physical health problems he usually directed that person to the proper doctors. Finally, in the interests of the sufferer, he would make them well, as often as it was necessary, with his gift of healing.

K.I.: As you told us, you had Elder Porphyrios as a spiritual father and guide for many years.

Fr. G.E.: This was really the area in which he shined. Primarily, with his simplicity and

with his affability, he created a climate of ease and trust for each person that approached him. This is indispensable for the sacrament of Repentance and Confession. Here I must mention that many people who found it difficult to confess certain sins to other priests felt at ease in the presence of the Elder and confessed.

Elder Porphyrios listened very carefully to what each person said to him, as he was gifted with pastoral attentiveness. He listened to people carefully first, and spoke afterwards. His words were always few and to the point, based, as we said, on the principle of individualization. Each individual who met the Elder was for him, a unique and unrepeatability, of boundless worth.

He confronted the problems that were put to him with particular care, with a feeling of responsibility and plenty of prayer. It was usual to see him silent during confession and you felt that he was praying and seeking enlightenment from God. It was also quite usual for him not to give quick answers in order to form some more impressions. Sometimes he said to us, "I don't have any information at the moment, I can't answer you now." We would return a second and a third time for the same problem.



He prayed day and night for people and for the solution to their problems. All the people who were honored to have contact with him and to become his spiritual children, acknowledge the fruits of his prayer, which really solved their problems.

The astounding thing was that during our confessions with the late Elder, what he often underlined as the root of the problem was quite irrelevant to the problem. He very often said that the root of our problems was our ego, which he considered to be the basis of all sin and of Man's various problems. There are many things which we could say relating to this. What I would like to mention as indicative of this, is some pieces of advice that the Elder gave, and the methods he used to confront various problems that have a general validity and meaning for people.

K.I.: We would very much like to hear about it, Fr. George.

Fr. G.E.: We often spoke to him about our children and the problems they face. He answered us in his characteristic way, "You become saints and your children will turn out well." That was something that he constantly repeated.

Concerning the subject of raising children he stressed that we should not pressure them; that is to say, that their upbringing should not be oppressive, as that brings the opposite results. This advice was priceless and helped many parents to change their course, and many children who were literally being mistreated by the oppressive good intentions of their parents, calmed down and found their way in life.

Something which when I heard it made a moving impression on me, was regarding the subject of fasting. It concerns a couple of newlyweds. The husband was used to keeping the fasts. The wife on the other hand, didn't keep the fasts, as that was the way she was brought up. She didn't object to fasting, it's just that she wasn't used to it.

When they put their problem to Elder Porphyrios he advised the husband as follows, "You shall fast as you always have, but you won't talk about fasting to your wife. During times of fasting you'll always keep your refrigerator full of food. Let your wife eat; you can keep your fasts." Truly the time came, as the couple themselves later admitted, that through following the advice of the Elder, the wife also started to fast. It seems she was a well-intentioned woman and wanted to agree and go along with her husband on the issue of fasting.

He often mentioned and advised people about so called "compulsion," the psychological condition where a person compels himself to do different things which he does not believe in and that do not represent him. This is a strange condition, a great inner muddle, which makes a person find himself disturbed inside and in terrible disarray. Elder Porphyrios helped those people who had this problem to admit it. He then told them how to overcome it, by dedication to God, prayer, and life according to God's will.

There is something else that I would like to say, because it has great importance and concerns everyone, especially

Christians. It is the subject of confronting naughty thoughts. We all know about the war the devil makes on us through our thoughts. Personally, I know from my own experience as a spiritual father, which God has made me worthy to become, how many people are confused and really troubled at this point.

When we asked Elder Porphyrios about this problem, he said, "You're continuing along your way. When the devil comes along and tugs at your shirt sleeve to put you off course, don't turn around to start a conversation or dispute with him. You continue on your way. He'll tug at your shirt sleeve, but you continue on your way and somewhere he'll get fed up and he'll leave you alone." Although, *time would fail me* (Heb 11:32), I wish to refer to something which has to do with teachers. It concerns advice the Elder gave to a high-school teacher who had just been appointed and was about to take up her position. He told her, "When you're on your way to school say the prayer 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.' When you go into the classroom feel as if you're entering a church. Face the children with love and firmness. They'll feel your love and understand your strictness. And if a particular child presents certain problems and creates unpleasant situations, give his name to the priest to remember him during the proskomide."

K.I.: You know so many things about Elder Porphyrios, Fr. George. What a blessing it is for us to have you tell us them!

Fr. G.E.: I tried to the best of my ability to describe this great figure who truly was a gift from God to the twentieth-century, an exceptional blessing.

The Elder had received in the eyes of the world very little education. However he was truly a wise man, who has wisdom from on high. Correspondingly he had a natural love of learning; that's why he always read knowledgeably. He asked for and read books on all subjects, apart from theology, which he naturally studied. He read medical books, books on physics, astronomy, etc. He spoke with scientists and academics. With each one he spoke at a high level about the specific areas of their subject. I will mention just two incidents and then end my talk.

The first incident concerns an astronomy professor of international fame, who visited the Elder and discussed subjects of astronomy with him. This professor told me, "The thing that made an impression on me during my discussions with Elder Porphyrios, was that he really knew what he was talking about. He never, but never, made a mistake."

I was present at the second incident. We were with a surgeon, a director of a large hospital in Athens, and Elder Porphyrios started to describe to him how a particular operation is done. The surgeon, amazed at what the Elder said, simply agreed with him.

K.I.: We thank you warmly Fr. George, for all of the testimony you have given us. It has helped us visualize yet another side of divine reality, as expressed by Elder Porphyrios.

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CHRIST IS RISEN!

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

SALVATION THROUGH CONCESSION

Source: Life of St. Pachomius (commemorated on May 15th).

There was a small monastery about two miles to the south of Tabennesi. The father of that monastery would often come to see our Elder Pachomius because he loved him very much; and the words of God he heard from his mouth he would repeat to his own monks so that they too might hear God's commandments.

It happened that a brother of his monastery asked for a certain rank, and he replied to that brother, "Our father, Abba Pachomius, warned me not to do this because you are not yet worthy of that thing."

The brother grew angry and dragged him along, saying, "Come, let us go to him, and he shall have to prove that to me." The other followed him in amazement and sorrow wondering what was going to happen. When the two of them and one other came to Abba Pachomius, they found him busy building a part of the monastery wall. The brother approached our father Pachomius and said to him very angrily, "Come down and give me proof of my sin, O liar Pachomius!"

Elder Pachomius, thanks to his long suffering, gave him no word whatever in reply. The other went on and said to him, "Who compelled you to lie, you who pride yourself on clear vision while your light is darkness?" The man of God, Abba Pachomius, understood the wiles of the devil who was in that man, and he said to him respectfully, "I have sinned, forgive me. Do you never sin yourself?" And at once the brother's wicked anger calmed down.

Then our father Pachomius took the father of that monastery aside and questioned him, "What happened to this brother?" He answered him, "Forgive me, my lord father. The fact is that this man asked me for a thing that he does not deserve. I knew that he would not obey me, so I quoted you to him by name so he might perhaps have nothing to say. For I know that nothing is hidden from you. And behold, he has added an evil deed to his wickedness."

Then our father Abba Pachomius said to him, "Listen to me; give him that office so that by this means we may snatch his soul out of the enemy's hands. For if we do good to a bad man, he comes thereby to have a perception of the good. This is God's love, to take pains for one another." When they heard this teaching of our holy father Pachomius, they went away very comforted and giving thanks to God. When they arrived at their monastery, the father of the monastery gave the rank to the brother as he had asked, in accordance with our father Abba Pachomius' instruction.

A few days later, that brother came to regret his fault. Then he went back to our holy father Abba Pachomius, kissed his hands and feet, and said to him, "Truly, O man of God, you are much greater than what we hear of you every day. For the Lord knows that if you had not been patient with me the day I insulted you, sinner that I am, and if you had spoken some harsh word to me, I would have rejected the monastic life and gone back to the world. Blessed are you, O man of God, my lord father, for thanks to your patience and graciousness, the Lord has brought me back to life."

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]

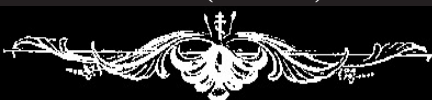
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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STAND FAST!

A Sermon By St. John Maximovitch, from "Orthodox America," Vol. XIV, No. 2-3, September-October, 1993.

Stand fast on spiritual watch, because you don't know when the Lord will call you to Himself. In your earthly life be ready at any moment to give Him an account. Beware that the enemy does not catch you in his nets, that he not deceive you causing you to fall into temptation. Daily examine your conscience; try the purity of your thoughts, your intentions.

There was a king who had a wicked son. Having no hope that he would change for the better, the father condemned the son to death. He gave him a month to prepare.

The month went by, and the father summoned the son. To his surprise he saw that the young man was noticeably changed: his face was thin and drawn, and his whole body looked as if it had suffered.

"How is it that such a transformation has come over you, my son?" the father asked.

"My father and my lord," replied the son, "how could I not change when each passing day brought me closer to death?"

"Good, my son," remarked the king. "Since you have evidently come to your senses, I shall pardon you. However, you must maintain this vigilant disposition of soul for the rest of your life."

"Father," replied the son, "that's impossible. How can I withstand the countless seductions and temptations?"

Then the king ordered that a vessel be brought, full of oil, and he told his son: "Take this vessel and carry it along all

the streets of the city. Following you will be two soldiers with sharp swords. If you spill so much as a single drop they will cut off your head."

The son obeyed. With light, careful steps, he walked along all the streets, the soldiers accompanying him, and he did not spill a drop.

When he returned to the castle, the father asked, "My son, what did you see as you were walking through the city?"

"I saw nothing."

"What do you mean, 'nothing'?" said the king.

"Today is a holiday; you must have seen the booths with all kinds of trinkets, many carriages, people, animals..."

"I didn't notice any of that," said the son. "All my attention was focused on the oil in the vessel. I was afraid to spill a drop and thereby lose my life."

"Quite right, my son," said the king. "Keep this lesson in mind for the rest of your life. Be as vigilant over your soul as you were today over the oil in the vessel. Turn your thoughts

away from what will soon pass away, and keep them focused on what is eternal. You will be followed not by armed soldiers but by death to which we are brought closer by every day. Be very careful to guard your soul from all ruinous temptations."

The son obeyed his father, and lived happily.

Watch, stand fast in the faith, be courageous, be strong. (1 Cor 16:13).

The Apostle gives Christians this important counsel to bring their attention to the danger of this world, to summon them to frequent examination of their hearts, because without this one can easily bring to ruin the purity and ardor



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of one's faith and unnoticeably cross over to the side of evil and faithlessness.

Just as a basic concern is to be careful of anything that might be harmful to our physical health, so our spiritual concern should watch out for anything that might harm our spiritual life and the work of faith and salvation. Therefore, carefully and attentively assess your inner impulses: are they from God or from the spirit of evil? Beware of temptations from this world and from worldly people; beware of hidden inner temptations which come from the spirit of indifference and carelessness in prayer, from the waning of Christian love.

If we turn our attention to our mind, we notice a torrent of successive thoughts and ideas. This torrent is uninterrupted; it is racing everywhere and at all times: at home, in church, at work, when we read, when we converse. It is usually called thinking, writes bishop Theophan the Recluse, but in fact it is a disturbance of the mind, a scattering, a lack of concentration and attention. The same happens with the heart. Have you ever observed the life of the heart? Try it even for a short time and see what you find. Something unpleasant happens, and you get irritated; some misfortune occurs, and you pity yourself; you see someone whom you dislike, and animosity wells up within you; you meet one of your equals who has now outdistanced you on the social scale, and you begin to envy him; you think of your talents and capabilities, and you begin to grow proud...

All this is rottenness: vainglory, carnal desire, gluttony, laziness, malice-one on top of the other, they destroy the heart. And all of this can pass through the heart in a matter of minutes. For this reason one ascetic, who was extremely attentive to himself, was quite right in saying that "man's heart

is filled with poisonous serpents. Only the hearts of saints are free from these serpents, the passions."

But such freedom is attained only through a long and difficult process of self-knowledge, working on oneself and being vigilant towards one's inner life, i.e., the soul.

Be careful. Watch out for your soul! Turn your thoughts away from what will soon pass away and turn them towards what is eternal. Here you will find the happiness that your soul seeks, that your heart thirsts for.



Struggle, my child, as much as you can to become forceful—force yourself in everything, especially in silence and in mournful tears. When silence is practiced with knowledge and maintained with tears, the foundation stone of monasticism is set, on which the secure house will be built wherein the soul will find spiritual warmth and comfort.

It is a bad omen for the soul's future if silence is not kept, since one who is not silent scatters whatever he gathers; for a monk who is free with his mouth will be disorderly in everything. When we are silent, we have the time for interior prayer, which brings full assurance, and the time for luminous thoughts, which fill the intellect and heart with light. Therefore, my child, compel yourself in everything, for the good beginning is praised, but the negligent beginning is censured, for its end is most lamentable.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou
From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

READING THE BIBLE

By St. Justin Popovich.



The Bible is in a sense a biography of God in this world. In it the Indescribable One has in a sense described Himself.

The Holy Scriptures of the New Testament are a biography of the incarnate God in this world. In them it is related how God, in order to reveal Himself to men, sent God the Logos, Who took on flesh and became man, and as man

told men everything that God is, everything that God wants from this world and the people in it.

God the Logos revealed God's plan for the world and God's love for the world. God the Word spoke to men about God with the help of words insofar as human words can contain the uncontainable God.

All that is necessary for this world and the people in it—the Lord has stated in the Bible. In it He has given the answers to all questions. There is no question which can torment the human soul, and not find its answer, either directly or indirectly in the Bible.

Men cannot devise more questions than there are answers in the Bible. If you fail to find the answer to any of your questions in the Bible, it means that you have either posed a senseless question or did not know how to read the Bible and did not finish reading the answer in it.

What the Bible Contains

In the Bible God has made known:

- (1) what the world is; where it came from; why it exists; what it is heading for; how it will end;
- (2) what man is; where he comes from; where he is going; what he is made of; what his purpose is; how he will end;
- (3) what animals and plants are; what their purpose is, and what they are used for;
- (4) what good is; where it comes from; what it leads to; what its purpose is; how it is attained;
- (5) what evil is; where it comes from; how it came to exist; why it exists—how it will come to an end;
- (6) what the righteous are and what sinners are; how a sinner becomes righteous and how an arrogant righteous man becomes a sinner; how a man serves God and how he serves satan; the whole path from good to evil, from God to satan;
- (7) everything—from the beginning to the end; man's entire path from the body to God, from his conception in the womb to his resurrection from the dead;
- (8) what the history of the world is, the history of heaven and earth, the history of mankind; what their path, purpose, and end are.

The Beauty of the Bible

In the Bible God has said absolutely everything that was necessary to be said to men. The biography of every man—everyone without exception—is found in the Bible. In it each of us can find himself portrayed and thoroughly described in detail; all those virtues and vices which you have and can have and cannot have.

You will find the paths on which your own soul and everyone else's journey from sin to sinlessness, and the entire path from man to God and from man to satan. You will find the means to free yourself from sin. In short, you will find the complete history of sin and sinfulness, and the complete history of righteousness and the righteous.

If you are mournful, you will find consolation in the Bible; if you are sad, you will find joy; if you are angry—tranquility; if you are lustful—continenence; if you are foolish—wisdom; if you are bad—goodness; if you are a criminal—mercy and righteousness; if you hate your fellow man—love.

You will find a remedy for all your vices and weak points, and nourishment for all your virtues and accomplishments. If you are good, the Bible will teach you how to become better and best; if you are kind, it will teach you angelic tenderness; if you are intelligent, it will teach you wisdom.

If you appreciate the beauty and music of literary style, there is nothing more beautiful or more moving than what is contained in Job, Isaiah, Solomon, David, John the Theologian and the Apostle Paul. Here music—the angelic music of the eternal truth of God—is clothed in human words.

The more one reads and studies the Bible, the more he finds reasons to study it as often and as frequently as he can. According to St. John Chrysostom, it is like an aromatic root, which produces more and more aroma the more it is rubbed.

Prayerful Preparation

Just as important as knowing why we should read the Bible is knowing how we should read the Bible. The best guides for this are the holy Fathers, headed by St. John Chrysostom who, in a manner of speaking, has written a fifth Gospel.

The holy Fathers recommend serious preparation before reading and studying the Bible; but of what does this preparation consist?

First of all in prayer. Pray to the Lord to illumine your mind—so that you may understand the words of the Bible—and to fill your heart with His grace—so that you may feel the truth and life of those words.

Be aware that these are God's words, which He is speaking and saying to you personally. Prayer, together with the other virtues found in the Gospel, is the best preparation a person can have for understanding the Bible.

How We Should Read the Bible

Prayerfully and reverently, for in each word there is another drop of eternal truth, and all the words together make up the boundless ocean of the Eternal Truth.

The Bible is not a book, but life; because its *words are spiritual life* (Jn 6:63). Therefore its words can be comprehended if we study them with the spirit of its spirit, and with the life of its life. It is a book that must be read with life, by putting it into practice. One should first live it, and then understand it.

Here the words of the Saviour apply: Whoever, is willing to do it will understand that this teaching is from God: *If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.* (Jn 7:17). Do it so that you may understand it. This is the fundamental rule of Orthodox *exegesis* [*Ed.*, i.e., explanation].

At first one usually reads the Bible quickly; and then more and more slowly, until finally he will begin to read not even word by word, because in each word he is discovering an everlasting truth and an ineffable mystery.

Everyday read at least one chapter from the Old and the New Testament; but side by side with this, put a virtue from each into practice. Practice it until it becomes a habit to you. Let us say, for instance, that the first virtue is forgiveness of insults. Let this be your daily obligation. And along with it pray to the Lord: *O gentle Lord, grant me love towards those who insult me!* And when you have made this virtue into a habit, each of the other virtues after it will be easier for you, and so on until the final one.

The main thing is to read the Bible as much as possible. What the mind does not understand, the heart will feel; and if neither the mind understands nor the heart feels, read it over again, because by reading it you are sowing God's words in your soul. And there they will not perish, but will gradually and imperceptibly pass into the nature of your soul; and there will happen to you what the Saviour said about the man who *casts seed on the ground, and sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and grows, while the man does not know it.* (Mk 4:26-27).

The main thing is: sow, and it is *God Who causes and allows what is sown to grow.* (I Cor 3:6). But do not rush success, lest you become like a man who sows today, but tomorrow already wants to reap.

Seed in Our Souls

By reading the Bible you are adding yeast to the dough of your soul and body, which gradually expands and fills the soul until it has thoroughly permeated it and makes it rise with the truth and righteousness of the Gospel.

In every instance, the Saviour's parable about the sower and the seed can be applied to every one of us. The Seed of Divine Truth is given to us in the Bible. By reading it, we sow that seed in our own soul. It fails on the rocky and thorny ground of our soul, but a little also falls on the good soil of our heart—and bears fruit.

And when you catch sight of the fruit and taste it, the sweetness and joy will spur you to clear and plow the rocky

and thorny areas of your soul and sow it with the seed of the Word of God. Do you know when a man is wise in the sight of Christ the Lord? It is when he listens to His word and carries it out. The beginning of wisdom is to listen to God's word: *Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man.* (Mt 7:24).

Every word of the Saviour has the power and the might to heal both physical and spiritual ailments. *Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.* (Mt 8:8). The Saviour said the word—and the centurion's servant was healed.

Just as He once did, the Lord even now ceaselessly says His words to you, to me, and to all of us. But we must pause, and immerse ourselves in them and receive them, with the centurion's faith. And a miracle will happen to us, and our souls will be healed just as the centurion's servant was healed. For it is related in the Gospel that *they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick.* (Mt 8:16).

He still does this today, because the Lord *Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever.* (Heb 13:8).

Beware!

Those who do not listen to God's words will be judged at the Dreadful Judgment, and *it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment than for them.* (Mt 10:14-15).

Beware—at the Dreadful Judgment you will be asked to give an account for what you have done with the words of God, whether you have listened to them and kept them, whether you have rejoiced in them or been ashamed of them, the Lord will also be ashamed of you when He comes in the glory of His Father together with the holy angels: *Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.* (Mk 8:38).

There are few words of men that are not vain and idle. Thus there are few words for which we do not mind being judged. *For every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.* (Mt 12:36).

In order to avoid this, we must study and learn the words of God from the Bible and make them our own; for God proclaimed them to men so that they might accept them, and by means of them also accept the Truth of God itself.

Words of the Word

Great is the mystery of the word—so great that the second Person of the Holy Trinity, Christ the Lord, is called *the Word* or *the Logos* in the Bible.

God is the Word (Jn 1:1). All those words which come from the eternal and absolute word are full of God, Divine Truth, Eternity, and Righteousness. If you listen to them, you are listening to God. If you read them, you are reading the direct words of God. God the Word became flesh, became

man: *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.* (Jn 1:14), and mute, stuttering man began to proclaim the words of the eternal truth and righteousness of God.

The Grace-Filled Word

In every word of the Saviour there is much that is supernatural and full of grace; and this is what sheds grace on the soul of man when the word of Christ visits it. Thus, the Holy Apostle calls the whole structure of the house of salvation the word of the grace of God: *Brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.* (Acts 20:32).

Like a living grace-filled power, the Word of God has a wonder-working and life-giving effect on a man, so long as he hears it with faith and receives it with faith: *When ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.* (I Thess 2:13).

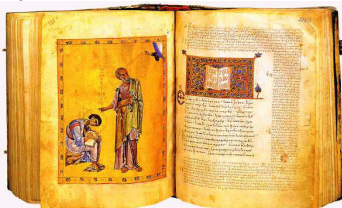
Everything is defiled by sin, but everything is cleansed and sanctified by the Word of God and prayer—everything—all creation from man on down to a worm (I Tim 4:5).

By the Truth which carries in itself and by the Power which it has in itself, *the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* (Heb 4:12) Nothing remains secret before it or for it.

The Birth-Giving Word

Because every Word of God contains the eternal Word of God—the Logos—it has the power to give birth and regenerate men. And when a man is born of the Word, he is born of the Truth.

For this reason St. James the Apostle writes to the Christians that God the Father has brought them forth ... *by the word of truth* (Jas 1:18), and St. Peter tells them that they have been born anew ... *by the word of the living God, which abides forever* (I Pet 1:23).



When someone is wronged in this life, either by men or by demons, God does not worry; because the soul benefits as a result. Many times, however, we say that we are wronged, while—in reality—we are the ones causing harm. We must be careful to distinguish the two.

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

A PRAYER TO THE THEOTOKOS

By St. Philotheos, Patriarch of Constantinople (could especially be offered in preparing to receive Holy Communion).

Truly immaculate and most-pure Virgin and Theotokos, an awesome miracle to angels, an inexplicable wonder to mankind, or rather—in reality—an awesome and incomprehensible miracle to both: thou art the very beginning of our race, the most pure vessel of divinity, the workplace of our salvation; and—in a way beyond any thought and reason, out of extreme goodness—thou didst bring to us the One of the Trinity, our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is perfect God and perfect man, and Who came to be united to our fallen human nature and thereby to save it and restore it to its original high dignity.

Thou art the restoration of those who fall, and—after the salvific economy of God the Word—thou didst also, without hesitation, deliver me from many dangers, unworthy as I am of any help and providence, for I sin arbitrarily in every way, time and place. Look, now, again upon my wretchedness, and visit me often; for I am overcome and do not know what will happen to me. If I look upon the multitude of my innumerable sins, I see myself far away from [the] dread Mysteries; and altogether unworthy. Again, if I do not draw near for a long time, being afraid to participate unto my condemnation, I become completely subservient to the adversary. Therefore, by throwing the great multitude of my transgressions into the ocean of the inexorable compassion of thy Son and God, and by proposing thee as a strong mediator, I take courage and draw near.

I implore thee, O immaculate Lady, make use of thy motherly boldness before Him; and make Him merciful to me. Yea, O most-pure one, stay before me and do not abhor me, the one who is conquered by many sins, and defiled and abused by deeds, words, movements of mind, and the myriad of devices and designs and well-contrived demonic deceptions through all of the senses. Show thyself to be my co-worker even in this time, by beseeching the Lord—Who is most conciliatory and forgiving—not to reject me and prove me empty of His grace. May He overlook my numerous transgressions, and—through His holy Body and His sacred and life-giving Blood—sanctify, illumine, save and make me a son of light, walking and directing myself towards His holy commandments.

Let me not return again and be defiled by sin, so that I may participate, without condemnation, in the immaculate awesome gift of grace, now and in the future. Let me also receive the most perfect promise: to escape eternal punishment and to be made worthy of eternal life, through thee, who art my sure hope and protectress, that I may glorify and magnify Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the Most-Holy and blessed Trinity unto the ages of ages. Amen.

PROCLAMATION OF PERSONHOOD

A Proclamation by the President of the United States of America, January 14, 1988.

America has given a great gift to the world, a gift that drew upon the accumulated wisdom derived from centuries of experiments in self-government, a gift that has irrevocably changed humanity's future. Our gift is twofold: the declaration, as a cardinal principle of all just law, of the God-given, unalienable rights possessed by every human being; and the example of our determination to secure those rights and to defend them against every challenge through the generations. Our declaration and defense of our rights have made us and kept us free and have sent a tide of hope and inspiration around the globe.

One of those unalienable rights, as the Declaration of Independence affirms so eloquently, is the right to life. In the 15 years since the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade*, however, America's unborn have been denied their right to life. Among the tragic and unspeakable results in the past decade and a half have been the loss of life of 22 million infants [*now 55 million*] before birth; the pressure and anguish of countless women and girls who are driven to abortion; and a cheapening of our respect for the human person and the sanctity of human life.

We are told that we may not interfere with abortion. We are told that we may not "impose our morality" on those who wish to allow or participate in the taking of the life of infants before birth; yet no one calls it "imposing morality" to prohibit the taking of life after people are born. We are told as well that there exists a "right" to end the lives of unborn children; yet no one can explain how such a right can exist in stark contradiction of each person's fundamental right to life.

That right to life belongs equally to babies in the womb, babies born handicapped, and the elderly or infirm. That we have killed the unborn for 15 years does not nullify this right, nor could any number of killings ever do so. The unalienable right to life is found not only in the Declaration of Independence but also in the Constitution that every President is sworn to preserve, protect, and defend. Both the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments guarantee that no person shall be deprived of life without due process of law.

All medical and scientific evidence increasingly affirms that children before birth share all the basic attributes of human personality -- that they in fact are persons. Modern medicine treats unborn children as patients. Yet, as the Supreme Court itself has noted, the decision in *Roe v. Wade*

rested upon an earlier state of medical technology. The law of the land in 1988 should recognize all of the medical evidence.

Our nation cannot continue down the path of abortion, so radically at odds with our history, our heritage, and our concepts of justice. This sacred legacy, and the well-being and the future of our country, demand that protection of the innocents must be guaranteed and that the personhood of the unborn be declared and defended throughout our land. In legislation introduced at my request in the First Session of the 100th Congress, I have asked the Legislative branch to declare the "humanity of the unborn child and the compelling interest of the several states to protect the life of each person before birth." This duty to declare on so fundamental a matter falls to the Executive as well. By this Proclamation I hereby do so.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Ronald Reagan, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim and declare the unalienable personhood of every American, from the moment of conception until natural death, and I do proclaim, ordain, and declare that I will take care that the Constitution and laws of the United States are faithfully executed for the protection of America's unborn children.

Upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God. I also proclaim Sunday, January 17, 1988, as National Sanctity of Human Life Day. I call upon the citizens of this blessed land to gather on that day in their homes and places of worship to give thanks for the gift of life they enjoy and to reaffirm their commitment to the dignity of every human being and the sanctity of every human life.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this fourteenth day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twelfth.

Ronald Reagan, President of the USA



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HIEROMARTYR SAVVAS TRLAICH, BISHOP OF GORNJI KARLOVAC

By Fr. Ignatius Shestakov, translated Fr. Andrew Phillips.



The Gornokarlovatsky Diocese of the Church of Serbia is situated on the territory of contemporary Croatia and includes the western most areas settled by Orthodox Serbs in the 15th century. The growth of the Orthodox population there was accelerated at the beginning of the 16th century, when Serbs from neighboring Dalmatia and Bosnia settled there, fleeing from Turkish oppression. Over time, the so-called military region of

Kraina was formed, serving as a protective flank for the Austro-Hungarian Empire from Turkish expansion. The Serbs who lived in Kraina served in the Austrian Army and received special privileges from the Emperors and at that time Kraina was one of the largest and most prosperous dioceses of the Church.

However, Roman Catholic proselytism and the spread of Uniatism down the centuries was a constant danger for the Serbs. On more than one occasion they had to stand up for their privileges and the purity of their faith. The 20th century, during which the Church suffered terrible trials, was no exception to this. During the Second World War, the Gornokarlovatsky Diocese found itself on the territory of the puppet “Independent Croatian State” and suffered in ways that had never been seen before. It seems as if most of the devilish evil of the Croat fascists fell to its lot. Obviously, the tragedy was that the Diocese was located in the very heart of the newly-formed pseudo-State, very close to the Croat capital of Zagreb.

During the genocide which took place between 1941 and 1945, 65 Orthodox priests were murdered by the Roman Catholic Ustashi forces, 116 churches were completely destroyed, 39 others seriously damaged and over 160 parish and monastic libraries were completely or partially destroyed.

The sufferings of the clergy and the people were fully shared in by the bishop of Gornji Karlovac, bishop Savvas Trlaich. In 2000, he was glorified by the Council of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church as a hieromartyr. A true son of his people, he showed himself to be a true pastor, laying down his life for his flock, and his ministry was crowned by martyrdom.

Vladyka Savvas was born on July 6th, 1884 in Mol to the family of Stephen and Elizabeth Trlaich and was baptized Svetozar. After studying at grammar school and then at the

seminary in Sremski Karlovtsy, he graduated from the faculty of law at the University of Belgrade. He was ordained deacon and then priest in 1909. From 1909 to 1927, Fr. Svetozar served as a parish priest. In early 1927 he was appointed to an administrative post at the Holy Synod and then became its secretary.

Widowed, in 1929 he took his monastic vows with the name of Savvas and became rector and archimandrite of the Monastery of Krushedol. He served there until 1934, when he was appointed Vicar-Bishop of Sremski. He was consecrated bishop in Sremski Karlovtsy on September 30th, 1930, by Patriarch Barnabas of Serbia. As Patriarchal Vicar, Vladyka Savvas chaired the diocesan council of the Archdiocese of Belgrade-Karlovtsy until November 1936 and from then until early 1937 he chaired the ecclesiastical court. Then, on September 4th, 1938, he was appointed bishop of Gornji Karlovac, with his residence in Plashkom.

The German invasion of Yugoslavia and the ensuing proclamation of an Independent Croatian State saw Plashkom occupied by the Italians, but at the end 1941, it was handed over to the Croat Ustashi. On this, bishop Savvas and nine priests were taken hostage. On May 23rd, 1941 the Ustashi occupied the bishop’s residence and expelled the bishop. On June 8th, the notorious executioner Josip Tomlenovich appeared at the residence and ordered any diocesan money and papers of importance to be handed over to the Ustashi. Bishop Savvas was ordered to leave the town and head for Serbia. However, he refused to do this and stated that he could not abandon his diocese and his people.

On June 17th, 1941 Vladyka was arrested together with other well-known Serbs and priests who did not wish to leave the place of their ministry. The Ustashi locked their prisoners into a cowshed and set an armed guard. For one month all those arrested, and especially bishop Savvas, were subjected to humiliation and torture on a daily basis. They were then sent to the notorious concentration camp at Gospich. The prisoners were taken from the railway station at Gospich to the local prison and again subjected to further humiliation and torture.

In the first half of August 1941, about 2,000 Serbs were taken from Gospich to Velebita; bishop Savvas among them. It is supposed that he was murdered there, at the same time as about 8,000 other Serbs, in August 1941. The Holy Synod of the Serbian Church constantly, but unsuccessfully, called for the forces of occupation to explain what had happened to bishop Savvas and other Serbian bishops on the territory of the Independent Croatian State and tried to obtain their release.

Unfortunately, we have no exact information about the circumstances of the martyrdom of bishop Savvas. However, the Serbian historian, Velibor Dzhomich in his book, “Ustashi crimes against Serbian priests,” quotes a testimony

which may throw some light on the question. According to this, a Fr Iovan Silashki wrote the following in an issue of “The Banat Herald” newspaper:

In 1941, the Gornokarlovatsky Diocese was under the control of the dreadful Ustashi regime. The bishop and the priests were told that they were undesirables and that they must abandon their flocks. The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Zagreb, Aloysius Stepinac, openly told Vladyka that he must leave “Croatian” Karlovac, otherwise he would be “liquidated.” Vladyka answered him: “Even if it costs me my head, I will not abandon my people!”

Soon it became clear that the Catholic Archbishop was not joking. Vladyka Savvas was arrested and horribly tortured. During the tortures and beatings in Plashkom, the Ustashi used a gramophone to play the hymn, *As many as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ*.

When they took Vladyka to his place of execution, his mother stood in front of the church and waited for him. She wanted to see her son for one last time and make her farewells. However, the executioners did not allow her to do this. Vladyka nevertheless blessed his mother, his legs tied, and went to his death.

A few years after this, a stranger walked into the church in Bashaida, where Vladyka had served. He spoke to the postmaster Savvas Saravolets.

“Did you know Vladyka Savvas Trlaich,” asked the stranger, “I heard that he was priest here.”

“Of course, Vladyka was my teacher. I’m grateful to him for everything I have managed to do in life. How do you know Vladyka?”

“I was an eyewitness of his sufferings,” answered the stranger.

“The Ustashi butchers took Vladyka to a clearing and continued to torture him there. They tore his skin off him and then covered him with salt. Then they buried him alive, with just his head protruding, brought an iron harrow and pulled it across his head until he gave up his soul to God. What happened after that, I don’t know. Maybe the Ustashi threw him into one of the many precipices there, which they used as graves for the Serbs. So even in death he wasn’t separated from his people.”

Unfortunately, this is all that we know about bishop Savvas’ martyrdom.

As the result of the devastating losses suffered by the Serbians of this regions (which could never be made up for), after the war the Gornokarlovatsky Diocese could not be restored to its former prosperity. The destruction of its holy places and shrines also continued under the Communist regime, so that churches which had been damaged often fell into total ruin.

Dire tribulations hit the diocese again during the 1991-1995 war. Half a century after the first, a second act of spiritual genocide unfolded for the Serbs. On Orthodox Christmas in 1992, the St. Nicholas Cathedral, built in the 18th century, was blown up by the new Ustashi. Subjected to an artillery bombardment, the bishops’ residence in Karlovtsy, with its library, records and museum, was looted. The bishops’ residence of the Gornokarlovatsky Diocese was destroyed during Catholic Christmas, in 1993. After the Croat attack on the Serbian Kraina Republic, during the “Operation Storm” in August 1995, Serbian people were expelled from their ancient diocese and many of its holy places were desecrated and destroyed. During the war of 1991-1995, 11 churches were destroyed and 45 damaged. After the expulsion of the Serbs, many churches and other church premises were abandoned and neglected.

Notwithstanding the difficulties, the diocese survived and now the situation is returning to normal. Church life is being reborn, ancient churches are being restored and new ones are being built. In 2005, after a long gap, a new bishop was appointed to the Gornokarlovatsky Diocese. He is Gerasim Popovich, a graduate of the Moscow Theological Academy. The memory of Hieromartyr Savvas is kept with special care in the diocese and he is often mentioned in the diocesan journal.

The restoration of Church life in the diocese is faced with many problems, above all the lack of a flock. Twice subjected to ethnic cleansing and expulsion in the 20th century, it is difficult for Serbs to return to where they had lived for centuries. We hope and trust that, despite all the difficulties, through the prayers of Hieromartyr Savvas, the life of this ancient diocese, which has suffered so much, will grow in strength and never be extinguished until the end of time.



When, on a clear autumn night, I gaze at the clear sky—sown with numberless stars, so diverse in size yet shedding a single light—then I say to myself: *Such are the writings of the Fathers!* When, on a summer day, I gaze at the vast sea—covered with a multitude of diverse vessels with their unfurled sails like white swan’s wings, vessels racing under a single wind to a single goal, to a single harbor—I say to myself: *Such are the writings of the Fathers!* When I hear an harmonious, many-voiced choir, in which diverse voices—in elegant harmony—sing a single Divine song, then I say to myself: *Such are the writings of the Fathers!*

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (+1867)

HONOR THY FATHER AND THY MOTHER

By Fr. Seraphim Stephens, based on a talk given during the 1996 Saint Herman Youth Conference in Washington D.C.

Honor thy father and thy mother is a familiar commandment from God. It is an integral and unique part of what is called *The Ten Commandments* (Exod 20). To properly understand its importance and special positioning in the list of Ten, it is necessary to briefly review the Ten Commandments.

The Ten Commandments are not the only commandments of God, but are a kind of summary of God's Laws. They might be seen as chapter headings for all of the other laws of God. They are sort of an Old Testament Symbol of Faith, much as our New Testament Creed serves to summarize all of the teachings of Christianity. The Ten Commandments set the limits of our behavior. God knows what brings life and death. The Ten Commandments establish the outer limits of behavior beyond which is death. On the positive side of the Ten Commandments are all the things we are permitted by God to do. These bring life.

The positioning of each of the Ten Commandments is important in understanding the order God has established in His laws. The first four commandments deal specifically with our relationship with God. Our acknowledgement, worship and honor of God and His Creativity are covered in these four commandments. The Fifth Commandment, *Honor thy father and thy mother*, is specially positioned in place five. I will return to that commandment momentarily. The next five commandments treat our relationship with each other, our fellow human beings, setting the limits of acceptable behavior.

Returning to the Fifth Commandment, *Honor thy father and thy mother*, it can be seen that it is a linking commandment between our relationships with God and our relationships with all other people. *Honor thy father and thy mother* is the closest commandment to God that does not directly relate to Him. The highest human relationship, that next to God alone, is our relationship of honor toward our parents.

We can now see that there are three divisions in the Ten Commandments: God and our relationships to Him; father and mother and our relationships to them; the rest of the community of God's people and our relationships toward them.

The Fifth Commandment, being closest to God, is the testing ground for our relationship to Him and a proving ground for our relationship to everyone else in the Kingdom of God. How we relate to our parents greatly impacts on how we honor God and our fellow human beings.

In the case of this Fifth Commandment honor is defined as love and respect. Further, it implies not rebelling against, nor challenging the authority of our parents. Surely, if we rebel against and challenge the authority of our parents, we will also rebel against God and His Authority. In like manner, if our relationship with our parents is poor, then we surely will have difficulty in our relationships to other people: students to teachers, husbands to wives, employees to employers, friends to friends, the young to the elderly. It seems crucial, then, to our spiritual and social survival, that we properly order our relationships with our parents.

I work at an alternative school with young people—many of whom are criminalized. A preponderance of these young people have extremely poor relationships with their parents. These relationship problems spill over into poor relationships in school and with the general civic community. Many of these youths view their parents as “buffoons,” the police as “pigs,” teachers as “powerless,” elders as “worthless,” and anyone in authority as “stinkers.” Virtually none of the most challenged of these young people has any relationship whatsoever with God.

I also serve as a criminologist at a college. In this field of study we have seen an incredible rise in violent crime among teenagers. There has been an increase in illicit drug use and promiscuity among our teenage population. I see these behaviors as directly related to a negative view of authority and all people in authority.

There is an interesting passage in the Old Testament, in II Kings 2:23-24: *And he [Elisha] went up from thence unto Bethel: and as he was going up by the way, there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And he turned back, and looked on them, and cursed them in the name of the Lord. And there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two children of them.* If Elisha were responsible for the juvenile justice system here in the United States, I think we would see very few young people getting into trouble with authority figures.

There is also a disturbing Scripture in the New Testament that requires close scrutiny: II Timothy 3:1-5: *This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*

I particularly draw attention to *disobedient to parents ... unloving ... lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God*. All around us we see treachery today that is directly related to disobedience to parents. Young people are “kicking” off the

protective cover of the parents in order to satisfy insatiable, fleshly desires. We see an entertainment industry that has exploited dishonor and blasphemy and every filthy and brutal behavior known to humanity. Should not this flag a warning to us of the seriousness of this day and time?

Considering the great dishonor referred to above, it is appropriate to conclude that honor brings good things. It might also be generalized that honor and respect of parents is the root of good order in the entire universe. It clearly lays the foundation of our relationship to God and to all other people.

A question for each of us is in order. To what extent have I contributed to the disorder in contemporary society by my dishonor of my parents? This should lead us to make a good confession acknowledging our dishonor of our parents and of God. When we honor our parents that same honor passes on to God. Let us turn to the Mystery of Confession and begin a new life of true honor.



WISDOM FROM THE DESERT

From an Orthodox pamphlet.

One of the fathers related: There was a devout scholar from Antioch who pestered a hermit, urging him to receive him and make him a monk. The old man said to him, "If you want me to receive you, go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor according to the Lord's commandment, and then I shall receive you." Therefore, he went away and acted accordingly.

After this the hermit said to him, "You have another precept to keep, that you not speak." He took heed and for five years did not speak. Some people began to praise him, and his abba said to him, "It is not good for you to be here, so I will send you to a coenobium in Egypt," and he sent him off.

When he sent him, the hermit failed to say whether he was to speak or not to speak, so he continued to obey the command and did not speak.

The abbot who received him, seeking a test to determine whether or not he was mute, sent him on an errand while the river was in flood, so that he would be forced to say, "I cannot cross it." The abbot sent a brother after him see what he did. As he approached the river, he knelt down, being unable to cross, and behold, a crocodile came and took him up and bore him across to the other side. When he had performed the errand and returned to the river, the crocodile again bore him across. The brother who had been sent after him, having come along and seen this, told the abbot and the brothers and they were astonished.

It happened that some time later he died, and the abbot sent a message to the old man who had sent him, saying,

"That man you sent to me may not have been able to speak, but he was like an angel of God."

The hermit then replied, saying, "It is not that he was unable to speak, but obeying the command which I gave him at the outset, he remained silent." And they all marveled and gave glory to God.

Once, there was a monk from the Monastery of St. Paul who had gone to the Church of St. Gerasimos on the island of Kephallonia. During the Divine Liturgy, he stood in the Altar area and was praying with his komboskini (prayer rope) the Prayer of the Heart – "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner" – while the others were chanting. They had also brought a possessed person into the church to be cured by St. Gerasimos. While the monk was saying the prayer in the Altar, the demon was being seated outside and was shouting, "Stop working that string, will you, monk; it is burning me!"

The priest heard it too, and said to the monk, "Pray with your komboskini as much as you can, my brother, so that God's creature can be freed of the demon."

The demon then shouted in great anger, "You, rotten priest, you. What are you telling him to pull that string for? It is burning me!"

The monk then prayed with his komboskini with even greater effort and the possessed man was delivered from the demon.

One of the Fathers telling about Kellia, said there was once a hard-working old man there who wore a mat. He went to find Abba Ammonas, who, when he saw him wearing the mat, said to him, "This is no use to you."

But the old man questioned him in the following way: "Three thoughts occupy me; should I wander in the deserts, or, should I go to a foreign land where no-one knows me, or, should I shut myself up in a cell without opening the door to anyone, eating only every second day?"

Abba Ammonas replied, "It is not right for you to do any of these three things. Rather, sit in your cell and eat a little every day, keeping the word of the Publican always in your heart (*God be merciful to me a sinner*, Lk 18:13) and you may be saved."

Just as the light of the sun attracts a healthy eye, so through Jobedience and love, knowledge of God naturally draws to itself a pure intellect.



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A MIRACLE BY ST. MENAS

By James Drescher, "A Selection of Texts Relating to St. Menas."



And there was a man at the shrine of the holy Abba Menas (a military martyr of Alexandria, early 4th century) whose name was Mark. And he was a brickmaker by trade and was extremely poor. He had been ailing with his liver for a long time and had spent all that he had on the doctors, so that he lacked bread to eat. And this is the reason why he was poor. And he had five children and himself and his wife.

The archbishop of the local diocese asked about him and was told, "he has had a severe illness. But God and your prayers came to his aid and cured him. But he has fallen into extreme poverty."

So the archbishop sent for him and told him to make bricks at the shrine of the holy Abba Menas till it was completed; and he gave him alms. And the workman went and did as the archbishop had told him. And after some days the alms were spent and his children were again in need of bread, for, as we have already said, the man was extremely poor. At that time, the builders and locksmiths received their board and expenses daily, but this poor brickmaker did not; for it was not usual to give brickmakers their board and expenses but only their honorarium [*Ed.*, A voluntary payment that is given to a person for services for which fees are not legally or traditionally required].

And while Mark, the workman, was still working, his wife sent to him from Alexandria, saying, "Why do you labor for nothing? Behold, your little children will starve to death here."

When he received his wife's message, he was exceedingly distressed. He said to his eldest son who was working with him, "Let us leave the work today and find out how things are at home. Blessed be God who requites [*Ed.*, repays] us according to the sins we have committed." And his heart was troubled exceedingly as he thought upon the plight and distress of his children and he began to weep and lament.

And when he had washed his hands in order to go to the city (some 40 kilometers to the northeast), his son said to him: "Father, behold the day is done and we shall not be able to reach the city now. Let us finish our work today. Tomorrow, please God, we shall go." His father said to him, "No, we shall go this moment."

While they were talking together, behold the holy Abba Menas himself came to them, mounted on a white horse

and in the guise of a soldier. He said to him, "Why have you washed yourself today? It is not yet time."

He said to him, "I am a poor man, my lord, and my children suffer from hunger. I wish to go and see them." Abba Menas, in the guise of a soldier, said to him, "Finish your work today and I myself will give you your wages to take home to your children."

And so the man worked till the next day, for he said within himself, "Better I go home with something than that I go empty-handed and my children starve to death through me."

Next day, at the ninth hour, the holy Abba Menas came to him again, still in the guise of a soldier, and the workman bowed and did reverence to him. The saint said to him, "Are you going to the city today?" He said to him, "Yes, if you please. If you had not told me, your servant, yesterday to wait till today, I should have gone yesterday to have news of my children, lest they starve to death."

The holy Abba Menas dismounted from his horse. He took a clay brick from those which the workman had made and said to him, "This is your wages. Take it home and live on it with your children and come back and finish your work."

The man was bewildered. He said, "If you are going to deal with me as you agreed, my lord, why, do so. If not, let me go and see my children so that they may not starve to death through me."

Abba Menas said to him, "This is your wages."

The man said to him again, "If this is my wages, why, I cannot fill my house with bricks." Abba Mena said to him, "Even if you can make them, nevertheless take this with you to the city till I come and give you your wages."

The man said to him, "If this is my wages, what shall I do with it?"

And when the blessed soldier was saying these things and the workman stood arguing with him, his son said to him, "Hush, father. We will take it with us to the city for him lest he beat you and you have a worse illness and we suffer from hunger. If you had not been ill before, this poverty would not have befallen us."

And the brickmaker held his peace. He took the brick and put it in the basket along with his mould. He went his way sorrowing. And when he was a little way from the soldier, he took out the brick, intending to throw it away.

His son said to him, "Nay father, lest he seek after it and not find it and beat us. I believe that he may be a soldier of the august rank who has given us this brick to take to the city for him and he will remember us by it and give us our wages. Unless he had wished to give us our wages because of our poverty, what would be the need of this brick in the city? Scarcely can we drag our bodies there and we are to carry this great burden."

His father answered and said to him, “When we arrive in the city, we shall make a brick for him. Did I not make this one? I shall make this other also from the clay in the holders.”

His son said to him, “Do you not know that this clay is different from the clay in the holders? Perhaps he wants this clay for some purpose. Give it to me and I will take it to the city for him; for it is better to bear a burden than bear the wrath of an augustal whom you cannot save yourself from.”

And his son took the brick and carried it to the city. And when he got home, his mother spoke very despondently to him, saying: “If only you had been here, you would have drawn water for whomever wished it. We shall find our food from day to day.” She also said to them, “Why did you not come the day I sent for you?”

He said to her, “A soldier of the augustal rank cheated us, saying, “Do your work for me today and tomorrow I will give you your wages.” Afterwards he cheated us of our wages and instead put another burden on us, telling us to take it to the city for him. And behold, it is in our basket along with our mould.”

His wife put her hand in the basket and took out the brick, intending in her anger to throw it away. And when she had taken it out of the basket, she said: “You yourself do not know what he gave you, brother. I myself was surprised when you told me that he had given you a brick of clay. Behold now, I see that it is bronze.”

Her husband cried out, “As the Lord lives, I made it myself with my own hands.”

And while they were saying that it was bronze, behold it was transformed and became beaten gold. At once they knew that it was the holy Abba Menas who had given them the brick.

The man’s wife said to him, “Perhaps it was really the augustal soldier and he gave you the gold brick, tempting you.”

Her husband said to her, “Sister, do not disbelieve us. This was a clay brick, one of those which I had made along with my son, and the soldier took it in his hands and put it in our basket. And when we had got away from him, I took it out, intending to throw it away; and it was the same sort of brick as at the first. If my son had not stopped me, I would have thrown it away.”

On saying this, they rose and prayed together in unison, glorifying the God of the holy Abba Menas.

Later on, the brickmaker went to the local market, approached the goldsmiths and said to them: “Be quick and weigh it.” And they found that it weighed 53 litrae. With this gold, he had a gold paten made and a gold chalice and gave them to the shrine of the holy Abba Menas and he then returned and continued at his work.

And it befell that after working till evening he went again to take his basket and he found another brick in it, from

among those which he had made that day. It was of fresh clay and smelled fragrantly. And the man realized at once that the holy Abba Menas had put it in the basket. He again made his way home and when he arrived there he again found the brick to be gold.

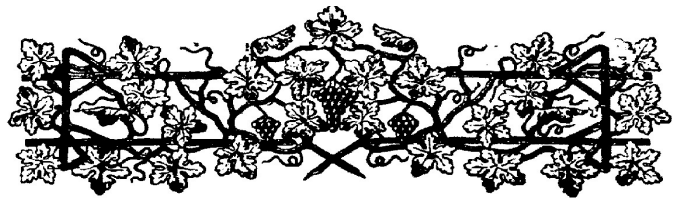
The man became very rich and he set to work again with a great joy that gave him no respite day or night. He subsequently reported the repeated marvels to the archbishop, who in turn, informed the emperor. The emperor honored the bricklayer with the rank of stratelates [*Ed.*, driver/leader of the army].

And the people living in Alexandria and those living in Mareotis (the site of St. Menas’ martyrion) rejoiced that God had visited his people and wrought great wonders in turning the clay bricks into gold.



What words can describe your divinely-radiant beauty, O Virgin Mother of God? We cannot circumscribe you in our words and thoughts, for everything about you surpasses our speech and understanding. But, with your loving permission, we may sing your praises. In you, all graces find a place. You are the fullness of everything noble and good, a living picture and ikon of all goodness and kindness, for you alone were found worthy of the gifts of the Spirit in their entirety; or rather, you alone had mysteriously dwelling in your womb Him in Whom all these gifts were stored. In a way past understanding, you became His tabernacle; and now, through death, you proceed hence to immortality; and are fittingly translated from earth to heaven—to live with Him forever in the heavenly tabernacles. From there, you care for your inheritance; and by your un-sleeping intercessions, you reconcile us to your Son.”

St. Gregory Palamas



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.

Ὕμνος Εἰς τὴν Κοίμησιν τῆς Θεοτόκου

Ἀπὸ τὸν Φώτη Κόντογλου.

Ἐν τῇ γεννήσει τὴν παρθενίαν ἐφύλαξας, ἐν τῇ κοιμήσει τὸν κόσμον οὐ κατέλιπες, Θεοτόκε.

Μετέστης πρὸς τὴν ζωὴν, Μήτηρ ὑπάρχουσα τῆς ζωῆς. Καὶ ταῖς πρεσβείαις ταῖς σαῖς λυτρομένη ἐκ θανάτου τὰς ψυχὰς ἡμῶν.

† † †

Ὡ, τί παράδοξο θαῦμα! Ἡ πηγὴ τῆς ζωῆς σὲ μνήμα ἀποθέεται, κί' ὁ τάφος σκάλα γίνεται ποῦ πάγει στὸν οὐρανό. Εὐφραίνου Γεθσημανή, ἡ ἁγιασμένη ἐκκλησιὰ τῆς Θεοτόκου. Ἄς κραζοῦμε οἱ πιστοί, ἔχοντες τὸν Γαβριὴλ γιὰ ταξίαρχο: Κεχαριτωμένη, χαῖρε, μὲ σένα εἶναι ὁ Κύριος, ποῦ δωρίζει στὸν κόσμο μὲ σένα τὸ μέγα ἔλεος.

Τὴν κοίμησή σου δοξάζουνε Ἐξουσίες, Θρόνοι, Ἀρχές, Κυριότητες, Δυνάμεις καὶ Χερουβεὶμ καὶ τὰ φρικτὰ Σεραφεῖμ. Ἀναγαλλιάζουνε οἱ ἄνθρωποι στολισμένοι γιὰ τὴ γιορτὴ σου. Προσκυνᾶνε οἱ βασιλιάδες, μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς Ἀρχαγγέλους καὶ τοὺς Ἀγγέλους, καὶ ψέλνουνε: Κεχαριτωμένη χαῖρε, μαζὶ σου εἶναι ὁ Κύριος, ποῦ δωρίζει στὸν κόσμο μὲ σένα τὸ μέγα ἔλεος.

Στολισμένη μὲ τὴ θεϊκὴ δόξα ἡ ἱερὴ καὶ δοξασμένη, Παρθένη, μνήμη σου, κί' ὅλους τοὺς πιστοὺς τοὺς σύναξε γιὰ νὰ εὐφρανθοῦνε, καὶ μπροστὰ ἀπ' ὅλους πηγαίνει ἡ Μαριὰμ μὲ χορὸ καὶ μὲ τύμπανα, ψέλνοντας τὸν Μονογενῆ σου, γιατί μὲ δόξα δοξάσθηκε.

Τοὺς δικούς σου ὕμνολόγους, Θεοτόκε, ποῦ συγκροτήσανε ἕναν πνευματικὸ θίασο, ἐσὺ ποῦ εἶσαι ζωντανὴ κί' ἄφθονη πηγὴ, στερέωσέ τους. Καὶ στὴ θεϊκὴ δόξα σου, ἀξιώσέ τους μὲ στεφάνια δόξας νὰ στεφανωθοῦνε.

Νικηθῆκανε τῆς φύσης οἱ νόμοι σὲ σένα, Παρθένη ἄχραντε. Γιατί σὲ σένα παρθενεύει ἡ γέννα, καὶ μὲ τὴ ζωὴ σμίγει ὁ θάνατος. Ἐσὺ ποῦ ἀπόμεινες μετὰ τὴ γέννα Παρθένης καὶ μετὰ θάνατο ζωντανή, σῶξε παντοτινά, Θεοτόκε, τὴν κληρονομία σου...

† † †

Περιγραφή τῆς Εἰκόνης
Κοιμήσεως τῆς Θεοτόκου

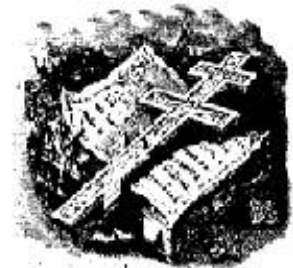
«...Ἐν τῷ μέσῳ ἡ Παναγία κειμένη ἐπὶ τῆς κλίνης νεκρά, ἔχουσα ἐπὶ τοῦ Παναγίου στήθους αὐτῆς ἐσταυρωμένας τὰς θεοφόρους χεῖρας. Καὶ πλησίον

τῆς κλίνης ἔνθεν καὶ ἔνθεν μανουάλια μὲ λαμπάδες ἀνημμένας.

Ὁ δὲ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος καὶ ὁ Θεολόγος Ἰωάννης παρὰ τοὺς πόδας αὐτῆς ἀσπάζονται αὐτήν, καὶ γύρωθεν οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ ἅγιοι ἱεράρχαι, Διονύσιος ὁ Ἀρεοπαγίτης, Ἰερόθεος καὶ Τιμόθεος, βαστάζοντες Εὐαγγέλια, καὶ γυναῖκες κλαίουσαι.

Ἐπάνωθεν δὲ αὐτῆς ὁ Χριστὸς φέρων εἰς τὰς ἀγκάλας Του τὴν παναγίαν ψυχὴν ἐν νεφέλῃ λευκῇ, καὶ γύρωθεν Αὐτοῦ ἀκτίνες φωτὸς καὶ πλῆθος ἀγγέλων. Καὶ ἄνωθεν εἰς τὸν ἀέρα πάλιν οἱ δώδεκα Ἀπόστολοι, φερόμενοι ἐπὶ νεφελῶν.

Εἰς δὲ τὴν δεξιὰν ἄκραν τοῦ ὀσπιτίου, ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Δαμασκηνὸς βαστῶν χαρτίον λέγει: **Ἄξιως ἔμψυχον σὲ οὐρανὸν ὑπεδέξαντο οὐράνια, Πάναγγε, θεῖα σκηνώματα,** καὶ εἰς τὴν ἀριστερὰν ὁ ἅγιος Κοσμάς ὁ ποιητὴς βαστῶν καὶ αὐτὸς χαρτίον λέγει: **Γυναῖκα σὲ θνητὴν, ἀλλ' ὑπερφυῶς καὶ μητέρα Θεοῦ εἰδότες, πανάμωμε, οἱ κλεινοὶ ἀπόστολοι...**



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

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

Νὰ ἐλέγχετε τίς σκέψεις σας, νὰ συγκρατεῖτε τὰ λόγια σας, νὰ κυριαρχεῖτε στὰ πάθη σας, νὰ κάνετε ἔργα ποῦ ἀντέχουν στὸ φῶς τῆς ἡμέρας.

Ἡ πνευματικὴ τοποθέτηση εἶναι νὰ χαίρεσαι μὲ τὰ ἀντίθετα ἀπ' αὐτὰ ποῦ χαίρονται οἱ κοσμικοί. Νὰ μὴ ζητᾶς τὴ δική σου ἀνάπαυση. Νὰ κοιτάξεις τί ἀναπαύει τὸν ἄλλο. Τότε ἀναπαύεται καὶ ὁ Θεὸς σὲ σένα. Καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος παύει νὰ εἶναι ἄνθρωπος, θεώνεται.

Γέροντας Παῖσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης (+1994)

Μοναχός Κωνσταντίνος Καβαρνός (+2011)

Τοῦ πατρὸς Ἀστερίου Γεροστεργίου.

Τὴν 3^{ην} Μαρτίου, 2011, ἔφυγεν ἀπὸ ἀνάμεσά μας ὁ λῆξιαν σεβαστὸς καὶ ἀγαπητὸς διδάσκαλός μας καὶ διδάσκαλος τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τοῦ γένους τῶν Ἑλλήνων, πλήρους ἡμερῶν, Κωνσταντίνος Π. Καβαρνός. Ἐξῆσε σχεδὸν ἕνα αἰῶνα. Ἀπεβίωσεν εἰς ἡλικίαν 92½ ἐτῶν εἰς τὴν Ἱερὰν Μονὴν τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἀντωνίου Ἀριζόνας, ὅπου καὶ ἐτάφη. Ἐκεῖ διήλθεν τὰ τρία τελευταῖα ἔτη τῆς ζωῆς του ὡς μοναχός. Οἱ πατέρες τῆς Ἱερᾶς αὐτῆς Μονῆς, μὲ τὴν εὐλογίαν τοῦ γέροντος Ἐφραΐμ, μετὰ πολλῆς ἀγάπης ἐφρόντισαν διὰ τὰς ἀνάγκας τῆς πρεσβυτικῆς του ἡλικίας.

Ἐγεννήθη ἐν Βοστώνῃ τὴν 19^{ην} Ὀκτωβρίου τοῦ ἔτους 1918, ἀλλὰ εἰς μικρὰν ἡλικίαν οἱ μετανάσται γονεῖς του Παναγιώτης καὶ Εἰρήνη ἐπέστρεψαν εἰς τὴν νῆσον Λέσβον ἀπ' ὅπου κατήγοντο μαζὶ μὲ τὰ τέκνα των Φραγγούλαν, Ἰωάννην καὶ Κωνσταντίνον, καὶ ἐγκατεστάθησαν εἰς τὸ χωρίον Τρίγωνα τῆς ἐπαρχίας Πλωμαρίου. Ἐκεῖ ὁ Κωνσταντίνος ἐπὶ ἕξι ἔτη ἐφοίτησεν εἰς τὸ Δημοτικὸν Σχολεῖον καὶ ἐν συνεχείᾳ ἐκ νέου ἡ οἰκογένεια ἐπανήλθεν εἰς Βοστώνην.

Ἐνταῦθα ἐπὶ ἕξι μῆνας ἐδιδάχθη τὴν Ἀγγλικὴν γλῶσσαν εἰς εἰδικὸν σχολεῖον διὰ μετανάστας καὶ διεκρίθη ἐν αὐτῷ. Μετὰ δὲ τὴν ταχεῖαν καὶ ἀναγκαίαν ἐπιτυχή ἐτοιμασίαν εἰσήχθη εἰς τὸ Ἀγγλικὸν Γυμνάσιον Βοστώνης, τὸ πρῶτον ἰδρυθὲν δημόσιον Γυμνάσιον ἐν Ἀμερικῇ, ἀπ' ὅπου ἀπεφοίτησεν μετὰ πολλῶν ἐπαίνων. Ἐν συνεχείᾳ καὶ κατόπιν εἰσαγωγικῶν ἐξετάσεων εἰσήχθη εἰς τὸ Πανεπιστήμιον Harvard. Αἱ ἀπαιτήσεις τότε διὰ τὴν εἰς τὸ ἐκπαιδευτήριον τοῦτο εἰσαγωγὴν ἦσαν κατὰ πολὺ μεγαλύτεραι ἀπ' ὅτι εἶναι σήμερον.

Κατὰ τὴν διάρκειαν τῶν σπουδῶν του ἐνταῦθα διεκρίθη καὶ ἐβραβεύθη ἐπανειλημμένως. Ἦτο ὑπόδειγμα φοιτητοῦ καὶ προικισμένος μὲ ἰσχυρὰν κριτικὴν διάνοιαν καὶ ἀπέραντον μνήμην. Ἐκτὸς τῆς Ἀγγλικῆς καὶ Ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσης, τὰς ὁποίας κατεῖχεν ἀπταιστως, ἐγνώριζεν εὐχερῶς τὴν Γαλλικὴν, τὴν ἀρχαίαν Ἑλληνικὴν καὶ Λατινικὴν γλῶσσαν.

Αἱ δημοσιευθεῖσαι μέχρι σήμερον ἐργασίαι του εἶναι πολλαί, ἄνω τῶν 100, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀρκεταὶ ἀδημοσίευτοι. Μὲ τὴν ἐργασίαν «Ὁ Βίος τοῦ Ἀτόμου κατὰ τὸν Πλάτωνα ἐν σχέσει πρὸς τὸν Χριστιανισμόν καὶ τὴν νεωτέραν Φιλοσοφίαν» ἐκέρδισεν εἰς τὸ Harvard τῷ 1941 τὸ Francis Bowen Prize. Τὸ αὐτὸ ἔτος συνέγραψε τὴν διατριβὴν του διὰ τὸ πτυχίον B.A. (magna cum laude) τὴν μελέτην «Ἡ Φιλοσοφία τοῦ Πολέμου καὶ τῆς Εἰρήνης» καὶ ἐν συνεχείᾳ ὑπηρετήσεν εἰς τὸν Ἀμερικανικὸν στρατὸν ὡς ἐκπαιδευτὴς ἐν Barksdale, Louisiana κατὰ τὴν διάρκειαν 1942-1944.

Μετὰ τὴν ἀπόλυσίν του ἐκ τοῦ στρατοῦ καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἔτος 1945 ἐκέρδισεν ἐκ νέου τὸ Francis Bowen Prize

διὰ τὴν μελέτην του «Τὸ Πρόβλημα τοῦ Προορισμοῦ τοῦ Ἄνθρωπου ἐντὸς τῆς Φιλοσοφίας τοῦ Πλάτωνος» καὶ τὸ 1947 ἐκέρδισεν τὸ Bowdoin Prize διὰ τῆς γνωστικῆς/μεταφυσικῆς μελέτης του «Διάλογος μεταξὺ Μπέρξον, Ἀριστοτέλους καὶ Φιλολόγου». Τὸ βραβεῖον τοῦτο ἀπονέμει ἡ Φιλοσοφικὴ Σχολὴ τοῦ Harvard εἰς ἐξαιρετικῆς ἀξίας φιλολογικὰ καὶ λογοτεχνικὰ ἔργα.

Τὸ Πανεπιστήμιον Harvard ἀναγνωρίζον καὶ τιμῶν τὸν διαπρεπέστερον σπουδαστὴν του κατ' ἔτος ἐξέλεξεν ὡς Sheldon Fellow τὸν Κωνσταντίνον καὶ προσέφερεν εἰς αὐτὸν τὴν δυνατότητα νὰ ταξιδεύσῃ εἰς ὠρισμένας χώρας τοῦ ἐξωτερικοῦ μὲ ἔξοδα τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου καὶ δυνηθῆ νὰ μελετήσῃ τὰ διάφορα φιλοσοφικὰ συστήματα καὶ ἔλθῃ εἰς γνωριμίαν μὲ διαφόρους ἐπιστημονικὰς προσωπικότητας. Οὕτω ὁ Κωνσταντίνος ἐπεσκέφθη τὴν Ἑλλάδα, τὴν Γαλλίαν καὶ Ἀγγλίαν καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς γνωριμίαν μὲ ἐπιστημονικὰς κορυφὰς τῶν χωρῶν αὐτῶν.

Μετὰ ταῦτα ἐπιστρέψας εἰς Βοστώνην ὑπέβαλεν εἰς τὸ Harvard τὴν ἐπιστημονικὴν του διατριβὴν διὰ τὸ πτυχίον τοῦ διδάκτορος Ph.D. «Ἡ Κλασικὴ Θεωρία τῆς Σχέσεως», ἣτις εἶναι μία ἱστορικὴ καὶ κριτικὴ μελέτη ἐπὶ τῆς μεταφυσικῆς τοῦ Πλάτωνος, Ἀριστοτέλους, καὶ τοῦ Θωμᾶ τοῦ Ἀκινάτου. Κατὰ τὴν προφορικὴν παρουσίαν καὶ ὑπεράσπισιν τῆς διατριβῆς του οἱ καθηγηταὶ του τὸν συνεχάρησαν θερμῶς καὶ τοῦ ἀπένευμον τὸ πτυχίον τοῦ διδάκτορος (Ph.D.). Οὕτω ὁ Κωνσταντίνος ἀνεδείχθη λαμπρὸς Ἑλληνοαμερικανὸς ἐπιστήμων, τιμήσας τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν του καταγωγὴν καὶ διατηρήσας βαθέως ἐντὸς τῆς ψυχῆς του τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν γλῶσσαν καὶ τὸν Ἑλληνικὸν πολιτισμὸν.

Κατὰ τὰ πρῶτα ἔτη τῶν σπουδῶν του εἰς τὸ Harvard ἐσπούδασεν βιολογικὰς ἐπιστήμας, ὅπως βοτανολογίαν, γενικὴν ζωολογίαν, συγκριτικὴν ἀνατομίαν, φυσικὴν ἀνθρωπολογία καὶ βιοχημίαν μὲ στόχον νὰ ἀκολουθήσῃ τὴν ἰατρικὴν ἐπιστήμην. Ὅμως μετὰ τὸ μέσον τῶν σπουδῶν του ἀπεφάσισεν νὰ ἀλλάξῃ κατεύθυνσιν καὶ σπουδάσῃ φιλοσοφίαν. Ἡ ἀλλαγὴ αὐτὴ εὐηργέτησεν αὐτὸν ποικιλοτρόπως εἰς τὴν μελλοντικὴν ἐπαγγελματικὴν σταδιοδρομίαν. Οὕτω «ἀνατέταλκεν λαμπρὰ καὶ χαρμόσυνος ἡμέρα» διὰ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξίαν καὶ τὸν Ἑλληνισμόν. Τοῦτο πιστεύομεν ἀκρὰ δάντως ὅτι ἦτο ἔργον τῆς Θεῆς προνοίας νὰ ἐτοιμασθῇ ἄνθρωπος «ὡς σκεῦος ἐκλογῆς» ὅστις ἐπέπρωτο νὰ καταστῇ οἰκουμενικὸς διδάσκαλος τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας καὶ εὐεργέτης πνευματικὸς ἐν πράξει καὶ θεωρίᾳ.

Ὁ καλὸς Θεὸς ἐνεφύσησεν εἰς τὴν καρδίαν του πνεῦμα ἀγάπης, ἀληθείας, εἰρήνης, ὑπομονῆς, διακρίσεως, ἀνδρείας, ταπεινώσεως, ἐπιμονῆς, τιμιότητος, ἐργατικότητος, λιτότητος, ἐγκρατείας, σωφροσύνης, σοβαρότητος, ἀσκητικότητος, ἀνεκτικότητος, ἀνεξι-

κακίας, καταλλαγής, προσευχής, αγιότητας και πολλών άλλων ἐν γένει χριστιανικῶν ἀρετῶν. Ἐγραψεν και ἐδημοσίευσεν πλῆθος βιβλίων, μονογραφῶν και ἄρθρων. Ὄταν προσέξῃ κανεὶς ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ ἔργα θα διαπιστώσῃ ὅτι δὲν προήλθον ἐκ τοῦ γραφείου τοῦ ἐπιστήμονος, ἀλλὰ ὅτι εἶναι καρποὶ τῆς δράσεως τοῦ διδασκάλου. Εἰς τὸ γράφειν ἐξήτει τὸ τέλειον. Πολλάκις τὰ γραφόμενά του τὰ ἐξύγιζεν τόσον ὥστε οὔτε μία φράσις νὰ καθίσταται περιττὴ ἢ ἐλλειπής. Ἐπίσης δὲν ὠμίλει ἢ ἔγραψεν ἐκ τοῦ προχείρου ἀλλὰ κατόπιν πολλῆς σκέψεως και περισυλλογῆς.

Σχεδὸν ὅλαι αἱ διαλέξεις του μετὰ τὸ πέρας αὐτῶν ἦσαν κείμενα ἔτοιμα πρὸς δημοσίευσιν. Κάποτε καθηγητῆς τῆς ἱστορίας τοῦ Harvard ἠρώτησεν τὸν ἀδελφὸν του Ἰωάννην, τὸν ἐπίσης διακεκριμένον φιλόλογον και ἀπόφοιτον τοῦ ἰδίου Πανεπιστημίου τὸ ἐξῆς: «Ὅλα ὅσα γράφει ὁ ἀδελφός σας Κωνσταντῖνος τὰ πιστεύει;» Καὶ ἡ ἀπάντησίς του ἦτο: «Ναί. Μέχρι και τὸ τελευταῖον κόμμα!».

Ἠγάπα μετὰ πάθους κάθε τι τὸ κλασσικὸν και Ἑλλη-νικόν. Εὔρισκεν ψυχικὴν γαλήνην και ἄφατον χαρὰν και ἀνεπτέρουτο τὸ πνεῦμα του και ὁ ἐνθουσιασμός του μελετῶν τοὺς κλασσικοὺς συγγραφεὶς τῆς ἀρχαιότητος, ἀλλὰ και συγγραφεὶς τῶν μεταγενεστέρων χρόνων, ὅπως τὸν Μέγαν Βασίλειον, τὸν Γρηγόριον Νύσσης, τὸν Γρηγόριον Θεολόγον, τὸν Ἰωάννην Δαμασκηνόν, τὸν Μέγαν Φώτιον, τὸν Εὐγένιον Βούλγαριν και ἄλλους. Εἶναι ἐκεῖνος ὅστις πρὸ δεκαετιῶν ἐμελέτησεν και μετέφρασεν εἰς τὴν Ἀγγλικὴν και τελευταίως ἐξέδωκεν εἰς δύο τόμους ἀνθολογίαν τῆς Φιλοκαλίας τῶν Ἱερῶν Νηπιτικῶν Πατέρων.

Ἀποτέλεσμα τῆς μελέτης αὐτῆς, ἀλλὰ και τῆς φροντίδος και ἀγάπης πρὸς τοὺς φοιτητὰς και πρὸς ὅλους ἐκεῖνους οἵτινες ἐνδιαφέροντο νὰ μάθουν σωστὰ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν γλῶσσαν συνέταξεν και ἐδημοσίευσεν τὸ γνωστὸν Φιλοσοφικὸν Λεξικὸν εἰς τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν και Ἀγγλικὴν γλῶσσαν. Τὸ δὲ μικρὸν ἔργον του Ὁρθόδοξος Χριστιανικὴ Ὁρολογία (Orthodox Christian Terminology) διέπεται ὑπὸ τοῦ ἰδίου πνεύματος, ἐνδιαφέροντος και ἀγάπης πρὸς ὅλους ἐκεῖνους οἱ ὅποιοι ἐπιθυμοῦν νὰ ἀντλήσουν και γευθοῦν τὴν Ὁρθοδοξίαν και τὴν Ἑλληνισμὸν ἐκ τῶν ἀρχικῶν πηγῶν.

Τὴν ἀγάπην και εὐγνωμοσύνην πρὸς τοὺς εὐσεβεὶς γονεῖς του, ἀλλὰ και πρὸς τὰ ἀδέλφια του τὴν ἀπέδειξεν ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος ἀφιερῶνων μέγα μέρος τῆς ζωῆς του διακονῶν αὐτοὺς προσωπικῶς κατὰ τὰ δύσκολα ἔτη

τοῦ γήρατος και τῶν ἀσθενειῶν των. Ἐπὶ ἔτη ἐφρόντιζεν διὰ τὸν πατέρα και τὴν μητέρα του, τοὺς ἀγαπητοὺς ἀδελφὸν Ἰωάννην και ἀδελφὴν Φραγγούλαν. Δυνάμεθα νὰ εἴπωμεν ὅτι ἡ διακονία του πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἦτο πολλάκις ὄχι ἀπλῶς δύσκολος ἀλλὰ και πολὺ ἐξαντλητικὴ. Ἦδύναντο νὰ εἴπῃ τὸ τοῦ Ἀποστόλου Παύλου: *Αὐται αἱ χεῖρες ὑπηρετήσαν ὑμᾶς.*

Ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος εἶχεν γνωριμίαν και προσωπικὴν φιλίαν και μεγάλην ἐκτίμησιν πρὸς τὸν μέγα σύγχρονον λογοτέχνην και εἰκονογράφον Φώτιον Κόντογλου. Τὸ μαρτυροῦν αἱ 92 ἀνέκδοτοι προσωπικαὶ ἐπιστολαὶ πρὸς αὐτόν. Ἦτο θαυμαστής τοῦ ἔργου και τῶν ἰδεῶν αὐτοῦ καθὼς και τοῦ τρόπου τῆς ζωῆς του, διὸ και εἰς πολλὰ τὸν ἠκολούθει. Ὡς ἐκεῖνος εἶχεν ὡς ἄμβωνα διαδόσεως τῶν ἰδεῶν του τὴν Ἀθηναϊκὴν ἐφημερίδα «Ἐλευθερία», οὕτω και ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος ἐδημοσίευσεν καθ' ἐκάστην ἐβδομάδα διδακτικὸν ἄρθρον εἰς τὴν ἐκδιδομένην ἐν Βοστώνῃ Ἑλληνοαμερικανικὴν ἐφημερίδα «Ἑλληνικὸν Χρονικόν» (Hellenic Chronicle). Μάλιστα ἡ ἐφημερίς αὐτὴ τὸ πρῶτον συνελήφθη και ἐσχεδιάσθη ἐντὸς τῆς οἰκίας Καβαροῦ ἐν Belmont ὑπὸ τῶν ἀδελφῶν Ἰωάννου και Κωνσταντῖνου Καβαροῦ και τοῦ ἐκδότου Παναγιώτου Ἀγριτέλη. Καὶ οἱ τρεῖς αὐτοὶ νέοι συνεδέοντο διὰ φιλίας και εἶλκον τὴν καταγωγὴν ἐκ τῆς νήσου Λέσβου. Τὸ ἰδιαίτερον διὰ τὸν Κωνσταντῖνον ἦτο ὅτι οὐδέποτε κατὰ τὴν ἐπὶ δεκαετιῶν συνεργασίαν των ἔλαβεν ἔστω και ἓνα δολλάριον ὡς ἀμοιβήν.

Τὰ πάντα προσέφερεν διὰ τὴν διαφώτισιν τοῦ ἀναγνωστικοῦ κοινοῦ ἀμισθί.

Κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον τρόπον συνειργάζετο και μὲ ἄλλας ἐφημερίδας και περιοδικὰ, ὡς ἦτο ὁ «Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος», τὰ περιοδικὰ και ἐπίσημα ὄργανα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος «Ἐκκλησία» και «Ἐφημέριος». Τὸ αὐτὸ συνέβαινεν και διὰ τὰ μεταφρασθέντα ἔργα του εἰς διαφόρους γλώσσας ὅπως Ἀλβανικά, Ἀραβικά, Φιλανδικὰ, Γαλλικά, Ἰαπωνικά, Ρωσικά, Σερβικά, και Σουηδικὰ. Οὐδέποτε ἐξήτησε κάτι τὸ ὑλικὸν διὰ τὰς μεταφράσεις. Ἡ χαρὰ του ἦτο νὰ βλέπῃ τὰ ἔργα του νὰ κυκλοφοροῦν εἰς παγκόσμιον κλίμακα. Τοῦ ἦτο ἀρετὴ δι' αὐτὸν αὐτὴ ἡ ἀμοιβή.

Ὁ σεβαστὸς διδάσκαλος ἦτο συνεργάσιμος μὲ ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καλῆς θελήσεως, οἵτινες προσεπάθουν νὰ ἐργασθοῦν διὰ τὸ γενικὸν καλὸν τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας και τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ. Ἐγραψε χιλιάδας σελίδας, ἀλλ' οὐδέποτε ἐναντίον προσώπων. Ἐσέβετο



τήν προσωπικότητα τῶν ἄλλων καὶ ἠγωνίζετο διὰ τὰς ἀρχάς του καὶ τὸ «πιστεύω» του καὶ προέβαλλεν αὐτὰ θετικῶς μετὰ δυνάμεως πολλῆς.

Δὲν ἦτο ἀνθρωπάρεσκος. Ἀπεχθάνετο τὴν ἀνθρωπαρέσκειαν καὶ ἐθρῆνει διὰ τὴν κατάπτωσιν τοῦ νεοελληνισμοῦ ἐν σχέσει μὲ τὰς χονδροειδεῖς ἐκδηλώσεις τῶν ὑλιστῶν καὶ ἀπίστων, τὸ κυνηγητὸν τῆς εὐμαρείας, φιλαυτίας καὶ τοῦ εὐκόλου πλουτισμοῦ. Τὸ ζήτημα τῆς καταστροφῆς τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς γλώσσης τὸν ἐπλήγωσε βαθέως. Παρὰ ταῦτα ὅμως ἦτο ἀνθρωπος αἰσιόδοξος καὶ ἔβλεπεν ὅτι μελλοντικῶς οἱ Ἕλληνες θὰ ἀνανήψουν καὶ θὰ ἐκτιμήσουν καὶ θὰ ἀγαπήσουν τὸ ἔνδοξον παρελθὸν αὐτῶν καὶ θὰ ἐργασθῶν φιλοτίμως διὰ τὴν πνευματικὴν των ἀνόρθωσιν.

Ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος πάντοτε προσεπάθει νὰ ὠθήσῃ τοὺς φοιτητάς του νὰ ἀγαπήσουν τὰς κλασσικὰς σπουδὰς, αἱ ὁποῖαι καλλιεργοῦν τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐσωτερικῶς καὶ δημιουργοῦν ἀνθρώπους «καλοὺς ἀγαθοὺς». Ἐβλεπεν ὅτι αἱ ἐκλεκταὶ διάνοιαι σήμερον στρέφονται πρὸς τὰς κερδοφόρους καὶ πρακτικὰς ἐπιστήμας καὶ εὐρίσκειτο ἐν ἀγωνίᾳ. Ὁ ἴδιος ἦτο ἀνθρωπος ἀπλοῦς εἰς τὴν συμπεριφορὰν καὶ ἐσαγήνευε τοὺς νέους διὰ τοῦ λόγου του. Εὐαρεστεῖτο νὰ συνομιλῇ πρὸς ὅλους τοὺς λίαν πεπαιδευμένους χωρὶς νὰ παραθεωρῇ καὶ τοὺς πλέον ἀπλοῦς ἀνθρώπους. Εἰς ὅλους εἶχεν κάτι νὰ προσφέρῃ ἀλλὰ καὶ κάτι νὰ διδαχθῇ ἐξ αὐτῶν. Πολλάκις ἔλεγεν, «διδάσκω ἀεὶ διδασκόμενος».

Παρομιώδης ἦτο ἡ ἀπέραντος μνήμη του. Ἐνεθυμῆτο λεπτομερῶς ὄχι μόνον αὐτὰ τὰ ὁποῖα ἐμελέτα, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅσα ἤκουσεν ἀπὸ τοὺς διδασκάλους του πρὶν δεκαετιῶν. Ἐκείνον δὲ τὸν ὁποῖον ἐξετίμα ἰδιαίτερος, ὡς εἶπομεν ἀνωτέρω, καὶ ἠκολούθει εἰς πολλὰ ἦτο ὁ φίλος καὶ ἐμνευστῆς του Φώτιος Κόντογλου. Ὑπάρχουν εἰς τὸ ἀρχεῖον του μεταφρασμένα εἰς τὴν Ἀγγλικὴν καὶ ἔτοιμα πρὸς ἔκδοσιν πολλὰ ἔργα τοῦ Φωτίου ὡς καὶ λεπτομερῆς λαμπρὰ βιογραφία του. Τὸν ἐθεώρει ἄνθρωπον στερεόν, ἀκλόνητον καὶ γνήσιον τέκνον τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ. Καὶ ἡμεῖς νομίζομεν ὅτι εὐρίσκειται εἰς τὴν σειρὰν Παπαδιαμάντης – Κόντογλου – Καβαρνός.

Ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος εἶναι ὁ νέος ἅγιος τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν ἀλλὰ καὶ Ἀγγλικῶν γραμμάτων. Καὶ ὡς ἐκεῖνοι οὕτω καὶ ὁ σεβαστὸς διδάσκαλος ἦτο γνώστης τῆς Βυζαντινῆς μουσικῆς καὶ συνέγραψεν τρεῖς ἐργασίας περὶ αὐτῆς. Οὕτω ὅσα ἐγράψεν θεωρητικῶς τὰ ἐφήρμοξε πρακτικῶς. Ἐπὶ δεκαετίας ἔψαλλεν εἰς τὸν Ἱερόν μας Ναὸν μελωδικώτατα καὶ κατανυκτικώτατα καὶ εἰς Ἁγιορειτικὸν ὕφος κατὰ τὰς Κυριακὰς καὶ μεγάλας ἑορτὰς καὶ εἰς ἄλλας ἱερὰς ἀκολουθίας.

Ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος ἦτο ἀνθρωπος τῆς προσευχῆς. Ἐκτὸς τῆς δημοσίας λατρευτικῆς προσευχῆς ἐφρόντιζεν καὶ διὰ τὴν κατ' ἰδίαν προσευχὴν πρὸς καλλιέργειαν καὶ τροφήν τῆς ψυχῆς του. Ἀπαραιτήτως κάθε πρωτὶ μετὰ τὴν ἔγερσιν ἐκ τῆς κλίνης εὐρίσκειν δίπλα του τὸ

ἀναλόγιον μὲ τὸ βιβλίον Ὁρολόγιον τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ἀνεγίνωσκεν τὸ συναξάριον, τὸ ἀπολυτίκιον, τὸ κοντάκιον καὶ τὸ μεγαλυνάριον τῶν ἑορταζομένων ἁγίων. Τὸ ἴδιον ἐποίει καὶ κατὰ τὸ ἑσπέρας. Δηλαδή τὸ σπουδαστήριόν του μετετρέπετο καὶ εἰς κατ' οἶκον Ἐκκλησίαν. Ἐπὶ τῶν τοίχων τῶν δωματίων τῆς οἰκίας του ἦσαν ἀνηρτημένα ἱερὰ εἰκόνες προερχόμεναι ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν τοῦ μέντορός του Φωτίου Κόντογλου καὶ ἄλλων ἁγιογράφων. Πάντοτε δὲ ἐφρόντιζε νὰ εὐρίσκειται ἀνημμένη ἀκοίμητος κανδήλα πρὸ τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ τῆς Ἁγίας Θεοτόκου.

Ὅσοι δὲ ἐπεσκέπτοντο αὐτὸν διὰ συμβουλὴν ἢ ἄλλα θέματα ἠσθάνοντο, ὅτι ἐδῶ ἐγεύοντο τὴν ὑπαρξιν ἐνὸς ἄλλου κόσμου, ἐδῶ ἔπνεε ἄρωμα τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας μας, διὸ καὶ αἱ συζητήσεις ἐλάμβανον τόνον σε μὲν καὶ κατανυκτικόν. Ἀπὸ δὲ τὰ εὐλογημένα χεῖλη του ἠκούετο πολλάκις ἡ εὐχή: «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ ἐλέησόν με». Ἐδῶ εὐρίσκει κανεὶς ἓνα βυζαντινὸν χριστιανικὸν οἶκον μὲ ὀρθοδόξους ἐνοίκους. Ἦκουσα πολλάκις τὸν χαρακτηρισμὸν αὐτὸν ἀπὸ πολλοὺς ἐπισκέπτας του. Οἱ δὲ ἐπισκέπται οὗτοι ἐλάμβανον μεθ' ἑαυτῶν φεύγοντες, ἐκτὸς τῆς κατανύξεως καὶ ψυχικῆς γαλήνης, καὶ δῶρα τινὰ ἐκ τῶν βιβλίων του.

Περὶ τοῦ τρόπου τῆς νηστείας του τί νὰ εἴπωμεν; Ἦτο φοβερὸς εἰς τὸ θέμα τοῦτο. Ἦτο τηρητῆς ὄχι μόνον τῆς φιλανθρωποῦ ἐκκλησιαστικῆς νηστείας, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς αὐστηροτέρας ἰατρικῆς τοιαύτης. Ὡς προητοιμασμένος ἀρχικῶς νὰ σπουδάσῃ τὴν ἰατρικὴν ἐπιστήμην ἦτο ἐνήμερος περὶ ὅλων ἐκείνων τῶν βλαπτικῶν τροφῶν καὶ τὰς ἀπέφευγεν ὅσον ἦτο δυνατόν. Πάντως ἦτο λιτοδίαιτος ἀκολουθῶν τὴν ἀγωγὴν τῶν προγόνων μας ἰατρῶν καὶ δὴ τῶν Ἱπποκράτους καὶ Γαληνοῦ, οἵτινες ἐτόνιζον τὸ «πᾶν μέτρον ἄριστον», «τὸ μηδὲν ἄγαν» καὶ «τὸ σῶμα λέπτυνον», δηλαδή τὴν προληπτικὴν ἰατρικὴν (preventive medicine). Ὅταν δὲ ἐπρόκειτο νὰ συγγράψῃ κάτι σπουδαῖον ἢ νὰ δώσῃ κάποιαν διάλεξιν ἐτήρει αὐστηρὰν νηστείαν διὰ νὰ ἔχη διαυγῆ νοῦν. Εἰργάζετο νυχθημερόν. Εἰς τὴν προτροπὴν μας νὰ παύσῃ ὀλίγον ἐργαζόμενος καὶ εὖρη ὀλίγην ἀνάπαυσιν ἔλεγεν ὅτι ἠσθάνετο κούρασιν μὴ ἐργαζόμενος, ἐνῶ μὲ τὴν ἐργασίαν εὐρίσκειν ξεκούρασιν καὶ μεγάλην πνευματικὴν εὐφορίαν καὶ χαρὰν.

Εἰς τὴν ἐργασίαν καὶ εἰς τὰς ἀνάγκας του ἦτο αὐτάρκης, μὴ στηριζόμενος εἰς τὰς δυνάμεις καὶ βοήθειαν ἄλλων προσώπων. Εἰς τὴν μακρὰν σταδιοδρομίαν του ἔσχεν γνωριμίαν καὶ συνεργασίαν μετὰ πλειάδος ἡγετικῶν ἐκκλησιαστικῶν προσωπικοτήτων ἐνταῦθα καὶ ἐν Ἑλλάδι. Ἐξετίμα δὲ ἰδιαίτερος τοὺς πατέρας Γαβριὴλ Διονυσιάτην καὶ Φιλόθεον Ζερβάκον, εἰς τοὺς ὁποίους κατὰ καιροὺς ἐξωμολογεῖτο καὶ διὰ τοὺς ὁποίους συνέγραψεν καὶ ἐξέδωκεν εἰς τὴν σειρὰν «Σύγχρονοι Ὁρθόδοξοι Ἅγιοι» (Modern Orthodox Saints) δύο

τόμους περὶ τῆς ἁγίας βιοτῆς καὶ τοῦ πνευματικοῦ ἔργου αὐτῶν ἐν τῇ Ὁρθοδόξῳ Ἐκκλησίᾳ.

Πολλοὶ ἐκ τῶν συνεργα τῶν καὶ φίλων του προ ἔτρεπον τὸν Κωνσταντῖνον νὰ μεταβῆ καὶ ἐγκαταθῆ εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα, ἀλλὰ ὑπερίσχυσεν ἡ γνώμη ἐκείνων, οἵτινες προέτρεπον αὐτὸν νὰ παραμείνῃ εἰς τὴν Ἀμερικὴν καὶ συνεχίσῃ νὰ θέτῃ στερεὰ θεμέλια διὰ τῶν συγγραμμάτων αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν Ὁρθόδοξον Ἐκκλησίαν ἐνταῦθα, ὅπερ καὶ ἐποίησεν. Διὰ τοῦτο σήμερον ὅπου καὶ νὰ κοιτάξῃ κανεὶς εἰς τὸ διαδίκτυον βλέπει μετὰ χαρᾶς πολλοὶ νὰ χρησιμοποιοῦν τὰ ἔργα καὶ τὰς ἰδέας του.

Εἶχε πρόγραμμα καὶ διάθεσιν νὰ προετοιμάξῃ καὶ ἀποστέλῃ τὰ ἔργα του εἰς διαφόρους βιβλιοθήκας τῆς Ἀμερικῆς καὶ τῆς Ἑλλάδος. Οὕτω ἐτύπωνε καὶ ὠρισμένον ἀριθμὸν ἀντιτύπων ἐκάστου βιβλίου πανοδέτων εἰδικῶς διὰ τὰς βιβλιοθήκας. Καὶ μετὰ τῶν βιβλιοθηκῶν αἱ ὁποῖαι ἠγόραζον τὰ βιβλία του ἦσαν καὶ αἱ ἐξῆς εἰς τὰς ὁποίας ὁ ἴδιος ἀπέστελλεν τὰ βιβλία δωρεάν: Ἡ βιβλιοθήκη τῆς πόλεως Μπέλμοντ, τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Harvard, τῆς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ, τῆς Βουλῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων, τῆς Μαρσσελίου Ἀμερικανικῆς Ἀθηνῶν, τῆς Μητροπόλεως καὶ τῆς πόλεως Μυτιλήνης, τοῦ Πλωμαρίου, τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριαρχείου Κωνσταντινου πόλεως, καὶ πολλῶν Ἱερῶν Μονῶν τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὄρους καὶ ἐν ταῦθα.

Ὁ καθηγητὴς Κωνσταντῖνος ἔζη τὴν μοναχικὴν ζωὴν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ καὶ πρὶν γίνῃ μοναχὸς εἰς τὸ μοναστήρι τῆς μεναοῖας του, τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἀντωνίου ἐν Ἀριζόνα, ὅπου τώρα ἀναπαύεται τὸ σκῆνωμά του, διὸ καὶ πολλοὶ ἀπεκάλουν αὐτὸν κοσμοκαλόγερον.

Ἡμεῖς πιστεύομεν ἀκραδάντως ὅτι ἠτοιμάσθη ἐκ τῆς Θεῆς Προνοίας ἐκ νεαρᾶς ἡλικίας καὶ ἐδωρῆθη εἰς τὴν Ὁρθόδοξον Ἐκκλησίαν, διὰ νὰ διαλάβῃ εἰς τὸν πνευματικὸν ἀγῶνα, νὰ καταστῆ νέος ἅγιος, ὁ πρῶτος Ἑλληνοαμερικανός, ὁ νέος ἀγιορείτης Νικόδημος τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας μας ἐν Ἀμερικῇ.

Ὁ μέγας εἰς τὴν σκέψιν, ὁ ἀπλοῦς εἰς τὴν ζωὴν Κωνσταντῖνος, ἐπλούτισεν τὴν Ὁρθοδοξίαν καὶ τὸν Ἑλληνισμὸν διὰ τῶν συγγραμμάτων του. Θὰ γίνῃ αἰσθητὴ ἡ ἀπουσία του ἀπὸ ἀνάμεσά μας, ἀλλὰ συγχρόνως θὰ πληροῖ καὶ τὴν καρδίαν ὄλων χαρᾶς, διότι ὄντως εὐρίσκεται εἰς τὰς ἀγκάλας τοῦ Κυρίου μας, ἐν χώρᾳ ζώντων, ἔχων παρρησίαν ἐνώπιον Αὐτοῦ καὶ πρὸς βεβύλων ὑπὲρ πάντων.

Ἄς εἶναι ἑλαφρὸν τὸ χῶμα τὸ καλύπτει τὸ ἡγιασμένον σκῆνωμά του καὶ νὰ εἶναι βέβαιος ὅτι τὸ ἱερόν του ἔργον ὡς διδασκάλου θὰ συνεχίζεται διὰ μέσου τῶν φίλων, φοιτητῶν καὶ μαθητῶν του καὶ τῶν μυριάδων ἀναγνωστῶν τῶν βιβλίων του καὶ ὅτι θὰ πολλαπλασιάζεται εἰς τὸ διηνεκές. Αἰωνία σου ἡ μνήμη σεβαστὲ καὶ πεφιλημένε ἅγιε διδάσκαλε.

Ἁγία Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ

Ἡ πλέον Παρεξηγημένη καὶ Συκοφαντημένη Ἁγία Γυναίκα τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης

Τοῦ θεολόγου καὶ ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ ἱστορικοῦ – νομικοῦ Ἰωάννη Σιδηρᾶ.

Τὸ παρὸν κείμενον ἀποτελεῖ μίαν προσπάθειαν συνοπτικῆς ἐνημερώσεως τῶν ἀναγνωστῶν μας γὰρ τὸ ἐξ' ἀγνοίας καὶ ἀμάθειας σπιλωμένο καὶ δυσφημισμένο πρόσωπο Ἁγίας Μαρίας τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς. Τὰ εὐαγγέλια καὶ ἡ ὑμνογραφία τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου ἐκκλησίας μας θὰ καθοδηγήσουν τὴν γραφίδα μας.

† † †

Μεταξὺ τῶν γυναικῶν, οἱ ὁποῖες περιλαμβάνονται ἐν τῇ Καινῇ Διαθήκῃ, ἡ Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ καταλαμβάνει περιφανῆ θέσιν. Εἶναι γυναίκα «θαυμασία», κατὰ τὸν χαρακτηρισμὸν τοῦ Νικηφόρου Καλλίστου Ξανθοπούλου. Στὴν δὲ ζωὴν τῆς ὑπάρχουσιν πολλὰ θαυμαστά, ὅπως ὁ θαυμαστὸς τρόπος τῆς ἀπαλλαγῆς τῆς ἐκ τῶν ἑπτὰ δαιμονίων, ἡ θαυμαστὴ προσήλωση καὶ διακονία τῆς πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ θαυμαστὴ ἀγάπη καὶ τόλμη, τὴν ὁποία ἐπέδειξε κατὰ τὴν σταύρωση τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ κατὰ τὴν ἐπίσκεψιν τῆς στοῦ κενὸ μνημεῖο του.

Τὸ πρόσωπο τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς κατέλαβε σπουδαία θέσιν στὶς σελίδες τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς γραμματείας καὶ τῆς ὑμνογραφίας τῆς Ἀνατολῆς καὶ τῆς Δύσεως, ἐπέρασε ἀκόμη καὶ στὴ σφαῖρα τοῦ θρύλου. Ἐθαυμάσθη καὶ ἐξυμνήθη ὑπὸ πολλῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ παρεξηγήθη καὶ ἐσπιλώθη. Ὑπῆρξε, ὄντως, γὰρ πολλοὺς – τοὺς κυρίως ἁδαιεῖς – ἡ πέτρα τοῦ σκανδάλου.

Ἀπὸ τὰ κακόβουλα μυθεύματα τῆς ραββινικῆς φιλολογίας μέχρι καὶ τῶν μυθιστορημάτων τῆς ἐποχῆς μας, τὸ πρόσωπο τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς ἔγινε ἀντικείμενον βαναύσου δυσφημίσεως καὶ αἰσχροῦ κατασυκοφαντήσεως.

Ἔτσι, οἱ ἄτοπες καὶ φαντασιόπληκτες τῶν δῆθεν ἐμπνευσμένων ζωγράφων εἰκόνες τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς, ὡς πόρνης μετανοούσης, τὰ διάφορα μυθιστορήματα καὶ κινηματογραφικὰ ἔργα, ὅπως καὶ ἡ προσωνυμία τῶν κακόφημων γυναικῶν μὲ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς ἁγίας ἰσαποστόλου Μαρίας τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς, συντηροῦν μέχρι καὶ σήμερον τὴν πεπλανημένην γνώμην περὶ αὐτῆς. Γι' αὐτὸ ἐπαληθεύεται ἡ ρῆσις τοῦ ἀεμνήστου κ. Δυοβουνιώτη, ὅτι «ἡ δυσφημία καὶ ὅταν ἀκόμη εἶναι ψευδής, δυσκόλως ἐξαλείφεται ἀκόμη καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἴδιους τοὺς Ἁγίους».

Ἡ Ἁγία Ἰσαπόστολος Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ κατήγετο ἀπὸ τὴν Κώμην Μαγδαλᾶ ἐξ' οὗ καὶ ἡ ὀνομασία αὐτῆς «Μαγδαληνὴ». Προφανῶς ἡ Μαρία Μαγδαληνὴ ἐγνώρισε τὸν Ἰησοῦ κατὰ τὴν μετάβασίν του εἰς τὰ ὄρια τῆς κώμης Μαγδαλᾶν (Μαγδαλᾶ). Ἡ φήμη τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ὡς διδασκάλου καὶ θεραπευτοῦ ὁδήγησε τὰ βήματα τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς νὰ συναντήσῃ τὸν Χριστό, ὁ ὁποῖος τὴν

ἐθεράπευσε καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν στιγμή ἐκείνη τὸν ἀκολούθησε καὶ ἔγινε μαθήτριά του.

Σχετικὰ μὲ τὴν δράση τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς στὴ Γαλιλαία ἐλάχιστες πληροφορίες ἔχουμε. Οἱ περισσότερες πληροφορίες τῶν Εὐαγγελιστῶν γιὰ τὴν Μαγδαληνὴ ἀναφέρονται στὴν δράση αὐτῆς στὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα. Βασικὰ δὲ γεγονότα στὰ ὁποῖα μαρτυρεῖται ἡ παρουσία τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς ἀπὸ ὄλους τοὺς Εὐαγγελιστὲς εἶναι ἡ σταύρωση ἐπὶ τοῦ Γολγοθᾶ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ ἡ συμμετοχὴ τῆς στὸ γεγονός τῆς Ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Κυρίου, ὅταν ἐπεσκέφθη τὸ κενὸ μνημεῖο αὐτοῦ.

Σὲ διάφορες ἄλλες σποραδικὲς περιπτώσεις οἱ Εὐαγγελιστὲς ἀναφέρουν πρῶτο τὸ ὄνομα τῆς ὁσίας Μαρίας τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς μεταξὺ τῶν ὑπολοίπων γυναικῶν. Ὑπάρχουν ὅμως καὶ περιστατικὰ στὰ ὁποῖα Μαρία ἢ Μαγδαληνὴ μνημονεύεται μόνη τῆς. Ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς Ἰωάννης συγκεκριμένα ἀναφέρει:

1) Ὅτι αὐτὴ ἦλθε πολὺ πρῶτὴ στὸ μνημεῖο καὶ εἶδε ἀπομακρυσμένο τὸν λίθο τοῦ μνημείου.

2) Ὅτι ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ ἔσπευσε καὶ ἀνήγγειλε στὸν Πέτρο καὶ τὸν Ἰωάννη ὅτι ἀπεμάκρυναν τὸν Κύριο ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου.

3) Ὅτι ἡ Μαρία Μαγδαληνὴ ἐνῶ ἴστατο πρὸ τοῦ μνημείου κλαίουσα καὶ συνομιλοῦσε μὲ τοὺς ἀγγέλους, εἶδε καὶ ἄκουσε τὸν Ἰησοῦ, νομίζοντας μάλιστα ὅτι εἶναι κηπουρός. Ἀργότερα δὲ ἀναγνωρίζοντας αὐτόν, τὸν προσεκύνησε καὶ ἐνῶ ἀπεπειράθη νὰ τὸν ἀγγίξει ἄκουσε τὸ γνωστὸ «μὴ μου ἅπτου» καὶ ἔλαβε τὴν ἐντολὴ νὰ πληροφορήσει τὸ γεγονός τῆς Ἀναστάσεως στοὺς μαθητές.

Μέγα ζήτημα ὅμως γεννᾶται κατὰ πόσο Μαρία ἢ Μαγδαληνὴ ταυτίζεται μὲ κάποια ἐκ τῶν δύο γυναικῶν ποὺ ἤλειψαν τοὺς πόδες τοῦ Ἰησοῦ μὲ μύρο, ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ τὸ ἐὰν εἶναι ἡ πόρνη γυναίκα ποὺ εὐεργετήθηκε ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ.

Ἡ πλάνη λοιπὸν περὶ τῆς Μαρίας τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς ἔχει τὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς στὴν κακόβουλη, χριστόμαχη καὶ θεόμαχη ραββινικὴ φιλολογία, ἡ ὁποία παρουσιάζει συκοφαντικῶς τὴν Μαγδαληνὴ ὡς μοιχαλίδα. Τὸ δὲ γεγονός ἐπιπλέον τῆς μυρώσεως τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀπὸ μία γυναίκα κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια κάποιου δείπνου, ἀπετέλεσε τελείως αὐθαίρετα τὴν βάση γιὰ τὴν ταύτιση αὐτῆς μὲ κάποιο ἄλλο γυναικεῖο πρόσωπο. Σημειωτέον ἐν προκειμένῳ ὅτι τὸ γεγονός τῆς μυρώσεως τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἱστοροῦν καὶ οἱ τέσσερις εὐαγγελιστές.

Ἔτσι, ἐταυτίσθη τελείως αὐθαίρετα ἡ μυραλείψασα τὸν Ἰησοῦ ἁμαρτωλὴ γυναίκα στὴν διήγηση τοῦ Εὐαγγελιστοῦ Λουκᾶ (7:36-50), κατ' ἀρχὰς μὲν πρὸς

τὴν Μαρία, τὴν ἀδελφὴ τῆς Μάρθας καὶ τοῦ Λαζάρου, ἐπειδὴ ὁμοιάζουν περιγραφικὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τῶν δυὸ μυρώσεων, ἀργότερα ὅμως ἐταυτίσθη πρὸς τὴν Μαρία τὴν Μαγδαληνὴ, ἐπειδὴ αὐτὴ πάντοτε ἐξεδήλωνε ἐνθουσιωδῶς τὴν εὐγνωμοσύνη τῆς πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦ, τὸν ὁποῖο ἀκολουθοῦσε παντοῦ καὶ πάντοτε. Ἐφθασε μάλιστα ἡ ραββινικὴ ὑπουλὴ φιλολογία νὰ γράψει ὅτι ἡ ἀπαλλαγὴ τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς ἀπὸ τὰ ἑπτὰ δαιμόνια ἦταν στὴν πραγματικότητά ἡ ἀπαλλαγὴ τῆς ἀπὸ τὴν σαρκικὴ ἁμαρτία καὶ ἡ ἐπιστροφή τῆς στὴν ὁδὸ τῆς μετανοίας καὶ τῆς ἀγνότητος. Μεγάλῃ ὄντως φαντασιοπληξία.

Ἔνα εἶναι τὸ γεγονός: ὅτι ὄντως ὑπῆρξαν δυὸ γυναῖκες, οἱ ὁποῖες μυράλειψαν τοὺς παναχράντους πόδες τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ὅτι μία ἐξ' αὐτῶν ὑπῆρξε γυναίκα ἁμαρτωλὴ ποὺ εἶχε μετανοήσει καὶ εἶχε ἀλλάξει βιοτή. Σὲ καμία ὅμως περίπτωση ἡ γυναίκα αὐτὴ, ποὺ τὸ ὄνομά τῆς δὲν μαρτυρεῖται στὰ ἱερὰ εὐαγγέλια, δὲν ταυτίζεται μὲ τὴν ὁσία Μαρία τὴν Μαγδαληνὴ, οὔτε καὶ μὲ τὴν Μαρία, τὴν ἀδελφὴ τοῦ Λαζάρου.

Σημειωτέον ἐν προκειμένῳ ὅτι κατὰ τὸν Στ' αἰῶνα ὁ πάπας τῆς Ρώμης Γρηγόριος ὁ Α' ἐταύτισε τὴν ἁμαρτωλὴ γυναίκα τῆς διηγήσεως τοῦ Λουκᾶ πρὸς τὴν Μαρία τοῦ Λαζάρου καὶ πρὸς τὴν Μαρία τὴν Μαγδαληνὴ. Μέγα λάθος. Ἄλλοι πάλι ἐταύτισαν Μαρία τὴν Μαγδαληνὴ πρὸς τὴν Μαρία, ἀδελφὴ τοῦ Λαζάρου. Καὶ τοῦτο ὅμως εἶναι

τελείως ἀβάσιμο καὶ αὐθαίρετο. Σὲ κάθε περίπτωση Μαρία ἢ Μαγδαληνὴ εἶναι τελείως διάφορο πρόσωπο πρὸς τὶς δυὸ προαναφερθεῖσες γυναῖκες.

Ὅσον ἀφορᾷ τὴν προσωπικότητα τῆς ὁσίας Μαρίας τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς ὑπογραμμίσουμε παραπάνω ὅτι δὲν ὑπῆρξε ἁμαρτωλὴ γυναίκα, ἀλλὰ δαιμονιοζομένη, ποὺ ἐλευθερώθη ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστό. Παρέστη δὲ ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ ὡς μαθήτρια τοῦ Κυρίου σὲ ὅλες σχεδὸν τὶς δημόσιες ἐμφανίσεις του, κατὰ τὴν σταύρωση καὶ τὴν ταφή του, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὸ γεγονός τῆς Ἀναστάσεως κατὰ τὴν ἐπίσκεψή τῆς στὸ κενὸ μνημεῖο τοῦ κυρίου, ὅπου ἐπληροφορήθη τὴν ἀνάστασή του.

Στὰ ἱερὰ εὐαγγέλια βεβαίως δὲν ἀναφέρεται ἐὰν Μαρία ἢ Μαγδαληνὴ ἦταν παρθένος ἢ ἔγγαμος, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴν παράδοση τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου ἐκκλησίας ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ θεωρεῖται παρθένος, διότι στὰ ἱερὰ εὐαγγέλια δὲν ἀναφέρεται ὡς ὑπανδρὸς καὶ μετὰ τέκνων. Ἴσως τοῦτο τὸ γεγονός νὰ ἐξηγεῖ καὶ τὴν συνεχὴ παρουσία αὐτῆς πλησίον τοῦ Ἰησοῦ. Ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν ὑμνογραφία τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου ἀνατολικῆς



Ἐκκλησίας δὲν τίθεται θέμα ἀμαρτωλότητος Μαρίας τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς, οὔτε γάμου αὐτῆς.

Ὁ χαρακτηρισμὸς τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς ὡς «Παρθένου» ἀπαντᾶται καὶ στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη ὑμνογραφία μόνον μιὰ φορὰ στὸ ἀπολυτίκιο αὐτῆς, ποὺ ἀποδίδεται στὸν Ἅγιο Ἰωάννη τὸν Δαμασκηνό. Ὑπάρχει ὁμως καὶ ἄλλος χαρακτηρισμὸς ποὺ ἀποδίδεται στὴν Μαγδαληνή. Ὁ χαρακτηρισμὸς αὐτὸς ἐκφράζεται μὲ τὸν ὄρο «κόρη», ποὺ σημαίνει κοράσιο, παρθένος κοπέλα. Ὁ ὄρος αὐτὸς ἀποδίδεται ἀπὸ τὸν Ρωμανὸ τὸν Μελωδὸ στὴν Μαγδαληνή, σὲ κάποιο ὕμνο του.

Ἀξιοσημείωτο πάντως εἶναι τὸ γεγονός ὅτι ἐπὶ τῆ βάσει τῶν εὐαγγελικῶν μαρτυριῶν πληροφοροῦμεθα τὴν ἐμφάνιση τοῦ Ἀναστάσιου Κυρίου μας πρῶτον ἐνώπιον τῆς Μαρίας Μαγδαληνῆς καὶ ἔπειτα στὶς ὑπόλοιπες μυροφόρους γυναῖκες.

Σύμφωνα λοιπὸν μὲ τὰ παραπάνω, ὅσα γράφονται στὸ πρὸ ὀλίγου καιροῦ τυπωθὲν βιβλίον ὑπὸ τὸν τίτλο «Κώδικας Νταβίντσι» ἀναφορικὰ μὲ τὸ πρόσωπο Μαρίας τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς, καθίστανται μυθεύματα νοσηρῆς φαντασιοπληξίας. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ ἀπεικόνιση τῆς Μαρίας τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς ἀπὸ τὸν γνωστὸ ζωγράφο Λεονάρντο Νταβίντσι μεταξὺ τῶν μαθητῶν κατὰ τὸν Μυστικὸ Δεῖπνο εἶναι ἐπίσης ἀβάσιμη καὶ αὐθαίρετη. Ἐπὶ τόσους αἰῶνες ἡ προπαγάνδα τῆς κακόβουλης ραββινικῆς φιλολογίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀβάσιμες καὶ αὐθαίρετες εἰκασίες τῆς παπικῆς αἰρέσεως ἔχουν παγιώσει στοὺς πιστοὺς μία στρεβλωμένη ἄποψη περὶ τοῦ ἄγνωστοῦ προσώπου τῆς ὁσίας Μαρίας τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς.

Εἶναι δὲ χαρακτηριστικὸ ὅτι τόσο μεγάλη ἄγνοια ἐπικρατεῖ, ὥστε πολλοὶ ταυτίζουν ἀκόμη καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα ποὺ ἀναφέρεται στὸ τροπᾶριο τῆς Κασσιανῆς μὲ τὸ πρόσωπο τῆς Μαγδαληνῆς. Εἰς τὸ τροπᾶριο τῆς Κασσιανῆς ἡ γυναῖκα ποὺ ἀναφέρεται εἶναι ὄντως ἡ ἀμαρτωλὴ ἀνόνηθη γυναῖκα τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου ποὺ μυράλειψε τοὺς πόδες τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀλλὰ σὲ καμία ἀπολύτως περίπτωση ἡ Μαγδαληνή. Τὸ τραγικότερο εἶναι ὅτι οἱ ἀδαεῖς ταυτίζουν καὶ τὸ ὄνομα ἀκόμη τῆς ὑμνογράφου Κασσιανῆς μὲ τὸ πρόσωπο τῆς ἀμαρτωλοῦ γυναίκας, ἐνῶ ἡ ἀλήθεια εἶναι πὼς ἡ Κασσιανὴ συνέγραψε ἀπλῶς τὸ τροπᾶριο λαμβάνοντας ὡς θέμα τὴν μετανοοῦσα ἀμαρτωλὴ γυναῖκα ποὺ μυράλειψε τοὺς πόδες τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Εἶναι ἀκροτάτη συκοφαντία, βλασφημία καὶ ἀμαρτία, νὰ χαρακτηρίζεται ἡ ὁσία Μαρία Μαγδαληνή ὡς πόρνη, ἐνῶ εἶναι μία ἐκ τῶν Ἁγίων γυναικῶν τῆς ἐκκλησίας μας ποὺ ἐορτάζουμε τὴν ἱερὰ μνήμη της στὶς 22 Ἰουλίου ἐκάστου ἔτους. Φαίνεται πάντως πὼς ἐπαληθεύεται ἡ γραφὴ τοῦ ἀειμνήστου κ. Δυοβουνιώτη, ὅτι «**ἡ δυσφημία καὶ ὅταν ἀκόμη εἶναι ψευδῆς, δυσκόλως ἐξαλείφεται ἀκόμη καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἴδιους τοὺς Ἁγίους**».

Ἀπολυτίκιον

Ἦχος α΄. Τὸν τάφον σου Σωτήρ.

Χριστῶ τῷ δι' ἡμᾶς, ἐκ Παρθένου τεχθέντι, Σεμνῇ Μαγδαληνῇ, ἠκολούθεις Μαρία, αὐτοῦ τὰ δικαιώματα, καὶ τοὺς νόμους φυλάττουσα, ὅθεν σήμερον, τὴν παναγίαν σου μνήμην, ἐορτάζοντες, ἀνευφημοῦμέν σε πίστει, καὶ πόθῳ γεραίρομεν.

Κοντάκιον

Ἦχος δ΄. Ὁ ὑψωθεῖς.

Ὁ ὑπερούσιος Θεὸς ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ, μετὰ σαρκὸς ἐπιφοιτῶν Μυροφόρε, σὲ ἀληθῆ Μαθήτριαν προσήκατο, ὅλην σου τὴν ἔφεσιν, πρὸς αὐτὸν κεκτημένην, ὅθεν καὶ ἰάματα, ἀπετέλεσας πλεῖστα καὶ μεταστάσα νῦν ἐν οὐρανοῖς, ὑπὲρ τοῦ κόσμου πρεσβεύεις ἐκάστοτε.

Ὁ Οἶκος

Τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου ὁ Χριστὸς, ἀνύστακτον ἰδὼν σου, τῆς πίστεως τὸ ἄμμα, ἀγάπης τε τὸ φίλτρον τὸ ἀναπόσπαστον Σεμνῇ, πρώτη ἐμφανίζει ἐαυτὸν σοι, ἀναστὰς ἐκ τοῦ μνημείου, ὡκιστα ἐλθούση μετὰ μύρων, καὶ προσιούση σὺν δάκρυσι τῷ ἀπροσπελάστῳ, καὶ αὐτὸς σοι ἀμειβόμενος, τὴν τοῦ Πνεύματος θείαν ἐνέργειαν δωρεῖται, καὶ τῆς πρὸς τὸν ἀναρχον Πατέρα ἀνόδου ἐμφανίζει σοι βουλήν καὶ πέμπει δὲ σε, θεία εὐαγγέλια τοῖς κατεπηχόσι Μύσταις τῆς αὐτοῦ ἐγέρσεως ἀπαγγεῖλαι. Διὸ μεγίστην πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔχουσα παρρησίαν, ὑπὲρ τοῦ κόσμου πρεσβεύεις ἐκάστοτε.



Λοιπὸν, ἔτσι πράγματι πρέπει νὰ βλέπομαι τὸ Χριστό. Εἶναι φίλος μας, εἶναι ἀδελφός μας, εἶναι ὅ,τι καλὸ καὶ ὠραῖο. Εἶναι τὸ Πᾶν. Ἀλλὰ εἶναι φίλος καὶ τὸ φωνάζει: «Σᾶς ἔχω φίλους, βρέ, δὲν τὸ καταλαβαίνετε; Εἴμαστε ἀδελφία. Βρὲ ἐγὼ δὲν εἶμαι... δὲν βαστάω τὴν κόλαση στὸ χέρι, δὲν σᾶς φοβερίζω, σᾶς ἀγαπᾶω. Σᾶς θέλω νὰ χαίρεστε μαζί μου τὴ ζωή».

Κατάλαβες; Ἔτσι εἶναι ὁ Χριστός. Δὲν ἔχει κατήφεια, οὔτε μελαγχολία, οὔτε ἐνδοστρέφεια, ποὺ ὁ ἄνθρωπος σκέπτεται ἢ βασανίζεται ἀπὸ διάφορους λογισμοὺς καὶ διάφορες πιέσεις, ποὺ κατὰ καιροὺς στὴ ζωὴ τοῦ τὸν τραυμάτισαν.

Ὅταν ἐμεῖς βρῖσκουμε κάποιον θησαυρὸ ἢ ὅ,τι ἄλλο, δὲν θέλομε νὰ τὸ λέμε πουθενά. Ὁ Χριστιανὸς ὁμως, ὅταν βρεῖ τὸ Χριστό, ὅταν γνωρίσει τὸν Χριστό, ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς ἐγκύψει μέσα στὴν ψυχούλα του καὶ τὸν αἰσθανθεῖ, θέλει νὰ φωνάζει καὶ νὰ τὸ λέει παντοῦ, θέλει νὰ λέει γιὰ τὸ Χριστό, τί εἶναι ὁ Χριστός. Ἀγαπήσατε τὸ Χριστὸν καὶ μηδὲν προτιμήσατε τῆς ἀγάπης Αὐτοῦ. Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι τὸ πᾶν, εἶναι ἡ πηγὴ τῆς ζωῆς, εἶναι τὸ ἄκρον τῶν ἐφετῶν, εἶναι τὸ Πᾶν. Ὅλα στὸ Χριστὸ ὑπάρχουν τὰ ὠραῖα.

Γέροντας Πορφύριος(+1991)

Τὸ Κράτος εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα Ἀνεγείρει Τζαμιὰ, Ἐνῶ εἰς τὴν Ρωσσίαν Ἱερους Ναοὺς

Ὁ δήμαρχος Μόσχας παραχωρεῖ οἰκόπεδα εἰς τὸ Πατριαρχεῖον, διὰ νὰ ἀνεγείρῃ Ἐκκλησίας καὶ νὰ τὰς ἔχη «ἀνοικτάς» εἰς τοὺς νέους!

Εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα τὸ Κράτος, ἡ κομματοκρατία, ἡ δὴμαρχοι, δημοσιογράφοι βάλλουν ἐναντίον τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, κάμνουν ὅ,τι δύνανται διὰ τὴν ἀπομάκρυνσιν τῶν Θρησκευτικῶν συμβόλων ἀπὸ τὰ δημόσια κτήρια, ζητοῦν τὴν ὑπερφορολόγησιν καὶ τὴν ἀρπαγὴν τῆς Ἐκκλησιαστικῆς Περιουσίας, γλευάζουν τὸ αἷμα διὰ τὴν ἐκπλήρωσιν τοῦ Τάματος τῶν Ἀγωνιστῶν τοῦ 1821, προπαγανδίζουσι τὴν ἀνέγερσιν Τεμένους καὶ Τζαμιῶν εἰς ὀλόκληρον τὴν Ἑλλάδα μὲ χρήματα τοῦ ὑποτιθεμένου χρεοκοπημένου κράτους καὶ ὁ Δήμαρχος Ἀθηναίων ἀπαγορεύει τὸ «Χριστὸς Ἄνεστη».

Τὴν ἰδίαν στιγμὴν ὁ Δήμαρχος Μόσχας ἀνεκοίνωσεν ὅτι θὰ παραχωρήσῃ οἰκόπεδα διὰ τὴν ἀνέγερσιν Ἱερῶν Ὁρθοδόξων Ναῶν, τοὺς ὁποίους ἡ Ἐκκλησία θὰ πρέπη νὰ ἀνοίξῃ εἰς τοὺς νέους, διότι πιστεύει ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησία δύναται νὰ ἐπιλύσῃ πολλὰ προβλήματα τῶν νέων. Εἰς σχετικὴν ἀνταπόκρισιν τοῦ Ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ Πρακτορείου Εἰδήσεων «amen» ἐκ τῆς Μόσχας:

Σύμφωνα μὲ τὸν Πατριάρχῃ Κύριλλο, ἡ Μόσχα θὰ ἀποτελέσει τὸ παράδειγμα γιὰ ὀλόκληρη τὴ Χώρα ὥστε νὰ ἀλλάξῃ σύνολη ἡ εἰκόνα τῆς κοινωνίας γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία. Ὁ Δήμαρχος τῆς Μόσχας ζήτησε οἱ ἐκκλησίες νὰ ἀνοιχθοῦν στοὺς νέους, καὶ νὰ μὴ ἀποτελέσουν μόνον τόπο προσευχῆς. «Δὲν πρόκειται νὰ ὑπάρξῃ καμμία καθυστέρηση ἢ ἐμπόδιο» στὸ σχέδιο ἀνέγερσιν 200 Ὁρθοδόξων ἐκκλησιῶν στὴ Μόσχα, διαβεβαίωσε τὸ Πατριαρχεῖο ὁ Δήμαρχος τῆς Ρωσσικῆς Πρωτεύουσας κ. Σέργιος Σοβιάνιν τὴν 29ῃ Ἀπριλίου μετὰ τὴν ἐπίλυση ὀρισμένων διαφορῶν, ποὺ ἐπηρεασθήσαν τῆς ἐγκρισῆς ἀνέγερσιν νέων τόπων λατρείας. «Τώρα πρέπει νὰ προχωρήσουμε εἰς τὴν φάσιν ὑλοποιήσεως, δηλ. σχεδιασμοῦ καὶ οἰκοδόμησιν τῶν νέων ἐκκλησιῶν», τόνισε ὁ Δήμαρχος, θέτοντας τὰ θεμέλια ἐνδὸς ἐκ τῶν πρώτων Ἱ. Ναῶν ποὺ οἰκοδομοῦνται κοντὰ στὸ Θέατρο Νουμπρόβκα ὅπου τὸ 2002 ἡ κατάληψις ἀπὸ Τσετσένους τρομοκράτες κατέληξε σὲ αἰματοκύλισμα μὲ τὴν ἐπέμβαση τῶν Ρωσσικῶν δυνάμεων ἀσφαλείας.

Μέχρι σήμερον ὁ Δήμος Μόσχας παρεχώρησε εἰς τὴν Ὁρθόδοξον Ἐκκλησίαν 15 οἰκόπεδα καὶ σύντομα θὰ παραχωρήσῃ ἄλλα πέντε. Ἔργασίαι ἔχουν ἤδη ξεκινήσει σὲ ἄλλα 80 σημεῖα, προσέθεσε ὁ Δήμαρχος. «Μὲ τὸ τέλος τοῦ χρόνου—δήλωσε ὁ κ. Σοβιάνιν—θὰ ξεκινήσουν ἐργασίαι γιὰ ἄλλες 8 ἢ 9 ἐκκλησίας». Ἀπὸ πλευρᾶς τοῦ ὁ Πατριάρχῃς Μόσχας καὶ πάσης Ρωσσίας Κύριλλος τόνισε πὺς «200 ἐκκλησίες δὲν ἀρκοῦν, γιὰ νὰ ἐπιλύσουν συνολικὰ τὸ πρόβλημα, ἀλλὰ ἡ κατάσταση

θὰ ἀλλάξῃ ριζικὰ, διότι θὰ ἔχουμε τὴ δυνατότητα νὰ διακονήσουμε ἀνθρώπους σὲ ἐκκλησίες, οἱ ὁποῖες θὰ εὐρίσκονται πλέον σὲ κοντινὴ ἀπόστασις».

Γιὰ τὸ Ρωσσικὸ Κράτος, ἡ στήριξις τῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἶναι ἰδιαίτερος σημαντικὴ, γιὰ τὴν καταπολέμησιν πολλῶν κοινωνικῶν προβλημάτων, ὅπως ὁ ἀλκοολισμὸς, ἡ ἐθνοτικὴ βία, οἱ ἐκτρώσεις καὶ οἱ ἀμβλώσεις. Γι' αὐτὸ τὸ λόγο ὁ Δήμαρχος Σοβιάνιν κάλεσε τὴν ἐκκλησιαστικὴν ἡγεσίαν νὰ καταστήσῃ τις ἐκκλησίες ὄχι μονάχα χώρους προσευχῆς, ἀλλὰ ἐπίσης χώρους συνάντησιν καὶ στήριξις γιὰ τοὺς νέους ἀνθρώπους καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ποὺ χρῆζονται ἀρωγῆς καὶ βοήθειας. Κατὰ τὸν Πατριάρχῃ Κύριλλο, ἡ Μόσχα θὰ λειτουργήσῃ ὡς παράδειγμα γιὰ ἄλλες περιοχὰς τῆς Ρωσσίας καὶ «ἂν ἐπιτύχουμε εἰς τὴν ὑλοποίησιν αὐτοῦ τοῦ προγράμματος, σύνολη ἡ θρησκευτικὴ εἰκόνα τῆς Ρωσσίας θὰ μεταλλαχθεῖ ριζικὰ».

Σύμφωνα μὲ στοιχεῖα τοῦ Πατριαρχείου, ἡ ἀναλογία μεταξὺ τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ Ἱ. Ναῶν καὶ Ὁρθοδόξων πιστῶν εἰς τὴν Μόσχα εἶναι ἓνας Ἱ. Ναὸς γιὰ κάθε 35 χιλιάδες κατοίκων καὶ σὲ ὀρισμένα δημοτικὰ διαμερίσματα γιὰ κάθε 150 ἢ καὶ 200 χιλιάδες κατοίκων. Ἀπὸ τὴν πτώσιν τοῦ ἀθείστου κομμουνιστικοῦ καθεστώτος στὶς ἀρχὰς τῆς δεκαετίας τοῦ 1990 μέχρι σήμερον ἔχουν ἐπισκευασθεῖ καὶ ἐκ βάθρων ἀνεγερθεῖ εἰς τὴν ἐπικράτειαν τῆς Ρωσσίας περισσότερες ἀπὸ 23.000 ἐκκλησίες, ποὺ ἔχουν ἀλλάξῃ ριζικὰ τὴν θρησκευτικὴν εἰκόνα τῆς πάσαις ποτὲ μητέρας τοῦ σύγχρονου ἀθείστου.



Τὰ πρῶτα χρόνια ποὺ γνωρίσαμε τὸν παπα-Ἐφραίμ τὸν Κατουνακιώτη, ἀγωνιζόταν μὲ πολλὴ ζήλοσιν εἰς τὴν προσευχὴν. Μιὰ βραδιὰ ἔπεσε εἰς τὸ κρεβάτι νὰ ξεκουραστῇ λίγο καὶ μετὰ νὰ σηκωθῇ γιὰ ἀγρυπνία. Οἱ δαίμονες πολλὴν φθόνον εἶχαν μέσα τους. Ἡ προσευχὴ τοῦ πάπα Ἐφραίμ ἦταν φωτιὰ. Ἔρχονται λοιπὸν, ἓνας ὀλόκληρος λεγεώνας, ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ κελί του καὶ ἀρχίζουν φωνές.

Ἐυπνὰ τὸ καλογέρι φοβισμένο. Βάζει αὐτὴν, κατάλαβε δαίμονες εἶναι. Ὅλοι μαζί μὲ μιὰ φωνή: « Πόλεμος – Πόλεμος...». Νόμιζαν ὅτι θὰ τρομάξῃ.

Ὅμως τί κάνει τὸ καλογέρι; Σηκώνεται ἀπὸ τὸ κρεβάτι σὺν ἀστραπή. Ἀρπάζει τὸ τρακοσάρι (κομποσοκίον), καὶ τοὺς ἀπαντᾷ καὶ αὐτὸς μὲ θάρρος καὶ δυνατὰ. «Ναὶ – ναὶ! Πόλεμος – Πόλεμος...».

Καὶ δώστου ἀρχινᾷ ἡ μάχη. « Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με». «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ ἐλέησόν με τὸν ἁμαρτωλό». Ἐβγαλε τέτοια ἀγρυπνία ποὺ τὴν θυμόταν γιὰ χρόνια. Ἐλεγε κι αὐτὸς μετὰ εὐχαριστῶν στοὺς δαίμονες ποὺ τὸν ξυπνήσανε.

Γέροντας Ἀρσένιος ὁ Σπηλιώτης (+1983)

HOLY ZEAL

By Archbishop Averky of Jordanville (+1976).

I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I if it be already kindled? (Lk 12:49)

† † †



The chief thing in Christianity, according to the clear teaching of the Word of God, is the fire of Divine zeal, zeal for God and His glory—the holy zeal which alone is able to inspire man in labors and struggles pleasing to God, and without which there is no authentic spiritual life and there is not and cannot be any true Christianity. Without this holy zeal, Christians are

“Christians” in name only: they only *have a name that they live*, but in reality *they are dead*, as was said to the holy seer of mysteries John (Rev 3:1).

True spiritual zeal is expressed, first of all, in zeal for God’s glory, which is taught us in the words of the Lord’s prayer which stand at its very beginning: *Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

Those who are true zealots for God’s glory glorify God with their whole heart—both in thought and feeling, both by words and deeds and with their whole life—and naturally desire that all other people should glorify God also in the same way; therefore, they cannot endure with indifference when in their presence, in some way or other, the name of God is blasphemed or holy things are mocked. Being zealous for God, they sincerely strive to please God themselves and serve Him alone with all the power of their being, and they are ready to forget themselves all the way to sacrificing their very life in order to bring all men to the pleasing and the service of God. They cannot calmly listen to blasphemy, and therefore they cannot support communion with and have friendship with blasphemers and mockers of the Name of God and despisers of holy things.

A striking and extremely clear example of such fiery zeal for God’s glory comes to us from the depths of antiquity of the Old Testament in a great Prophet of God, the flaming Elias, who grieved in soul when he saw the apostasy from God of his people, led by the impious King Ahab, who introduced into Israel the pagan worship of Baal in place of the true God. *I have been very jealous for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. (1 Kgs 19:10).*

And behold, this holy zeal aroused him, by the power of the grace of God which reposed on him, as a chastisement of Israel which had apostatized from God, to “close the heavens,” so that *there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. (1 Kgs 17:1; 18:42-45; Jas 5:17-18).*

This same zeal later aroused Elias to *slay the false prophets and priests of Baal (1 Kgs 18:40)*, after the miraculous descent of the fire from heaven on Mt. Carmel, so that these deceivers might no longer turn the sons of Israel away from the true worship of God. By the power of the same Divine zeal, St. Elias brought down fire from heaven, which *consumed the captains and their fifties (2 Kgs 1:9-14)* which had been sent by the king to seize him. That all this was in reality holy zeal which was pleasing to God is testified to by the fact that the Holy Prophet Elias did not die the usual death of all men, but was miraculously *raised up to heaven in a chariot of fire*, as if signifying his authentically fiery zeal for God (2 Kgs 2:10-12).

But even then, in the severe Old Testament, the Lord Himself showed to His true servant that one can have recourse to such severe measures only in extreme cases, for *the Lord was not in the great and strong wind rending the mountains and crushing the rocks, and not in the earthquake, and not in the fire, but in the voice of a gentle breeze (1 Kgs 19:11-12).*

This is why, when James and John, who were especially fervent in their zeal for the glory of their Divine Teacher, wished to bring down fire from heaven, imitating the Holy Prophet Elias (so as to punish the Samaritans who did not desire to receive him when He was walking through the Samaritan village to Jerusalem), the Lord forbade them to do this, saying: *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. (Lk 9:51-56).*

And nevertheless (let immoderate lovers of peace pay heed!), the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Who said, *take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart (Mt 11:29)*, found it sometimes necessary to manifest great strictness and have recourse to severe measures. He taught us by this very fact that meekness and humility do not mean spinelessness and should not yield before manifest evil, and that a true Christian should be far from sugar-sweet sentimentality and should not step away in the face of evil which presumptuously raises its head; instead, he should always be uncompromising towards evil, fighting with it by all measures and means available to him, in order decisively to cut off the spread and strengthening of evil among men.

Let us recall with what harsh accusatory words the Lord addressed the spiritual leaders of the Hebrew people, the Scribes and Pharisees, condemning them for hypocrisy and lawlessness: *Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! (Mt 23:29)* and threatening them with God’s judgment.

And when words turned out to be insufficient, He applied action against the lawless ones in very deed. Thus, finding that in the Temple they, were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and money-changers were sitting, when He had made as it were a scourge of little cords, *He drove them all out of the Temple, the sheep also and the oxen, and the money of the changers He poured out, and the tables He overthrew* (Jn 2:14-15; Mt 21:12-13).

We know many other examples from sacred and Church history when mere words of persuasion turned out to be insufficient; and in order to cut off evil it was necessary to have recourse to more severe measures and decisive acts. But it is essential that in such cases there should really be in a person only pure and holy zeal for God's glory, without any admixture of self-love or any other strivings of human passions which only hide themselves behind a supposedly holy zeal for God!

In the history of the Church, the great hierarch of Christ, Nicholas the Wonderworker, Archbishop of Myra in Lycia, whose memory we celebrate in December, has become glorious by just such an authentically holy zeal, with a decisive irreconcilability towards evil. Who does not know this wondrous hierarch of Christ?

The most characteristic feature of St. Nicholas, which has given him such glory, is his extraordinary Christian mercy; many Orthodox people refer to him "Nicholas the Merciful," a title based on the facts of his life and the numberless cases of his help to men. But once this great hierarch, so glorious for his mercy toward his neighbor, performed an act which disturbed many and continues to disturb them even now, even though its authenticity is witnessed by the Church tradition contained in our iconography and Divine services.

According to tradition, St. Nicholas took part in the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea, which brought forth a condemnation of the heretic Arius, who denied the Divinity of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the Son of God. During the disputes which occurred in connection with this, St. Nicholas could not listen with indifference to the blasphemous speeches of the arrogant heretic Arius, possessed by pride, who demeaned the Divine dignity of the Son of God, and before the whole Council he struck him in the face with his hand.

This evoked such a general consternation that the Fathers of the Council decreed that the bold hierarch be deprived of hierarchical rank. But in that very night they were made to understand by a wondrous vision: they saw how the Lord Jesus Christ gave St. Nicholas His Holy Gospel, and the Most Pure Mother of God placed upon his shoulders the episcopal omophorion. And then they understood that St.

Nicholas was guided in his act not by any evil, passionately sinful motives, but solely by pure, holy zeal for God's glory. And they forgave the hierarch, abrogating their sentence against him.

By citing such a picturesque example, we do not in the least wish to say that every one of us can or should follow this example literally; for any such person wishing to replicate the saint's example must be himself just as great a holy hierarch as St. Nicholas. However, this should absolutely convince us that we do not dare to remain indifferent or be unconcerned about the manifestations of evil in the world, especially when the matter is one of God's glory, of our Holy Faith and Church. Here we must show ourselves to be completely uncompromising, and we do not dare enter into any sort of cunning compromises or any reconciliation, even purely outward, or into any kind of an agreement with evil.

To our personal enemies, according to Christ's commandment, we must forgive everything, but with the enemies of God we cannot have peace! Friendship with the enemies of God makes us ourselves the enemies of God; this is a betrayal and treason towards God, under whatever well-seeming pretexts it might be done, and here no kind of cunning or

skillful self-justification can help us!

It is interesting to note how displeasing this act of St. Nicholas is to all the contemporary consenters to evil, these propagandists of a

false "Christian love." It is this "love" that is being utilized as the pretext to reconciliation not only with heretics, persecutors of the Faith and the Church, but even with the devil himself. All of them conduct their "business" in the name of "universal love" and "the union of all;" they are, after all, the fashionable slogans of our days. For the sake of this, these consenters strive even to refute the very fact of the participation of St. Nicholas in the First Ecumenical Council, even though this fact is accepted by our Holy Church and therefore must be respected by all of us as reliable.

All of this happens, of course, because among contemporary people, even those who call themselves "Christians," there is no longer an authentic holy zeal for God and His glory; there is no zeal for Christ our Saviour, zeal for the Holy Church and for every holy thing of God. In place of this there prevails a luke-warm indifference, an indifferent attitude to everything except one's own earthly well-being. Concurrently, there is an intentional forgetfulness of the just judgment of God which unfailingly awaits all of us, and of eternity which will be revealed after death.

And without this holy zeal, as we emphasized at the beginning, there is no true Christianity, no authentic spiritual life, i.e., a life in Christ. That is why this has been replaced now by all kinds of cheap surrogates, at times quite low ones,

So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth ... I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent! [Rev 3:16, 19]

which however often answer to the tastes and attitudes of contemporary man. And therefore such pseudo-Christians, skillfully covering up their spiritual emptiness by hypocrisy, often have great success in contemporary society, from which authentic spirituality has been rinsed out; at the same time, all authentic zealots of God's glory are despised and persecuted as "difficult people," "intolerant fanatics," "people who are behind the times."

And thus even now before our eyes is occurring the *winning* of the faithful [*Ed.*, an agricultural method developed by ancient cultures for separating grain from chaff]. Some will remain with Christ to the end, and some will easily and naturally join the camp of His opponent, Antichrist, especially when the hour of threatening trials will come for our faith, when precisely it will be necessary to show in all its fullness the whole power of our holy zeal, which is abhorred by many as "fanaticism."

But at the same time one should not forget that, besides true holy zeal, there is also a zeal without understanding—zeal which loses its value because of the absence in it of a most important Christian virtue; that is the virtue of discernment, and therefore, in place of profit can bring harm.

And there is likewise a false, lying zeal, behind the mask of which is concealed the foaming of ordinary human passions—most frequently pride, love of power and honor, and the interests of a party politics. These passions play the leading role in political struggles, for which there can be no place in spiritual life, in public church life, but which unfortunately is often to be encountered in our time. Such unwarranted struggles are the chief instigator of every imaginable quarrel and disturbance in the Church, the managers and instigators of which often hide themselves behind some kind of supposed idealism. In reality, however, they pursue only their own personal aims, striving to please not God but their own self-concern, and being zealous not for God's glory but for their own glory and the glory of the colleagues and partisans of their party.

All of this, it goes without saying, is profoundly foreign to true holy zeal, hostile to it, is sinful and criminal, for it only compromises our Holy Faith and Church!

And so, the choice is before us: are we with Christ or Antichrist? *The time is near* (Rev 22:10)—thus did even the holy Apostles warn us Christians. And if it was "near" then, in Apostolic times, how much "nearer" has it become now, in our ominous days of manifest apostasy from Christ and persecution against our Holy Faith and Church?

And if we firmly resolve in these fateful days to remain with Christ, not in words only but in deeds as well, it is absolutely indispensable right now, without putting it off, to break off even bond of friendship and every form of communion with the servants of the approaching Antichrist. The evil one and his many servants have enlisted so many

of them in the contemporary world, under lying pretexts of universal peace" and "prosperity;" and especially must one free oneself unconditionally from every subservience to them and dependence on them, even if this might be bound up with detriment to our earthly well-being or even with danger for our earthly life itself. Eternity is more important than our brief existence on earth, and it is precisely for it that we must prepare ourselves!

And therefore, only Holy Zeal for God, for Christ, without any admixture or any kind of slyness or ambiguous cunning politics, must guide us in all deeds and actions. Otherwise, a stern sentence threatens us: *Because thou art neither hot nor cold, I will vomit thee out of My mouth.* (Rev 3:16).

Be zealous, therefore, and repent! (Rev 3:19). Amen.



A great while after St. Athanasios of Mt. Athos had started constructing the Great Lavra (c. 961), he faced a great economic difficulty; he had neither the money to pay the craftsmen's wages, nor did he have any food. So he started out for Karyes, the Holy Mountain's capital, to find out what he ought to do.

After he had walked for two hours, suddenly there appeared before him a glorious lady, who asked him, "Abba Athanasios, where are you going? Why have you abandoned the project which you have started, a project which pleases God? Go back and finish it!"

Astonished, he looked at her with awe and asked, "Who are you? My lady, how do you know me, and how do you order me to return? With what can I continue the monastery's construction, since no means are left for it?"

Then she told him that she was the Mother of God. She ordered him to return, and she promised that she would take care of the money and the food supplies. The saint asked her to give him a sign in confirmation of this. "Here, hit with your staff this rock," she told him, and immediately fresh water sprang from the rock—which to this day is still flowing.

Saint Athanasios returned to his monastery where he found money, and his storage bins were full of food, even as the Theotokos had promised. With renewed desire and zeal he continued, and soon the monastery was completed (963), and he gave thanks and glory many times to her blessed name.

From "An Athonite Gerontikon"

[*St. Athanasios of Mt. Athos is commemorated on July 5th*]

ARE CHRISTIANS PREPARED FOR PERSECUTION?

By James Hitchcock, professor of history at Saint Louis University.

From the Editor: Even though this article's author is a non-Orthodox Christian, his views correctly bring to attention the increasingly hostile environment within which Christianity exists today, even in the most democratic of all nations. It is certainly a timely reminder for all those whose duties include leading His flock. Christians all over the world are being subjected to an environment of increasing persecution which is abundantly evident domestically as well. The "free-minded" leaders of this persecutory movements carry on their work with complete disregard as to how this great nation was created and the Christian roots of America's forefathers.

† † †

Authentic religion, precisely because it penetrates so deeply into the being of its adherents, has the capacity to inspire either great love and devotion or great hatred, sometimes one transforming itself into the other. At certain times in history that suppressed hatred bursts out violently, in systematic and frenzied attempts to, as Voltaire is supposed to have urged, "Crush the infamous thing." Such was the French Revolution, the triumph of Communism in Russia, and other episodes.

While particular justifications are offered for this frenzy of annihilation—the privileges of the clergy, ecclesiastical wealth—beneath it all is something which no degree of "reform," nor attempts by Christians to be accommodating, could ever expunge. This something is the hatred of a system of beliefs which calls each man's life into question at every moment, which reminds people of the infinite God who judges their every action. It is this which finally is intolerable to a certain kind of mind, which senses that it will not be at peace with itself until every vestige of this transcendent claim has been eradicated.

The often sadistic violence of the French Revolution seemingly betrayed the cool rationality which the Enlightenment proposed. But not the least of the Enlightenment's inadequacies was that it did not understand the irrational forces which it was helping to unleash. Today the tradition of the Enlightenment appears to have reached its end in the murky half-light of "post-modernism." However, classical Enlightenment critiques of Christianity—that it is superstitious and repressive—are now invoked with more effect than at any time in the past two hundred years, and with the same potential for irrational violence.

Among the numerous "stories" which the media ignore are the acts of vandalism directed at churches, occurrences which seem to have become so common as to be treated almost routinely. To date this is about as far as the enemies of religion have gone in inflicting physical harm.

But the frenzied symbolic assaults on religion are numerous and frightening, revealing as they do the barely suppressed violence which its enemies harbor and which, it is fair to judge, they would eagerly act out in life if given the opportunity.

The hateful blasphemies of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence in San Francisco are merely one example. Frenzied blasphemy—the mocking of sacred symbols, the association of those symbols with the sickest kind of pornography—reveals the depth of the violent hatred because it represents an assault in some ways worse than the desire to do bodily harm. It aims to annihilate the sacred core of the believer's very being. It is a mentality in which the actual killing of individuals would be almost an anti-climax.

It is one of the supreme ironies of an age awash in ironies that it is Christians who are now routinely accused of being hateful, of fomenting violence, even as the guardians of public opinion carefully conceal from view the true mentality of the anti-Christians. (Thus the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence are presented merely as a group of merry pranksters who do what they do in order to raise money for charity.)

One of the results of the style of [Roman Catholic] episcopal leadership which has prevailed in America for three decades is that much, although not all, of this hatred has been diverted away from the Roman Catholic Church and towards those Protestants who can be called Fundamentalists. It is now treated as merely self-evident that the latter are hate-filled and intolerant, while the Roman Catholic Church is assessed in each particular situation, showing promise of change in some areas, intransigent in others. More than one bishop has probably prayed quietly, "Thank God for Pat Robertson. Let them pick on him rather than me."

How is it possible that anti-Christian bigotry is so strong in a society which is apparently the most religious in the Western world? In part the answer is that the very strength of religion inevitably provokes hatred; where it is weak it is simply ignored. On the other hand, Christianity is also not perceived as truly powerful. Thus religion is hated for its alleged oppressiveness but at the same time is not feared, the classic predicament of those Western monarchies where revolution occurred (England in the 1640's, France in the 1790's, Russia in 1917).

The single greatest enemy of a vibrant Christianity in the United States is not its proclaimed opponents but the deep, seemingly ineradicable complacency of its own adherents, a complacency which is to a great extent abetted, even actively fostered, by the clergy themselves. Most American Christians, including some who are ostensibly orthodox, live by the assumption that one espouses a religion in order to make one's life richer and more satisfying. The ultimate test is whether, like everything in the culture is supposed to do, it makes the individual "feel good about himself."

Most professed believers cannot conceive of why it should ever be necessary to make sacrifices for their religion, which is why there is almost total indifference to the fate of persecuted believers during one of the great ages of religious persecution in the history of the world.

Christians are now completely on the defensive in Western society in terms of their beliefs. Public discussion of religion is often casually hostile, and those who profess to believe are often apologetic in the popular sense of that word. As the events at Littleton, Colorado showed, public agencies like schools are tolerant of all kinds of deviant behavior, even as they are increasingly vigilant against the “intrusion” of religion into the public square. While there may be no systematic pattern of discrimination in employment, it would be a brave (or foolish) person who would talk openly in a job interview about deeply held religious beliefs. In the academy, including institutions which are nominally Christian, such discrimination is often taken for granted.

This is merely the beginning of a process which is likely to get worse. Looking at the situation through purely human eyes, it is likely that, as the reality of this hostility finally begins to dawn on comfortable Christians, and the price of their faith keeps getting higher, most will simply fall away, abandoning a faith which has become a handicap instead of a support.

In an important sense the real battle now is not between believers and overt secularists but between orthodox and liberal Christians, a reality which is at its starkest in Protestantism but which is also present in the Roman Catholic Church [*Ed.*, and in the Orthodox Church as well]. Because the Fundamentalists remind them of what they once were, and perhaps ought still to be, liberal Protestant leadership regards their orthodox fellow Christians as the single greatest enemy of the human race. People who boast of their ability to “reach out” towards the despised and rejected have been the most effective soldiers in the war to demonize and marginalize orthodox believers, to the point where the National Council of Churches [*Ed.*, a very liberal organization] is a public apologist for religious persecution throughout the world. Liberal Christianity is finally at the point of abandoning any claim about the unique importance of Jesus Christ in the economy of salvation, and this will merely intensify its view of orthodoxy as dangerous.

Especially in view of the nation’s apparent indifference (if not worse) to the scandalous behavior of its president, some orthodox believers are in a state of discouragement, to the point of urging withdrawal from the public square into a kind of monasticism which will try to keep the faith alive for a better day. But in this atmosphere it is well to recall the Church’s wisdom that not all are called to the monastic life and that the degree to which the monks of the Dark Ages simply huddled in their monasteries has been exag-

gerated—many of them were missionaries, bishops, even royal officials.

One major argument for believers remaining active in the public sphere is the explanation (excuse?) which Evelyn Waugh gave for his seemingly un-Christian behavior—how much worse it would be if there were no active Christian presence. Those who know the truth have an obligation in justice to, for example, the unborn, which they are not free to abandon.

Those who advocate a strategy of quasi-monastic withdrawal also underestimate the strength of the enemy. Jerry Falwell said all that needs to be said on the subject when he explained that Evangelicals began entering politics because the government would not let them alone. There is no place in the modern world where anyone can hide.

Thus Christians are obligated to continue the public struggle, no matter how much obloquy [*Ed.*, calumny] it continues to bring down on them, even as they are obligated to storm heaven with their prayers. A major need is preparing Christians to live in an environment of hostility, increasing discrimination, possibly even of persecution. But this is perhaps the most severe of the many pastoral tasks presently being neglected.



Above all, do not forget prayer. Kneel at night before the icons to say your prayers. Feel that you are condemned by your sins before the feet of Christ, and implore Him: *My Lord, Thou who became man for me, Thou wast reviled, Thou wast mocked, Thou wast spat upon, Thou wast scourged, Thou didst wear a crown of thorns, Thou wast crucified, Thou didst pour out Thy precious Blood: whereas I have defiled Thine image by my sins, I implore Thee and entreat Thee, condemn me not, give me time for repentance and confession, that I may weep for my sins. Help me, O my God, because, by myself, without grace, I can do nothing.*

Every night, before lying in bed to go to sleep, reflect on how your whole day passed. Think if you pleased or grieved God. Your conscience will inform you. If you are not pleased, say, “since I am not pleased with myself, how shall God be?” And try continuously to correct yourself, so that you will not grieve God. A conscience without censure is either pure, or callous and hardened.

Never despair. For God, there is no unforgiveable sin. His compassion and mercy is an abyss. Pride and despair are from the devil. Why despair, since there is a God Who is long-suffering? ... Despair is a great sin, it is unbelief.

Elder Ieronymos of Aigina (+1966)

ABORTION AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

By Joe Sobran, "Sobran's Newsletter," August 24, 2000.

In his famous essay "Politics and the English Language," George Orwell analyzed the corrupting influence of dishonest politics on the way we speak and think. There is no better example than the effect abortion has had on our language.

Though abortion—including the killing of viable infants at the verge of birth—is now a sacrament of the Democratic party, nobody admits to being "pro-abortion"; they are "pro-choice." This is an obvious lie. The right to choose anything presupposes the right to live. The child, fetus, embryo, or whatever you want to call the entity growing within its mother's womb has no "choice" about being killed. It will never have a choice about anything.

The pro-abortion side is pro-abortion in the same way that advocates of slavery were pro-slavery. "Oh," they protest, "but we don't insist that everyone get an abortion; we only want people—that is, mothers—to have a choice!" Then nobody was pro-slavery either, since nobody insisted that every white man own a slave; they were "pro-choice." They wanted each white man to be "free" to decide whether to buy slaves; or they wanted every state to decide whether to permit slavery. Of course they overlooked the obvious fact that the slaves themselves had no choice; in their minds this was irrelevant.

The bad conscience of the pro-aborters shows in their studious avoidance of the word kill to describe what abortion is. Why be coy about it? We don't mind speaking of "killing" when we kill lower life forms. Lawn products kill weeds; mouthwashes kill germs; insecticides kill bugs; mousetraps kill mice. If the human fetus is an insignificant little thing, why shrink from saying an abortion kills it? But the pro-abortion side prefers the evasive euphemism that abortion "terminates a pregnancy."

As Orwell noted, dishonest people instinctively prefer the abstract to the concrete. Abstract language avoids creating unpleasant mental images that might cause horror and shame; concrete language may remind us of what we are really doing. This is why military jargon dehumanizes the targets of bombs and artillery: so that soldiers and pilots won't vividly imagine the men, women, and children they are killing. Part of the job of military leadership is to anesthetize the consciences of fighting men. And political leaders (who usually start the wars in the first place) do their part by describing the bombing of cities as "defending freedom."

In the modern world people are trained to avoid looking directly at the effects of violence they commit or sanction. If possible, the killing is delegated to specialists, who themselves are increasingly remote from their victims—as in recent U.S.

bombings of Iraq and Yugoslavia, where American casualties were nearly zero. Most of us don't mind if our military kills people on the other side of the world; we feel no pain, even vicariously. We may even buy the official explanation that our bombs are "preventing another Holocaust." It may seem otherwise to the Iraqis and Slavs on whose homes those bombs are falling.

But just as the news media refrain from showing us what those bombs actually do, they never show us what an abortion looks like. They even refuse to carry ads by abortion opponents, on grounds that pictures of slaughtered fetuses are in "bad taste." They certainly are in bad taste; all atrocities are. But the media are willing to show some atrocities, as in the killing fields of Rwanda a few years ago. Since we're forever debating abortion, why not let us see one? Why the blackout?

The answer, of course, is that the news media themselves are pro-abortion. They adopt the dishonest language of the pro-abortion side: pro-choice, fetus, terminate, and—my favorite—abortion provider (to make the abortionist sound like a humanitarian).

A few years ago NBC produced a sympathetic movie about a woman seeking an abortion—Norma McCorvey, the "Roe" of "Roe v. Wade." But when Mrs. McCorvey later changed her mind and became an active opponent of abortion, did NBC do a sequel? Unimaginable.

We have to keep our guard up at all times against political language, especially in seemingly bland journalism, that is subtly infected with propagandistic purposes.



Unfortunately, western rationalism has had its influence on certain Eastern Orthodox leaders—who are members of the Eastern Orthodox Church only in body. In spirit, they really belong to the West; which they consider to "reign" over the secular world. But if they were to view the West spiritually, to see it in the light of the East, in the light of Christ, then they would be able to discern its spiritual twilight. For the light of the intelligible Sun—the light of Christ Himself—is disappearing in the West; and a deep darkness is slowly setting in.

And all these gatherings and interreligious conferences are the work of the evil one; the leaders are engaging in endless discussions on issues that need no discussion, issues that even the Holy Fathers never addressed in the past. All these are meant to confuse and scandalize the faithful, and drive some into heresies and others to schisms, so that he [the evil one] can gain more ground. Ah! The misery and confusion they [i.e., the conferences, such as those of the WCC] bring to people!

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

RAISING CHILDREN

An interview Fr. George Romanenko, the priest of a church in the village of Borisovo in Moscow region and a well-known children's psychiatrist. (Source: the web pages of <http://www.pravoslavie.ru>, edited for content).

- **Father, you have been a priest for many years and still practice psychiatric therapy. Do you have a lot of patients?**

- Yes, a lot, but I don't treat them, I only provide some medical consultation and sort of social counseling, and then direct them further: send some to physicians, some to hospitals, and others to visit shrines.

- **Are children's mental illnesses wide-spread nowadays?**

- If we take into account boundary conditions, then many people can be called unwell. The percent of people with serious illnesses, for example, schizophrenia, does not vary, but the number of neuroses grows every year. By the time they reach their teenage, 90% of children have mental problems, either in a light or serious form.

- **And what causes it?**

- Firstly, it is linked with heredity and the state of health of parents; and our gene pool is constantly being undermined. Secondly, it has to do with the method of raising these children. And thirdly, the environment, such as the offensive and low mental capacity TV culture, all those scary cartoons along with meaningless teletubbies [*Ed.*, a late 1990s BBC children's television series—targeted at pre-school viewers—that revolves around the adventures of fictional humanoid beings], etc., discos... and so on; all of it aggravates the condition of those who are unwell.

- **What illnesses are most frequent and most serious?**

- You can't classify them serious or light, they are all serious. One child has terrors, another has habit spasms and someone else has emotional disturbances. A car broke down, and it doesn't matter whether it can't ride because the engine failed or its tires flattened, you still can't use it. By pubescent age the illness gets worse, and the person is already mature enough to produce a new ill generation.

- **Terrible picture. Does it mean that every year things get worse? Mentally unhealthy people can't give life to healthy children?**

- They can be born physically healthy, but the threshold of their excitability gets lower, they find it harder to resist an irritating environment, and their break-downs occur faster.

- **According to statistics, most of the children are sick, but the parents can often be unaware of it, because, judging by what you tell us, illness can often take a hidden form. How could one tell the signs of abnormality, what should parents pay attention to?**

- We should look out for fears, hyperactivity, absent-mindedness, special irritability, fussiness, children's sadism, strange behavior (e.g., a child passionately loves only one toy or constantly draws close to the same object). For example: a boy tortured a dog, a cat, and then decided to revenge his

friends who offended him. He took a stick, hammered nails into it and tried to gouge out their eyes. What to do? Shall we decide that it was just a childish prank and forget about it? Or should we be alarmed and try to find out how to prevent this kind of incident in the future? You should pay attention if a child is simply constantly misbehaving. Maybe you have problems establishing contact with your child, or maybe he or she has intracranial pressure due to, say, complicated birth. If you feel that there are problems in communication between you and your child, turn to an Orthodox-minded psychologist for a start, and if he recommends it and it is truly needed, then take him to a psychiatrist or children's psychoneurologist. Again, if and only if it is truly needed, you would be provided medical prescription and get recommendations on the best regime for your child.

- **What can we do to prevent children's mental illnesses?**

- The only way is raising the child properly.

- **If a teenager gets whimsical, aggressive, does not behave, gets oversensitive and contact with him is broken, but everyone around tells parents that it's alright, they shouldn't take it to heart, everyone used to be like that themselves... Can you trust such advice?**

- No, we didn't use to be like that. The mental state of people for each new generation, including teenagers, worsens. St. John Chrysostom used to say that the teenage years are the most difficult; no one can definitely say what kind of an adult a child will turn into. Only God knows. You should remember that at that stage you shouldn't irritate your kids, but you shouldn't do whatever they want either. There is a golden rule: to bring the kids up strictly but in love. Total control is unacceptable, the child is a free personality being loved by God. Parents should learn to be humble, patient, bear the difficulties in communication with love, but if a child's behavior goes beyond boundaries, a punishment, and at times severe, is called for.

- **Opinions are divided on the subject of punishment; some suggest that a child should never be beaten.**

- You should punish your child only as the last resort. If his behavior is extremely bad, he spits, swears at his mother and father, is careless with icons, you should repeatedly explain to him that such behavior is unacceptable, and if he continues to behave like that, he should be punished. The punishment must be effective and never be applied in anger; you may hit hard, preferably on his bottom, but just a few times and quickly. If you spank him lightly, just pretending you are hitting, he will grow up a masochist. You should do it quick and hard, from the heart. Let him scream, cry, don't talk to him, and later, when he's calmed down, explain to the child that you have to do it because you love him. Never say "oh forgive me it just happened." If after punishments the child doesn't want to change anyway, take him to an Orthodox psychiatrist. Sometimes the children can't control themselves at all, they are already sick.

- What should we avoid while raising our children?

Do not go to extremes. For instance, I once walked down the street and was startled by a woman bawling. I thought somebody was killed or something and ran towards her. Turned out it was a young mother “talking” to her two-year old child who was waddling in the puddle. Poor children, whose mothers spend their whole days shouting: don’t, don’t, don’t!...

A child doesn’t belong to his parents, he belongs to God. It is a separate and unique personality. And you should treat a child and bring him up as an unique personality, in the spirit of love and freedom. The gift of freedom, according to Holy Fathers, is even higher, than the gift of love. Raising a child, we should remember that we have an image and likeness of God in front of us. And while punishing or encouraging the child we should remember the same. Let us raise our children with love, patience, humbleness and gentleness, and not by constantly humiliating, offending, provoking and tempting them.

- Thus, is excessive supervision bad for children?

- Of course, anything excessive is harmful, you must know the limits in everything. It is important not to bully the child, so that he doesn’t become a drug addict, but equally, you shouldn’t let him manipulate you. How can you find the golden medium? How does one know when to punish a child, and when it is better to not do so? Dear brothers and sisters, the only compass, the only beacon you have is your love for your child. You will raise him in a manner that corresponds to your love for him. Your loving heart lets you know when you should punish and when you should forgive. Many people refer to different books, often providing contradictory advice. You cannot bring up a child like that. A child is raised by your heart, and regardless of how many pedagogic books you have read, how many useful lectures have attended, if you don’t love your child truly, you cannot bring him up properly.

Parents need special patience when their kids become teenagers. Try not to nag and control your children without an important reason. You should avoid suppressing the teenager too much. Approximately 90% of marriages that fail early and spouses that leave their home are usually associated with overwhelming parents’ control; this is especially true about mothers. The kids who are suppressed as teenagers, they grow up inadequately, they do not feel freedom, they do not feel God, they turn into a cowed animal. Don’t shout: “I don’t want you to ever meet that girl again!” Gently say ‘I don’t like it, I would like you not to do it, but if you insist on seeing her, well, do it in secret, but it would hurt me... I will pray for you.’ Pray to God about your children, pray in church, take them with you on pilgrimages. Try to become friends with your child.

We are very blessed to belong to our Orthodox Church; we have the Lord, the Absolute Truth, and it is thus easier for us to bring up a child properly. You can give a child a decent upbringing only in a family of believers, or at least people

seeking faith. Because neither psychologists, nor doctors and pedagogues, with all their experience, can grow in the children the spirit of kindness, love, chastity and compassion. Higher values can be imparted only by the Church.

- Father, I know a couple of families, where children have total freedom. They don’t have any duties at home, school-girls are allowed to be out late, they plan their days themselves, do their shopping themselves...

- Would you want your son to marry such a girl? I wouldn’t. Who needs a partner, who can only eat, drink and party? What about duties?

- But they study and are they good students...

- Being a good student is far from all. Once I worked as a paramedic, and I can tell you a story from my work experience. We were called to a home, where the head of the family, an old man, just died. We were met by his son and daughter, both with higher education; in general you could see it was a home of a well educated family. So they told us to take away that “corpse.” We told them that an ambulance does not take away dead people, and that they should themselves prepare their father’s body for funeral. They responded: “We don’t need him here, it is not nice.” We responded in shock: “What do you mean by ‘not nice,’ he is your father!” Then they asked us, if there were any special cases when an ambulance would take away a corpse. We naively told them that we were obliged to pick up a dead person if the body was found in a public place or factory, etc. So they dragged their father to the building’s hallway (where the common stairs of all the apartments are) and said: “Now he is in a public area, you’ve got to take him away.”

That’s “bare” education for you. To allow your child everything is a big mistake, it is a sin, because qualities like sympathy and kindness don’t grow in a person on their own. Watch the kids at school, whether they call each other offensive names, how aggressive they are, how cruelly they fight with each other. Higher experiences, thoughts and feelings have to be imparted on children. What good may possibly come out of a child who grew up totally free? He may grow up a lover of freedom, but without God in his soul. You ought to fight bad tendencies from the very start. A child must know the meaning of the word “no,” that there is some things which are forbidden to him. Of course there is no harm in him asking “May I?” once again.

- What is the best way for a single parent to raise their child?

- In an single-parent family, a child is developing incompletely. It is difficult for a woman alone to bring up a child properly, especially a boy, on her own. She can’t raise a man, because she is a woman. It is equally difficult to raise a daughter without a father as well. How would you give her an idea of a family, of a role of a woman, good relations in the family? Dear parents, treasure your family, your husband—the father

of your children; your wife—the mother of your children. Quite often, a couple breaks up over a worthless argument, matters which could be settled. Make up with your partner for the sake of your children, and God will reward you. If your husband left you, if he found a new family and doesn't want to have anything common with "his past," you should pray for him and try to spend more time with the grandfathers of your children. You should arrange it so that there will be some presence of a man in the house; this is not an invention of psychiatrists and psychologists, it is God's will!

- **What is the best method to keep good healthy children the way they are?**

- First and foremost there must be peace in the family. And the only way to have peace in the family is for somebody in the family to have humility. Secondly, show your child how you believe in God. Take him to Church, read good books with him. Thirdly, both parents and their children should be open with each other, so that the children wouldn't want to lie to their parents or cajole them. You can achieve this only by setting the example yourself. Don't tell your child that you can't buy him jeans because you have no money, then spend it on something else. You should be honest and tell him that the money you have has to be spent on something more vital; that is why you can't afford it now. It is very important not to lie in the family.

- **Is the number of children in a family important for the mental health of a child?**

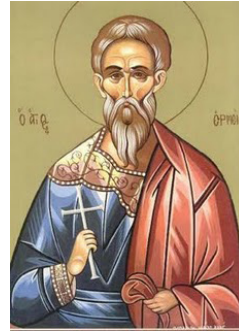
- Three is a necessary minimum. Children grow up as better people if there are many of them in a family. Everything is shared, everything is ours, we are a family. Everyone works, and learns to take care of others. Also, if you have many kids, you have more chances of spending your old age with one of them. If you have only one child, there is little chance that you would meet your old age surrounded by love and care. And in general, women are saved by child-bearing.

And you must remember something else which is important: God provides for the children. There exist no families with many kids that starve; of course this presumes able and willing fathers. God does not abandon children. So don't fear, have more children!

A woman once called me and told me that she was pregnant with her third baby and that her husband wanted her to have an abortion; her mother was also against the baby because of the lack of money. I told her to have her baby and give it away to our parish, we would raise it. Thank God, she had a daughter and named her Mashenka (Maria). The woman's husband was a driver. As soon as his boss found out that his employee had a third baby, he promoted him to his personal driver, the man's salary increased, and now they are much better-off, they have a car and a dacha, all thanks to Mashenka, who they thought would make them starve...

GOD'S REVELATION TO ST. HERMAS

From an Orthodox pamphlet, re-published by request.



One of the Seventy, he is mentioned in the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (16:14). A Greek by birth, he spent a long time in Rome. He was bishop in Philippoupolis, and finished his life as a martyr. He compiled the very instructive book "The Shepherd" through revelations from the angels of God.

Hermas was a rich man, but fell into extreme poverty through his own sins and those of his sons. A man appeared to him, clad in white and with a staff in his hand, and told him that he was the angel of repentance, sent to him before the end of his life. The angel gave him twelve commandments:

1. To believe in God.
2. To live in simplicity and innocence.
3. To love truth and flee from falsehood.
4. To guard his thoughts in chastity.
5. To learn patience and magnanimity of soul.
6. To know that a good and an evil spirit attend every man.
7. To fear God, but not the devil.
8. To perform every good deed and to restrain himself from every evil one.
9. To pray to God in faith from the depths of his heart, so that his prayer might be heard.
10. To preserve himself from melancholy, the daughter of doubt, and from anger.
11. To try true and false prophecies.
12. To preserve himself from every evil desire.

St. Hermas is commemorated on May 31st. The holy Apostle endured much grief from the pagans for preaching the Gospel, but he died in peace.



The wife expresses love for her husband through obedience. She is *obedient to him exactly as the Church is to Christ* (Eph 5:22-24). It is her happiness to do the will of her husband. Attitude, obstinacy, and complaining are the axes which chop down the tree of conjugal happiness.

The woman is the heart. The man is the head. The woman is the heart that loves. In her husband's moments of difficulty, she stands at his side, just as the empress Theodora stood by the emperor Justinian. In his moments of joy, she tries to raise him up to even higher heights and ideals. In times of sorrow, she stands by him like a sublime and peaceful world offering him tranquility.

Elder Aimilianos of Simonopetra, Mount Athos

THY WILL BE DONE

Translated from "A Treasure Hidden Under a Bushel," by Sergei Nilus (+1930).

If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. [Jas 1:26]

How much self-deception there is on the path of acquiring piety. Some think that piety consists solely in a great number of prayers; others claim it lies in the accomplishment of numerous outward deeds unto the glory of God and for the good of one's neighbor; still others, only in the unceasing desire to attain salvation; some, only in the strict fulfillment of the outward rites or canons of the Church.

All this is good and necessary to a certain degree. But he is deceived who thinks that herein lies the basis and the essence of true piety.

True piety, which sanctifies us and completely dedicates us to God, lies in the fulfillment of God's true will at that time, in that place, in those circumstances in which God has placed us; it lies in the fulfillment of all that He requires of us. However many pious feelings and desires we may have, however many wonderful deeds we may perform, they will have no value in God's eyes and we shall receive a reward for them only when by these feelings, desires and actions we truly fulfill the will of God. Let a servant perform the most exceptional services in his master's house, but if he does not fulfill the master's will, then these deeds which his master does not require of him will be of no value, and his master, in all justness, will say that his servant is negligent in his duties.

True piety requires that we not only fulfill the will of God, but that we do it with love. God desires that all our offerings to Him be made willingly and joyfully. In all His commandments He first of all requires of us a clean heart, filled with love for Him. The love and mercy which our heavenly King and Lord has towards us are so measureless that we must place all our happiness in trying to be His most faithful and totally devoted servants.

This faithfulness and devotion must everywhere and at all times be steadfast, even in times of difficulty, in all that which is contrary to our opinions, intentions, and inclinations. To fulfill God's will we must be ready to sacrifice all our pleasures, our time, our freedom, our glory and finally, our life itself. To nourish within oneself such devotion to God and to express it in deeds; this is true piety. But because we do not always see the reason behind God's will, we are obliged to fulfill it through self-denial, as slaves, in blind obedience; but we must be wise even in our blindness. This obligation is essential for everyone. The most enlightened person, capable of leading people to God, has need of Divine guidance, even if he is completely ignorant of its designs.

Thy Will Be Done, on Earth as It Is in Heaven

Just as here on earth, so in heaven, nothing happens without the will and allowance of God. But people love God's will only when it is in accordance with their own desires. Let us love God's will alone—then earth will be for us like heaven. Let us thank God for everything, for all that is bad as well as for what is good; what seems bad turns into good when we accept it as being sent from God. Let us not complain about the path chosen for us by God's Providence, but let us seek there, according to our strength, signs of God's wisdom and goodness. In the movement of the celestial bodies, in the ordering of the seasons, in the affairs of human life everywhere the will of God is accomplished. Let us pray to God that His will might be fulfilled in us, that we might love His will, that we might delight in it, that it would root out our self-will and become the sole ruler of our hearts. For God's will alone is all good, pleasing, and perfect, and it is our duty to fulfill it.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said of Himself that He always did what was pleasing to His Father. Jesus Christ is our example and His Father is our Father. Let us, therefore, pray to the Lord that He would act in us according to His Father's will, just as He Himself acted; that He would mysteriously unite us to Himself and that we should desire nothing else than to do what is pleasing to His Father. Then everything in us will become a continual sacrifice to God, an unceasing prayer, a constant expression of our love for God.

Thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful... (Lk 10:41)

We seem to think that we have a thousand things to do, while we really have only one thing. If we do this one thing poorly, then everything else, even if it seems successful, will do us no good. Why are we concerned about so many things? Why do we increase our worries? Let us resolve to devote our attention and all our efforts to this one thing which has been given to us; let us, according to our strength, do what God's Providence calls and obliges us to do. Let us leave aside everything that has no relation to "the one thing needful," because it will only hinder its fulfillment.



Abba Moses said, "If a man's deeds are not in harmony with his prayer, he labors in vain." The brother said, "What is this harmony between practice and prayer?" The old man said, "We should no longer do those things against which we pray. For when a man gives up his own will, then God is reconciled with him and accepts his prayers." The brother asked him, "In all the affliction which the monk gives himself, what helps him?" The old man said, "It is written, *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*" (Pss 46:1)

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THE TRUTH OF ORTHODOXY

From "The Holy Fathers of Orthodox Spirituality", *The Orthodox Word*,
Vol. 10, Sept-Oct. 1974.

And when he served the Liturgy, his face became like an angel's and was penetrated with such light that it was not possible to look freely at him His mind was bright, clearly beholding the truth of God. He loved these truths with all the fullness of his heart. Therefore, when he would give a talk his words went from heart to heart and were always effective and fruit-bearing.

[From "The Life of St. Symeon the New Theologian"]

† † †

Never has there been such an age of false teachers as this pitiful 20th century, so rich in material gadgets and so poor in mind and soul. Every conceivable opinion, even the most absurd, even those rejected by the universal consent of all civilized people—now has its platform and its own "teacher" ... As a result, philosophy has a thousand schools, and "Christianity" a thousand sects. Where is the truth to be found in all this, if indeed it is to be found at all in our most misguided times?

In only one place is there to be found the fount of true teaching, coming from God Himself, not diminished over the centuries, but ever fresh, being one and the same in all those who truly teach it, leading those who follow it to eternal salvation. This place is the Orthodox Church of Christ, the fount is the grace of the All-Holy Spirit, and the true teachers of the Divine doctrine that issues from this fount are Orthodoxy's Holy Fathers...

The Orthodox teaching of the Holy Fathers is not something of one age, whether "ancient" or "modern." It has been transmitted in unbroken succession from the time of Christ and His Apostles to the present day, and there has never been a time when it was necessary to discover a "lost" patristic teaching. Even when many Orthodox Christians may have neglected this teaching (as is the case, for example, in our own day), its true representatives were still handing it down to those who hungered to receive it.

There have been great patristic ages, such as the dazzling epoch of the fourth century, and there have been periods of decline in patristic awareness among Orthodox Christians; but there has been no period since the very foundation of Christ's Church on earth when the patristic tradition was not guiding the Church; there has been no century without Holy Fathers of its own. St. Nicetas Stathatos, disciple and biographer of St. Symeon the New Theologian, has written: "It has been granted by God that from generation to generation there should not cease the preparation by the Holy Spirit of His prophets and friends for the order of His Church."

Most instructive is it for us, the last Christians, to take guidance and inspiration from the Holy Fathers of our own and recent times, those who lived in conditions similar to our own and yet kept undamaged and unchanged the same ever-fresh teaching, which is not for one time or race, but for all times to the end of the world, and for the whole race of Orthodox Christians.

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

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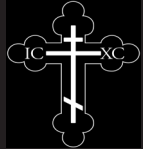
Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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CORRECTING OUR HEART

By St. Theophan the Recluse, from "Orthodox America," translated from "Pisma o Khristianskoi Zhizni," Moscow, 1908.

We are sons of the fallen, conceived in iniquity and we come forth into the light with corruptible natures; in the font of holy Baptism we are born anew, into a holy life.

No one can boast of being immaculate or sinless or capable of presenting himself before God as holy. Therefore, every person must enkindle and warm within his heart an inspired determination towards self-improvement and a divine zeal for cleansing the heart from anything and everything which is not pleasing to God. However, to educate oneself in what is holy is a task which is exceedingly difficult and complex.

The path towards righteousness lies through many hidden crossroads, and anyone embarking on the commendable spiritual struggle of self-amendment must unfailingly make a preliminary tracing in his mind of what he is to correct and how. He is to constantly bear this sketch in his mind and heart in order that with this as a faithful guide, he might without hindrance and more certainly bring his task to a successful conclusion.

What is it we must correct in ourselves? Almost everything there is within us. Sin loves absolutism. If it finds a place in our heart, then already it is in control, spreading its evil power throughout our entire being. For sinful man and sinful humanity it is the same; there is no purity: *From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it.* (Isa 1:6). Each person can easily prove

this to himself by closely examining his sinful heart. There he will discover the kernel of evil, the initial awakening of sin, and also how it manifests itself when it surfaces.

The seed of all moral evil is self-love. It lies in the very depths of the heart. Man, according to his calling, should forget about himself, his life, his activities; he should live solely for God and for others. In consecrating all that he does by elevating this as a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God the Savior, he should offer his life and all its activity entirely for the benefit of his neighbors, and shower upon them all that he receives from the Bountiful One, i.e., God.

One does not exist without the other; it is impossible to love God without loving one's neighbors, just as it is impossible to love one's neighbor unless one loves God. Likewise, in loving God and one's neighbor it is impossible not to sacrifice oneself for the glory of



God and the good of one's neighbor. But when a person separates himself from God—in his thoughts, his heart, his desires—and consequently also from his neighbor, then naturally he comes to dwell upon himself alone: His "I" becomes the focus towards which he directs everything else, to the neglect even of the divine precepts and the good of his neighbor.

Here, then, is the root of sin. Here is the seed of all moral evil. It conceals itself deep within the heart. As it grows, however, it spreads and draws to the surface, emerging in three forms, three trunks, as it were, all permeated by its power, its energy. These three are: self-exaltation, self-interest and love of pleasure. The first causes a person to say in

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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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his heart: "I am number one;" the second: "I want to have everything;" the third: "I want to live for my own enjoyment."

I'm Number One.

What soul has not experienced such a thought? And it is not only observed among those who by nature are gifted with superior talents, or who have managed to accomplish something important or beneficial; such persons may be prone to mentally exalt themselves above their fellow man. What we observe is that self-exaltation is found in all ages, ranks and circumstances; it shadows a person through all the mental and moral stages of perfection; it does not depend on any external conditions. Even if a man should live alone, in anonymity, far removed from everyone and anyone, he is never and nowhere free from the temptation of self-exaltation. It all starts from the moment man received into his heart the first flattering suggestion of the serpent Be as Gods. From that time forth man began to exalt himself above his fellow creature; like a god, he began to place himself above that position in which he was placed by nature and by society. This is a sickness common to each and all of us. It seems there's nothing dangerous in indulging oneself with the thought that one is superior to someone else, to another, a third. But just look at how much evil, how much darkness is generated by this seemingly—to us—insignificant thought!

He who exalts himself above everyone else in his mind and heart, if he undertakes something, does so not according to the voice of reason and conscience, not according to the counsel of wisdom and the inspiration of the word of God, but according to his own understanding. He undertakes something because he desires to do so; he is self-willed, self-assured. If he should succeed in his undertaking, he attributes it to himself alone. This causes him to be high-minded, proud, pretentious, and ungrateful. In his relations with others, he wants his will to be done in everything and at all times; he wants everything

to be subject to his control, he loves to exercise authority and is inclined to be coercive. In his relationships with others he cannot tolerate someone else's advantage, no matter how minor its expression. He is disdainful and intractable. On encountering any transgression of his will, he is beside himself and becomes enflamed with revenge. If he possesses a strong character, he thirsts after glory and honor; if he has a weak character, he is hypocritical and vainglorious. He is audacious, capricious, haughty, inclined to gossip...

Here, then, are the various forms in which self exaltation appears, and the many sinful movements which are indebted to self-exaltation for their genesis! And there is scarcely anyone who cannot convict himself of this sin in one or another of its forms.

I want to Have Everything

"I want everything to be MINE" determines the covetous man. This is the second outgrowth from the root of evil. It reveals most noticeably the spirit of self-love which acts here as a kind of independent entity; the covetous man does not say a word; he does not take a step or make a move unless it is to bring him some advantage. Everything about him is calculated, everything is so ordered, everything is motivated in such a way that time and place and objects and persons—in short, everything his hand or mind touches upon—bears their own related tributes into his coffers.

Personal gain or interest: this is the principal incentive which everywhere and always brings his entire being into a flurry of activity, and under its influence he is prepared to transform everything into a means to achieve his own ends; he will seek the highest ranks of dignity and honor if this is advantageous; he will accept the most difficult employment if it is more profitable than others; he will set his mind to endure any and every difficulty—he won't eat or drink—if only his gain is realized. He is either mercenary or acquisitive or stingy, and

only under the strong influence of vainglory is he able to love splendor and luxury. His possessions are dearer to him than life itself, dearer than people, dearer than the Divine commandments. His spirit is stifled, as it were, by things, and even lives through them and not of itself. It is here, then, where we observe the power and the sphere of influence belonging to this second outgrowth from the seed of evil—self-love! And who doesn't have certain things which it would be as painful to part with as it would be to part with happiness?

I Want to Live for My Own Enjoyment

"I want to live for my own pleasure," says the carnal man. His soul is mired in the flesh and in feelings. He doesn't think about heaven, about spiritual needs or the requirements of the conscience or about responsibility. He doesn't want to, nay, cannot think of this: *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.* (Rom 8:7). His experience is limited to various forms of enjoyment; he cannot do without them; they occupy his thoughts and conversations.

If the carnal man begins to please his palate, he becomes an epicurean; the play of colors cultivates his taste for elegant dress; a variety of sounds inspires garrulousness; the need for food leads him to gluttony; the need for self-preservation leads him to laziness; other needs, to dissipation. Linked to nature through the flesh, the man whose soul is enslaved by his flesh drinks up pleasures from nature in as many ways as there are functions of his body. And together with these pleasures he absorbs the essential spirit of nature—the spirit of involuntary, mechanical operation. Consequently, the more a person indulges in self-gratification, the more limited is his circle of freedom. And whoever gives free reign to such indulgence may be regarded as an outright prisoner of his flesh.

Conclusion

Here, then, is how evil grows within us from a tiny, almost imperceptible seed. In the depths of the heart, as we have seen, lies the seed of evil—self-love. From it there springs forth three branches, three variations, each filled with the seed's power; self-importance, self-interest and carnality. And these three generate an innumerable multitude of passions and sinful inclinations.

Just as the main trunks of a tree grow out into many branches, so, too, there arises within us a whole tree of evil which, taking root in the heart, later, spreads throughout our entire body, penetrates to the outside, and occupies our surroundings. One can say that a similar tree exists within everyone whose heart is in some way inclined towards sin. The only distinction is that in one person one branch is more fully developed, and in another person a different branch.

Why is it that for the most part we don't notice this in ourselves and often think or even unashamedly say aloud: "What have I done?" or "What's bad about me?" We don't notice because we cannot. Sin won't allow it. It is very sly and foreseeing. If a naked tree of evil, as we have described it, presented itself before the mind's eye, there is no one who

would not be immediately repulsed. For this reason, sin hastens to clothe the tree with leaves, to cover its hideousness, and it covers it in such a way that the soul in which the tree grows can distinguish neither its roots nor its trunk nor even its branches. These leafy coverings are distraction and an excess of worldly cares.

The distracted person doesn't like to dwell within himself; the person preoccupied with worldly concerns hasn't a spare minute. The first one simply cannot, and the second hasn't time to take note of what goes on in his soul. With the first stirrings from sleep their soul hurries out of itself; in the case of the first it departs into a world of daydreams. In the latter it sinks into a sea of ostensibly necessary affairs.

The present does not exist for them, and this essentially characterizes their activity. One prefers to live in a self-made world and touches upon reality only in part, unintentionally, superficially. The other, in his mind and heart, lives in the future. Everything he does he tries to finish as soon as possible in order to go onto the next; he begins this, and rushes towards a third. In general, only his hands, feet, tongue, etc. are occupied with the present, while his thoughts are all directed towards the future. In such a state, how can they possibly discern what lies concealed in the heart?

Sin, however, is not content with this leafy covering alone, for it is not impervious to penetration; its leaves can be blown aside by the winds of misfortune and by inner shakings of the conscience, thereby exposing the tree's grotesque form. Therefore, sin creates of itself a kind of impenetrable covering resembling stagnant murky water in which it submerges its tree together with its foliage. This covering is composed of ignorance, insensibility and negligence. We don't know the danger that threatens us and therefore we are unaware of it, and because we are unaware of it we give in to negligence.

Here in general terms is all which we stand to change in ourselves; here is that broad field of activity in the holy spiritual struggle of self-amendment! We must strip sin of its covering, chase from our souls negligence, insensibility, self-delusion, distraction and excessive "busy-ness." We must chop off its branches, all carnal passions and inclinations; finally, we must extirpate its very root by chasing out self-love. How? We do this by means of self-denial.

This task is neither small nor simple. The sinful uncleanness described above covers the soul not like dust which can be blown off with a breath of air. No, it has penetrated our very being, it has grafted itself onto our being and become a part of us, as it were. For this reason, to liberate oneself from it is the same as to separate oneself from oneself, to pluck out an eye or cut off a hand. Such difficulty, however, should not overwhelm us; rather, it should rouse us from our negligence.

He who earnestly desires salvation does not look at the obstacles to his goal; they only cause him to be more stalwart, to set to work with greater determination and to begin even more zealously the saving task of self-amendment.

REV. FR. ANTHONY MOSCHONAS JANUARY 15, 1939 – AUGUST 13, 2011

Information partially extracted from the related announcements by the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of San Francisco.

*All you who have walked the hard and narrow way in life,
who took up the Cross as a yoke and followed me faithfully,
come receive heavenly crowns,
the rewards I have prepared for you.*

[Evlogitaria from the Funeral Service]

† † †



On August 13th, 2011, the Orthodox communities of Arizona mourned the loss of a beloved Orthodox clergyman, a devoted and loving spiritual father and an extraordinary family man. He was well known to many who have been part of Orthodoxy's growth in the southwestern United States as well as the many visitors of the St. Demetrios

Greek Orthodox church in Tucson, AZ, where the miraculous Holy Gospel is available to all for veneration (see story that follows).

Father Anthony was born in Kefallonia, Greece on January 15, 1939. He actively attended church in his youth, learning the rich tradition of Byzantine music from his father who was a chanter. During his high school years he moved to Athens where he worked and continued his studies. He also served in the Greek Air Force.

Upon returning to his home village, Father Anthony married Maria Katerelos, his childhood sweetheart on September 16, 1963, following which they immigrated to Montreal, Canada. Father Anthony worked as a printer's apprentice but always felt a calling to serve the church. He moved his family to Brookline, Massachusetts in 1967 to attend Holy Cross Theological School, and was subsequently ordained a priest on June 6, 1970.

Father Anthony's first assignment began one week following his ordination on June 11, 1970 at Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in Sioux City, Iowa. For nearly five years, Father Anthony served this small community, learning the duties of a parish priest, and also celebrating the parish's 75th Anniversary in 1973.

Desiring to move to a warmer climate for the health of his family, Father Anthony was transferred to Saint Demetrios in Tucson, Arizona on November 11, 1974 where he would remain for 30 years until his retirement in June 2004. During his tenure at Saint Demetrios, Father Anthony cultivated this small parish into an active community, initiated Thanksgiving dinners for the homeless and was instrumental in organizing and achieving the means of supporting the

community and spreading their Hellenic Culture throughout the city.

The youth of the community were an absolute priority for Father Anthony; he also established a Greek language school at the parish and a similar program within the University of Arizona. He also led the formation of a mission community in Sierra Vista, Arizona and worked closely with Saint Anthony Greek Orthodox Monastery in Florence, Arizona, where he has been laid to rest. Lastly, his generosity (to a fault) was perhaps one of his better hidden treasures. In his usual low-key mannerism, Fr. Anthony helped countless number of citizens, without any regard for the level of need or who they were. Everyone who asked (or was perceived to be in need of financial assistance or spiritual support) received Fr. Anthony's helping hand, in whatever manner he was able to provide it.

Fr. Anthony touched many lives with his kindness, wisdom, humility, alms, and love. He will be missed dearly by all those who were fortunate to have known him. May his memory be eternal!

The Miracle of the Bleeding Gospel

[April 27, 1989]

An open letter written by Fr. Anthony Moschonas to His Grace Bishop Anthony (+2004) of San Francisco.

Your Grace, with respect and reverence, I kiss your right hand. Christ is Risen!

With great humility and fear of God I am writing to you to confirm our telephone conversation on Good Friday, concerning the miracle that occurred in our church.

On the evening of April 27th, Holy Thursday, at 7:30 p.m., we started the service of the Holy Passion (the Service of the "Twelve Gospels"). Before I started the reading of the twelve Gospels, I placed a stand at the Holy Door and laid the Holy Gospel upon it. The Gospel is in two languages, Greek and English, and the cover is gold-plated, with a small enamel on it. According to the holy tradition of our Church, one side has the Crucifix of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the other side has the Resurrection.

During the reading of the prescribed passages of the Holy Gospel, I left it at the Royal Door, on the stand. Father Anthony Sipsas, a retired priest, and I alternated reading the holy passages, one in English and one in Greek. When I finished the reading of the fifth Gospel, I picked it up to place it on the Holy Altar, while preparing ourselves for the procession of the crucified Christ on the Cross. When I picked up the Holy Gospel, it appeared heavier than usual. I did not pay much attention to it, thinking to myself that I was tired from the work of the day. With Fr. Sipsas, the Altar boys, and the reader, we started the procession of the crucified Christ chanting the hymn, *Today is hung upon the Tree, He who suspended the Land in the midst of the waters.*

After I placed the cross on the center of the Church, in the solea, we returned to the Holy Altar to continue the Service. As I stood in front of the Holy Altar, my eyes focused upon the Holy Gospel's Icon of the Crucifixion. With great astonishment, I clearly observed blood on the Holy Body of our Lord. Fear came all over me. After looking at it for a long time, I called Fr. Sipsas and asked him to tell me what he saw. "Blood, my son, blood ... I don't know," he replied. The blood was on the Holy Icon of Christ, on the right side of His body, at the place where he was pierced. Some blood also appeared on the left side of His chest.

For the reading of the sixth Gospel, I used a different Bible. After I finished reading the Gospel, I announced the miracle to the faithful that were present. When the services finished, I called a few men to come into the Holy Altar to witness the phenomenon. Some of the ladies asked me if they could say a prayer to the Almighty God that His sign, a miracle, be for the best intended use of the world and to thank Him for the great and marvelous things that happened among us, the unworthy servants and sinners. It was during such a prayer, I remembered, that our Lord appeared to the Myrrh bearers. As I finished, with great fear and tremor, because of my unworthiness, I proceeded towards the Holy Altar. I picked up the Holy Gospel and placed it in the solea for all people who were present to exalt and venerate.

The next day, Good Friday, before the procession of the Epitafio, I announced the miracle to the congregation once again. After the procession, all of the faithful drew near and venerated it.

The Holy Gospel remains on the Holy Altar and in the near future we will place it in a case. We will put it in the Church for the glorification of our Almighty God and for the strengthening of the faith among His flock.

Asking humbly and with reverence that you pray for me, the sinner, and for the faithful of my community, I wish that the resurrected Lord grant you health, happiness and long life.

Your spiritual child in Christ,
Fr. Anthony Moschonas
May 2, 1989



The present temporal life is like the sea, and we are the ships. Just like ships at sea, we don't encounter only peace; but many times we meet with strong winds and great storms: scandals, temptations, sicknesses, sorrows, distress, persecutions and various dangers. We must not, however, lose courage. We must be bold, courageous and faithful. If we lose courage in the face of dangers, as timid humans of little faith, let us call upon Christ as Peter did; and He will reach out His hand and help us.

Blessed Elder Philotheos of Paros (+1980)

THE SPIRITUAL EXALTATION OF THE LORD'S CROSS

By St. Theophan the Recluse, from "Letters on the Spiritual Life."

The Exaltation of the Lord's Cross (September 14th) has arrived. Then the Cross was erected on a high place, so that the people could see it and render honor to it. Now, the cross is raised in the churches and monasteries. But this is all external.

There is a spiritual exaltation of the cross in the heart. It happens when one firmly resolves to crucify himself, or to mortify his passions—something so essential in Christians that, according to the Apostle, they only are Christ's who have crucified their flesh with its passions and lusts (cf. Gal 5:24). Having raised this cross in themselves, Christians hold it exalted all their lives.

Let every Christian soul ask himself if this is how it is, and let him hearken to the answer that his conscience gives him in his heart. Oh, may we not hear, "You only please your flesh in the passions; your cross is not exalted—it is thrown into the pit of the passions, and is rotting there in negligence and contempt!"

When the Lord was taken down from the Cross, the Cross remained on Golgotha, and then it was thrown into the pit that was in that place, where this instrument of execution was usually thrown, together with other refuse. Soon Jerusalem was razed and all of its edifices were leveled to the ground. The pit containing the Cross of Christ was also filled over.

When the pagans rebuilt the city (the Jews were forbidden to come near the place where it was), it happened that on the place where the Cross of Christ was hidden, they placed an idol of Venus, the pagan Goddess of fornication and all manner of lusts. This is what the enemy suggested to them and this is how it is with our inner cross.

When the enemy destroys the spiritual order in the soul, this is our mental Jerusalem, and then the spiritual cross is thrown down from the Golgotha of the heart and is covered over with the garbage of the affections and lusts. Lustful self-pleasure then rises like a tower over all our inner peace, and everything in us bows down to it and fulfills its commands until grace shines upon us, inspiring us to cast down the idol and lift up the cross of self-crucifixion.



Against impure thoughts, use the spiritual sword: the name of [Jesus]. You must offer repentance to the Lord, and you must not hide anything from your spiritual father. Wounds that are exposed heal quickly.

St. Joseph the Hesychast (+1959)

THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

By St. John Maximovich of Shanghai and San Francisco (+1966).

And He [Jesus Christ] is the head of the body, the Church (Col 2:28), which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. (Eph 1:22).

In the Holy Scripture, the Church is repeatedly called the Body of Christ. *Who [Paul] now rejoice in my sufferings for you, ... for His Body's sake, which is the Church (Col 1:24),* the Apostle Paul writes about himself. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, he says, are given by Christ., *for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ. (Eph 4:11-12).*

At the same time, bread and wine are made into the Body and Blood of Christ during the Divine Liturgy, and the faithful partake thereof. Christ Himself ordained it, in communicating His apostles at the Mystical Supper with the words, *Take, eat; this is My Body ... Drink ye all of it; For this is My Blood of the New Testament (Mt 26:26-28).*

How is the Body of Christ at the same time both the Church and the Holy Mystery? Are the faithful themselves both members of the Body of Christ, the Church, and also communicants of the Body of Christ in the Holy Mysteries?

In neither instance is this name, *Body of Christ*, used metaphorically, but rather in the most actual sense of the word. We believe that the Holy Mysteries, while keeping the appearance of bread and wine, are the very Body and the very Blood of Christ. We likewise believe and confess that Christ is the Son of the Living God, come into the world to save sinners; that He became true man, and that His flesh, taken from the Virgin Mary, was actual human flesh; that in body and soul Christ was a true man, like other men in all respects except sin, while remaining at the same time true God. In this incarnation, the Divine nature was neither diminished nor changed in the Son of God; likewise the human nature was not changed at this incarnation, but retained in full all human qualities.

Unchanged and unconfused forever, indivisibly and inseparably, Godhead and manhood were united in the One Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Son of God became incarnate to make people *partakers of the Divine nature* (II Pet 1:4), to free them from sin and death, and to make them immortal. Uniting ourselves with Christ, we receive Divine grace which gives human nature strength for victory over sin and death. By His teaching, the Lord Jesus Christ has

shown people the way to victory over sin, and He grants them eternal life, making them partakers of His eternal Kingdom by His Resurrection. In order to receive from Him that Divine grace, the closest possible contact with Him is necessary. Drawing all to Himself by His divine love, and uniting them unto Himself, the Lord has united to each other those who love Him and come unto Him, uniting them into one Church.

The Church is unity in Christ, the closest union with Christ of all who rightly believe on Him and love Him, and their union is through Christ. The Church consists of both her earthly and heavenly parts, for the Son of God came to earth and became man that He might lead man into heaven and make him once again a citizen of Paradise, returning to him his original state of sinlessness and wholeness and uniting him unto Himself.

Man's return to Paradise and his union with Christ is accomplished by the action of Divine grace granted through the Church; however, man's effort is also required. God saves His fallen creature by His own love for him, but man's love for his Creator is also necessary; without it he cannot be saved. Striving toward God and cleaving unto the Lord by its humble love, the human soul obtains power to cleanse itself from sin and to strengthen itself for the struggle to complete victory over sin.

The body also partakes in that struggle; now it is a receptacle and instrument of sin, but it is foreordained to be an instrument of righteousness and a vessel of holiness. God created man, breathing divine breath into the animate body He had created earlier from the earth. The body was to have been an instrument of the spirit, subject to God, for through it the human spirit manifests itself in the material world. Through the body and its separate members, the spirit reveals its properties and qualities which God gave it, as to His own image, which is why the body also, as a manifestation of the image of God, is both called and is indeed *our beauty created in the image of God. (sticheron from the Funeral Service).*

When the first-created people fell away in spirit from their Creator, the body, hitherto subject to the spirit and obtaining its directions through the soul, ceased to be subordinate to it and began to strive to dominate it. In place of the law of God, the law of the flesh began to rule man. Sin, in turn, having cut man off from the source of life—God—rent man asunder. The union of spirit, soul, and body was violated, and death entered into him. The soul, no longer surrounded by the streams of life, could not transmit them to the body, which became corruptible, and the soul began to languish.



Christ came to earth to restore the fallen image and return it to union with Him Whose image it is. Uniting man unto Himself, God thus restores him to his original goodness in all its fullness. Granting grace and sanctification to the spirit, Christ also purifies, strengthens, heals, and sanctifies the soul and the body.

But he that is joined unto the Lord is one Spirit [with Him] (I Cor 6:17). The body, then, of the man who has been united unto the Lord, must be an instrument of the Lord, must serve for the fulfillment of His will, and become a part of the Body of Christ. For a man's complete sanctification, the body of the servant of the Lord must be united with the Body of Christ, and this is accomplished in the Mystery of Holy Communion. The true Body and the true Blood of Christ which we receive become part of the great Body of Christ.

Of course, for union with Christ, the mere conjoining of our body with the Body of Christ does not suffice. The consumption of the Body of Christ becomes beneficial when in spirit we strive toward Him and unite ourselves with Him. Receiving the Body of Christ, while turning away from Him in spirit, is like the contact with Christ which they had who struck Him and mocked and crucified Him. Their contact with Him served not for their salvation and healing, but for their condemnation.

But those who partake with piety, love and readiness to serve Him, closely unite themselves with Him and become instruments of His Divine will. *He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him, said the Lord.* (Jn 6:56). Uniting with the Risen Lord, and through Him with the entire Eternal Trinity, man draws from It power for eternal life and himself becomes immortal. *As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me.* (Jn 6:57).

All who believe in Christ and unite themselves unto Him by giving themselves to Him and by the reception of Divine Grace, jointly comprise the Church of Christ, whose Head is Christ Himself, and they who enter into her are her members.

Christ, invisible to the bodily eye, clearly manifests Himself on earth through His Church, just as the invisible human spirit manifests itself through its body. The Church is the Body of Christ both because her parts are united to Christ through His Divine Mysteries, and because through her Christ works in the world. We partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, in the Holy Mysteries, so that we ourselves may be members of Christ's Body: the Church.

This is not accomplished instantly. To fully abide in the Church is already a state of victory over sin and complete purification therefrom. Everything sinful estranges us from the Church to some degree, and keeps us out of the Church. This is why, in the prayer read over every penitent

at Confession, we hear, *...reconcile and unite [him/her] unto Thy Holy Church.* Through repentance a Christian is cleansed and he is united closely to Christ in partaking of the Holy Mysteries. Later, however, the dirt of sin again settles upon him and estranges him from Christ and the Church, and therefore repentance and Communion are again necessary.

Until man's earthly life finishes its course, up to the very departure of the soul from the body, the struggle between sin and righteousness continues within him. However high a spiritual and moral state one might achieve, a gradual or even headlong and deep fall into the abyss of sin is always possible. Therefore, communion of the holy Body and Blood of Christ, which strengthens our contact with Him and refreshes us with the living streams of the grace of the Holy Spirit flowing through the Body of the Church, is necessary for everyone.

The great importance of partaking of the Holy Mysteries is seen in the life of Saint Onuphrius the Great to whom, as well as to other hermits living in the same desert, angels brought Holy Communion; and in the life of Saint Mary of Egypt, whose final wish after many years in the desert was to partake of the Holy Mysteries. And there are similar examples in the lives of Saint Sabbatius of Solovki and many others. Not in vain did the Lord say, *Amen, amen, I say unto you, except ye eat the Flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, ye have no life in you.* (Jn 6:23).

To partake of the Body and Blood of Christ is to receive in oneself the Risen Christ, the Victor over death, Who grants to those with Him victory over sin and death. Preserving in ourselves the grace-filled gift of Communion, we have a guarantee and foretaste of the blessed, eternal life of the soul and body.

Up to the very "Day of Christ," His Second Coming and the Judgment of the whole world, the struggle of sin with righteousness will continue, individually in each person, and collectively in all mankind.

The earthly Church unites all who are reborn through baptism and who have taken up the cross of the struggle with sin, and who follow after Christ, the contest-master of this struggle. The Divine Eucharist, the offering of the bloodless sacrifice and partaking thereof, sanctifies and strengthens its partakers and makes those who receive of the Body and Blood of Christ true members of His Body, the Church. But only with death is it determined whether a man remained a true member of the Body of Christ to his last breath, or whether sin triumphed in him and drove out the grace which he received in the Holy Mysteries and which bound him to Christ.

He who, as a member of the earthly Church, has reposed in grace, goes over from the earthly Church into the heavenly Church; but he who falls away from the earthly Church will

not enter into the heavenly, for the Church in this world is the way into the heavenly. The more one is found to be under the influence of the grace of communion and the more tightly one has united himself to Christ, the more one will find pleasure in communion with Christ in His coming Kingdom.

It is very important to partake of the Mysteries of Christ just before death, when the lot of a man is determined forever. It is necessary to try to receive just before death, if there be even the slightest possibility of this, to beseech the Lord to find us worthy of this and to take thought for others, so that they may not be deprived of Communion before the end.

Inasmuch as sin continues to operate in the soul until death, so the body is liable to its consequences, bearing in itself the seeds of disease and death from which it is freed only when it decays after death, and then rises at last free of them in the general resurrection. He who unites himself in spirit and in body with Christ in this life will be with Him in spirit and in body in the life to come. The grace-filled streams of the life-creating Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ are the well-spring of our eternal joy in converse with the risen Christ and in the contemplation of His glory.

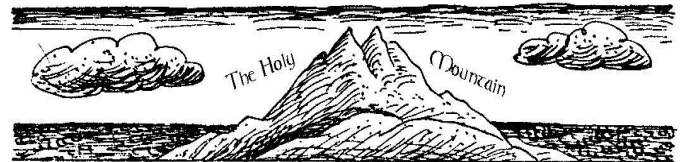
The same consequences of sin, not yet completely driven out from the human race, operate not only in individual people, but through them they are manifested in the earthly activity of entire parts of the Church. Heresies, schisms, and disputes arise constantly, tearing away part of the faithful. Misunderstandings between local Churches or parts of them have troubled the Church since antiquity, and prayers for their cessation are repeatedly heard in the Divine services.

We pray for the unity of the Churches, unity to the Churches (Triadic, Resurrection Canon, Tone 8), Set aright the dissensions of the Church (service to the Archangels, 8 November, 26 March, 13 July), and similar prayers have been offered by the Orthodox Church through the centuries. Even on Holy and Great Saturday, before the epitaphion of Christ, the Church pronounces: O most blameless, pure Virgin, who didst bring forth the Life, stop the scandals of the Church, and grant peace as thou are good. (Last verse of the second stasis of the Lamentations).

Only when Christ appears on the clouds will the tempter be trampled down, and all scandals and temptations disappear. Then the struggle between good and evil, between life and death will cease, and the earthly Church will merge with the Church Triumphant, in which God will be all in all (I Cor 15:28).

In the Kingdom of Christ to come, there will no longer be a need to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, for all who have been vouchsafed it will be in closest converse with Him

and will enjoy the pre-eternal light of the Life-originating Trinity, experiencing that blessedness which no tongue can express, and which is incomprehensible to our feeble mind. For this reason, after partaking of the Holy Mysteries at Liturgy, in the altar there is always said the prayer which we sing during the Paschal season: *O Christ, Thou great and most sacred Paschal O Wisdom, Word and Power of God! Grant us to partake of Thee more perfectly in the unwaning day of Thy Kingdom. (Ninth Ode, Paschal Canon).*



In the skete of St. Anne lived a certain hiermonk Savvas, the famous “Papa-Savvas” as he was called. Fr. Joachim Spetsieris had him as his spiritual father. The Empress of Russia, Catherine, also had him as her spiritual father. He served the liturgy every day; he was a God-bearing, clairvoyant teacher of noetic prayer.

Once some people asked him, “What motivates you to commemorate so many names in the *proskomidi*?” He answered, “When I was younger, we called the bishop to consecrate the church above the Holy Monastery of St. Dionysios” (It was there that he first practiced *hesychasm*, with his elder, Papa-Hilarion, another famous spiritual father.) “After the consecration, the bishop said to my Elder, ‘May I give Papa-Savvas some names to commemorate for forty days, since he serves liturgy every day?’ My Elder told him, ‘Give him as many as you want.’ So he gave me sixty-two names.

When I had completed thirty-nine Liturgies and was about to serve the fortieth, I leaned against the chanter’s stand and waited for my Elder to come, so that I could say the entrance prayers to serve Liturgy. I fell asleep and saw in my sleep that I was wearing priestly vestments and was standing before the Holy Table. On the Holy Table was the holy *diskos* for the Liturgy, and the holy chalice full of the holy Blood of Christ. Then I saw a priest come and take the communion spoon and the paper from the *proskomidi*, approach the Holy Table, and put the paper on it beside the holy *diskos*. Then he dipped the spoon into the holy Blood of Christ and a name was erased. He dipped it again and another one was erased, and so forth until all were done and the paper was clean. Then I awoke, and in a little while my Elder came. Immediately I told him what I saw. The Elder said to me, ‘Didn’t I tell you not to believe in dreams?’ After the Liturgy he added, ‘You are not worthy for their sins to be forgiven; through the power of the Blood of Christ their sins were forgiven.’ So this is the reason why I commemorate the names of everyone.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou
From Counsels from the Holy Mountain

THE LIFE OF OUR PANAGHIA IS SET BEFORE VIRGINS AS AN EXAMPLE

By St. Ambrose of Milan, from "Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers."

The life of Mary is set before virgins as an example, and her many virtues are dwelt upon, her chastity, humility, hard life, love of retirement, and the like; then her kindness to others, her zeal in learning, and love of frequenting the temple. St. Ambrose then sets forth how she, adorned with all these virtues, will come to meet the numberless bands of virgins and lead them with great triumph to the bridal chamber of the Spouse.

† † †

Let, then, the life of Mary be as it were virginity itself, set forth in a likeness, from which, as from a mirror, the appearance of chastity and the form of virtue is reflected. From this you may take your pattern of life, showing, as an example, the clear rules of virtue: what you have to correct, to effect, and to hold fast.

The first thing which kindles ardor in learning is the greatness of the teacher. What is greater than the Mother of God? What more glorious than she whom Glory Itself chose? What more chaste than she who bore a body without contact with another body? For why should I speak of her other virtues? She was a virgin not only in body but also in mind, who stained the sincerity of its disposition by no guile, who was humble in heart, grave in speech, prudent in mind, sparing of words, studious in reading, resting her hope not on uncertain riches, but on the prayer of the poor, intent on work, modest in discourse. She was accustomed to seek not man but God as the judge of her thoughts, to injure no one, to have goodwill towards all, to rise up before her elders, not to envy her equals, to avoid boastfulness, to follow reason, to love virtue.

When did she pain her parents even by a look? When did she disagree with her neighbors? When did she despise the lowly? When did she avoid the needy? She would only to go to such gatherings of men as mercy would not blush at, nor modesty pass by. There was nothing gloomy in her eyes, nothing forward in her words, nothing unseemly in her acts; there was not a silly movement, nor unrestrained step, nor was her voice petulant. The very appearance of her outward being was the image of her soul, the representation of what is approved. For a well-ordered house ought to be recognized on the very threshold, and should show at the very first entrance that no darkness is hidden within, as our soul hindered by no restraints of the body may shine abroad like a lamp placed within.

Why should I detail her spareness of food, her abundance of services—the one abounding beyond nature, the other almost insufficient for nature? And there were no seasons of slackness, but days of fasting, one upon the other. And if ever the desire for refreshment came, her food was generally what came to hand, taken to keep off death, not to minister to comfort. Necessity before inclination caused her to sleep, and yet when her body was sleeping her soul was awake, and often in sleep either went again through what had been read, or went on with what had been interrupted by sleep, or carried out what had been designed, or foresaw what was to be carried out.

She was unaccustomed to be away from home, except for divine service, and this only with parents or kinsfolk. Busy in private at home, accompanied by others abroad, yet with no better guardian than herself, as she, inspiring respect by her gait and address, progressed not so much by the motion of her feet as by step upon step of virtue. But though the Virgin had other persons who were protectors of her body, she alone guarded her character. The holy Virgin Mary attended to everything as though she were warned by many, and fulfilled every obligation of virtue as though she were teaching rather than learning.

Such has the Evangelist shown her, such did the angel find her, such did the Holy Spirit choose her. Why delay about details? How her parents loved her, strangers praised her, how worthy she was that the Son of God should be born of her. She, when the angel entered, was found at home in privacy, without a companion, that no one might interrupt her attention or disturb her; and she did not desire any women as companions, even those that had the companionship of good thoughts. Moreover, she seemed to herself to be less alone when she was alone. For how should she be alone, who had with her so many books, so many archangels, so many prophets?

And that is how the holy Archangel Gabriel found her, when he visited her (Lk 1:28); Mary trembled, being disturbed, as though at the form of a man, but on hearing his name recognized him as one not unknown to her. And so she was a stranger as to men, but not as to the angel; that we might know that her ears were modest and her eyes bashful. Then, when saluted, she kept silence, and when addressed, she answered, and she whose feelings were first troubled, afterwards promised obedience.

Holy Scripture points out how modest she was towards her neighbors. For she became more humble when she knew herself to be chosen of God, and went forthwith to her kinswoman in the hill country, not in order to gain belief by anything external, for she had believed the word of God.



Blessed, she said, *art thou who didst believe*. (Lk 1:56). And she abode with her three months. Now in such an interval of time it is not that faith is being sought for, but kindness which is being shown. And this was after that the child, *leaping in his mother's womb*, had saluted the mother of the Lord, attaining to reason before birth.

And then, in the many subsequent wonders, when the barren bore a son, the virgin conceived, the dumb spake, the wise men worshipped, Simeon waited, the stars gave notice. Mary, who was moved by the angel's entrance, was unmoved by the miracles. *Mary*, it is said, *kept all these things in her heart*. (Lk 2:19). Though she was the mother of the Lord, yet she desired to learn the precepts of the Lord, and she who brought forth God, yet desired to know God.

And then, how she also went every year to Jerusalem at the solemn day of the Passover and went with Joseph. Everywhere modesty is the companion of her singular virtues in the Virgin. This, without which virginity cannot exist; it must be the inseparable companion of virginity. And so Mary did not go even to the temple without the guardianship of her modesty.

This is the likeness of virginity. For Mary was such that her example alone is a lesson for all. Let us conclude then that whoever desires its reward for herself may imitate the pattern. How many kinds of virtues shine forth in one Virgin! The secret of modesty, the banner of faith, the service of devotion, the Virgin within the house, the companion for the ministry, the mother at the temple.

Oh! How many virgins shall she meet, how many shall she embrace and bring to the Lord, and say: *She has been faithful to her espousal, to my Son; she has kept her bridal couch with spotless modesty*. How shall the Lord Himself commend them to His Father, repeating again those words of His: *Holy Father, these are they whom I have kept for Thee, on whom the Son of Man leant His head and rested; I ask that where I am there they may be with Me*. (Jn 17:24). And if they ought to benefit not themselves only, who lived not for themselves alone, one virgin may redeem her parents, another her brothers. *Holy Father, the world hath not known Me, but these have known Me, and have willed not to know the world*. (Jn 17:25).

What a procession shall that be, what joy of applauding angels when she is found worthy of dwelling in heaven who lived on earth a heavenly life! *Then too Mary*, (in Hebrew Miriam) *taking her timbrel*, shall stir up the choirs of virgins, singing to the Lord because they have passed through the sea of this world without suffering from the waves of this world (Ex 15:20). Then each shall rejoice, saying: *I will go to the altar of God; to God Who maketh my youth glad*. (Pss 42:4); and, *I will offer unto God thanksgiving, and pay my vows unto the Most High*. (Pss 49:14).

Nor would I hesitate to admit you to the altars of God, whose souls I would without hesitation call altars, on which Christ is daily offered for the redemption of the body. For if

the virgin's body be a temple of God, what is her soul, which, the ashes, as it were, of the body being shaken off, once more uncovered by the hand of the Eternal Priest, exhales the vapor of the divine fire.

Blessed are the virgins, who emit a fragrance through divine grace as gardens do through flowers, temples through religion, altars through the priest.



If *precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints* (Pss 116:15), and *the memory of the just is praised* (Prov 10:7), how much more fitting is it for us to celebrate with highest honors the memory of the ever-virgin Mother of God, the Holy of Holies, through whom the saints receive their hallowing? That is exactly what we are doing by commemorating her holy passing away, through which, having been made *a little lower than the angels* (Pss 8:5), she rose incomparably higher than the Angels, Archangels, and all the heavenly powers above them, because of her nearness to the God of all, and the marvels written of old which were accomplished in her.

St. Gregory Palamas

If artists who make statues and paint portraits of kings are held in high esteem, will not God bless ten thousand times more those who reveal and beautify His royal image? For man is the image of God. When we teach our children to be good, to be gentle, to be forgiving, to be generous, to love their neighbor, to regard this present age as nothing, we install virtue in their souls, and reveal the image of God within them; for all of these are attributes of God. This, then, is our task: to educate both ourselves and our children in godliness; otherwise what answer will we have before Christ's judgment seat? Let us be greatly concerned for our wives and our children, and for ourselves as well. The good God Himself will bring this work to perfection, so that all of us may be counted worthy of the blessings He has promised.

St. John Chrysostom

Faith is the key of God's treasury. She dwells in simple, kind, loving hearts. *All things are possible to him that believeth*. (Mk 9:23). Faith is a spiritual mouth, the more freely it opens the greater the stream by which the Divine springs enter into it; let this mouth freely open, as your bodily one does; do not let your lips be compressed by doubt and unbelief: if you compress them by doubt and unbelief, the treasury of God's blessings will be closed to you. The more openly, the more heartily you believe in God's omnipotence, the more bountifully will God's heart be opened to you. *What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them*. (Mk 11:24).

St. John of Kronstadt

PRAY FOR THE REPOSED!

Hieromartyr John of Riga, from Orthodox Life, Vol. 42, No. 6 (Nov.-Dec., 1992), pp. 29-32.

The death of people who are close and dear to us is one of the most difficult trials sent to us by the Lord God during this temporary life. There are no tears more bitter than the tears of a mother for the beloved child of her heart who goes to the grave before his time. What sorrow can we compare to the sorrow of widows and orphans? Nonetheless, our Lord and Saviour turns to these people, the most unfortunate ones in the eyes of the world, saying respectfully, *Do not weep!* The Apostle Paul commands these sorrowing ones, saying, *Do not sorrow!*

What does all this mean? Of course, it does not mean that we should forget those dear loved ones of ours who have departed, that we should cast them out of our hearts. No. We should love them after their death just as we loved them in life. However, we should not sorrow over their death. Death does not separate us who are Christians from communion in love with those who are dear to us. The Lord Himself has given us the very grace-filled means needed to have communion with them.

The first among these means is prayer. Prayer is the best means for spiritual communion among people who are still alive. The Apostle Paul beseeched the believers to pray continually for him in order that the Lord would grant him strength and power to preach. Likewise, St. Paul prayed for others that the Lord would confirm them in the Faith and in a Christian life. There is no doubt that the prayers of believers strengthened the Apostle and that his prayers strengthened them.

We find an amazing example of the power and action of mutual prayer in the Acts of the Apostles. While St. Peter was in prison sleeping between two guards, *prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him* (Acts 12:5). What was the result of this prayer? During that very night, the Angel of the Lord appeared in the prison, awoke the sleeping Apostle, and led him out of prison.

The power and action of prayer for the souls of the departed is even greater than prayer for the living. There is no greater comfort than prayer and no greater joy than joy in the Lord for those who are separated from their bodies. It is unjust, as some think, to assume that the needs of our departed brethren are unknown to us. However, this is not true. The spiritual needs of the dead are the same as the spiritual needs of the living. The dead need the mercy and goodness of the Heavenly Father, forgiveness and remission

of sins, grace-filled help from God in the fulfillment of all good desires, and the peace and ease of the heart and conscience. These things are most important both for the living and the dead. *Give rest, O Lord, to the souls of Thy departed servants* is the continual prayer and best intention of our Mother Church for the souls of Her departed. We should also beseech the Lord with this intention for the departed souls of our own loved ones.

It could be that some soul bound himself with earthly attachments, with earthly cares, and could not be free of them after death. Earthly thoughts about home and cares, about acquiring things, might still tug at this soul, torture him, and not allow him the freedom to strive with heart and soul towards God. We should pray that the Lord will grant rest to such a soul in the quiet harbor of His Kingdom. We should pray that the Lord will destroy and burn up in the fire of His Grace the memory of his earthly cares. We should pray that the Lord will warm this soul with love and with the desire for eternal treasure, that the Lord will give rest to this soul in the sweetest hope of eternal blessedness.

Perhaps, having confessed at the hour of death, some soul did so quickly, in a confused manner. This soul might have forgotten something because of troubled feelings, and he now grieves over this. Perhaps, this soul did not have time to offer God true repentance, to fully cleanse his sins by tears of compunction. Perhaps, the awareness of unconfessed and unforgiven sins tear and torture this soul. Pray for this soul who is suffering. Pray that the Lord God might comfort him with the protection of His inextinguishable mercy. Pray that this soul might receive, albeit at this late hour, remission of sins because of his sincere remorse.

Who can enumerate all those bonds with which our soul might bind itself in this lifetime and by which it might remain bound for eternity. One might have been envious of his neighbor in the depths of one's soul and bound himself thus. Another person might have mocked the weakness of His neighbor and become according to the words of the Lord, worthy of Hell. Another person might have lied and as a result became the son of the father of lies. *If Thou shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, O Lord, who shall stand?* Therefore, no matter how holy a man's life might be, no one can be sure that he will pass into the next world completely reconciled with God. No man can say that the prayerful intercessions of those brethren who are left alive are unnecessary for him.

Was not the repentance of St. Ephraim the Syrian sincere and deep? Even he, sensing that his end was near, besought



his brethren, "O Brothers, accompany me into the world above with prayers, psalms, and offerings. Remember me on the fortieth day after my death; because prayers and offerings made by the living help the departed."

Works of charity are another means of communion with the departed. "If you desire to honor the dead, offer a gift for him. Honor him by good works, charitable offerings, and services" (St. John Chrysostom). Send gifts for the reposed through the hands of the poor and the hopeless. In the name of the reposed, do acts of charity to the best of your ability and be assured that your gift will be received by God. Our Lord Jesus Christ has assured us that our gifts will be received, saying, *In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me.* (Mt 25:40). Can it be that He Who is all-powerful will remain in debt to us? If you give food and drink to the hungry and the thirsty in His name, then the Lord will fill the soul of your departed brother with the appearance of His light-bearing and joy-filling Image.

It could be that the soul of your relative is ashamed before the holy angels because of his lack of good deeds and because of his wretched sins, and he hides in darkness and in murky depths from the face of God. Clothe the naked; wash the feet of the tired; receive and give rest to the traveler in the name of such a soul; and the merciful Lord will vest this soul in the Garment of His Mercy, will adorn it in the Robe of His justification, will wash its sinful filth in His Most Precious Blood.

It could be that the soul of your friend bound by sins languishes in a dungeon without the vision of God's face. Hurry to a prison and assuage the heart of a suffering prisoner in the name of your departed friend. The Lord will send His bright angels to comfort the soul of your sorrowing friend, to strengthen him with hope, and make him rejoice in the promise of God's mercy.

It could be that a soul has left this world for the spiritual world without having drawn close to the holy inhabitants of that world through prayer; he may have appeared in that higher sphere as one entering a strange and unfamiliar land and may not find any spiritual "relative" in this upper Sion. Take in the stranger; give rest to the beggar; give him a place to rest his head, and the Lord will grant the soul, for whom you do this, one of the bright dwellings in His Father's mansion. The souls of the righteous will receive this soul in bright and joyful communion. St. John Chrysostom says, "If we desire to relieve the sufferings of a sinner, let us do acts of mercy in his name. Though he be unworthy, the Lord will comfort and pity him."

When we pray for the reposed and do charitable works in their name, it is necessary, brethren, to reflect on our own death while there is still time. We should prepare now so that we will not pass into the future life of torture bound

by bonds of sin. No matter how short or how long the Lord has determined that we will live on earth, there is no doubt that our entire present life is a road leading to death and to the threshold of eternity.

There is nothing better or of more value for us to acquire than *a peaceful, blameless, repentant, and Christian end to our life.* He who has lived piously will repose piously. He who has lived with the Lord will die with the Lord. He who zealously serves the Lord before death will be with the Lord after his repose. *Where I am, there shall also My servant be.* For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.



It is good to pray always and not to lose heart, as the Lord says, And again the Apostle says, *Pray without ceasing,* (Lord Jesus Christ Have Mercy On Me) that is by night and by day and at every hour, and not only when coming into the church, and not bothering at other times. But whether you are working, lying down to sleep, traveling, eating, drinking, sitting at table, do not interrupt your prayer, for you do not know when he who demands your soul is coming (death approaching...). Don't wait for Sunday or a feast day, or a different place, but, as the Prophet David says, *in every place of his dominion.*

Whether you are in church, or in your house, or in the country; whether you are guarding sheep, or constructing buildings, or present at drinking parties, do not stop praying. When you are able, bend your knees, when you cannot, make intercession in your mind, *at evening and at morning and at midday.* If prayer precedes your work and if, when you rise from your bed, your first movements are accompanied by prayer, sin can find no entrance to attack your soul.

Lets us also proclaim: With You, Lord, I will flee, that I may gain in You Life in every place. The prison with You is no prison, for in You man goes up into Heaven; the grave with You is no grave, for You are the Resurrection...

St. Ephraim the Syrian



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.

Τυφλοί, Κουφοί, Άλαλοι

Ομιλία του Μητροπολίτου Φλωρίνης π. Αύγουστίνου Καντιώτου (+2010).

Πολλές θρησκείες, αγαπητοί μου, υπάρχουν στον κόσμο. Άλλ' αν ρωτήσετε όχι μόνο τους ανθρώπους μα και τις πέτρες ακόμα, θα φωνάξουν, ότι η μόνη αληθινή είναι αυτή που ίδρυσε ο Κύριος ημών Ιησούς Χριστός με τη διδασκαλία του και το τίμιο αίμα του. Γιατί ο Χριστός δεν είναι ένας απλός άνθρωπος. Είναι Θεός! Το κηρύττει η διδασκαλία του, τα άθανάτα λόγια του τὸ βεβαιώνουν τὰ ἀμέτρητα θαύματά του, που έκανε, κάνει και θα κάνει μέχρι συντελείας τῶν αἰώνων.

Τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο μᾶς διηγείται πολλά ἀπὸ τὰ θαύματα που έκανε ὁ Χριστός. Θα μιλήσουμε γιὰ δύο. Τὸ ένα. Καθὼς μπήκε σὲ μιὰ πόλι, ἄκουσε πίσω του φωνές. Τί ἔλεγαν; «*Ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς...*» (Ματθ. 9:27).

Εἶνε τὸ «*Κύριε, ἐλέησον*» που λέμε κ' ἐμεῖς στὴν ἐκκλησία στὴ λατρεία μας. Ἀπὸ τὴν ὥρα που βάζει τὸ πετραχήλι ὁ παπᾶς, μέχρις ὅτου τελειώσει, δέκα, εἴκοσι, τριάντα και περισσότερες φορές λέμε «*Κύριε, ἐλέησον*». Ἀλλὰ πῶς τὸ λέμε; Τὸ δικό μας «*Κύριε, ἐλέησον*» βγαίνει ἀπὸ καρδιά παγωμένη ἐνῶ τὸ «*Κύριε, ἐλέησον*» τοῦ εὐαγγελίου βγαίνει σὰν φωτιὰ ἀπὸ τὴν καρδιά, μὲ πίστι και δάκρυα.

Ἄν πᾶτε στὴ Ῥωσία, τὸ «*Κύριε, ἐλέησον*» δὲν τὸ λέει μόνο ὁ ψάλτης. Σ' ἐμᾶς τὸ λέει ὁ ψάλτης ἐνῶ ἄλλοι, ιδίως οἱ γυναῖκες, κουβεντιάζουν. Θέλεις νὰ κουβεντιάσης; βγες ἔξω. Μέσα στὴν ἐκκλησία τὰ στόματα κλειστά, οἱ καρδιές στὸ Θεό. Τὸ «*Κύριε, ἐλέησον*», που λέει ὁ ψάλτης, πρέπει νὰ τὸ λένε ἀπὸ τὴν καρδιά τους ὅλοι οἱ Χριστιανοί. Καὶ τότε φτάνει ἓνα «*Κύριε, ἐλέησον*» νὰ κἀνη θαῦμα, ὅπως ἔκανε τὸ «*Κύριε, ἐλέησον*» που ἔλεγαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εὐαγγελίου.

Ποιοί ἦταν αὐτοί, που πίσω ἀπὸ τὸ Χριστὸ φώναζαν «*Ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς...*»; Ἦταν δυὸ δυστυχισμένοι. Τί ἦταν, φτωχοί; Μπορεῖ νὰ ἴσαι φτωχὸς και νὰ ἴσαι εὐτυχισμένος, χαρούμενος, νά'χης παράδεισο μέσα σου μπορεῖ νὰ ἴσαι φτωχὸς και νὰ ἴχης μιὰ καλὴ γυναῖκα και καλὰ παιδιὰ, και δὲ χρειάζεσαι τίποτα περισσότερο· μπορεῖ νὰ ἴσαι φτωχὸς και νὰ εἴσαι ὑγιής. Αὐτοί ἦταν δυστυχεῖς, γιατί δὲν εἶχαν τὴν ὑγεία τους, δὲν εἶχαν μάτια.

Ποιὸς ἀπὸ σᾶς, ἀν τοῦ δώσουν ἓνα τσουβάλι δολλάρια ἢ μιὰ βαλίτσα λίρες, δίνει τὰ μάτια του; Κανεῖς. Ἄρα λοιπόν, ἐσὺ που ἔχεις τὰ μάτια, δόξαζε τὸ Θεό, εἴσαι πλούσιος. Ἄμα ἔχης τὴν ὑγεία σου, εἴσαι ἓνας πλούσιος. Ὁ Ὠνάσης ἦταν ὁ πιδ πλούσιος στὸν κόσμο· τὸν πῆγαν στὰ καλύτερα νοσοκομεῖα, ἔφεραν τοὺς καλύτερους γιατρούς. Τί ἔλεγε; Κάντε με καλά, και σᾶς δίνω ὅλα τὰ καρᾶβια μου! Ἄρα λοιπόν, ἐσὺ που ἔχεις μάτια και βλέπεις, αὐτιὰ και ἄκους, καρδιά και χτυπᾶ, ἔχεις ὑγεία, ἔχεις ἓνα θησαυρό.

Αὐτοί που ἀκολουθοῦσαν τὸ Χριστὸ και φώναζαν «*Κύριε, ἐλέησον*», δῶσ' μας τὸ φῶς μας, ἦταν τυφλοί. Τὸ ἴπαν μιὰ φορά, τὸ ἴπαν δυὸ, τὸ ἴπαν δέκα φορές, μα ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν ἀπαντᾶ. Γιατί ἄραγε; Δὲν ἀκούει; Ἄν ἀκούη! Ῥαντὰρ εἶνε. Ἄν τὰ δικά μας ῥαντὰρ ἀκούνε ἀπὸ τόσο μακριὰ, ὁ Χριστὸς εἶνε τὸ μεγάλο ῥαντὰρ που ἀκούει τίς φωνές ὅλων, ὅσο μακριὰ κι ἀν βρίσκονται. Εἴτε στὴ σπηλιὰ εἴσαι εἴτε στὸ Βόρειο Πόλο εἴτε στὸ Νότιο Πόλο ἢ πάνω στὰ ἄστρα ἢ στὰ βάθη τῆς θαλάσσης ἢ τῆς γῆς, ὁ Θεὸς εἶνε ὄλο αὐτιὰ. Γιατί ὅμως ἐδῶ δὲν ἀπαντᾶ; Δοκιμάζει τὴν πίστι τους.

Μπαίνει ὁ Χριστὸς σ' ἓνα σπίτι, μπαίνουν κι αὐτοί και τὸν πλησιάζουν μὲ δάκρυα. Πιστεύετε, τοὺς ρωτᾶει, ὅτι μπορῶ νὰ κἀνω αὐτὸ που ζητᾶτε; Κι ὅταν εἶδε ὅτι ἡ πίστι τους εἶνε βράχος, τότε ἄγγιξε μὲ τὰ ἁγιά του δάκτυλα τὰ μάτια τους και οἱ τυφλοὶ εἶδαν τὸ φῶς τους. «*Δόξα σοι τῷ δεῖξαντι τὸ φῶς...*».

Τὸ δεύτερο θαῦμα. Μόλις ἔφυγαν οἱ τυφλοί, νὰ και ἔρχεται ἓνας που ὑπὸ τὴν ἐπήρεια δαιμονίου δὲν ἄκουγε και δὲ μιλοῦσε καθόλου· ἦταν κωφάλαλος. Ὁ Χριστὸς

ἔβγαλε τὸ δαιμόνιο, και ἄνοιξαν τὰ αὐτιὰ του και ἄκουγε και ἄρχισε ἡ γλῶσσα του νὰ μιλά.

Αὐτὰ τὰ θαύματα ἔκανε ὁ Χριστὸς. Θεράπευσε δυὸ τυφλοὺς και ἓνα κωφάλαλο. Ὁ λαὸς θαύμασε τὰ πρωτάκουστα αὐτὰ σημεῖα. Δὲν πίστεψαν ὅμως ὅλοι. Ἄμα κάποιος εἶνε προκατειλημμένος, χίλια θαύματα νὰ δῆ κι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστὸς νὰ κατεβῆ στὴ γῆ, δὲ πιστεύει. Καὶ τὴν ἡμέρα ἐκείνη κάτι φῖδια φαρμακερά, παιδιὰ τοῦ διαβόλου, σκοτεινοὶ και ὑπερήφανοὶ ἄνθρωποι, οἱ φαρισαῖοι, ὄχι μόνο δὲν πίστεψαν, ἀλλὰ ἄρχισαν νὰ διαβάλλουν τὸ Χριστὸ λέγοντας, ὅτι βγάξει τὰ δαιμόνια μὲ τὴ δύναμι τοῦ σατανᾶ! Ὑπάρχει χειρότερη βλασφημία;



—Τί μ' ενδιαφέρουν έμένα αυτά; θα πής. Έγώ, δόξα τῷ Θεῷ, ἔχω μάτια καὶ βλέπω, ἔχω αὐτιά κι ἀκούω, ἔχω γλῶσσα καὶ μιλάω...

Ἄν σ' ενδιαφέρει; Πολὺ μᾶς ενδιαφέρει! Γιατὶ ὑπάρχουν δύο εἰδῶν τυφλοὶ: τυφλοὶ σωματικῶς καὶ τυφλοὶ πνευματικῶς. Καὶ ὑπάρχουν κουφοὶ σωματικῶς καὶ κουφοὶ πνευματικῶς. Καὶ ὑπάρχουν ἄλαλοι σωματικῶς καὶ ἄλαλοι πνευματικῶς.

Ποιοὶ εἶνε τυφλοὶ στὴν ψυχὴ; Νά, οἱ φαρισαῖοι. Δὲν εἶδαν τὰ θαύματα; Καὶ ὅμως δὲν πίστεψαν. Μάτια εἶχαν καὶ μάτια δὲν εἶχαν.

Ὅπως τότε ἐκεῖνοι, ἔτσι καὶ σήμερα νεώτεροι γραμματεῖς καὶ φαρισαῖοι βλέπουν θαύματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τῆς Παναγίας, τῶν ἁγίων, καὶ δὲν πιστεύουν. Τυφλοὶ εἶνε. Νά κάποιοι ποὺ πῆγαν στὸ πανεπιστήμιο καὶ στὸ ἐξωτερικὸ κ' ἔμαθαν μερικὰ γράμματα, καὶ τώρα κάθονται διπλοπόδι στὸ καφενεῖο μὲ τὸ τσιγάρο στὸ στόμα καὶ λένε πῶς δὲν ὑπάρχει Θεός. Ποιοὶ τὸ λένε; Αὐτοὶ ποὺ δὲν ἔμαθαν ἀκόμα τὸ ἄλφα τῆς ἐπιστήμης. Ξέρετε πῶς μοιάζουν; Σὰν νὰ πῆ κάποιος, ὅτι ἓνα ἐργοστάσιο, μὲ τόσες μηχανές καὶ τροχοὺς καὶ μοτέρ, φύτρωσε μόνο του, ὅπως τὰ μανιτάρια πάνω στὴν κοπριά. Τὸ λέει κανεὶς; Δὲν τὸ λέει. Ὅποιος πῆ τέτοιο πρᾶγμα, θὰ τοῦ φορέσουν ζουρλομανδύα καὶ θὰ τὸν πᾶνε στὸ φρενοκομεῖο.

Τὸ ἐργοστάσιο τῆς Δ.Ε.Η. κάποιος τὸ ἔφτιαξε. Καὶ τί εἶν' αὐτὸ μπροστὰ τὸ μεγάλο ἐργοστάσιο ποὺ λέγεται ἥλιος καὶ φωτίζει τόσους αἰῶνες δωρεάν; Αὕτῃ τῇ Δ.Ε.Η. τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ποιός τὴν ἔφτιαξε; Θέλεις ἄλλο ἐργοστάσιο; Νά τὸ χῶμα ποὺ πατᾶς! Τὸ σπέρνεις καὶ βγαίνουν ἀπὸ μέσα λουλούδια, θάμνοι, δέντρα (ἀχλαδιές, μηλιές, πλατάνια...). Ποιός τὸ ἔκανε; Ὅλοι οἱ γεωπόνοι νὰ μαζευτοῦν, ἓνα σπόρο δὲ φτειαχνοὺν οὔτε θὰ φτειαξοῦν ποτέ. Στὸ φεγγάρι δὲν ὑπάρχει οὔτε νερὸ οὔτε φρούτο οὔτε δρόσια οὔτε ἀέρας: τίποτα, ξεραύλα. Ἄχ, τυφλὲ ἄνθρωπε, ὅλα σοῦ τὰ δίνει ὁ Μεγαλοδύναμος, καὶ δὲν ἔχεις μάτια νὰ τὰ δῆς καὶ νὰ τὸν δοξάσης. Νά λοιπὸν τυφλοὶ ποὺ ὑπάρχουν στὸν κόσμο.

Ἀλλὰ ὑπάρχουν καὶ κουφοί. Ποιοὶ εἶνε κουφοί; Ἔχουν αὐτιά, καὶ αὐτιά δὲν ἔχουν. Προχθὲς ἦρθε στὸ γραφεῖο τῆς μητροπόλεως μιὰ γυναίκα καὶ ἔκλαιγε.

—Τι ἔχεις; τῆς λέω, πέθανε τὸ παιδί σου;

—Μακάρι νὰ πέθαινε. Ἄχ, ἦταν καλὸς μαθητῆς, ἔπαιρνε καλοὺς βαθμούς. Τελευταῖα ἔμπλεξε μὲ παρέες καὶ ξενυχτάει. Τὸν συμβουλεύω ἐγώ, τὸν συμβουλεύει ὁ ἄντρας μου, μὰ αὐτὸς δὲν ἀκούει. Αὐτιά δὲν ἔχουν τὰ παιδιά σήμερα...

Δυστυχησμένοι γονεῖς! Δὲν ἀκοῦνε οἱ μικροὶ τοὺς μεγάλους, τὰ παιδιά τὸν πατέρα, οἱ μαθηταὶ τὸ δάσκαλο, οἱ Χριστιανοὶ τὸ δεσπότη, τὸν ἱεροκήρυκα. Δὲν ἀκοῦνε τὸ Χριστό, τὸ Θεό.

Τυφλοὶ ἄνθρωποι, κουφοὶ ἄνθρωποι. Ἀλλὰ ὑπάρχουν καὶ ἄλαλοι. Ἀπ' τὸ πρωὶ μέχρι τὸ βράδυ μπορεῖ νὰ λένε γιὰ χωράφια, γιὰ δουλειές, γιὰ ἔρωτες, γιὰ γυναῖκες, γιὰ λεπτά, γιὰ πολιτικὴ... Γιὰ ἓνα μόνο δὲ μιλάνε: γιὰ τὸ Θεό! Γλῶσσα ἔχουν καὶ γλῶσσα δὲν ἔχουν. Προσευχὴ δὲν κάνουν. Ποῦ καταντήσαμε!

Τί τὸ ὄφελος λοιπὸν νᾶχης μάτια καὶ νὰ μὴ βλέπης τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ Θεοῦ; Τί τὸ ὄφελος νᾶχης αὐτιά καὶ νὰ μὴν ἀκοῦς τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο; Τί ὄφελος νὰ ᾄχης γλῶσσα καί, ἐνῶ ἡ μπουκιά εἶνε στὸ στόμα σου, ἐσὺ νὰ βλαστημᾶς τὰ θεῖα; Καὶ ὁ διάβολος ἀκόμα τρέμει ὅταν ἀκούῃ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Θεοῦ μας.

Ἀδέρφια μου, σᾶς μιλῶ μὲ πόνο καὶ ἀναστε ναγιμὸ. Φθάσαμε στὸ τέλος. Θὰ ἔρθῃ μεγάλη καταστροφή. Διότι φύγαμε ὅλοι ἀπὸ τὸ δρόμο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἄνθρωπε, σοῦ ἔδωσε ὁ Θεὸς μάτια, γιὰ νὰ βλέπης τὰ μεγαλεῖα του καὶ νὰ λὲς «Ὡς ἐμεγαλύνθη τὰ ἔργα σου, Κύριε...» (Ψαλμ. 103:24). Σοῦ ἔδωσε αὐτιά, γιὰ ν' ἀκοῦς τὸ λόγο του. Σοῦ ἔδωσε γλῶσσα γιὰ νὰ τὸν ὁμολογῆς. Σοῦ ἔδωσε καρδιὰ γιὰ ν' ἀγαπᾶς ν' ἀγαπᾶς ὅλους (πατέρα, μάνα, παιδιά, πατρίδα, ὅ,τι ἱερὸ καὶ ὄσιο), μὰ πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα ν' ἀγαπᾶς Αὐτόν.

Χριστιανοί! Τὰ λόγια αὐτὰ φυτέψτετα στὴν καρδιά σας. Τυφλοί! Ἄς παρακαλέσουμε τὸ Θεὸ ν' ἀνοίξῃ τὰ μάτια μας νὰ τὸν δοῦμε. Κουφοί! Ἄς τὸν παρακαλέσουμε ν' ἀνοίξῃ τ' αὐτιά μας ν' ἀκούσουμε τὴ φωνὴ του. Ἄλαλοι! Ἄς τὸν παρακαλέσουμε, ἡ γλῶσσα μας νὰ γίνῃ κιθάρα, καὶ μέρα-νύχτα νὰ ὑμνῇ Πατέρα Υἱὸν καὶ ἅγιον Πνεῦμα, εἰς αἰῶνας αἰῶνων. Ἀμήν.

† Ἐπίσκοπος Ἀγίουστίνος



Κάθε ἄνθρωπος, ποὺ σὲ προσβάλλει, ποὺ σὲ βλάπτει, ποὺ σὲ συκοφαντεῖ, ποὺ σὲ ἀδικεῖ μὲ ὅποιοδήποτε τρόπο, εἶναι ἓνας ἀδελφός σου, ποὺ ἔπεσε στὰ χέρια τοῦ κακοποιοῦ διαβόλου. Ἐσύ, ὅταν ἀντικρίσεις τὸν ἀδελφό σου νὰ σὲ ἀδικεῖ, τί πρέπει νὰ κάνεις; Πρέπει νὰ τὸν λυπηθῆς πολὺ, νὰ τὸν συμπονέσης καὶ νὰ παρακαλέσης θερμὰ καὶ σιωπηλὰ τὸ Θεό, νὰ στηριξῇ ἐσένα, στὴ δύσκολη αὐτὴ ὥρα τῆς δοκιμασίας σου καὶ νὰ ἐλεήσῃ καὶ τὸν ἀδελφό σου, ποὺ ἔπεσε θύμα τοῦ ληστοῦ διαβόλου, κι ὁ Θεὸς θὰ βοηθήσῃ κι ἐσένα καὶ τὸν ἀδελφό σου. Διότι, ἂν δὲν τὸ κάνεις αὐτό, ἂν, ἀντιθέτως, ὀργιστεῖς ἐναντίον τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου, ἀντιτάσσοντας στὴν ἐπίθεσή του τὴν ἀντεπίθεσή σου, τότε ὁ διάβολος, ποὺ βρίσκεται στὸ σβέγκο τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ σου, πηδάει καὶ στὸ δικό σου σβέγκο καὶ σᾶς χορεύει καὶ τοὺς δύο.

Γέροντας Πορφύριος (+1991)

Ἡ Φωτιά τῆς Σμύρνης

Ἐνα ἀπόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Τὰ Ματωμένα Χώματα» τῆς Διδῶς Σωτηρίου. Ἀφιερωμένο σὲ ὄσους δὲν ξεχνοῦν καὶ δὲν φοβοῦνται τὴν ἀληθινὴ ἱστορία. Ἐλπίζουμε ὅτι ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς τῶν καιρῶν μας δὲν θὰ ἐπιτρέψει τὶς μέλλουσες γενεές νὰ ἐξαφανίσουν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐθνικὴ μνήμη τὰ γεγονότα τοῦ 1923...

Τὸ τούρκικο ἰππικὸ περνοῦσε καμαρωτὸ ἀπὸ τὴν παραλία. Κανεὶς δὲν ἔβγαλε τσιμουδιά. Καὶ τὰ μωρὰ κερῶσανε. Μόνο μία πολὺ ψιλὴ παιδικὴ φωνούλα ρώτηξε: «Τὶ θὰ μᾶς κάνουνε οἱ Τούρκοι; Τὶ θὰ μᾶς κάνουνε;»

Αὐτὴ ἔταν ὄλουων ἢ ἀγωνία, μὰ κανεὶς δὲν τὴν ἐξεστόμιζε. Ἀπὸ μερικὰ μπαλκόνια ξένων σπιτιῶν ἀκούστηκαν ἀδύναμα παλαμάκια καὶ «γιασασίν». Σὰν τέλειωσε ἡ παρέλαση, ἔγινε νεκρικὴ ἡσυχία. Ἡ δικιά μας μαούνα ἦταν ἡ τελευταία ἀπ' τὶς ἐξήντα καὶ βρισκότανε σιμὰ στὴν ξηρά. Σὲ λίγο ἀκούστηκε τελάλης.

-Μπρὲ σεῖς, τί λέει;

-Λέει, νὰ βγεί ὁ κόσμος καὶ νὰ πάει στὶς δουλειές του δίχως νὰ φοβᾶται. Κανένας δὲ θὰ κακοπάθει.

-Μπορεῖ ἡ νίκη νὰ μερώνει τσ' ἀνθρώπους, εἶπε ἡ μάνα μου.

-Οἱ Μεγάλες Δυνάμεις δώκανε ἐντολὴ νὰ μὴν ἀνοίξει ρουθοῦνι Χριστιανικό.

-Αὐτὴ ἔναι ἡ ἀλήθεια. Φτάνει τὸ αἷμα. Τὶ τὰ γενιτσαριὰ θᾶχουμε;

-Τόσοι στόλοι! Τόσα βασιλικά γιὰ τὰ μάτια ἠθαυρέψατε πῶς στέκουνε δῶ χάμου;

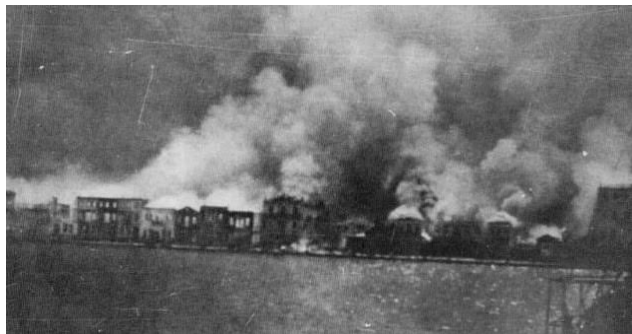
Ὁ ἀδερφός μου ὁ Κώστας μὲ πλησίασε ὅλο χαμόγελα καὶ φουσκώνοντας σὰν διάνος, μοῦπε εἰρωνικά:

-Τὶ γνώμη ἔχεις τώρα, Μανωλάκη, γιὰ τὸ χτήμα π' ἀγόρασα; Ἐκανα καλὰ ἢ μὲ πέρασε κορόϊδο ὁ μπάρμπα-Θόδωρος;

Ἦμιονα τόσο χαρούμενος πὺν θὰ τοῦ συγχωροῦσα χίλιες τόσες κακοκεφαλιές κι ἄλλες τόσες εἰρωνεῖες. Ὅλοι στὴ μαούνα γινήκαμε τώρα μιὰ παρέα. Βγάλαμε ὅ,τι φαγώσιμο εἶχαμε, παστά, αὐγά, κονσέρβες. Ἀρχίσαμε τὰ τραταμέντα καὶ τὶς τσιρεμόνιες. Ξάφνου, μέσα στὴ γενικὴ χαρὰ, ἀκούστηκε μιὰ φωνὴ κι ὕστερα πολλὲς μαζὶ:

-Φωτιά! Φωτιά!

-Βάλαν φωτιά στὴ Σμύρνη!



Πεταχτήκαμε ὀρθοί. Κοκκινόμαυρες φλόγες τινάζονταν στὸν οὐρανό, χοροπηδηχτές.

- Εἶναι κατὰ τὴν Ἀρμενογειτονιά.

- Κατὰ κεῖ φαίνεται νᾶναι.

- Πάλι οἱ Ἀρμεναῖοι θὰ τὰ πλερώσουνε!

-Ἀποκλείεται νὰ κάψουνε ὀλόκληρη τὴ Σμύρνη. Ποιὸ συμφέρον ἔχουνε;

Ἄφου ἔγινε πιά δική τους... Ποιὸ συμφέρον εἶχαμε μεῖς πὺν καίγαμε τὰ τουρκοχώρια στὴν ὑποχώρηση;

Ἡ φωτιά ἀπλωνόταν παντοῦ. Ντουμάνιασε πιά ὁ οὐρανός. Μαῦρα σύγνεφα ἀνηφορίζανε καὶ μερδευότανε τὸ ἔνα μὲ τ' ἄλλο. Κόσμος, ἑκατοντάδες χιλιάδες κόσμος, τρελλὸς ἀπὸ φόβο, ἀρχίνησε νὰ τρέχει ἀπ' ὅλα τὰ στενοσόκακα καὶ τοὺς βερχανέδες καὶ νὰ ξεχύνεται στὴν παραλία σὰν μαῦρο ποτάμι.

-Σφαγή! Σφαγή!

-Παναγιά, βοήθα!

-Προφτάστε. Σῶστε μας!

Ἡ μᾶζα πυκνώνει, δὲν ξεχωρίζεις ἀνθρώπους, μὰ ἔνα μαῦρο ποτάμι πὺν κουνιέται πέρα δώθε ἀπελπισμένα, δίχως νὰ μπορεῖ νὰ σταθεῖ οὔτε νὰ προχωρήσει. Μπρὸς θάλασσα, πίσω φωτιά καὶ σφαγή! Ἐνας ἀχὸς καταραυλαίει ἀπὸ τὰ βᾶθη τῆς πολιτείας καὶ σπέρνει τὸν πανικό.

-Τούρκοι!

-Τσέτες... Μᾶς σφάζουνε!

Ἡ θάλασσα δὲν εἶναι πιά ἐμπόδιο. Χιλιάδες ἀνθρώποι πέφτουνε καὶ πνίγονται. Τὰ κορμιά σκεπάζουνε τὰ νερὰ σὰν νᾶναι μόλος. Οἱ δρόμοι γεμίζουνε κι ἀδειάζουνε καὶ ξαναγεμίζουνε. Νέοι, γέροι, γυναῖκες, παιδιὰ ποδοπατιοῦνται, στριμώχνονται, λιποθυ-

μοῦνε, ξεψυχοῦνε. Τοὺς τρελαίνουν οἱ χαντζάρες, οἱ ξιφολόγες, οἱ σφαῖρες τῶν τσέτηδων!

-Βούρ, κεραταλάρ!

Τὸ βράδυ τὸ μονοφῶνι κορυφώνεται. Ἡ σφαγή δὲ σταματᾶ. Μόνο ὅταν τὰ πλοῖα ρίχνουνε προβολεῖς γίνεται μιὰ πρόσκαιρη ἡσυχία. Μερικοὶ πὺν καταφέρανε νὰ φτάσουνε ζωντανοὶ ἴσαμε τὴ μαούνα, μᾶς ἱστοροῦνε τὸ τί γίνεται ὄξω, στὶς γειτονιές. Οἱ τσέτες τοῦ Μπεχλιβᾶν καὶ οἱ στρατιῶτες τοῦ Νουρεντὶν τρῶνε ἀνθρώπινο κρέας. Σπάζουνε, πλατσιολογοῦνε σπίτια καὶ μαγαζιά.

Όπου βροῦνε ζωντανούς, τοὺς τραβοῦνε ὄξω καὶ τοὺς βασανίζουνε. Σταυρώνουνε παπάδες στὶς ἐκκλησιές, ξαπλώνουνε μισοπεθαμένα κορίτσια κι ἀγόρια πάνω στὶς Ἅγιες Τράπεζες καὶ τ' ἀτιμάζουνε. Ἀπ' τὸν Ἅγιο Κωνσταντῖνο καὶ τὸ Ταραγάτς ἴσαμε τὸ Μπαλτσόβα τὸ τούρκικο μαχαίρι θερίζει.

Ἄχ, γκρέμισε ὁ κόσμος μας! Γκρέμισε ἡ Σμύρνη μας! Γκρέμισε ἡ ζωὴ μας! Ἡ καρδιά, τρομαγμένο πουλί, δὲν ξέρει ποῦ νὰ κρυφτεῖ. Ὁ τρόμος, ἓνας ἀνελέητος καταλυτὴς ἄδραξε στὰ νύχια του κεῖνο τὸ πλῆθος καὶ τὸ ἀλάλιασε. Ὁ τρόμος ξεπερνάει τὸ θάνατο. Δὲ φοβάσαι τὸ θάνατο, φοβάσαι τὸν τρόμο.

Ὁ τρόμος ἔχει τώρα τὸ πρόσταγμα. Τσαλαπατᾶ τὴν ἀνθρωπιά. Ἀρχίζει ἀπὸ τὸ ροῦχο καὶ φτάνει ἴσαμε τὴν καρδιά. Λέει: Γονάτισε, γκισοῦρη! Καὶ γονατίζει. Ξεγυμνώσου. Καὶ ξεγυμνώνεται. Ἄνοιξε τὰ σκέλια σου! Καὶ τ' ἀνοίγει. Χόρευε! Καὶ χορεύει. Φτύσε τὴν τιμὴ σου καὶ τὴν πατρίδα σου! Καὶ φτύνει. Ἀπαρνήσου τὴν πίστη σου! Καὶ τὴν ἀπαρνιέται.

Ἄχ ὁ τρόμος! Ὅποια γλώσσα κι ἂν μιλᾷς, λόγια δὲ θὰ βρεῖς νὰ τότε περιγράψεις Τὶ κάνουν, λοιπόν, οἱ προστάτες μας; Τὶ κάνουν οἱ ναυάρχοι μὲ τὰ χρυσὰ σιρίτια, οἱ διπλωμάτες κι οἱ πρόξενοι τῆς Ἀντάντ! Στήσανε κινηματογραφικὲς μηχανὲς στὰ καράβια τους καὶ τραβοῦσανε ταινίες τῆ σφαγῆ καὶ τὸν ξολοθρεμό μας! Μέσα στὰ πολεμικὰ οἱ μὲ πάντες τους παίζανε ἐμβατήρια καὶ τραγούδια τῆς χαρᾶς γιὰ νὰ μὴ φτάνουν ἴσαμε τ' ἀφτιά τῶν πληρωμάτων οἱ κραυγὲς τῆς ὀδύνης καὶ οἱ ἐπικλήσεις τοῦ κόσμου. Καὶ νὰ ξέρει κανεὶς πὼς μιά, μόνο μιά κανονιά, μιά διαταγή, ἔφτανε γιὰ νὰ διαλύσει ὅλα κείνα τὰ μαινόμενα στίφη. Κι ἡ κανονιά δὲ ρίχτηκε κι ἡ ἐντολὴ δὲ δόθηκε!



Ἡ πορνεία ποῦ σήμερα τὴν λένε ἐλεύθερες σχέσεις ἢ ὀλοκληρωμένες σχέσεις—προσπαθώντας νὰ τὴν ὠραιοποιήσουν—οὐσιαστικὰ εἶναι μιά βαρὴ καταστροφὴ τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ὑπαρξῆς. Τὸ λέει καθαρὰ ὁ Ἀπόστολος ὅτι «κάθε ἁμαρτία εἶναι ἐκτὸς τοῦ σώματος», ἀλλὰ αὐτὴ ἡ ἁμαρτία εἶναι μέσα στὸ σῶμα. Ὅπως ἔλεγε δὲ καὶ ὁ πατὴρ Πορφύριος, ἡ σαρκικὴ σχέση «ἐπιφέρει μιά συγκλονιστικὴ ἀλλοίωση στὸν ἄνθρωπο, στὴν ψυχοσωματικὴ του ὑπόσταση.

π. Σάββας Ἁγιορείτης

Πῶς Κατήντησαν οἱ Ἕλληνες!

Τοῦ κ. Μιχαὴλ Ε. Μιχαηλίδη, Θεολόγου.

Ἀπὸ τότε ποὺ ἀποκαλύφθηκε τὸ τεράστιο οικονομικὸ χρέος τῆς Ἑλλάδος, ἀπὸ τότε φούντωσε καὶ ἡ ἀσφυξία τοῦ ἄγχους. Ἡ ὑπαρξιακὴ ἀγωνία βρῖσκεται στὸ φόρτε. Τὸ πολιτικὸ ἀνοσιούργημα τοῦ συνεχῶς αὐξανόμενου ἐλλείμματος, ὄχι μόνο δημιούργησε τὴν οικονομικὴ ἄπνοια, ἀλλὰ ἀποδιοργανώνει κι αὐτὸ τὸ ἴδιο τὸ κράτος.

Οἱ εἰδικοὶ κοινωνικοὶ καὶ οικονομικοὶ ἀρθρογράφοι, πολιορκοῦν, ἐδῶ καὶ καιρὸ, τὸν τύπο καὶ ὅλα τὰ ΜΜΕ, μὲ εἰδικὰ, γιὰ τὸ θέμα τῆς οἰκονομίας, ἄρθρα τους. «Ἡ χώρα μας», σημειώνει ὁ Χαρ. Μπαμπίλης, «διέρχεται μιά πρωτόγνωρη κρίση, ἡ ὁποία τὴν ἔφερε, δυστυχῶς, στὰ πρωτοσέλιδα τῶν ἐφημερίδων ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου καὶ στὰ δελτία εἰδήσεων. Τὸ ὑπέρογκο χρέος καὶ τὸ δημοσιονομικὸ ἔλλειμμα, δημιούργησαν συνθήκες χρεωκοπίας. Καὶ ἔδωσαν τὴν εὐκαιρία σὲ κάθε εἶδους κερδοσκόπους νὰ ἐπιτεθοῦν ἐναντίον τῆς Ἑλλάδος. Ἡ σοβαρότητα τοῦ προβλήματος ποὺ ἀντιμετωπίζουμε, σὲ ἀτομικὸ καὶ συλλογικὸ ἐπίπεδο, μᾶς φόρτωσε μὲ ἀρνητικὰ συναισθήματα καὶ ὀδήγησε πολλοὺς στὰ ὄρια τῆς κατάθλιψης...».

Τὸ καταλυτικὸ ὅμως ἐρώτημα εἶναι: Πῶς θὰ ἀπαλλαγοῦμε ἀπὸ αὐτὰ τὰ αἰσθήματα καὶ πῶς θὰ ξεφύγουμε ἀπὸ τὸ ἀδιέξοδο; Πρέπει νὰ συνειδητοποιήσουμε ὅτι ὅπωςδήποτε θὰ «ματώσουμε»...

Ἀνάμεσα στὶς συνέπειες, ποῦ εἶναι ὑποχρεωμένος ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς λαὸς νὰ ὑποστῆ, εἶναι καὶ ἡ εἰρωνικὴ χλεύη τῶν ξένων. Ἴσως αὐτὴ, νὰ εἶναι καὶ ἡ πιὸ ὀδυνηρὴ. Μ' ἓνα λάθος, μ' ἓνα σκάνδαλο, μ' ἓνα ξεστράτισμα κάποιων πολιτικῶν, καὶ ἀμέσως τὰ πάντα αὐτομηδενίζονται· χάνουν καὶ τὴν ὁμορφιά τους καὶ τὴ δόξα τους. Σβήνει ἀπ' τὴ μνήμη καὶ ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ ἱστορία καὶ οἱ ποιητὲς καὶ οἱ φιλόσοφοι καὶ οἱ Παρθενῶνες καὶ τῆς ἐχνης τὰ ἀριστουργήματα καὶ οἱ θριαμβικοὶ ἠρωϊσμοὶ τιτάνων καὶ ἡρώων...

Ἡ Ἑλληνορθόδοξη ἱστορία μας ἔχει πολλὲς ὁμοιότητες μὲ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ τὴν ἱστορία. Δὲν εἶναι λίγες οἱ φορὲς, ποῦ ὁ λαὸς τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ἀποστατοῦσε καὶ ἁμάρτανε ἀπέναντι τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ μόνο μὲ τὴν ἀληθινὴ μετάνοια καὶ τὴν ἐπιστροφή του, ξανάβρισκε τὴν ἐλευθερία του. Οἱ ὑπέροχοι καὶ μοναδικοὶ ψαλμοὶ συχνὰ ἀναφέρονται στὴ διαγωγὴ καὶ τὴ στάση τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἀπέναντι στοὺς Ἑβραίους. Καὶ ποῖα ἦταν ἡ στάση τῶν ἐχθρῶν; Ὁ χλευασμὸς καὶ ὁ περιγέλος! Χλεύαζαν καὶ περιγελοῦσαν, ὄχι μόνο τὸ λαό, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν ἴδιο τὸ Θεὸ τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ.

Σὲ στιγμὲς αὐτογνωσίας, ἔλεγαν οἱ Ἰσραηλίτες: «Ἐγενήθημεν ὄνειδος τοῖς γείτοσιν ἡμῶν, μυκτηρισμὸς

καὶ χλευασμὸς τοῖς κύκλω ἡμῶν» (Ψαλμ. 78:4). Γίναμε, δηλαδή, ὄνειδος καὶ περιέγελος στοὺς γειτονικοὺς μας λαοὺς, (τοὺς Μωαβίτες, τοὺς Ἀμμωνίτες καὶ τοὺς Ἰδουμαίους). Γίναμε περιπαίξιμο καὶ χλευασμὸς σ' ὅλους τοὺς ἀλλόφυλους, ποὺ μᾶς περικυκλώνουν. Αἰτία τῶν δεινῶν καὶ τῆς Ἱερουσαλήμ ἦσαν οἱ ἁμαρτίες τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ τῶν ἀρχόντων. Γι' αὐτό, παρατηρεῖ ὁ Παναγιώτης Τρεμπέλας: «Ὁ λαὸς ἀποδύρεται μὲν γιὰ τὴν ἐρήμωση αὐτή, ἀλλὰ ζητώντας τὴ βοήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ κατὰ τῶν ἀδίκων καὶ ἀσεβῶν εἰσβολέων, ταυτόχρονα τὸν ἰκετεύει ὅπως “μὴ μνησθῆ ἄνομιῶν ἀρχαίων,” ἀλλὰ νὰ φανεῖ “ ἕλεως ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις αὐτῶν ἔνεκεν τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ”».

«Ἡ Ἱστορία Ἐπαναλαμβάνεται»

Ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς λαὸς ἀμάρτησε. Ἀποστάτησε καὶ ἀρνήθηκε τὸ Θεὸ καὶ τὸ νόμο Του. «Φάγωμεν καὶ πίωμεν», ἦταν τὸ σύνθημά του. Ἀρνήθηκε τὴν πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ μέχρι τώρα ζητᾶνε χωρισμὸ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀπὸ τὸ κράτος. Ζητᾶνε νὰ καταργηθοῦν τὰ θρησκευτικὰ μαθήματα ἀπ' τὰ σχολεῖα. Ἀρνοῦνται τὴν προσευχή, τὰ Χριστιανικὰ σύμβολα, τὸν Σταυρὸ τοῦ Κυρίου, τὶς ἐκκλησιαστικὲς τελετές, καὶ ὄχι μόνον ἀσωτεύουν καὶ ζοῦν τὴν παρὰ φύσιν ζωὴ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ θεωροῦν νόμιμο καὶ καλὸ! Βρίσκονται, δηλαδή, στὴν ἔσχατη πτώση.

Τώρα λοιπὸν, ἔχει ἐπιτρέψει ὁ πάνσοφος καὶ πανάγαθος καὶ Δίκαιος Θεός, νὰ δοκιμαστοῦμε μὲ πολλοὺς τρόπους, γιὰ νὰ συνέλθουμε καὶ νὰ ἐπιστρέψουμε κοντὰ Του, σὰν τὸν ἄσωτο, γιὰ νὰ ἰδοῦμε καλύτερες μέρες. Ἀνάμεσα λοιπὸν στὶς νέες δοκιμασίες, δὲν εἶναι μονάχα οἱ συνέπειες τῆς οἰκονομικῆς κρίσης, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ ταπεινωτικὲς εἰρωνεῖες καὶ οἱ χλευασμοὶ κάποιων «ἄσπονδων φίλων» μας!

Ἀρθρογράφος καθημερινῆς ἐφημερίδας σημειώνει: «Στοὺς Financial Times τοῦ Λονδίνου δημοσιεύθηκε μία καρικατούρα μὲ τὸν Παρθενῶνα καὶ μιὰ πινακίδα, ποὺ ἔγραφε: Πρὸς πώληση—Πληροφορίες στὸν κ. Παπανδρέου». Ἐξυπνη, βέβαια, ἡ ἀπάντηση τοῦ ἀρθρογράφου, ἀλλ' ἡ προσβολὴ τῆς ἐθνικῆς ἀξιοπρέπειας, μένει. Ἀπαντᾷ λοιπὸν: «Κατ' ἀρχὴν ἡ οἰκονομικὴ κατάσταση τῆς Μεγάλης Βρετανίας σήμερα εἶναι τέτοια, ποὺ δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ ἀγοράσει οὔτε τὸν Ξυλοθραύστη. Ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ πότε ἀποφάσισε ἡ Ἀγγλία νὰ πληρώνει γιὰ αὐτὰ ποὺ ἀφαιρεῖ καὶ ἀρπάξει; Καὶ τώρα δὲν ἔχει παρὰ νὰ στείλει ἕνα ἄλλο λόρδο Ἐλγιν νὰ πάρει καὶ τὸν ὑπόλοιπο Παρθενῶνα. Καὶ μιὰ συμβουλή. Ἡ Ἀγγλία εἶναι ἡ τελευταία στὸν κόσμον, ποὺ θὰ μπορούσε νὰ κάνει χιοῦμορ μὲ τὸν Παρθενῶνα!»

Ἰσάξια, βέβαια, ἡ ἀπάντηση, μὲ εὐφυΐα καὶ εἰρωνικὸ χιοῦμορ! Ἀλλ' εἴρωνες καὶ χλευαστὲς ἐμφανίστηκαν καὶ στὴ Γερμανία καὶ τὴν Τουρκία (sic) καὶ ἀπὸ ἄλλες κατευθύνσεις. Προσβλητικὰ ἦταν τὰ σχόλια τοῦ

Τούρκου ὑπουργοῦ Ἐπικρατείας καὶ ἀντιπροέδρου τῆς κυβέρνησης, Μπουλέντ Ἀρίντς, ὁ ὁποῖος, μιλώντας σὲ σεμινάριο τύπου, εἶπε: «Σὲ λίγο θὰ ἀνοίξουν μαντῆλι, γιὰ νὰ ζητιανεύουν»!

Τὰ μαπαρὰζ εἰρωνικῶν καὶ χλευαστικῶν ἐπιθέσεων εἶναι πολλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ πολλὲς κατευθύνσεις. Ἄς προσέξουμε, γιατί, ὡς Χριστιανοί, πρέπει νὰ πάρουμε μαθήματα ταπεινώσεως καὶ ἀρετῆς. Οἱ μυκτηρισμοὶ καὶ οἱ χλευασμοὶ, σὰν φάρμακα, καλὸ θὰ μᾶς κάμουν. Καταφυγὴ μας ὁ Θεός.



Ὁ καλὸς δοκιμάζεται στὰ χέρια τῶν κακῶν, περνᾷ στὰ λανάρια...

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὅταν εἶναι δίκαιος, ἔχει τὸ Θεὸ μὲ τὸ μέρος του. Ὅταν κανεὶς βαδίζει μὲ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο δικαιούται τὴ θεῖα βοήθεια. Ἀπὸ κεῖ καὶ πέρα μὴ φοβᾶται τίποτα.

Ἡ κατάρα καὶ βέβαια πιάνει, ὅταν ὑπάρχει στὴ μέση ἀδικία.

Νὰ τρελαθεῖτε ἀπὸ τὴ θεῖα τρέλα τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ Θεοῦ. Νὰ σᾶς κάψει ὁ Θεὸς μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη Του στὶς καρδιές σας.

Ὅταν ἔχουμε μέριμνα δὲν μπορούμε νὰ καταλάβουμε τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ (ὅπως τὸ παιδί ὅταν παίζει δὲν αἰσθάνεται τὸ χᾶδι τοῦ πατέρα του).

Ὁ θεῖος ἔρωτας, ἂν φουντώσει μέσα στὴν ψυχή, εἶναι τόσο θερμὸς, ποὺ ἔχει τὴ δύναμη νὰ καίει κάθε ἄλλη ἐπιθυμία καὶ κάθε ἄσχημη εἰκόνα. Ἐὰν κινεῖσθε μὲ εὐλάβεια καὶ προσευχή, ἀγιάξεστε πάντοτε καὶ τὰ πάντα ἀγιάζονται. Ὅταν κανεὶς ἔχει τὸ νοῦ τοῦ στοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀγιάζει τὴ δουλειά του, τὸ ἔργο τῶν χειρῶν του.

Μὴν ξεχνᾶς σὲ κάθε δουλειὰ νὰ παίρνεις τὸ Χριστὸ μαζί σου. Νὰ κάνεις κάπου-κάπου διακοπὴ στὴ δουλειά σου γιὰ νὰ λὲς τὴν εὐχή.

Ἐπειδὴ μᾶς κουμαντάρουν τὰ σίδηρα, οἱ καρδιές μας ἔγιναν σιδηρένεις.

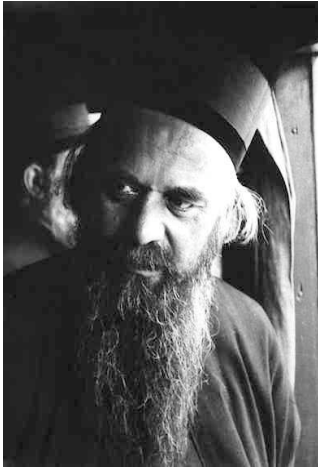
Πρῶτα νὰ θυμώσατε ὅτι θὰ πεθάνουμε. Δεύτερο ὅτι ἴσως πεθάνουμε ὄχι ἀπὸ φυσικὸ θάνατο. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ πρέπει νὰ εἴμαστε πάντα ἔτοιμοι.

Ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι πλασμένος νὰ κάνει τὸ καλὸ καθὼς ὁ Δημιουργὸς του.

Γέροντας Παῖσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης (+1994)

Από Ποῦ Προέρχεται ἡ Σημερινὴ Κρίση;

Αγίου Νικολάου Βελιμίροβιτς, ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο του, «Δρόμος Δίχως Θεοῦ δὲν Ἀντέχεται», Τεραπευτολικές Ἐπιστολές Α΄, ἐκδ. «Ἐν Πλῶ», Ἀθήνα 2008, σσ. 33-36. Ὁ τίτλος τοῦ πρωτοτύπου εἶναι: «Στὸν παπα-Κάραν γιὰ τὴν Κρίση τοῦ Κόσμου».



Μὲ ρωτᾶς, ἄνθρωπε τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀπὸ ποῦ προέρχεται ἡ σημερινὴ κρίση, καὶ τί σημαίνει αὐτή. Ποιὸς εἶμαι ἐγὼ γιὰ νὰ μὲ ρωτᾶς γιὰ ἓνα τόσο μεγάλο μυστικό; «Μίλα, ὅταν ἔχεις κάτι καλύτερο ἀπὸ τὴ σιωπή», λέει ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος. Ὅμως παρόλο ποῦ θεωρῶ, ὅτι ἡ σιωπὴ εἶναι τῶρα καλύτερη ἀπὸ κάθε ὁμιλία, καὶ ὅμως λόγω ἀγάπης

πρὸς ἐσένα, θὰ σοῦ ἐκθέσω ἐκεῖνα ποῦ σκέπτομαι περὶ αὐτοῦ ποῦ ρώτησες.

Ἡ κρίση εἶναι Ἑλληνικὴ λέξη, καὶ σημαίνει δίκη. Στὴν Ἁγία Γραφή αὐτὴ ἡ λέξη χρησιμοποιεῖται πολλὲς φορὲς. Ἔτσι ὁ ψαλμωδὸς λέει: «Διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἀναστήσονται ἀσεβεῖς ἐν κρίσει» (Ψαλμ. 1:5). Σὲ ἄλλο μέρος πάλι λέει: «Ἔλεος καὶ κρίσιν ἄσομαι σοι, Κύριε» (Ψαλμ. 100:1). Ὁ σοφὸς Σολομώντας γράφει, ὅτι «παρὰ δὲ Κυρίου πάντα τὰ δίκαια». (Παρ. Σολ. 16:33). Ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Σωτῆρας εἶπε, «ἀλλὰ τὴν κρίσιν πάσαν δέδωκε τῷ υἱῷ» (Ἰωάν. 5:22), ἐνῶ λίγο πιὸ κάτω λέγει πάλι «νῦν κρίσις ἐστὶ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου» (Ἰωάν. 12:31). Ὁ ἀπόστολος Πέτρος γράφει «ὅτι ὁ καιρὸς τοῦ ἄρξασθαι τὸ κρίμα ἀπὸ τοῦ οἴκου τοῦ Θεοῦ» (Ἄ΄ Πετρ. 4:17).

Ἀντικατάστησε τὴ λέξη «κρίση» μὲ τὴ λέξη «δίκη» καὶ διάβασε: «Διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἀναστήσονται ἀσεβεῖς ἐν δίκη» ἢ «ἀλλὰ τὴν δίκην πάσαν δέδωκε τῷ υἱῷ» ἢ «νῦν δίκη ἐστὶ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου» ἢ ὅτι «ἀποδώσουσι λόγον τῷ ἐτοιμῶς ἔχοντι δικᾶσαι ζωντας καὶ νεκρούς».

Ἔως τῶρα οἱ Εὐρωπαϊκοὶ λαοὶ χρησιμοποιοῦσαν τὴν λέξη «δίκη», ἀντὶ γιὰ τὴ λέξη «κρίση», ὅποτε καὶ νὰ τοὺς ἔβρισκε κάποια συμφορὰ. Τῶρα ἡ καινούργια λέξη ἀντικατέστησε τὴν παλιά, καὶ τὸ κατανοητὸ ἔγινε ἀκατανόητο. Ὅταν γινόταν ξηρασία, πλημμύρα, πόλεμος ἢ ἔπεφτε ἐπιδημία, ὅταν ἔρριχνε χαλάζι, γίνονταν σεισμοί, πνιγμοὶ καὶ ἄλλες συμφορὲς, λέγανε «Θεῖα δίκη!». Καὶ αὐτὸ σημαίνει: Κρίση μέσα ἀπὸ ξηρασίες, κρίση μέσα ἀπὸ πλημμύρες, μέσα ἀπὸ πολέμους, μέσα ἀπὸ ἐπιδημίες κ.λπ. Καὶ τὴ σημερινὴ χρηματικό-οικονομικὴ δυσκολία ὁ λαὸς τὴν θεωρεῖ

ὡς Θεῖα δίκη, ὅμως δὲν λέει ἡ δίκη ἀλλὰ ἡ κρίση. Ἔτσι ὥστε ἡ δυσκολία νὰ πολλαπλασιαζέται μὲ τὸ νὰ γίνεται ἀκατανόητη!

Ἐφόσον ὅσο ὀνομαζόταν μὲ τὴν κατανοητὴ λέξη «δίκη», ἦταν γνωστὴ καὶ ἡ αἰτία, λόγω τῆς ὁποίας ἦρθε ἡ δυσκολία, ἦταν γνωστὸς καὶ ὁ Δικαστής, ὁ Ὅποιος ἐπέτρεψε τὴν δυσκολία, ἦταν γνωστὸς καὶ ὁ σκοπὸς τῆς ἐπιτρεπόμενης δυσκολίας. Μόλις ὅμως χρησιμοποιήθηκε ἡ λέξη «κρίση», λέξη ἀκαταλαβίστικη σὲ ὅλους, κανεὶς δὲν ξέρει πᾶν νὰ ἐξηγήσει οὔτε γιὰ ποῖο λόγο, οὔτε ἀπὸ Ποῖον, οὔτε ὡς πρὸς τί. Μόνο σ' αὐτὸ διαφέρει ἡ τωρινὴ κρίση ἀπὸ τὶς κρίσεις ποῦ προέρχονται ἀπὸ τὴν ξηρασία ἢ τὴν πλημμύρα ἢ τὸν πόλεμο ἢ τὴν ἐπιδημία ἢ τοὺς πνιγμοὺς ἢ κάποιους ἄλλους πειρασμοὺς.

Μὲ ρωτᾶς γιὰ τὴν αἰτία τῆς τωρινῆς κρίσης, ἢ τῆς τωρινῆς Θεῖας δίκης! Ἡ αἰτία εἶναι πάντα ἡ ἴδια. Ἡ αἰτία γιὰ τὶς ξηρασίες, τὶς πλημμύρες, τὶς ἐπιδημίες καὶ ἄλλα μαστιγώματα τῆς γενιᾶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἶναι ἡ αἰτία καὶ γιὰ τὴν τωρινὴ κρίση. Ἡ ἀποστασία τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Μὲ τὴν ἁμαρτία τῆς Θεο-ἀποστασίας, οἱ ἄνθρωποι προκάλεσαν αὐτὴ τὴν κρίση, καὶ ὁ Θεὸς τὴν ἐπέτρεψε, ὥστε νὰ ξυπνήσει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, νὰ τοὺς κάνει ἐνσυνείδητους, πνευματικοὺς καὶ νὰ τοὺς γυρίσει πρὸς Ἐκεῖνον. Στὶς μοντέρνες ἁμαρτίες, μοντέρνα καὶ ἡ κρίση.

Καὶ ὄντως ὁ Θεὸς χρησιμοποίησε μοντέρνα μέσα ὥστε νὰ τὸ συνειδητοποιήσουν οἱ μοντέρνοι ἄνθρωποι: Χτύπησε τὶς τράπεζες, τὰ χρηματιστήρια, τὶς οἰκονομίες, τὸ συνάλλαγμα τῶν χρημάτων. Ἀνακάτωσε τὰ τραπέζια στὶς συναλλαγὲς σ' ὅλο τὸν κόσμο, ὅπως κάποτε στὸ ναὸ τῶν Ἱεροσολύμων. Προξένησε πρωτόγνωρο πανικὸ μεταξὺ ἐμπόρων καὶ αὐτῶν ποῦ ἀνταλλάσσουν τὸ χρῆμα. Προκάλεσε σύγχυση καὶ φόβο. Ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ ἔκανε γιὰ νὰ ξυπνήσουν τὰ ὑπερήφανα κεφαλάκια τῶν σοφῶν τῆς Εὐρώπης καὶ τῆς Ἀμερικῆς, γιὰ νὰ ἔλθουν εἰς ἑαυτοὺς καὶ νὰ πνευματικοποιηθοῦν. Καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἄνεση καὶ τὸ ἀγκυροβόλημα στὰ λιμάνια τῆς ὑλικῆς σιγουριᾶς νὰ θυμηθοῦμε τὶς ψυχές μας, νὰ ἀναγνωρίσουμε τὶς ἀνομίες μας καὶ νὰ προσκυνήσουμε τὸν ὕψιστο Θεό, τὸν ζωντανὸ Θεό.

Μέχρι πότε θὰ διαρκέσει ἡ κρίση; Ὅσο τὸ πνεῦμα τῶν ἀνθρώπων παραμένει δίχως ἀλλαγὴ. Ὅσπου οἱ ὑπερήφανοι ὑπαίτιοι αὐτῆς τῆς κρίσης νὰ παραιτηθοῦν μπροστὰ στὸν Παντοδύναμο. Ὅσπου οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ οἱ λαοὶ νὰ θυμηθοῦν, τὴν ἀκαταλαβίστικη λέξη «κρίση», νὰ τὴ μεταφράσουν στὴ γλώσσα τους, ὥστε μὲ ἀναστεναγμὸ καὶ μετάνοια νὰ φωνάξουν: «Ἡ Θεῖα δίκη!» Πῆς καὶ ἐσύ, τίμιε πατέρα, ἡ Θεῖα δίκη, ἀντὶ ἡ κρίση, καὶ ὅλα θὰ σοῦ γίνουν ξεκάθαρα.

Χαιρετισμοὺς καὶ εἰρήνην,

+Νικόλαος

Λογισμοὶ Κατακρίσεως

Τοῦ Ἀρχιμ. Γερβ. Ραπτοπούλου, Τεροκλήρυκος.

«Μὴ κρίνετε, ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε.» (Ματθ. 7:1)

† † †

Ὅταντικείμενος, στὸν πόλεμό του ἐναντίον μας, ἐπανερχεται κάθε φορὰ μὲ μεγαλύτερη σφοδρότητα. Μὲ μεγαλύτερο μένος. Μὲ πιδ καυτὰ βέλη. Ἐπιδιώκει νὰ μᾶς καταβάλλει στὴ Χριστιανικὴ μας πορεία. Νὰ μᾶς νικήσει. Νὰ μᾶς καθυποτάξει. Νὰ μᾶς ἀποκλείσει ἀπὸ τὴ σωτηρία. Ἀπὸ τὴ βασιλεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας. Νὰ μᾶς στερήσει τὴ χαρὰ καὶ τὴν εὐφροσύνη τοῦ Παραδείσου.

Ἔτσι, στὸν πεισματώδη αὐτὸν πόλεμο ἐναντίον μας, χρησιμοποιεῖ καὶ τοὺς λογισμοὺς τῆς κατακρίσεως. Σφυροκοπεῖ καὶ μ' αὐτὰ τὰ βέλη. Εἶναι κι αὐτὰ μέσα στὶς μεθοδεῖες του, μέσα στὴ σατανικὴ του τέχνη. Μὲ ὅλη τὴν πονηρία ποὺ τὸν διακρίνει, καιροφυλακτεῖ καί, μόλις βρεῖ κατάλληλη εὐκαιρία, ἀδειάζει πάνω στὴν ψυχὴ τὴ φαρέτρα του. Καὶ βρίσκει εὐκαιρία.

Στὴν Ὁμιλία

Ὁμιλεῖ μιὰ καλὴ ψυχὴ. Ὁμιλεῖ εἴτε σὲ μεμονωμένα ἄτομα εἴτε σὲ ἀκροατήριο. Ἐκφράζει κάποια σωστὴ σκέψη, ὑποδεικνύει μέσα γιὰ τὸν καταρτισμὸ τῶν ψυχῶν, ποὺ τὴν προσέχουν, ἀναπτύσσει ἕνα πνευματικὸ θέμα, ποὺ ἐντυπωσιάζει καὶ ὠφελεῖ.

Τότε, ἀκριβῶς, ἀρχίζει ὁ καταιγισμὸς τοῦ ἀντικειμένου μὲ τὰ βέλη του. Μὲ τοὺς λογισμοὺς τῆς κατακρίσεως. Παρακινοῦνται οἱ ψυχὲς νὰ ἀποδοκιμάσουν τὴν ὁμιλία. Νὰ καταδικάσουν τὴ σκέψη τοῦ ὁμιλητῆ ἢ τῆς ὁμιλήτριας. Νὰ κριτικάρουν καὶ νὰ ψέξουν τὸ ὕφος, τὶς κινήσεις καὶ τὴ στάση. Νὰ παρεξηγήσουν τὶς διαθέσεις καὶ τὰ κίνητρα. Νὰ ἀπορρίψουν τὶς ιδέες. Νὰ τὶς θεωρήσουν ἀνεδαφικές. Λαθεμένες. Ἄστοχες.

Στὰ Ἔργα

Πολλοὶ ἀναλαμβάνουν καὶ κάνουν διάφορα ἔργα, ποὺ ἀποβλέπουν στὸ κοινὸ καλὸ. Ἔργα, ποὺ εἶναι καρπὸς τῆς Χριστιανικῆς τους ἀγάπης. Κι ὅλα γιὰ τὸ καλὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τὴ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἀκριβῶς γι' αὐτὸ τὸ λόγο ὁ ἀντικείμενος μαίνεται. Καὶ ἐξαπολύει τοὺς λογισμοὺς τῆς κατακρίσεως: Τὰ ἔργα αὐτὰ δὲν γίνονται μὲ καλὰ ἐλατήρια. Γίνονται ἀποκλειστικὰ γιὰ προβολή. Γιὰ αὐτοδιαφήμιση. Ἀπὸ ἀνθρωπαρέσκεια. Ἐξυπηρετοῦν φιλοδοξίες μόνο. Γι' αὐτὸ εἶναι καταδικαστέα καὶ ἀπορριπτέα.

Στὴ Συμπεριφορὰ

Οἱ καλὲς ψυχὲς συμπεριφέρονται μὲ τὸν πιδ ὁμορφο τρόπο. Μιλοῦν μὲ εὐγένεια, μὲ λεπτότητα, μὲ χάρη. Κι ἂν, καμιά φορὰ, ἀστοχοῦν στὸν καλὸ τρόπο συμπεριφορᾶς, δὲν τὸ κάνουν σκόπιμα. Κάποια αἰτία βαθύτερη ὑπάρχει, ποὺ συντελεῖ σ' αὐτὸ, ἀλλὰ ἐμεῖς τὴν ἀγνοοῦμε. Αὐτὸ ὅμως εἶναι μιὰ καλὴ εὐκαιρία γιὰ τὸν

αἰώνιο ψιθυριστῆ. Νὰ τί ψιθυρίζει στὶς ἀδύνατες στὴν ἀγάπη ψυχές: νὰ ἀποδοκιμάσουν τὴ συμπεριφορὰ. Νὰ θεωρήσουν γελοῖο τὸν τρόπο καὶ παράλογα τὰ λόγια τους. Νὰ ἀπορρίψουν ἐντελῶς αὐτὲς τὶς ψυχές. Σὰν τοὺς Γραμματεῖς καὶ Φαρισαίους, νὰ «διαλογίζονται ἐν ἑαυτοῖς» καὶ νὰ λένε «τίς ἐστὶν οὗτος;» (Λουκ. 5:21, 7:39-49).

Δεινὸς ὁ πόλεμος αὐτῶν τῶν λογισμῶν. Κουράζει τὴν ψυχὴ. Τὴν καταπονεῖ. Τὴ χωρίζει ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό. Τὴν ἀπομονώνει. Καὶ γίνεται ἔτσι λεία τοῦ ἀντικειμένου.

Πῶς νὰ Ἀποθήσουμε τοὺς Λογισμοὺς

Πρῶτον, μὲ τὴν αὐτογνωσία. Μὲ αὐτὴν θὰ ἀνακαλύψουμε μέσα μας ἕνα πλέγμα κακίας. Ἀσυμπάθεια, κακεντρέχεια, μισανθρωπία, ἀσπλαχνία, σκληρότητα, φθόνος, ζηλοτυπία καὶ ἐκδικητικότητα.

Δεύτερον, μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη ποὺ μᾶς δίδαξε ὁ Χριστός. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγάπη εἶναι εὐεργετικὴ. Δὲν φθονεῖ. Δὲν καυχίεται. Δὲν ὑπερηφανεύεται. Δὲν εἶναι συμφεροντολογικὴ. Δὲν θυμώνει. Δὲν μνησικακεῖ. Χαίρεται γιὰ τὴ χαρὰ τοῦ ἄλλου. Ὅλα τὰ ἀνέχεται. Ὅλα τὰ πιστεύει. Πάντα ἐλπίζει. Πάντα ὑπομένει. Καὶ παραμένει αἰώνια (Α΄ Κορ. 13:4-8).

Καὶ τρίτον, μὲ τὸ λόγο τοῦ Κυρίου. «Μὴ κρίνετε, ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε. Ἐν ᾧ μέτρῳ μετρεῖτε μετρηθήσεται ὑμῖν.» (Ματθ. 7:1-2). Μὴ κατακρίνετε, γιὰ νὰ μὴ κατακριθεῖτε. Γιατί μὲ τὸ κριτήριο ποὺ κρίνετε, θὰ κριθεῖτε. Καὶ μὲ τὸ μέτρο ποὺ μετράτε, θὰ μετρηθεῖ καὶ ἡ δικὴ σας συμπεριφορὰ. Καὶ μὲ ἐκεῖνο τὸ λόγο τοῦ Ἀπ. Παύλου: «Τί κρίνεις τὸν ἀδελφόν σου; ἢ καὶ σὺ τί ἐξουθενεῖς τὸν ἀδελφόν σου; πάντες γὰρ παραστησόμεθα τῷ βήματι τοῦ Χριστοῦ.» (Ρωμ. 14:10). Γιατί κατακρίνεις τὸν ἀδελφόν σου; ἢ καὶ σὺ γιατί καταφρονεῖς τὸν ἀδελφόν σου; Γιατί ὅλοι μας θὰ σταθοῦμε μπροστὰ στὸ βῆμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ἀδελφές ψυχές, τὰ βέλη τῶν λογισμῶν τῆς κατακρίσεως θὰ ἔλθουν, θὰ ἔρχονται στὴ ζωὴ μας. Μὴ φοβάστε. Εἶπαμε πῶς μποροῦμε νὰ τὶς ἀποθήσουμε. Τὸ ἐπαναλαμβάνουμε κι ἐδῶ: Μὲ τὴν αὐτογνωσία. Μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη. Καὶ προπαντὸς μὲ τὸν λόγο τοῦ Κυρίου, ὁ ὁποῖος μᾶς προλέγει πῶς, στὸ βῆμα τῆς παγκόσμιας κρίσης τοῦ Θεοῦ, θὰ βροῦμε ἔτοιμη τὴ ζυγαριὰ μας. Μὲ ὅποια ζυγαριὰ ἀγάπης ζυγίσαμε τὸν ἀδελφόν μας, μὲ τὴν ἴδια ζυγαριὰ θὰ μᾶς ζυγίσει καὶ ὁ Θεός.



Καὶ ἡ προσευχὴ λέγεται ἀρετὴ, ἂν καὶ εἶναι μητέρα τῶν ἀρετῶν. Γιατί γεννάει τὶς ἀρετὲς μέσω τῆς ἐνώσεως μὲ τὸ Χριστό.

Ἄββᾶς Μᾶρκος

Ἐσχατοί Καιροί;

Μοναχός Μουσῆς, Ἀγιορείτης.

Στοὺς δύσκολους καὶ ταραγμένους καιροὺς μας ὑπάρχει γενικὰ καὶ μία μικρὴ ἰσχυρὴ ομάδα ἀνθρώπων μὲ κάποιες μεταφυσικὲς ἀναζητήσεις. Κάποιοι βρίσκουν τὸν Θεὸ ὡς ἀνάγκη, ὡς ἀποκούμπι καὶ ὡς σχεδία. Συνήθως ὁ ἄνθρωπος βρίσκει ὅ,τι ψάχνει καὶ τὸν συμφέρει. Δὲν θέλει νὰ κουραστεῖ καὶ νὰ μοχθήσει πολὺ. Ἰκανοποιεῖται μὲ πρόχειρες καὶ εὐκόλες λύσεις. Ἔτσι, μερικὲς φορὲς ἐξαντλεῖ τὴ θρησκευτικότητά του σὲ τυπικὲς ὑποχρεώσεις, δίχως κανένα κόστος. Ἄλλοτε παρασύρεται ἀπὸ ἐπιτήδειους δασκάλους, ποὺ ἐκμεταλλεύονται τὸν θεῖο πόθο του μὲ τὸ νὰ τοῦ προσφέρουν προϊόντα ἀπελευθερωτικά, χαρούμενα, χαλαρωτικά καὶ ἄκοπα.

Στὴν ἀναζήτησή αὐτὴ ἐντάσσεται μία ἔντονη δαιμονολογία, ἀντιχριστολογία καὶ ἐσχατολογία, ποὺ δυστυχῶς τοποθετεῖται σὲ λαθεμένες βάσεις. Ὑπερβολές, καθορισμὸς ἡμερομηνιῶν τοῦ τέλους τοῦ κόσμου, ἀναφορὲς περὶ τῆς γεννήσεως τοῦ ἀντιχρίστου καὶ λοιπὰ δημιουργοῦν τρόμο καὶ φόβο στὶς ψυχὲς τῶν Χριστιανῶν, ποὺ δὲν εἶναι τὸ πρέπον καὶ τὸ ζητούμενο. Μερικοὶ μιλοῦν περισσότερο γιὰ τὸν ἀντίχριστο καὶ λιγότερο γιὰ τὸν Χριστό. Μόνιμη ἀσχολία τους εἶναι ἡ ἐριμνεΐα τῶν καιρῶν. Ἀρκετοὶ σῶφρονες καὶ συνετοὶ ἀνησυχοῦν γιὰ τὴ μεγάλη ἀνησυχία τῶν πιστῶν. Μόνιμη μέριμνά τους εἶναι κάθε εἶδηση ποὺ ἐπιβεβαιώνει τὶς ὑποψίες τους. Δὲν θεωροῦμε φυσιολογικὴ αὐτὴ τὴν ὑπερβολικὴ ἀντίδραση.

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἄφησαν τὴν πολεμικὴ τῶν ἀντίθεων παθῶν καὶ τὴν καλλιέργεια τῶν ἔνθεων ἀρετῶν καὶ ἀσχολοῦνται παθιασμένα μὲ φαντασίες, φοβίες, δεισιδαιμονίες, τυχὸν μαγεῖες ποὺ τοὺς ἔκαναν, μὴν πῆραν κατὰ λάθος κάποιον ἀριθμὸ. Λησιμόνησαν τὴ μελέτη, τὴν προσευχή, τὴν ἀγαθοεργία, τὴ μετάνοια, τὴ μυστηριακὴ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ζωὴ καὶ ταλαιπωροῦνται μὲ ὑποκειμενικὲς ἐπεξηγήσεις καὶ ξενόφερτες θεωρίες. Οἱ τοποθετήσεις αὐτὲς ἀπομακρύνουν ἀπὸ τὴν οὐσία, ἀπὸ τὴ βάση, ἀπὸ τὴ χαρὰ τῆς πνευματικῆς ζωῆς καὶ ὁδηγοῦν τὸν ἄνθρωπο σὲ ἓνα δαιμονιώδη λαβύρινθο.

Λέγοντας αὐτά, δὲν ἐννοοῦμε ὅτι δὲν τρέχει τίποτε. Δὲν μιλάμε γιὰ νοσηρὸ ἐφησυχασμὸ, γιὰ ραστώνη, παρασυρμὸ καὶ ἀδιαφορία. Χρειαζέται ὅπωςδὴποτε ἐγρήγορη, ὀρθοστασία, ἀνάταση, γενναιότητα, ἀντίσταση σὲ ὅ,τι ἀνίερο, ἀναληθές καὶ ἄτιμο. Ἡ ἐλευθερία τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου προσώπου εἶναι κάτι πολὺ σημαντικὸ καὶ θὰ πρέπει παντοῦ καὶ πάντοτε νὰ ὑπερασπίζεται μὲ κάθε τρόπο. Ὅλο τὸ ἐνδιαφέρον μας θὰ πρέπει νὰ στραφεῖ σὲ ὅ,τι εἶναι οὐσιαστικὸ, καίριο καὶ ἀληθινὸ μόνον σὲ αὐτά. Δυστυχῶς πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι φοβοῦνται νὰ ἀντικρίσουν τὴν ἀλήθεια, τὴν ἐσωτερικὴ

τους γυμνότητα. Ἔτσι θέλουν νὰ ἀσχολοῦνται μὲ ὅ,τι δὲν ἔχει προσωπικὸ κόστος.

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι σήμερα ἀγχώνονται μήπως δὲν θὰ μποροῦν νὰ χρησιμοποιήσουν τὰ κουταλοπήρουνά τους, γιατί δὲν θὰ ἔχουν τί νὰ φᾶνε. Μαζεύουν τροφίμα γιὰ τὶς δύσκολες ἡμέρες ποὺ ἔρχονται. Δὲν ἔχουν ἡμερομηνία λήξεως; Μὲ τί χαρὰ θὰ τὰ τρῶνε καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί τους γύρω θὰ πεθάνουν τῆς πείνας; Ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν δίδαξε τὸ «Πάτερ ἡμῶν»; Δὲν λέει ἐκεῖ «καὶ δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον»; Δηλαδὴ καὶ οἱ Χριστιανοὶ ἐνδιαφέρονται γιὰ τὸν παρὰ καὶ τὴ μάσα μόνον; Ἐχει μεγάλη σημασία νὰ δοῦμε καλὰ ποῦ διοχετεύεται ἡ ἀγωνιστικότητά τῶν Χριστιανῶν μας. Μὴ δίνουμε ἀφορμὲς γέλιου στοὺς καρδοκοῦντες ἀθεόφοβους εἴρωνες, ποὺ τελευταῖα ἔχουν ἀρκετὰ αὐξηθεῖ.

Κρινόμαστε ἀπὸ τὶς ἐπιλογές μας. Ἔχουμε εὐθύνη γιὰ τὶς ἐπιλογές μας. Χρειαζέται ἀπαραίτητα μελέτη, γνώση, ἐμπειρία, φώτιση καὶ συμβουλή. Ἄς τὸ ξαναπῶ. Χρειαζέται εἰλικρινὴς μετάνοια ὄλων, ὑγιὲς μεταστροφή, ἀλλαγὴ νοῦ, τρόπου ζωῆς, νέα νοοτροπία, ἄλλος προορισμὸς, διαφορετικὸς στόχος, ὑψηλὸς σκοπός, νοηματισμένος βίος. Ἡ τιμιότητα, ἡ δικαιοσύνη, ἡ εἰλικρίνεια μποροῦν νὰ ἐπιστρέψουν σὲ αὐτὸν τὸν ταλαίπωρο τόπο.

Ἄν ἡ πολυσυζητημένη κάρτα τοῦ πολίτη στερεῖ τὶς ἐλευθερίες μας, δὲν θὰ πρέπει φυσικὰ νὰ τὴν πάρουμε, ὑπακούοντας στὶς ἀποφάσεις τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Δὲν θὰ πρέπει ὅμως συνεχῶς νὰ ζοῦμε μὲ καχυποψίες, φαντασίες, ὑπερβολές, φανατισμοὺς, ἀκρότητες καὶ φατρίες. Δὲν εἶναι ὀρθὸς τρόπος πνευματικῆς ζωῆς ὁ φόβος, ὁ τρόμος, ὁ πανικὸς καὶ ὁ ἀντιδραστικὸς ξεσηκωμὸς κατὰ πάντων.

Εἴμαστε σὲ ἔσχατους καιροὺς; Ἦλθαν τὰ σημεῖα τῶν καιρῶν; Ὁ ἀντίχριστος σφραγίζει; Ἦλθε τὸ τέλος τοῦ κόσμου; Τὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ θὰ γίνῃ. Ὁ ἀρχαῖος ἅγιος Σιλουανὸς ἔλεγε: «Ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ νὰ ἐνωθοῦν δὲν φοβᾶμαι». Ὁ Χριστὸς χαρίζει στοὺς πιστοὺς ἀφοβία, ἀταραξία, ἐλπίδα, αἰσιοδοξία καὶ χαρὰ. Ἡ ἡττοπάθεια, ἡ κατῆφεια, ἡ ἀπαισιοδοξία καὶ ἡ ἀκαταστασία δὲν ἀνήκει ποτὲ στοὺς Χριστιανούς.



Τί εἶναι ἡ οἰκογένεια; Εἶναι ἓνα μικρὸ μοναστηράκι. Ὅπως στὸ μεγάλο μοναστήρι πᾶνε οἱ μοναχοὶ γιὰ νὰ βροῦν τὴν σωτηρία τῆς ψυχῆς τους, ἔτσι καὶ στὸ μικρὸ μοναστηράκι τῆς οἰκογένειας, γιὰ τὸν ἴδιο σκοπὸ θὰ πρέπει νὰ ἐντάσσονται οἱ ἄνθρωποι. Αὐτὸς πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ὁ σκοπός. Τώρα, ὁ καθένας ξέρει γιὰ ποῖο σκοπὸ παντρεύεται, ἀλλὰ ὁ σκοπὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, γιὰ τὸν ὁποῖο ἔχει δώσει τὸν γάμο, εἶναι αὐτός.

Γέροντας Αἰμιλιανὸς Σιμωνοπετριτῆς

THE NEW MARTYR EVGENY THE WARRIOR (+1996)

By Hieromonk Joachim, from the web pages of the Russian site "Eastern Orthodox Church" (<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/>).

On the Saturday before the Orthodox Church commemorates Great Martyr Dimitrios of Thessaloniki (October 26th/November 8th), the Russian Orthodox Church has a tradition of serving a special service for the dead called the parastasis on Friday evening, and then a Liturgy for the reposed with a pannikhida (requiem service) on Saturday morning. This tradition arose as a day to commemorate those soldiers who fell at the battle of Kulikvo in 1380. We thought it appropriate on this day to present the story of the soldier Evgeny Rodionov, who died a martyr's death in service of his country, and in defense of his Orthodox Christian faith.

Moscow priest Fr. Alexander Shargunov said during the memorial service for Evgeny Rodionov: "We know that he had to go through horrible, long-lasting sufferings that could be compared to the ones of great martyrs in ancient times. They were beheaded, dismembered, but they nevertheless remained devoted to Jesus Christ."

† † †



Shoulders back, chest out, the young soldier stands as if on parade in his camouflage fatigues—his boots polished his rifle at his shoulder, a halo around his head. His face is the blank mask of a man for whom duty is life. It is not easy being a soldier. Portraits of this young man, Evgeny Rodionov, are spreading around Russia—sometimes in uniform, sometimes in a robe,

sometimes armed, sometimes holding a cross, but always with his halo. The portraits are iconographic, venerated in homes and churches where Private Evgeny Rodionov has become the focus of popular veneration in post-Soviet Russia and beyond. He is Russia's new unofficial saint, a casualty of the war in Chechnya and of Christianity's continued defense against the Muslims, who has been glorified not by the Russian Orthodox Church but by a groundswell of popular devotion.

Evgeny Rodionov was born on May 23rd, 1977. He was baptized as a child—not because of any strong faith on the part of his parents, but because his mother was afraid for his health. A common superstition was to have a child baptized to ensure good health. His parents were typical Soviet citizens and thought rarely about God.

In 1989, when he was 10 years old, Evgeny put on his baptismal cross and never took it off again. His mother said to

him: "Maybe you should take it off in public so that no one should see you wearing a cross." Evgeny responded: "Never say such things mother."

In his childhood years and youth he was strong and healthy, finishing his ninth year at High School. He was interested for a while in boxing, even winning second place in a competition, but later quit after having doubts about such a sport, saying: "I cannot hit a person in the face." After finishing his schooling, he found work at a furniture factory, where he made more money than his mother who was forced by their modest circumstances to work three jobs.

Evgeny attended church services in an outlying Moscow suburb called Podolsk but it is not known to whom he confessed. In 1994, the family moved into a small two-bedroom apartment. In 1995 Evgeny was called up to serve in the army. The Russian armed forces require all young men to serve a period of time in the armed forces. He followed an ancient pious Russian custom of wearing a belt embroidered with Psalm 90, and wore this when he entered the army.

His mother, Liubov Vasilievna, recalled that Evgeny did not want to go, but felt that it was his duty to serve his country. He and his friends understood that there are things in this life that you do not want to do but have to do, and they had no thought of evading their military duty. His letters home were affectionate, filled with love and poetry.

Upon induction into the army, Evgeny was assigned to the Border Guards whose main responsibility was border security. He was sent with other young conscripts to serve in the Russian republic of Chechnya where the Russian Army was fighting a long running war against Muslim separatists. The conduct of the leadership of the Russian armed forces in this conflict has been severely criticized for its ineptitude, lack of planning and failure to provide even basic equipment for their troops.

On the night of the 13th of January 1996, Evgeny and some other young soldiers were posted, unarmed, to a checkpoint 200 meters from their base near the mountainous border between the republics of Chechnya and Ingushetia. The checkpoint, a control and registration post, was a small hut with no electricity and no method of communication back to their headquarters. It was situated on a road which was frequently used by terrorists and criminals for smuggling weapons, ammunition, captives, drugs and so on between the two republics. They suddenly disappeared.

Officers at the base later reported at an official investigation that they heard the young soldiers screaming, but did not investigate, and later falsely reported to the divisional commander that the missing men had deserted and this lie was repeated in letters to the missing soldier's families. Chechen rebels had in fact forcibly abducted Evgeny and his comrades from the checkpoint. They had commandeered an ambulance, which they drove up to the unsuspecting young soldiers, and

then the armed rebels leapt out, forced the conscripts into the ambulance and drove them off into captivity.

A follow-up army investigation revealed signs of a struggle and blood stains at the checkpoint, and as a result it was decided to upgrade security by moving the post away from the roadside and issuing weapons to the soldiers who manned it.

Upon capture the young conscripts were held in the cellar of an abandoned house for 100 days as ransom demands were sent to their families. Kidnapping and demanding ransom was almost a cottage industry in Chechnya during that time. They kept Evgeny hanging by his wrists in a basement; they starved and beat him. Rodionov's ransom was reported to be 50 million roubles (1.6 million US dollars)—at the time an impossible sum. Another report says it may have been in the \$10,000 range. Whatever it was, the ransom was not met; his parents simply did not have that kind of money.

Evgeny was held captive for three and a half months. The Chechens demanded that he remove the cross that he wore around his neck, deny his Christian faith and agree to become a Muslim to stay alive. Evgeny refused to renounce his faith. Having suffered indescribable tortures and torments, he did not betray his Orthodox faith, but confirmed it with his blood. Finally, on his 19th birthday, on May 23rd, 1996, they sawed off his head. He proved that Russian Orthodoxy is still alive and that today, after many years of atheism, Russia still has the potential as it did before to beget martyrs for Christ.

It wasn't until a month after the abduction, on the 16th of February 1996, that his mother received an official telegram notifying that her son "had absconded from his military post"—in fact while she was reading this telegram his captors were torturing her son. Liubov, knowing her son, felt affronted by such an accusation, and wrote a number of letters in reply to the Border Guard division trying to convince them that her son would never desert the army. She was not believed and so she decided to journey to Chechnya to find out the truth of her sons disappearance. Upon meeting Evgeny's Lieutenant and the Commander she felt that they were indifferent to her anguish and the fate of her son. They recommended that she return home and not get involved.

Instead, she ended up in the Russian region of Ingushetia, attending an Orthodox Church where the priest, Father Basil, offered her accommodation near the parish church. Here she received Holy Communion as a believer for the first time. Liubov then set off travelling throughout Chechnya searching for her son, showing his photograph, asking questions and continually praying to God for help. Her journey, which lasted for ten months as she chased down leads and ques-

tioned anyone who would talk to her, led through minefields, aerial bombing, and the threat of bandits. She met other Russian mothers searching for sons who had been reported missing in action or having deserted, or been captured by the Chechen rebels, and she met mothers of sons who had been murdered by beheading.

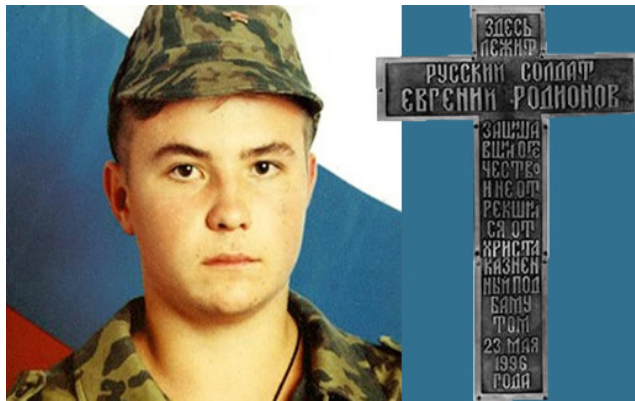
Liubov related: "I think that God was watching over me. I was walking along mined roads, but I did not step on a bomb. He protected me from bombings, He did not let me die, because my duty was to find my son, to bury him on his native land, according to Christian traditions. I have realized that recently. When I was walking along those military roads, I just kept silent, praying to God in my heart."

In one region of Chechnya with a group of Russian mothers, Liubov came across 55 Russian soldiers surviving out of a group of 150 held captive. But only two of them had become Muslim to save their lives and they were now guarding their former comrades and beating them cruelly. One of the converted soldiers, surrounded by Chechens told his mother: "I have no mother. I have only Allah. I am not Kostya, I am Kozbek!" The man's mother quietly replied: "It is better for you to die rather than be like this."

Liubov found the breakdown of normal society in Chechnya had led to such a levels of corruption, that everything was decided on the amount of money one was willing to spend. In September 1996 she finally met a Chechen rebel field commander named Rusland Haihoroev (also spelled Khaikhoroyev in some sources) who claimed to have knowledge of Evgeny. On first meeting him, Haihoroev told Liubov that her son had been killed during a Russian bombing raid. Liubov felt that he was lying; the man seemed very uneasy at her questioning, and he then told her that unless the Russians stopped their bombing, all Russian captives would be killed.

Haihoroev later admitted that Evgeny had tried to escape but was unsuccessful, and that he had been given the choice—change his faith and take off his cross, or die; but Evgeny had refused to remove his cross. Haihoroev eventually beheaded Evgeny with a rusted saw, a horrific task that took over an hour to complete on May the 23rd, 1996 (his 19th birthday) near the settlement of Bamut. His body, along with those of three other young Russian prisoners, was placed in a bomb crater outside the village of Alexeevskaya and covered up with lime and dirt.

The Chechens preferred this atrocious method of execution because they followed a local superstition believing that a decapitated victim would not come for the murderer after death. Such is their barbarity that the Chechens would often



record the executions. There are at least over 400 hours of such recordings on the internet of Russians being beheaded by Muslim Chechens. Russian troops occupied the village where Evgeny was murdered the day following the execution, too late to have prevented the deaths.

Rusland Haihoroev told Liubov seventeen times over the course of seventeen separate meetings, that she had borne a bad son who refused to adopt Islam and join the separatists in their fight against Russia: "Your son had a choice to stay alive. He could convert to Islam, but he did not agree to take his cross off. He also tried to escape once," said Haihoroev to Evgeny's mother. She finally agreed to pay Haihoroev some 100,000 roubles (about \$4,000) to take her to his gravesite in the forests outside of Alexeevskaya. This was money she did not have; she had to sell her apartment to finance the deal.

Chechens in Moscow handled the deal and when all was done, Haihoroev showed her where his body was. There, late at night, with the assistance of the Russian military, she was able to exhume his body. She found her son's headless body together with the cross he wore and died for among his bones and stained with small drops of blood. The head was discarded in another place.

According to Evgeny's mother, this event took place in the following way: "When I came to Chechnya in the middle of February, a living private cost ten million roubles. This price was increased to 50 million in August. A friend of mine was told to pay 250 million roubles for her son, since he was an officer. It was night-time when I and some sappers began digging into the pit in which the bodies of four Russian soldiers were thrown. I was praying all the time, hoping that my Evgeny was not going to be there. I could not and did not want to believe that he was murdered. When we were taking out the remnants, I recognized his boots. However, I still refused to accept the fact of his death, until someone found his cross. Then I fainted."

Liubov took Evgeny's body away, along with the bodies of his murdered friends. She returned to Moscow with the aid of the Russian Orthodox Church and buried him. Sadly, her grief was compounded because when she came back home, Evgeny's father died, just five days after her son's funeral. He simply could not stand the loss of his son.

Evgeny was posthumously awarded the Order of Courage by the Army. Liubov later returned to Chechnya on a second trip and recovered her son's head. Haihoroev himself and his bodyguards were killed on August the 23rd, 1999 in a fire fight between his group and a rival Chechen band.

The young soldier's fate would have probably been forgotten, like countless others who lost their lives fighting the Muslim terrorists if a Central TV film crew had not come

to the village where Evgeny's relics now lie six years later to shoot a short report on a cross being raised to grace a cupola on a restored church. Parishioners told the reporters about the heroic deed of the son and the courage of the mother, who had buried him in his homeland. They filed the story as a separate report which was broadcast and received wide coverage. A year later, a huge devotion to Evgeny had spread throughout Russia and the entire world.

As his story has spread, pilgrims have begun appearing in the small village just west of Moscow, where his mother, Liubov, tends his grave on an icy hillside beside an old whitewashed church. Some military veterans have laid their medals by his graveside in a gesture of homage. People in distress have left handwritten notes asking for his intercession.

Aleksandr Makeyev, a paratroop officer who heads a foundation to assist soldiers, said he had seen soldiers kneeling in prayer before an image of Evgeny: "The kids in Chechnya feel they've been abandoned by the state and abandoned by

their commanders," he told the newspaper *Moskovsky Komsomolets*: "They don't know who to appeal to for help, but they understand that Zhenya is one of them," he said, using Evgeny's nickname: "You can say he is the first soldier-saint of our days."

Icons and pictures of young Evgeny spread around Russia very quickly and he was hailed as a New Martyr for Christ. In these icons sometimes he wears a uniform, sometimes a red robe (which is the way he often appears in visions to the faithful, especially soldiers and children), sometimes armed, sometimes holding a Cross of martyrdom, but always with his halo. The picture distributed shows Evgeny wearing the cross for which he died around his neck. Miracles have been occurring in connection with Evgeny's relics as well. During a religious procession in commemoration of the New Martyr Evgeny on November the 20th, 2002 an icon of the brave young soldier started secreting sweet-scented myrrh.

Laminated cards bearing Evgeny's image have been mass produced and many soldiers carry them with them when they are deployed on active duty. The cards bear the words of a prayer, the troparion for a martyr: *In his sufferings, O Lord, Thy martyr Evgeny received an imperishable crown from Thee, our God; for possessed of Thy might, he set at naught the tormentors and crushed the feeble audacity of the demons. By his supplications save Thou our souls.*

A sign in memory of the brave Evgeny was put at the entrance to the school where he studied. There was also a documentary released about him. People's donations made it possible to erect a two-meter high Orthodox Cross on his grave which is located in the village of Satino-Russkoye, near Podolsk, in the Moscow region. This was later replaced



Liubov Rodionova
[Evgeny's mother]

by a more substantial memorial. People come to visit his grave from the most distant parts of Russia. A WWII veteran once came to visit Evgeny's grave and he took off his military decoration—the Bravery Medal—and put in on the tombstone. The writings on Evgeny's grave cross read: "The Russian soldier Evgeny Rodionov is buried here. He defended his Fatherland and did not disavow Christ. He was executed on May the 23rd, 1996, on the outskirts of Bamut." His own neck cross, the one that he refused to give up, his mother has donated to St. Nicholas Church in Ordinka, Moscow.

Because of the huge devotion to the New Martyr Evgeny, the pious faithful have sought official recognition from the Moscow Patriarchal authorities but thus far no official glorification has been authorized.

Evgeny's biography, entitled "The New Martyr of Christ, Warrior Evgeny," written by the priest Alexander Shargunov, was published in a booklet in 2002. The fifth edition was blessed by His Holiness the late Patriarch Alexey. In pamphlets, songs and poems, in sermons and on Web sites, the young soldier Evgeny Rodionov's story has become a parable of religious devotion and Russian identity: "Nineteen-year-old Evgeny Rodionov went through unthinkable suffering," reads an encomium on one Russian Web site, "but he did not renounce the Orthodox faith but confirmed it with his martyr's death. He proved that now, after so many decades of raging atheism, after so many years of unrestrained nihilism, Russia is capable, as in earlier times, of giving birth to a martyr for Christ, which means it is unconquerable."

May those who read this article learn from Evgeny's constancy, dignity and bravery to face and overcome our own daily temptations to betray Christ. May we bear our cross daily and NEVER, EVER be ashamed to wear our baptismal cross and be ready at all times to defend our holy Orthodox Christian Faith by living a holy life in accordance with the commands of Christ.



The person who cannot endure for Christ's sake a physical death... should at least be willing to endure death spiritually. Then he will be a martyr... in that he does not submit to the demons that assail him, or to their purposes, but conquers them, as did the holy martyrs and the holy fathers. The first were bodily martyrs, the latter spiritual martyrs. By forcing oneself slightly, one defeats the enemy; through slight negligence one is filled with darkness and destroyed.

St. Peter of Damaskos

BE PATIENT IN THE BATTLE

From the "Spiritual Meadow" by Saint John Moschos.

St. John Moschos was a Byzantine monk and ascetical writer, born about 550. He lived in many monastic communities from the monastery of St. Theodosius to Mount Sinai and the monasteries near Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. He died in Rome in 619. He is the author of the Spiritual Meadow wherein he narrates his experiences with many great ascetics, as related to him; he also gives a clear insight into the practices of Eastern monasticism, and acquaints us with the numerous heresies that threatened to disrupt the Church in the East.

† † †

There was once an Alexandrian priest called Conon who was in charge of baptisms. The fathers had decreed that the high quality of his character made him worthy of baptizing those who came seeking for it. So he anointed with the holy Chrism and baptized those who came. But whenever he had to anoint a woman he became so agitated that he wanted to leave the monastery. While battling with this thought Saint John the Baptist appeared to him, saying: "Endure, and persevere and I will lift this burden from you."

One day an attractive young Persian woman came to be baptized who was so beautiful that the priest could not bring himself to anoint her bare flesh with oil. When Archbishop Peter heard that the girl had already been there two days without being baptized, he was exceedingly angry with the priest and even wanted to delegate this ministry to a deaconess, but refrained from doing so as he did not want to be seen to be doing anything contrary to the canons. But Abba Conon took his cloak and went, saying that he would not remain any longer in that place. He had got as far as the hills, when behold, Saint John the Baptist met him in the way and spoke to him gently, saying: "Go back to your monastery and I will lift this battle from you."

"I certainly will not go back," replied Abba Conon indignantly. "You have so often made these promises and not fulfilled them." Then Saint John made him sit down and take off his clothes. He made the sign of the cross three times on his navel and said: "Believe me, Father Conon, I had been hoping that you would have been able to receive a reward because of this battle. As it is, however, look, I have taken this battle away from you, but you have forfeited any reward."

The priest returned to the monastery to once again take up his baptismal ministry. The next day he anointed and baptized the young Persian woman, hardly even noticing that she was, in fact, a woman. He continued the ministry of baptism for another twelve years in such tranquility of mind and body that he never experienced any excitement of the flesh, nor consciously thought of anyone specifically as a woman. And so in peace he lived out his days.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

By Professor Ivan M. Andreyev.

O Invincible and incomprehensible and divine power of the precious and life-giving Cross, forsake not us sinners.

[The order of Great Compline]

† † †



The Cross is the mighty and profound symbol of Christianity, a symbol whose meaning is inexhaustible. The eight-pointed Cross is the symbol of Orthodoxy. Gazing upon the Cross with his mind and heart, the Christian goes deeper into that symbol and grows spiritually. Just as a plant needs fertile soil, moisture, and sunlight in order to grow, so a Christian needs the Cross of Christ in his spiritual and physical life, for the Cross of Christ provides him with nourishment, drink, warmth, and light.

Does everyone know what the Cross is for Christians? Does everyone understand that the depth of meaning and substance of that Christian symbol is truly inexhaustible? Let us attempt to concentrate a bit in order to piously reflect on the Cross, on that same Cross which the Holy Church brings out to remind us of the Passion of Christ.

Our difficult, awful, evil, hurried time does not allow us to focus our concentration. People crave entertainment, a variety of experiences, productions, ideas, feelings, and actions. The Cross calls us toward the opposite. In it there is no movement, no change, no external variation. The Cross demands that we concentrate our attention upon the depths of the soul. Then, in its simplicity, stillness, and silence, its infinite substance and bottomless depth of meaning opens up to us.

The Holy Apostle Paul wanted to know nothing in the world *save Jesus Christ, and Him Crucified*. (I Cor 2:2). This was because to know the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified on the Cross, gives one everything he needs. The Cross was made of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree, which the first man touched, despite the Lord's commandment forbidding him to do so. On the Cross, our Lord Jesus Christ tore up the manuscript of Adam's sin and likewise accomplished the salvation of man. Watered with the Divine Blood, that Cross, which had come from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which had brought people death, was transformed into the Tree of Life.

Each Cross bearing the image of the Crucified Savior, wordlessly says to us... *Here is what I have done for you. What have you done for Me?* On the Cross is written everything that we need to know about God and about ourselves... our fall and our restoration, our sin and Divine Mercy. The

Cross instructs us in great patience and humility, love and forgiveness of all, crucifixion of our flesh and hope in eternal salvation. The outstretched, crucified arms clearly bear witness to the fact that the Lord does not desire the death of a sinner, and that He is ready to forgive and embrace everyone who truly repents, regardless of how sinful they might be.

We find prototypes of the Cross in the Old Testament. The Patriarch Jacob blessed Joseph's children Ephraim and Manasseh crosswise (Gen ch. 48). Moses used his staff to make the sign of the Cross on the waves of the Red Sea (Exod ch. 14). The latter example shows us that the Cross has the power to overcome even the laws of nature.

There are other examples in which through the Cross "the natural order is overcome." Thus, for example, the Holy Martyr St. Vasilissa of Nicomedia, having protected herself with the sign of the Cross, stood unharmed in the midst of the flames. Thus, the Holy Bishop Julian, after making the sign of the Cross over the cup of poison, drank it without suffering any harm.

The Cross is also the banner of military victory. When the Amalekites attacked the Hebrews after their exodus out of Egypt, Moses, supported by the priests, prayed with arms extended in the form of a Cross, and the Amalekites were defeated (Exod 17:11). St. Cyprian of Carthage explains that the Israelites were victorious because the cruciform stretching out of the arms was a prototype of the Cross of Christ. The clearest evidence of the victorious power of the Cross of Christ was demonstrated in Emperor Constantine the Great's seeing a brilliantly shining Cross in a clear, cloudless sky, and hearing the words "*In this [sign] you shall conquer.*"

The Cross also grants healing. In the Old Testament, the bronze serpent, which prefigured the Cross, healed all those who had been bitten by the deadly serpents sent by God as punishment for the Hebrews' complaining. If a prototype of the Cross held such healing power, how much more powerfully does the Cross of Christ itself heal!

From ancient times and still today, the Orthodox Church has considered the Cross a great defense against all disease, whether physical or spiritual. This is why since antiquity, Christians have worn the Cross on their breast. To wear such a Cross was considered to be: 1) a confession that you were a Christian, and 2) a defense, *to ward off any evil*.

Even today, one often sees written on Crosses to be worn on the breast, the words, *O Lord, Save and Protect [me]!* When a priest blesses such a Cross, he prays that it might be *for him that shall bear it on himself may it be for a saving defense and preservation against every evil of soul and body and for the increase in him of Thy spiritual gifts and Christian virtues* and that it might be filled with *Thy power and strength for the repulsion and dispelling of every snare of the devil*, and be *the preservation of soul and body from the face of enemies*

visible and invisible and from every evil." (Supplemental Book of Needs).

In the canon To the Honorable and Life-giving Cross (composed by Gregory of Sinai), the Orthodox Church chants: *O cross! Be unto me the might, the strength and the power, the deliverer and foremost defender against my assailants, the shield and protector, my victory and establishment, ever preserving and sheltering me.* And *O Cross ... as a three-edged sword thou dost cut off the principles of darkness, being the great weapon of Christ and an invincible and all-powerful trophy of victory...* For the Cross is *the symbol of the Incomprehensible Trinity, the Life-bearer.*

The Cross is a great, invincible weapon that conquers all. However, one needs to know how to use that weapon, that power. For even an ordinary weapon, a firearm or other weapon, can be an impotent one in the hands of someone inexperienced, and can even be a danger to the one who wields it.

The invincible and almighty power of the Cross becomes so, and is conditional upon faith and piety. One cannot use the power of the Cross, one cannot utilize it as a weapon in the absence of faith and piety, for it is a weapon of the Holy Truth of Christ. One must not make the sign of the Cross over oneself or others without faith and piety.

The enemies of the Cross are the enemies of Christ. During the time of the Zaporozhian Syetch, such enemies were discovered quite simply... It was enough to simply observe how a person read the *Our Father* and crossed himself with the Orthodox sign of the Cross.

The Cross is first of all the symbol of our salvation. In signing ourselves with the sign of the Cross, we pray to God the Father through His Son's Cross (when we say the Lord's Prayer) or to our Savior, God the Son Himself through the Cross of His Golgotha (when we address prayers to the Lord Jesus Christ), or to God the Holy Spirit (in the prayer *O Heavenly King*)—again through the Savior's Cross, through the Cross by which He acquired the right to send us the Comforter.

Signing oneself with the sign of the Cross has particular meaning when praying for forgiveness and salvation, for we cannot be forgiven or saved on account of any personal merits, no matter how great they might be! It is only thanks to the Passion of Christ, at the price of His precious blood, and only after our repentance and the fruits of repentance, that we dare hope in forgiveness and salvation. Such is the primary, profound meaning of signing oneself with the sign

of the Cross. If we comprehend that, how can we possibly make the sign of the Cross carelessly?

The Cross is the most-powerful, almighty source of comfort and strength in times of sorrow, despondency, and despair. The Cross is the last hope of those who despair, and it never puts to shame those who have hope. It is enough but to imagine the Savior Crucified, and with only a tiny corner of your heart to intend to repent, and immediately, without delay, the Savior, who kisses the intention, sends His almighty help. Countless numbers of people have been saved from committing suicide because, for just a moment, they turned their thoughts in faith to the crucified Savior.

It was from the Cross that the prayer for forgiveness of enemies went forth. It was from the Cross that the repentant wise thief was granted mercy. It was from the Cross that the Holy Apostle John the Theologian (and with him, all faithful Christians) was adopted by the Most-holy Theotokos,

the hope of those without hope that cannot be put to shame.

The Mother of God stood at the Cross, with her arms crossed on her breast. She was the first to cross her arms before the Cross of her Son and God, being crucified with Him in her maternal heart, remembering on Golgotha the Righteous Symeon's prophetic words *and a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.*

Comprehending that, dare we

not reveal the thoughts within our hearts? And crossing our arms over our breasts, dare we not remember in our hearts her holy crossed arms?

Approaching the Holy Chalice, we always fold our arms cross-wise across our breast. We do not sign ourselves with the sign of the Cross (lest, in doing so, we jostle the Holy Chalice), but we hold a cross [our crossed arms] over our breast. When we commune, we stand as it were at the cross, together with the Most-holy Theotokos, for we commune of the Body and Blood of the Crucified One.

With fear of God and faith draw nigh. Can one possibly approach without fear and faith the Crucified Savior, upon seeing Whom the sun went dark, the earth shook like a living being? Out of fear, the Angels were incapable of seeing the Lord's Passion.

The Cross teaches us humility and patience, sobriety and discernment, purity of heart, faith, hope and Christ's sincere love; this love is so sharply different from ordinary human love. Ordinary earthly love is egocentric and selfish, while Christ's true love is sacrificial and compassionate. The guide



to true love is always the Cross, from which true love in fact is *more powerful than death*.

All of the Holy Mysteries of the Church of Christ are intimately tied to the Cross. In Holy Baptism, everything is done under the sign of the Cross. In Chrismation; the same. Repentance is a *second Baptism*, a *Baptism of tears*. Holy Unction is an augmented Baptism of tears of repentance. Holy Matrimony is a Baptism into life together as husband and wife. Ordination is Baptism into service to the Church. Without the Cross, the Holy Eucharist would be utterly unimaginable.

Reflecting on the Mystery of the Cross as Eucharist [i.e. Thanksgiving], St. John Cassian the Roman, asserts that this Mystery will be performed eternally by Christ the High Priest in the Kingdom of Heaven, for Christ's Sacrifice on the Cross can never be forgotten even unto ages of ages.

To a true Christian, the Cross of Christ cannot but evoke a reciprocal, grateful, compassionate and sacrificial love for the Lord, together with a yearning to be crucified with Christ. After all, the Cross wordlessly prays about that very thing. In bearing a Cross upon one's breast, or signing oneself with the sign of the Cross, or crossing one's arms over one's breast, we Christians testify that we are ready to carry the Cross without complaint, to carry it humbly, voluntarily, and joyfully, for we love Christ and want to share in His suffering, for His sake. The Cross of Christ not only calls us to voluntarily suffer, but also shows us the example of undeserved travails crowned with the highest honor, the Crown of Thorns upon His Holy Head. And the whole "Karamazov" question of "how can the suffering of innocent children be justified" is resolved so clearly and profoundly simply by just looking upon the Savior, the Innocent One, nailed to the Cross.

However, the Cross is not simply a symbol of suffering. It is also a symbol of victory, and of the triumph of love and truth. It is also a symbol of the eternal joy that follows temporary suffering, a joy that nothing can ever take from us. The Cross truthfully promises us that every little tear will be wiped away, that all sorrow borne for Christ's sake, will turn to joy, that the droplets of tears, blood, and sweat a Christian who loves Christ sheds before his death will become diamonds, rubies and pearls of inexpressible beauty in the Kingdom of Heaven. The Cross calls us to spiritual struggle, and promises us help, victory, triumph, and the glory of the Resurrection.

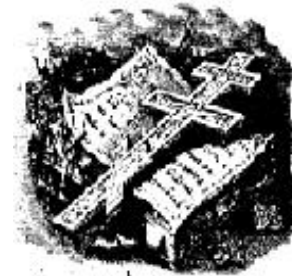
All of the above makes it possible to understand why a Christian's entire life, from the day of his birth to his final breath on earth, and even after his death, is accompanied by the Cross. A new mother, after the pain of giving birth, "forgets herself in her joy that a person has been born into the world" and signs herself and the newborn infant with the

sign of the Cross. The infant is baptized in the Holy Font in water that has been blessed by the Cross. With his first steps of intellectual and emotional development, a child learns—with his hand at first guided by a close relative—about the Cross and the sign of the Cross.

A Christian child's first conscious religious action should be to independently sign himself with the sign of the Cross. A Christian makes the sign of the Cross upon awakening (one should teach oneself that this must be the first thing he does); and, it should be his final action upon going to bed. A Christian signs himself with the sign of the Cross before and after eating, before and after studies, upon going outside, before beginning any work, before taking medication, before opening a letter received in the mail, upon receiving unexpected happy or sad news, upon entering someone else's home, a train, or a ship, and in general, at the beginning of any journey, recreational walk, or excursion, before bathing, visiting the sick, going to court, to an interrogation, to jail, into exile, before an operation, before a battle, before academic or other lectures, before and after a meeting or gathering, etc.

However, just as one must not wear a Cross as an amulet, one should not turn the sign of the Cross into a talisman, for both the Cross and the sign of the Cross are simply external expressions of that which must be in a Christian's heart: humility, faith, and hope in the Lord.

When a Christian dies, his relatives cross his arms over his chest, and form his fingers into the sign of the Cross. At the grave, the final Cross is erected. The Dread Judgment will begin with the appearance of the Cross of Christ...



An old man was asked, "How can a fervent brother not be shocked when he sees others returning to the world?" And he said, "Watch the dogs who chase hares. When one of them has seen a hare, he pursues it until he catches it, without being concerned with anything else. The others, seeing the dog launched in pursuit, run with it for a short time and soon come back. Only the one who has seen the hare follows it till he catches it, not letting himself be turned from his course by those who go back, and not caring about the ravines, rocks, and undergrowth.

So it is with him who seeks Christ as Master; ever mindful of the Cross, he cares nothing about any of the scandals that occur, till he reaches the Crucified One."

From A Word for the Desert

PRAYER IS THE GOAL OF OUR EARTHLY LIFE

By Archimandrite Touma (Bitar), abbot of the Antiochian Monastery of St. Silouan the Athonite, at Douma, Lebanon.

He came to me with the question, “I do not pray very much lately. I think I’m falling into negligence. What should I do to bring my prayer back?”

If you truly want to bring your prayer back, then you are able to do this in an instant. Through prayer you acquire prayer. Prayer is an act of will. Pray regularly. A little or a lot? It doesn’t matter. With feeling or without feeling? That doesn’t matter either. You begin with the body, with words and motions. What’s important is that you do it attentively. Don’t be hasty and don’t be slow. Don’t raise your voice and don’t hush it. Be moderate. Put your mind on what you are saying, on each word. Understand what you are saying. Whenever your mind wanders, even a little bit, bring yourself back.

Prayer with the body, with the tongue, the hand, the fingers, bending the body in bows and prostrations, keeping attention and understanding the meanings, all of this and similar things, is the introduction to the prayer of the heart. In prayer, the motion is from the outside towards the inside, and upwards. Prayer through control of the body enters one into tranquility. Tranquility enters him into humility, and humility raises up within him the fragrance of peace. Everything else follows after this.

Prayer is not an issue of temperament. This is why it only comes by force. A person forces himself, and it is given to him. Indeed, it is given to him as a gift from above! Likewise, if one waits to be overcome with a desire for prayer in order to pray, then he will never pray. Prayer with desire is in general psychological prayer with no spiritual value.

The basic desire for prayer, or you could say spontaneous prayer, only comes with strength and grace from the Most High. The beginning of prayer is not like this. Zeal for prayer might arise in the soul after encountering a person praying or after hearing or reading words about prayer that move the heart, and then when he begins to pray his interest quickly ceases and he finds prayer monotonous and dry. If he goes back, he loses it and if he stays firm and constant then he arrives at true prayer that spreads its roots in his soul, little by little, until it reaches its depths!

Usually the Lord God comforts one who prays at the beginning of the path, in order for him to stay firm. However, the comfort does not come when watched. You do not know when it will come to you. Pay attention that you do not wander off into imagination. Do not make room for images and feelings to slander you. That will lead you astray! Just the opposite, once you become familiar with prayer, beware of

fantasies, images, and feelings because in that is a departure from prayer. Likewise be careful about sentimentality and mental laxity. Prayer is something calm and firm!

Standing before God in prayer is something very serious. Naturally, God is not harsh, but He is not indulgent either. Prayer has its own special characteristics. Its joy is tranquil and its peace is alert. Its solace is mixed with thanks, a sense of unworthiness, and repentance.

Prayer connects you to God, to the Holy Trinity, to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Prayer is God’s language to man so that he will rise up to Him and enter into a relationship with Him. Thus, prayer teaches prayer and what comes before in it leads you to what comes after, just as the number one leads you to the number two and on to three and so forth.

You do not need techniques in prayer. It comes to you of itself when you insist on standing in the presence of God and when your Lord gives you what you ask. God seeks communion and calls you to Him and when you take a step in His direction, He leads you to Him, just as a father takes the hand of his child or a guide walks ahead of a traveler. Nothing is closer to the human heart than prayer.

Man is put together to be a being of prayer. At the deepest level, man realizes his humanity in which God created him in prayer. Why does the heart not incline to it spontaneously from the very beginning? Because the passions of the soul and the body have murdered man’s heart and taken control of it. For this very reason, at the beginning a person needs to force himself to pray, and then his heart will welcome it and take joy in it because it matches what is deeply rooted in him, even if it was hidden at first.

So prayer is the greatest gift to man, not only because it connects man to God, but because it is also the need and the solution for all things that man faces. People imagine that their problems and worries can be solved on the horizontal level, through human capacities. No doubt something of this is necessary, but everything without exception, all the cares and difficulties should first be faced with prayer, that is on the vertical level, by casting them at the feet of Jesus.

It is no surprise that the Lord said, *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* (Mt 11:28). Our rational solutions and initiatives are not always correct, but the Lord God knows exactly what we need. This is why through prayer, through putting the matter in God’s hands, through giving oneself and one’s concerns over, one finds the appropriate solution to all one’s problems!

However, if you correctly practice prayer, it draws you to the divine commandments, to repentance, to faith, to gentleness, and especially to love. Then if you practice the divine commandments, God’s presence will become deeper in your life and the commandments will then nourish your

prayer and press you on to prayer. But if you disregard the commandments, then prayer will quickly wither. If the commandments cause the relationship with God to grow, then prayer does too. For this reason, the commandments and prayer support each other so that the faithful will grow and attain the fullness of Christ.

This support is also accompanied. One prays and one works. One strives to lift his heart upwards at every moment and in every occasion. This is with regard to ordinary believers. But there are those for whom prayer becomes their work. Such people reach the end of prayer and the goal of work at the same time!

The truth is that prayer invites prayer. As long as one is engrossed in prayer, as long as one makes a habit of it, prayers rules his heart. At the end of the day, it is not as prayer that it satisfies man's being. The way is open for man to drink from prayer as much as he wants.

Prayer is the goal of man's path on earth. A person who does not pray and who does not lift his heart and his mind upwards remains just the outline of a person, no matter what he has accomplished! *For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?* (Mt 16:26).



Christ does not require big things from us to help us in our struggle. He expects very little, a tiny bit. A young man was telling me that he went to Patmos to worship, and fell into temptation's trap. A female tourist jumped on him and hugged him while he was walking. He pushed her away saying, "My Christ, I have come for worship... not for 'love'," and he went away. That same night in his hotel room, during prayer, he saw Christ immersed in Uncreated Light. Do you see the reward he received for that one little push? Others strive for years in the ascetic life, and may never be blessed with something like that. And he saw Jesus Christ only because he resisted temptation.

If one is not compassionate, he may sit for hours with his *komboschoini* [prayer rope]; and his prayer will have no result whatsoever. If there is pain in his heart about what he is praying for, even with a single sigh he will have prayed from the heart. Many, who when asked to pray have no time, will sigh for the other's problem; and that in itself is a prayer. I am not saying prayer needn't be done; however, if there is no time, a sigh for the pain of another is a prayer from the heart—it equals hours of prayer.

Elder Paisios the Athonite

TO A NEWLY-MARRIED COUPLE

By St. Tikhon.

Introductory Note: The following homily, by St. Tikhon, was published in the March 1902 English supplement to the Russian Orthodox American Messenger, the official periodical of the Russian Diocese. From the reference to St. Makarios the Great, we can date this homily rather precisely. The feast of St. Makarios is January 19. St. Tikhon mentions "evening songs" (Vespers hymns) to St. Makarios, which means that this couple was married on the eve of the feast—January 18. Of course, this would have been on the Julian Calendar; adding the requisite 13 days, we come to January 31, 1902 by western reckoning.

† † †

In greeting you, my beloved in Christ, on the occasion of your marriage, I also intend to say a few words for your edification. The Holy Church prescribes, in the marriage ritual, to offer to the people about to be married an edifying word by telling them what the sacrament of marriage is, and how they are to live in matrimony, in righteousness and honor.

A good deal is said about matrimony and family life, especially of late, but it is not always sane words that we hear. Therefore people ought firmly to know and to heed, and as for thee, beloved bridegroom, being a servant of the Orthodox Church, thou oughtest to teach as well what is the sacrament of matrimony, in righteousness and honor.

It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him (Gen 2:18), said God Himself, when our forefather Adam was still in Paradise. Without a helpmate the very bliss of Paradise was not perfect for Adam: endowed with the gift of thought, speech and love, the first man seeks with his thought another thinking being. His speech sounds lonely and the dead echo alone answers him. His heart, full of love, seeks another heart that would be close and equal to him. All his being longs for another being analogous to him, but there is none. The creatures of the visible world around him are below him and are not fit to be his mates. And as to the beings of the invisible spiritual world they are above him.

Then the bountiful God anxious for the happiness of man satisfies his wants and creates a mate for him—a wife. But if a mate was necessary for a man in Paradise, in the region of bliss, the mate became much more necessary for him after the fall, in the vale of tears and sorrow. The wise man of antiquity spoke justly: *Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.* (Ooh 4:9-10). [Ed.: "Ooh" is the formal abbr. for the book of Ecclesiastes].

But few people are capable of enduring the strain of moral loneliness, it can be accomplished only by effort and truly

not *All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given* (Mt 19:11), and as for the rest—it is not good for a man to be alone, without a mate.

The wife is the mate for her husband. Living chiefly with her heart, the woman is the best mate for the man, his best friend, consoler, and help, with the tender love, resigned loyalty, gentleness, long-suffering and sympathy proper to her heart. In the properties of woman's nature, man finds the counterpart of his powers, of reasoning, firmness, character, and from a good wife he receives support and encouragement: there is no heavy labour, no bitter circumstances to which a man cannot be reconciled by a loving wife.

Thus, the ancient philosopher says, that he who acquires a wife, acquires a help and a support for peace; grace upon grace is a modest wife and she is priceless! *A virtuous wife rejoices her husband and fills his years with peace; the amiability of the wife will gladden her husband, and her reasonableness will strengthen his bones; with her the rich man and the poor has a contented heart and a merry face at all times.* (Syr 26:1-14, 16-18; 36:26-29). *Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun.* (Ooh 9:9).

And this portion—matrimony—is acceptable in the eyes of God. This day in the evening songs the Holy Church praised the light giving, angel-like life of Saint Makarios of Egypt. He was made beautiful by his virtues, especially by his abstinence and prayer. Nevertheless one day this great saint heard a voice, which spoke. “Makarios, you have not as yet made yourself the equal in virtue of two women, who live not far from you.” The holy recluse found these women and inquired how they lived, what did they do to please God. The women humbly answered: “We are sinful, we live in the vanities of this world; there is no great virtue in us, and in one thing only we do not make God angry with us, as having married two brothers fifteen years ago we live so peacefully, that we have never spoken a harsh word to each other.”

This means, that matrimony is perfect and acceptable to God, but only when at its foundation there is no desire of material gain, no low impulse, but the mutual love and devotion of the husband and wife, joined to self-forgetfulness, constancy, gentleness, patience, when *the husband loves his wife and takes care of her, and the wife respects her husband and obeys him, as the head*, which the Holy Church also demands from them (Eph 5:22-29).

Moreover, in order to be acceptable in the eyes of God, marriage must be entered in *only in the Lord* (I Cor 7:39). The blessing of the Church must be called on it, through which it will become a sacrament. Thus, the married couple will be given grace that will make their bond holy and high, *unto the likeness of the bond between Christ and the Church* (Eph 5:23-32), which will help them in the fulfillment of their mutual duties.

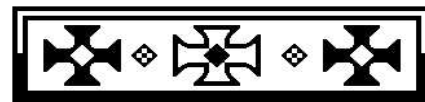
Sometimes, as for instance in this country, Church marriage is deemed unnecessary. But if without the help of God *we can accomplish no perfect and true good* (Jn 15:5), if *all our satisfaction is from God* (II Cor 3:5), if God produces in us *good desires and acts* (Phil 2:14), then how is it that the grace of God is unnecessary for husband and wife in order honorably to fulfill their lofty duties?

No, a true orthodox Christian could not be satisfied with civil marriages alone, without the Church marriage. Such a marriage will remain without the supreme Christian sanction, as the grace of God is attracted only towards that marriage, which was blessed by the Church—this treasury of grace. As to the civil marriage, it places no creative religious and moral principles, no spiritual power of God's grace, at the basis of matrimony and for its safety, but merely legal liabilities, which are not sufficient



for moral perfection.

Your matrimonial bond, my beloved, is blessed today by the Holy Church, and the grace of God has been imported to you, through the priest of God. And thou, oh wife, takest a husband not merely from the edifice of the church, but from the rank of the servants of God. Accordingly we hope and pray the Lord, praised in the Holy Trinity, that He grant you long life, fecundity, perfecting of life and faith, perfect love. We also pray that He fill you with all the good things of the earth and make you worthy of the promised bliss of reception, through the prayers of the Holy Virgin, with whose image I bless you, and of all the saints. Amen.



This, my brethren, is certain: whoever, whether man or woman, keeps the commandments of God, becomes wise and brave, and does not fear the whole world; whereas whoever does not keep them but does the will of the devil becomes a fool and a coward, and fears even his own shadow, even thought he be a king and possess the whole world.

St. Kosmas Aitolos

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ON THE LAST JUDGMENT

By ROCOR Archbishop Andrei (+1978).

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

[Rev 20:12]

On the western wall of the Kiev Cathedral of St. Vladimir, remarkable for its murals, right over the entrance to the church is a wonderful representation of the Last Judgment.

First of all, we are struck by the mass of people, their faces, eyes, and you have the vivid awareness that you are among them. Involuntarily, you try to find yourself, to determine your place according to your spiritual state. And within you occurs, as it were, a private judgment upon yourself. There are faces expressing terrible sorrow, a totally perished life trembles in them. There are others, full of malice, hatred, murmuring, envy, insatiable desires. Life passed on, but something is gnawing at them and will eternally gnaw at them.



But here, rays of light start to break their way through the enormous clouds, and they show us other faces: quiet, calm, joyful, happy. This is life! And the closer they are to the Throne, the more clear these faces are. And over the Throne shines the Cross. On the Throne is seated the Lord Savior of the world Himself, and around Him, John the Baptist, The Apostles, all the Saints are praying, triumphing. Here is harmonious rejoicing. Only one cry, one wail disturbs it. The Mother of God has

fallen on the shoulder of Christ, and she alone is pleading for the salvation of sinners, for mercy for all those without hope. She alone has been given the power to intercede to the end before the mercy of God.

Dear brothers and sisters! Wherever you may be in this terrible picture, do not despair. You have not yet perished! There is our Mother. She is whispering for you, and it is doubtful that even the Almighty God can refuse her. She is the 'finder of all those who are lost'. Just believe

in this, and warmth will begin to fill your heart; and a new hope will light up in it. Then love of the Wisdom of God will begin to reveal itself to you!

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

By St. John Maximovitch (his 1962 Nativity epistle to his flock).

Thou, Who art the God of peace and the Father of compassion, didst send unto us the Angel of Thy great Counsel, granting us peace.

† † †

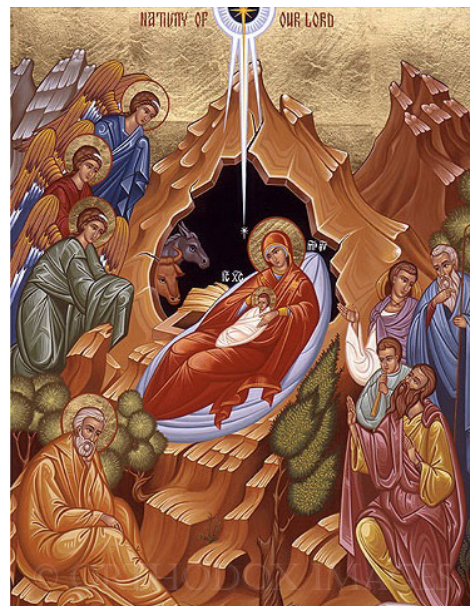
The Angel of the pre-eternal Counsel of the Holy Trinity comes to the earth. This is not an ordinary messenger; it is the Only-begotten Son of God Himself. He brings peace to men. *Peace be unto you*, He said more than once to His disciples. *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you*, He says to the apostles at the Mystical Supper, *not as the world giveth, give I unto you*. And appearing after His Resurrection, again He says: *Peace be unto you*.

For he is our peace, the Holy Apostle Paul says concerning Him: *He came to the earth to reconcile man unto God by the Cross, having slain the enmity thereby. And having come, He preached peace to those afar off and to those near, because through Him we both have access unto the Father*.

The wall that separated heaven and earth is destroyed; the sword that barred the way to the Tree of Life disappears. Unto man that had sinned comes his Creator, calling him into His embrace! By the mouths of the apostles, the Holy Spirit cries out: *In*

Christ, be ye reconciled to God. You that had sinned came not to God, but the Son of God, before Whom you sinned, came to you! He calls everyone to Himself; He gives forgiveness to everyone who merely thirsts for this. For without the desire of man himself, without at least his little effort, God's peace cannot settle in him.

The Lord forces no one to come to Him, but calls everyone: *Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*. Come all ye who are heavy laden with sins, who are exhausted from your labors and who do not find rest! You shall find that inner peace, which you will find nothing on earth more desirable than. The soul will feel unearthly peace and joy.



The Magi who worshipped the Babe experienced that joy; the shepherds, finding Him lying in a manger, also felt it. But neither peace nor joy touched the heart of Herod and those who wanted to destroy the Babe. For evil desire and malice are incompatible with inner peace. And whoever does

not have inner peace, also sows strife and malice about.

The Church now calls us to meet Christ Who comes from heaven. What can we do in order to meet Him like the Magi, and not like Herod? *Ye that desire life, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking guile. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it*. It tends to be hard to do

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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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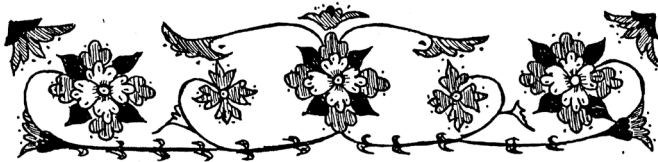
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this; we are weak when it comes to everything good. But the Son of God even came for this: in order to strengthen us. Not for naught was He born in Bethlehem, which signifies “house of bread.”

He feeds us with heavenly food, His flesh. “God, the Lord and Creator of all, as a babe in the flesh, is worshipped in a poor manger, crying out: ‘Eat My body and through faith be made steadfast.’”

These words of the divine Babe are directed to us. Let us hearken to His call! Let us follow the Magi; let us hasten with the shepherds! Our churches are now that cave of Bethlehem. Not illusory, but in reality does He, Who is now being born in His most pure flesh, rest in them. Let us worship Him; let us offer as a gift our thoughts and desires; let us confess our sins, and let us taste of His immaculate Body and Blood. Whoever did not do this earlier, let him at least accomplish it now, when the star of Bethlehem is already shining! Our minds will be enlightened and the heart will hear:

Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will among men!

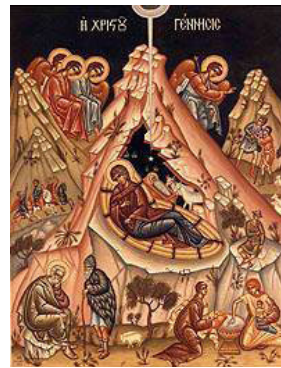


When we are compelled by our conscience to accomplish all the commandments of God, then we shall understand that the law of the Lord is faultless. It is performed through our good actions, but cannot be perfected by men without God’s mercy.

St. Mark the Ascetic

WHY THE NATIVITY FAST HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED

From “Orthodox Russia,” No. 21, 1999.



The Orthodox Church prepares its faithful to welcome the Nativity of Christ in a worthy manner by means of a 40-day Nativity fast, which lasts from November 15th to December 25th.

Besides generally known reasons, the Nativity fast is also undertaken by Orthodox Christians in order to venerate the suffering and sorrow undergone by the Holy Mother of God at the hands of the scribes and the Pharisees just prior to the sacred event of Christ’s Nativity.

Holy Tradition tells us that shortly before the righteous Joseph and the Holy Virgin set off for Bethlehem, they were subjected to the following tribulation. A certain scribe by the name of Ananias, entering their home and seeing the Virgin pregnant, was severely distressed and went to the High Priest and the entire Jewish council, saying: “Joseph the carpenter, who has been regarded as a righteous man, has committed an iniquity. He has secretly violated the Virgin Who was given to him from the temple of God for safekeeping. And now She is with child.” Then the High Priest’s servants went to Joseph’s house, took Mary and Joseph, and brought them to the High Priest, who began to denounce and shame the Most-blessed Virgin Mary.

But the Holy Virgin, crying in deep sorrow, replied: *The Lord God is My witness that I am innocent and have known no man.* Then the High Priest accused the righteous Joseph, but the latter swore on oath that he was not guilty of this sin. Yet the High Priest did not believe them and subjected them to the trial that was customary in those times, (when a woman suspected of violation was given to drink bitter water that had been cursed by the High Priest). However, the trial just served to confirm the innocence of the Holy Virgin and the righteous Joseph. All those present were amazed at this, unable to understand how a Virgin could simultaneously be with child and yet remain inviolate.

After that the High Priest allowed the holy couple to go home in peace. The righteous Joseph took the Virgin Mary and went to his house, joyously glorifying God. But this was not the end of the Holy Theotokos' trials. It is well known that afterwards she shared with Joseph the toil of a three-day journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. And in Bethlehem there was no place for the Holy Virgin either in an inn, or in some home, and since night was already approaching, She was forced to seek shelter in a cave which served as a resting place for cattle. In this humblest of shelters the Most-blessed Virgin remained in prayer and divine contemplation. It is here that She painlessly gave birth to our Lord Jesus Christ, Saviour of the world.

We can see from all of the above that the days immediately preceding the Nativity were not days of rest and comfort for the Holy Mother of God. In those days She suffered various sorrows and trials, but did not leave off her prayers and contemplation. The Holy Church appeals to the faithful to participate, at least to some small degree, in the Holy Theotokos' spiritual labor, constraining one's flesh during the Nativity fast and nourishing one's soul with prayer. However, the Church warns us that external fasting only is not enough. We must also apply ourselves to internal fasting, which consists of shunning malice, deceit, wrath, worldly bustle, and other vices. During this fast, as at all times, we must show works of love and mercy to our fellow beings, doing all we can to help those in need and in sorrow. Only then will our fasting be genuine and not hypocritical, only then will it be God-pleasing, and only then will we know the true joy of the bright feast of Christ's Nativity.



Take as an example the wisdom of Joseph and his submission. Do battle in chastity and service until you make yourself a king.

St. Pachomius (+348)

A THANKSGIVING PRAYER

Author unknown.

Every day we say... thank you Lord! Just this once, Lord, I want to come to you with no problems, but simply to say, Thank You:

For your forgiveness when I fail.

For the sheer joy of sleep when I'm terribly tired.

For silent strength of humility when pride overtakes me.

For the justice of your laws when people are cruel.

For the remedies for sickness when I am ill.

For the simplicity or orderliness when I face confusion.

For the assurance that you have made a place especially for me when I feel inadequate among my peers.

For the joy of helping others when I see people in need.

For the earthly evidence of your will when I'm trying to find out what life is all about.

For the reality of your world, when I stray too far into fantasy.

For the rightness of reasonableness when I panic too quickly.

For the fun that refreshes when everything gets too serious.

For the renewal in moments of silence when I'm overly stressed.

Thank you Lord, for all of these things.

But most of all, thank you for your abiding presence that makes every day I live a day of Thanksgiving!



Today the Virgin gives birth to the Transcendent One. What can I, the unworthy and filthy one, say about the grandeur of the innumerable dispensations of the Most High God! I am astonished and unable to look directly at it as I contemplate this mystery.

How did God condescend to be an infant in a cave of irrational beasts? How was He wrapped in swaddling clothes and carried in the holy arms of the holy Virgin, He Who was born by the Father without a mother! *Great art Thou, O Lord, and wondrous are Thy deeds, and no word sufficeth to hymn Thy wonders! Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!* (Rom 11:33).

My soul shall rejoice in the Lord; I shall noetically smother with kisses that most sweet and blessed Infant, so that He may deliver me from my irrational passions.

Elder Ephraim

From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE

From "Christian Answers for Our Days," a pamphlet made available by Ms. Sarah M.



From The Editor: Television is having an ever increasing role and influence on our beliefs and (worse) knowledge of arts and sciences. There are certain TV channels that are beginning to be viewed more and more as final authorities on history (e.g., the History Channel, Discovery Channel, etc.). These channels often find it necessary to attack the historicity of the Biblical record with "expert opinion." We thus thought that our readers would find the subject article interesting and informative.

We are aware that many have no desire to be either a Jew or a Christian, especially in a society where these religions have become so politicized. This does not mean, however, that the original authors of the Bible intended their histories, poetry, and letters to be used in the political way that they often are now. It is interesting that when the historicity of the works of ancient Hindu or Buddhist authors comes up, nobody questions their authenticity; meanwhile, the authors of the Bible are constantly attacked by an embittered group of Western "scholars." All of us, also, can respect the writings of Confucius or Lao Tzu as representative of their culture(s) and as reliable witnesses of their surroundings and times. Should not Biblical authors be afforded the same treatment?

To help remedy the trend, the subject article presents some statements from various archaeologists. Of special note among them is Sir William Ramsay, who set out to prove Luke, author of the gospel that bears his name and the book of Acts, wrong. Instead, he came back with a profound respect for this author.

† † †

Archaeology is the study of material remains of past human life and activities. An archaeologist is the person who conducts the research of those material remains.

Here's what some of the great archaeologists and students of archaeology had to say about how material remains of past human life and activities affected the Bible.

1. Nelson Glueck - "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference."

2. William F. Albright - "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament traditions."

3. F. F. Bruce - "Where Luke has been suspected of inaccuracy, and accuracy has been vindicated by some inscriptional evidence, it may be legitimate to say archaeology has confirmed the New Testament record."

4. Merrill Unger - "Old Testament archaeology has rediscovered whole nations, resurrected important peoples, and

in a most astonishing manner filled in historical gaps, adding immeasurably to the knowledge of biblical backgrounds."

5. Miller Burrows - "Archaeology has in many cases refuted the views of modern critics. It has shown in a number of instances that these views rest on false assumptions and unreal, artificial schemes of historical development ... The excessive skepticism of many liberal theologians stems not from a careful evaluation of the available data, but from an enormous predisposition against the supernatural."

Archaeology and the Old Testament

1. Genesis derives the ancestry of Israel from Mesopotamia. Archaeology confirms it.

2. Genesis 11:1 reads that "The whole earth was of one language and one speech." God confounded the language in Genesis 11:9. Most philologists attest to the likelihood of such an origin for the world's languages.

3. In the genealogy of Esau, there is mention of the Horites (Gen. 36:20). Archaeology confirms the Horites were a prominent group of warriors living in the near East in Patriarchal times.

4. The Bible claims the walls of Jericho fell outwards. Critics scoffed because "walls of cities do not fall outwards, they fall inwards." Archaeology proved in the early 1930s that the walls of Jericho did fall outward, just as the Bible said.

5. One critic said the Biblical record of the laver made of brass mirrors was not an original entry into the Priestly Code. So, he dated the writing of the Law at 500 B.C. However, archaeology has since found evidence of such bronze mirrors in what is known as the Empire Period of Egypt's history (1500-1200 B.C.). That's contemporary with Moses.

6. A century ago such familiar Biblical cities as Jericho, Samaria, Bethel, Shiloh, Bethshan, Gezer, Nineveh, Babylon, Ur and many others were shapeless mounds. Critics scoffed at the Biblical record. Within the last 100 years, all of these cities have been uncovered. The importance of the discoveries is that the excavation has produced material which confirms the Scriptures point after point.

7. Excavations are dated on the basis of levels at which things are found. At Tepe Gawra, a few miles north of Nineveh, a seal was found which depicted a man, a woman and a serpent. Another seal depicted a man and a serpent. Another seal depicted a man and a woman picking fruit from a tree. Behind the woman was a serpent standing erect. The seals were found in the level antedating 3000 B.C. It suggests that the story of the temptation is very old. It was known about long before Abraham and Moses. It was not some Hebrew fairy tale.

These are but a few of hundreds of confirmations of the Old Testament from archaeology.

Archaeology and the New Testament

1. Sir William Ramsay is regarded as one of the greatest archaeologists ever to have lived. He believed that the Book of Acts was a product of the mid-second century A.D. (150 A.D.). He set out to prove it. However, after thorough re-

search, he changed his mind. He became a firm defender for the mid-first century authorship of Acts.

2. For many critics the account of the birth of Jesus was held as ridiculous. They argued that there was no census, that Quirinius was not Governor of Syria at that time and that everyone did not have to return to his ancestral home for a census. Archaeology has proven the critics wrong (again).

- o The Romans had a regular enrollment of taxpayers and held censuses every 14 years. The procedure was begun under Augustus.

- o Quirinius was Governor of Syria about 7 B.C.

- o A papyrus found in Egypt gives directions for the conduct of a census. Families were to return to their own governments to complete family registration of the enrollment and that the tilled lands might retain those belonging to them.

3. Critics said Acts was unreliable because Luke wrote that Lystra and Derbe were in Lycaonia and Iconium was not (Acts 14:6). However, in 1910, Sir William Ramsay found a monument that showed Iconium was a Phrygian city. Later discoveries confirmed that.

4. In his letter to the Romans, Paul mentions the city treasurer, Erastus (Romans 16:23). The letter was written in Corinth. Excavations of Corinth in 1929 found this inscription on a pavement: "Erastus, curator of public buildings, laid this pavement at his own expense." The pavement dates from the 1st century A.D.

5. Many critics have blasted the usage of certain words by Luke.

- o Luke called rulers in Philippi "praetors." Scholars argued that two "duumvirs" would have ruled the town. However, archaeology shows that the title of "praetor" was employed by the magistrates of a Roman colony. Luke was right.

- o Luke called civil authorities in Thessalonica "politarchs." Critics said there was no such person. However, 19 inscriptions have been unearthed which use the title. Luke was right.

- o Luke called Gallio "proconsul." The Delphi inscription was unearthed which reads: "As Lucius Junius Gallio, my friend and the proconsul of Achaia."

Sir William Ramsay wrote of Luke: "Luke is a historian of the first rank ... this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians."

The Bible is to be trusted as an authentic Book of antiquity. Archaeology supports and confirms facts as stated in the Bible.

Additional Reading Sources

Read "An Introduction to Bible Archaeology" by Howard F. Vos (1956, Moody Press, Chicago, Ill., 125 pages) for some excellent basics to an understanding of how archaeology confirms the claims of Scripture.

You will enjoy reading the following books if you want to go deeper into the study of Biblical Archaeology.

- o "The Philistines and the Old Testament," Edward Hindson, 1971, Baker Books

- o "Archaeology and Bible History," Joseph Free, 1956, Scripture Press

- o "Archaeology and the Old Testament," Merrill Unger, 1954, Zondervan Publishing

- o "Highlights of Archaeology in Bible Lands," Fred Wight, 1955, Moody Press

- o "Out of the Earth," E.M. Blaiklock, 1957, Eerdmans

- o "Light from the Ancient Past," J. Finegan, 1959, Princeton University Press

- o "Excavations in Palestine," F. Bliss and R.A.S. Macalister, 1902, Palestine Exploration Fund

- o "The Old Testament in Modern Research," H. Hahn, 1966, Fortress Press

- o "Archaeology and the Religion of Israel," W.F. Albright, 1942, Johns Hopkins Press

- o "Archaeology and the Old Testament," J. Thompson, 1957, Eerdmans

- o "Documents from Old Testament Times," D.W. Thomas, 1965, Harper & Row

- o "Archaeology and the Ancient Testament," J. Kelson, 1968, Zondervan

- o "Biblical Archaeology," G.E. Wright, 1960, Westminster

Two other excellent resource books for researching archaeological finds that support the Bible are: "Unger's Bible Handbook" (1967, Moody Press) and "Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible" (1973, Eerdmans).



In the age of the Antichrist, when he will dominate the world, the simple but genuine prayer of a Christian will make him tremble, for Christians have tremendous power.

- Elder, some people say when the Antichrist comes, Christians will not be able to buy food and will starve.

- Well, Christians can live on bread and olives. The ones who will suffer are those who are used to having ten different kinds of cheeses on their table.

After the card, the identification cards and the establishment of the filing system, they will maliciously proceed to the marking by announcing on T.V. that someone stole another person's card and withdrew all his money from his bank account. On the other hand, they will advertise the "perfect system," the marking of the Antichrist's name, 666, on the hand and forehead with laser beams which will not be externally detectable.

Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain

THE CHOICE FOR LIFE

By Sonya Colberg, from "The Oklahoman," October 16th, 2011.

From the Editor: Once in a while we read a mass media story that instills hope in our minds for the future of our society. This is one such story that every mother-to-be must read. The choice for life for a healthy pregnant woman is much easier than the decision made by the protagonist of this story. In the end, cancer took a human life at the time that our Creator allowed; in the process, a baby came to life because of her mother's choice for life. Ms. Crimm traded her earthly life so that her baby can live; she said no to abortion, even when the majority of pro-lifers would have deemed abortion as an acceptable avenue. We are of the prayerful belief that our Lord and Savior and His Most Holy Mother's intercessions have granted Ms. Crimm her rightful place among His angels and saints. May her memory be eternal!

† † †

Stacie Crimm called her brother with astonishing news.

"You're not going to believe this," she said.

She laughed and cried all at once that day in March as she explained that five pregnancy tests showed she would be having a child. It was a joyous surprise at age 41 but even more so because she'd been told she would never be able to get pregnant, said her brother, Ray Phillips.

But even as she shopped for clothes for the child she longed to hold in her arms, she knew something was not right. She sent 159 text messages about her pregnancy to her brother in the months that followed. Many were joyful but then the bone-chilling messages came in during the predawn hours. She said severe headaches and double vision tortured her while tremors wracked her entire body.

"I'm worried about this baby," she texted.

"I hope I live long enough to have this baby," said another message. "Bubba, if anything happens to me, you take this child."

Initially, she and her brother used the Internet to try to diagnose her illness. The single mother-to-be had been exposed to mold while she was remodeling her home and her symptoms seemed to match up to mold exposure. At her family's encouragement, she visited a number of doctors. In July, a CT scan revealed that she had head and neck cancer.

Now she had to choose between her life and her baby's life. Phillips said she agonized only for a while before deciding against taking potentially life-saving chemotherapy

in hopes that she would soon hold a healthy baby in her arms.

The Turning Point

Crimm collapsed at her home in Ryan and was rushed to OU Medical Center in Oklahoma City on August 16th. Doctors said that the invasive tumor had begun wrapping around the brain stem, slowly squeezing the life out of Crimm. But on a beautiful sunny morning two days later, Crimm felt good enough to sit on the edge of her hospital bed to visit with her brother. He returned to his medical equipment business in Edmond with a lighter heart.

At noon, the baby's heart rate plummeted. Then Crimm's heart stopped 90 minutes later. With "code blue" issued, doctors and nurses rushed to resuscitate her and decided it was best to take the 2-pound, 1-ounce baby, Dottie Mae, by C-section.

Phillips raced back to the hospital, where the baby was in neonatal intensive care and the mother was in intensive care in a separate building.

"Sister was dying right there. She was gasping," he said. "The human body fights death."

A Mother's Will

Crimm's will was so strong she got off the ventilator and was no longer under sedation after several days.

"There was still a lot of hope at that point," said Jennifer Phillips, Ray Phillips' wife.

Doctors told the family that a treatment plan developed for Crimm could offer a small chance of surviving the aggressive cancer.

"The cancer was such that it had crossed one of her eyes and it had destroyed the muscle behind her eye. It paralyzed her throat. When she did talk, she was hard to understand. As far as her mind, she was there," Ray Phillips said.

But Crimm's improvement was short-lived. She often fell unconscious and hadn't been able to sign Dottie's birth certificate. Phillips gained guardianship because she frequently told him that if she didn't survive, she wanted him and his wife to raise the baby with the four children they already had at home.

"I think she's a miracle. I just want to do right by her and do what Stacie asked," Jennifer Phillips said.

A Nurse's Determination

On Sept. 8th, Crimm stopped breathing and once again was resuscitated. Hospital doctors and nurses warned the family that she likely was dying.



Ms. Stacie Crimm



Newborn Dottie Crimm

“Her heart had stopped. She quit breathing. She was technically dead, and then they brought her back,” said Ray Phillips.

But she had not yet held the baby whose life she had chosen above her own. She’d never touched the golden fluff of fuzz framing her baby Dottie’s angelic face. Never counted those fingers as tiny and perfect as a doll’s. Never looked into those dark blue eyes. But a quiet yet determined nurse and mother, Agi Beo, couldn’t bear to think of Crimm’s emotional pain.

“She was in the last stage with the brain tumor. And she never got to see the baby,” Beo said.

“This baby was everything she had in this world.”

With Crimm’s death imminent, Beo worked with nurse Jetsy Jacob to step up their questioning of the family, healthcare professionals and disease experts about Crimm’s condition, including her staph infection. They talked to Neoflight, the medical center’s neonatal transport team, about using a capsule-like ICU to safely move Dottie.

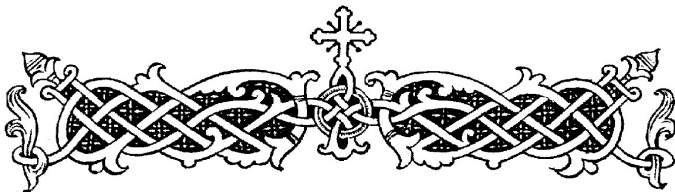
When his sister regained consciousness later that day, Phillips asked what she thought about possibly seeing Dottie. Crimm’s eyes popped open and she raised her hands as if to ask where was her child. Nurses wheeled Dottie down the hallway to her mother moments later. Phillips said doctors, nurses and others clad in protective gear gathered as nurses carefully lifted the baby from the incubator under her mother’s watchful eye.

They placed the baby on her mother’s chest. Mother and child gazed into each other’s eyes for several minutes. She smiled at the baby who at last lay in her arms.

No one said a word. No one had a dry eye.

Stacie Crimm died three days later.

Last week, Ray Phillips fulfilled his last promise to his sister. Healthy, 5-pound Dottie went home to live with Ray and Jennifer Phillips and her four new siblings.

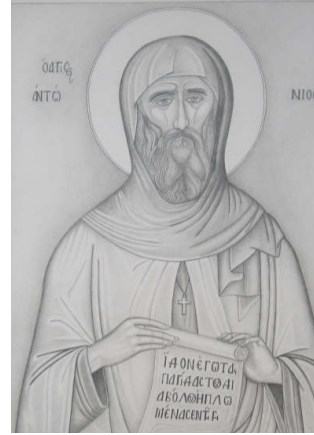


Christ the Lord came, as the strongest expression of God’s unchanging love for mankind, to rekindle the extinct fire of love in the hearts of God’s children, and to make natural once more that which had, at one time, been completely normal to man, as to the angels, and had in time become unnatural. Were a mother not to love her child, could that child love its mother? Were God not to love man, could man love God? But God, from the beginning - and from before the beginning - loves man, and it is therefore natural for man to love God.

St. Nikolai Velimirovich (+1956)

ST. ANTHONY IN AN AMERICAN PRISON

From “Orthodox Christian Prison Ministry.”



This icon of Saint Anthony is the work of an American monastic named Anthony. The unique situation of Anthony is that he does not live in a monastery, but in a maximum security prison in Colorado.

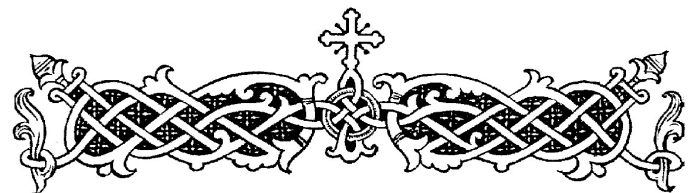
Anthony has never entered an Orthodox church, nor has he attended “live” a liturgy or any other service; he has only seen a liturgy that was video recorded.

The same situation exists for the other Orthodox Christians held in maximum security, such as the monk Matthew, and the majority of lay people like Loukas and George. This is because they became Orthodox after a personal search and while in prison.

The Orthodox faithful in the penitentiary do not recognize each other, since in this prison the detainees go into the courtyard individually and do not meet each other — they are completely isolated. But they can mail letters to the “outside world,” in compliance to certain conditions of course, such as the contents of the letters being checked. Our brothers understand Orthodoxy much more than one would expect. Another detainee, David, makes beautiful woolen prayer ropes, and has sent them to many Christians in various parts of the world.

The Orthodox of this Maximum Security Prison are the fruit of the grace of God through the missionary activity of a remarkable priest, Fr. Stephan Powley, who for years served there (he is now Chaplain of the prison).

Fr. Stephan, a former Evangelical Protestant, was ordained in the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese in the USA (under the Patriarchate of Antioch). He has been a prison Chaplain since January 1985 and has served in every security level from minimum to maximum. He is a priest in the Antiochian Archdiocese and serves the Orthodox Churches of Southern Colorado as needed.



No one should plead inability to do what is asked of us in the gospels, since there are souls who have accomplished far more than is commanded.

St. John Climacus

MIRACLES OF AN ASCETIC: ST. DANIEL THE STYLITE (+493)

From the Life of Daniel the Stylite (St. Daniel is commemorated on December 11th).



A certain man traveling to Constantinople from the East fell among robbers who stole from him everything that he had with him, mutilated his body, cut the sinews of his knees and leaving him half dead, went their ways.

By the providence of God, however, they had not inflicted any mortal wound on him. Some wayfarers who came to that place picked him up and carried him to the city of An-

cyra, for it was close to that city that this had befallen him. There they took him to the bishop who ordered him to be conveyed to the hospital and cared for there. But while his wounds were tended he was not able to walk. He therefore made this request of the bishop:

- I was traveling to Constantinople in fulfillment of a vow making my way to our lord Daniel, who stands on the column, when I met with this accident; and now that, thanks to you, I have been healed it behooves me to fulfill my vow. I pray you, therefore, servant of God, to send me safely to Constantinople to the holy man.

The bishop, since he thought that this was a pious request; gave him money for his expenses, also a beast and two men to conduct him to the holy man Daniel.

So the men took him and brought him to the holy man's enclosure and then carried him and laid him in front of the column. The man cried aloud and told the holy man the reason for which he had come and related what had happened to him and how he had been saved by the help of God and the bishop.

The holy man sent thanks to the bishop for the kindness he had shown to the man and after furnishing those who had brought him with supplies for their journey he dismissed them in peace with presents for the bishop. He handed over the man to some of the servants with orders to carry him and bring him to the enclosure daily at the hour of prayer, and to anoint him with the oil of the saints; the man's legs hung down as if they did not belong to him.

After a few days, one Friday when the Saint had said the prayers as usual and all had said *Amen*, the man suddenly leapt from the litter, and stood on his feet and said with a loud voice:

- Bless me, oh servant of God.

And he quickly ran up the steps and embraced the column giving thanks the while to God.

A certain woman had a son of twelve years, Damianus by name, dumb from birth; him she brought to the holy man's enclosure and signing to him not to go away, she left him and departed.

When the brethren saw the boy staying there and saying nothing to anybody, they brought him to the holy man. He, beholding him, ordered that he should remain in the monastery, saying:

- The boy shall be God's minister.

The brethren said:

- He is dumb, master!

He said to them:

- Moisten his tongue with the oil of the saints.

But the brethren suspected that from stress of poverty the mother had suggested to him to feign dumbness; so very often when the boy was asleep they woke him suddenly by making a noise; and at other times they would prick him in the body with needles or pens to see whether he would speak. But he said nothing, as he was held by the power of dumbness.

One Sunday, after some considerable time had passed, when the holy Gospel was going to be read aloud, and the deacon had announced the lesson from the holy Gospel of St. Matthew, the boy shouted out ahead of the others:

- Glory be to thee, oh Lord!

And after uttering this first cry he surpassed all the brethren in his singing of the psalms. A certain chamberlain, Calopodius by name, had built an oratory to the holy Archangel Michael and came to the holy man asking him to give him some brethren for this oratory in Parthenopolis. And together with the brethren the holy man gave him this boy to sing the psalms and he became God's minister, as the servant of God had foretold about him.

So great are the achievements of grace, so great the gifts of our Master to His sincere servants; he came not speaking and became a good speaker, he came voiceless and gained a beautiful voice, he was deserted by his mother as dumb and he proved to be the wonderful herald of the church.



Hold fast humility, practice obedience, exercise hospitality, keep the fasts, observe the vigils, love poverty, and above all maintain charity, which is the first and great commandment; keep closely bound to all that regards piety, avoid the tares of the heretics. Separate never from the Church your Mother; if you do these things your righteousness shall be perfect.

St. Daniel the Stylite

THE TEMPLE GUARDIAN AND SAINT GREGORY

By St. Gregory of Nyssa, from "The Life of St. Gregory Thaumaturgos (the Wonderworker)," (commemorated 17 November).

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 [St. 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 [St. Gregory] entered the temple with several companions, one of the demons was petrified at the invocation of Christ's name. The saint, having purified the defiled air with the figure of the Cross, he spent the entire night in prayer and singing hymns according to his usual custom. In this way, St. Gregory transformed the place into a temple of prayer which had been profaned by unclean sacrifices and images [cf. 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 St. 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 St. Gregory and reveal his audacity to the king because a Christian who was hostile to the gods had the effrontery to enter the temple.

The saint's admission to the temple for performing services was refused, and he was prohibited from visiting places where oracles were made to demons. The custodian's harsh anger was aroused by [St. Gregory's] splendid resolve, and he hurled all kinds of threats against the blessing offered to

the true God. The saint kept alleging to have more fortitude than his opponent and the ability to enter those places anytime he wished as well as being able to prove this.

The temple keeper was so struck with admiration at St. 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 was 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 [St. Gregory's] greatness, accomplishments, divine philosophy and teaching.

Thus that great man [St. 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 the novel 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 INEVITABILITY OF SUFFERING

By New Martyr Archbishop John of Riga.



A Latvian by birth, Archbishop John began his pastoral work in Russia where he inspired such love and devotion in his flock, that when the Communist revolution struck and trouble began, volunteers from among the workers organized a guard to watch over him day and night. Seeing in him a bold accuser of the new regime, the Bolsheviks never left

the Archbishop in peace; he was constantly followed and several attempts were made on his life.

In 1921, at the persistent entreaty of the Latvian Orthodox Patriarch Tikhon, blessed Archbishop John returned to his native Latvia. Under his guidance life was restored to the much suffering Latvian Orthodox Church. Here too he continued to speak fearlessly, his voice sounding forth like an alarm bell; the image of Golgotha often appeared in his sermons. He never forgot the persecuted Orthodox in Russia and conducted a ceaseless open battle against the Soviet atheist regime. In turn, his political enemies did not forget him.

During the night of October 11th, 1934, Archbishop John ascended his own Golgotha. He was tortured and burned alive in the attic of the cathedral. Over 100,000 people accompanied the coffin to the cemetery, a living glorification of this beloved archpastor and chief confessor of the Latvian Orthodox Church.

† † †

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. [Mt 16:21.23]

† † †

Like a thunderclap from a clear sky, so was the impression made upon the disciples by this revelation of the Lord concerning the sufferings which awaited him. Earlier He had told them that His path was also their path. *You will be hated for My name's sake. The servant is not greater than his master. He who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me.* And in the lives of Christ's true disciples there is a time of suffering the Passion, when each must enter his own Jerusalem, ascend his Golgotha, and the fateful Cross, and rake up the fateful cup, even unto death

Even the sons of this world have their Golgotha. Unforeseen and uninvited, suffering enters the house. You must suffer whether you like it or not. The bitter "must"...

This "must" is bitter even for the faithful disciple of Christ. And the cross of suffering frightens even him. in his soul

is heard the voice of Peter: *Be merciful to yourself; do not let this happen; defend yourself.* And this is not surprising, for after all, the great Sufferer Himself prayed: *If it be possible, take this cup from Me.* This is an altogether necessary "must", and we are powerless to stand against it.

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things. If the way of the Lord led to Jerusalem, if His fate was to be decided by the scribes, the Pharisees, the elders, then it was natural that He had to suffer and be killed.

This Jerusalem towards which Christ directed His steps was not the heavenly Jerusalem, but an earthly city, full of the spirit of this world which had fallen away from its God, not recognizing, not comprehending the visitation of the Lord. This is the same Jerusalem which at the altar of the Lord, killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent to it...

And the world, my brothers, even unto this day, stands on that same foundation. Perhaps it does not have the same outward appearance. Nowadays they do not crucify people on crosses, as they did Jesus Christ; they do not beat people with staves as they did Peter and John; nor are people stoned like Stephen. People have become too indifferent towards faith to suffer for its sake. Our path is less rocky, and whoever murmurs at the harshness and the evil of this world should know that he is far from suffering unto blood.

Nevertheless, now as never before, the words of the Lord contain a sacred truth: *If you were of the world, the world would love you, but because you are not of this world but I took you from the world, the world despises you.* It cannot do otherwise. The natural desire of man's heart is to live at peace with everyone. Youthful hearts often make decision for an unconcerned faith within themselves: "I want to get along with everyone, I mustn't antagonize anyone." But even the most well-intentioned man soon realizes that this is impossible. Even the meekest lamb is sure to meet on his way the ferocious wolf who says: "You are a thorn in my side."

He who believes must confess his faith. He who desires to serve God in the world must act according to his faith, but every confession inevitably arouses antagonism, and every action is sure to meet with hostility. To see that his honest persuasion and strivings are not recognized by the world, that his good deeds are everywhere met with opposition, that there where he sows only love he must reap evil—this is obviously very grievous to the follower of Christ. And he is often ready to ask together with his Master: "What evil has been done you?" or "How have I offended you?"

The truth which you proclaim and which you confess and which the world cannot gainsay; or the righteousness manifest in your life which silently reproaches the world; or the peace of the Lord written on your face which the world cannot forgive; or the heavenly other-worldliness of

your behavior which shames and accuses their earthly way of life. This is how you have offended the world. And the world would sooner pardon you of ten vices and crimes... which set you on a level with otters, than forgive one good deed which elevates you above the rest.

Why did Cain murder Abel? Because Cain's actions were evil and the actions of Abel were good and righteous. Why did the scribes and Pharisees condemn the Saviour? Because He was light, and darkness cannot abide the light.

Do not be surprised, then, my dear brothers, if the world hates you. This is nothing unusual. Do not let the evil mockings and vicious hatred of evildoers lead you astray. Go along the straight road with the name of the Lord through the world which lies in evil and think to yourself: I must follow the straight road and the world cannot do otherwise.

It would not be the world if it did not prefer the lies of its errors to truth, egoism to love, its laziness to zeal for God, worldly vanity to righteousness. I am not a disciple of Christ, not His soldier, if I do what is pleasing to everyone, if I go along the broad path together with the crowd instead of keeping to the narrow path where there are few travelers. And so, let us step forward in the name of the Lord with the full realization that "I must".

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

Some think: "How much more fervently and more willingly I would serve my Lord if only my life's path were easier, if it weren't so thickly strewn with sharp rocks." In saying this, you yourself obviously do not know who and what you are, what is beneficial for you and what is harmful, what you need and what you don't need.

It is true when they say that a man tolerates least of all his own well-being. Days of happiness, days of success, when everything goes according to one's wishes—how many times have such days woven a fatal net which captures man's soul? What dissoluteness grows in man's heart, like rust on the blade of a battle sword when it lies unused, or like a garden

which becomes overgrown if not tended by the gardener's shears.

Tell me, O Christian, what preserves you from the haughtiness which so easily penetrates even the strongest hearts, even the hearts of Christ's disciples? Is it not the cross and suffering? What humbles the passionate inclinations of the flesh which so quickly and easily spread in times of well-being and prosperity, like insects in a swamp on a sunny day? What teaches you to shun this uncleanness? Is it not the rod of misfortunes and sorrows? What arouses you from the sleep of self-assurance in which we are so easily lulled to sleep by times of earthly happiness? Or what is more conducive to lazy vegetation than cloudless, carefree days of prosperity? At such times, isn't a storm to be welcomed? What will draw you out of the dangerous state of insensibility? Will not sorrows? Will not illness? What tears us away from our worldly attachments, the love for the world and all that is

in it? Is it not necessity and misfortunes? Do not trials teach us to take life more seriously? Do not sorrows teach us to be prepared for death?

Wild brambles in the heart cannot be uprooted without the pruning shears of the heavenly Gardener, and the good fruit of truth and righteousness will not grow without the rain of tears and sorrows. True obedience cannot be experienced other than by the drinking of the bitter cup of grief, when one can only say: *Not my will, but Thine be done, Father...* And

submission to the will of God is never seen so clearly as in days and hours of storm, when in the midst of threatening and frightful waves the Christian gives himself totally into the hands of Him Whose very hands hold these tempests and waves.

When can the steadfastness, courage and strength of a soldier of Christ be better demonstrated than when trials and obstacles must be turned into Christian deeds, than in the war against evil or in times of danger? All the noble strength of the Christian soul, of the Christian character, shines forth most brightly in times of distress, misfortune, and suffering. All the miracles of God's grace are most evident in times when the waters of grief and misfortune flood our souls and we are forced to recognize our helplessness, our weakness, and thus in turn we surrender all our strength and understanding to Almighty God.

And are you going to ask, what for? And why? When God Himself chastises and calls you to account? Or, when the Lord sends you to the school of the Cross, will you say: "I have no need of its teachings?" Rather, you must say: "I need this; I must go to this school of the Cross; I must suffer with Christ in order to be raised with Him. When the Lord



chastens me, I must think and feel like a child chastised by the loving right hand of the Lord, like a grape vine under the gardener's pruning shears; like iron beneath the smith's hammer, like gold in the purifying furnace, like a cluster of grapes beneath the burning rays of the sun. This 'I must' is of God, and I must not shrink from it."

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

Let each soul bow before the divine "I must," for the will of God is good, perfect, guiding all to salvation. And you, O son of dust and corruption, bend your neck under His almighty hand before which your strength is as nothing; trust to Divine wisdom, before which your light is but a dark shadow; give yourself over to the fatherly guidance of Him Who desires, not enmity and sorrows, but peace and blessedness for all men and all mankind. When you submit your thoughts and your will to this thought and will, then no cup will be for you too bitter, and no cup too heavy; you will be able to bear it; no path too narrow you will be able to follow it; no trial will tempt you beyond measure; you will be able to withstand it. Such is the will of God.

If you are surrounded by your wife, your children, friends, and everyone you love, and if they try to persuade you to have pity on yourself, not to destroy yourself—pay no attention to their tears and their pleadings; point to the heavens and say: "Do not burden my heart; so it is pleasing to God and I must; you are reasoning according to man's wisdom and not the wisdom of God." And if from your own heart cries out the voice of flesh and blood and begins to persuade you: "this cannot happen to you, defend yourself," turn away from this counsel of your own heart and follow after that which glorifies God.

We can more easily bear our afflictions if we keep in mind the example of our Saviour. See with what peaceful and holy determination He goes to meet His passion. And then follow Him along the path of the Cross until, with His last breath, you hear from His lips the Divine words: *It is finished*. And then ask yourself: aren't you drawn by this example? Doesn't

this make clear the commandment, *He who wishes to follow Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me?* Doesn't this lead you to the conviction of that disciple who said, *I cannot wear a crown of roses when my Saviour is wearing a crown of thorns?*

At the cross of Christ, even the most suffering soul among us can find consolation: I have endured and even now endure much, but my Divine Saviour endured still more. If you find this example too lofty, read what the holy Apostle St. Paul says: *Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.* (2 Cor 11:25-27). See what he endured for Christ's sake; how many times he was beaten, stoned, imprisoned... and then understand how far we are from him.

Everywhere the Cross is the sign of Christianity. A Christian can simply not be without his cross.

Amen.



Death itself, which once was man's chiefest terror, has been overthrown, and now that which was once the object of hate and loathing is preferred to life. These are the achievements of Christ's presence; these are the tokens of His power. For it was not one people that He saved, as when through Moses He divided the sea and delivered Israel out of Egypt and the bondage of Pharaoh (cf. Ex. 14:16); nay, rather He rescued all mankind from the corruption of death and the bitter tyranny of sin; not leading them by force to virtue, not overwhelming them with earth or burning them with fire, or ordering the sinners to be stoned, but persuading men by gentleness and long-suffering to choose virtue and vie with one another and find pleasure in the struggle to attain it.

St. John of Damascus



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.

Χριστός Γεννᾶται, Δοξάσατε!

Αγίου Γρηγορίου Θεολόγου.

**Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε·
Χριστὸς ἐξ οὐρανῶν, ἀπαντήσατε·
Χριστὸς ἐπὶ γῆς, ὑψώθητε.
Ἄσατε τῷ Κυρίῳ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ
καὶ ἐν εὐφροσύνῃ, ἀνυμνήσατε λαοί,
ὅτι δεδόξασται.**

† † †

Καὶ ἐγὼ θὰ φωνάξω τὴν δύναμη (σημασία) τῆς ἡμέρας: Ὁ ἄσαρκος σαρκώνεται. Ὁ Λόγος γίνεται ὑλικός. Ὁ ἀόρατος ὁράται. Ὁ ἀναφῆς ψηλαφιέται. Ὁ ἄχρονος ἀρχίζει, Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς χθὲς καὶ σήμερα ὁ ἴδιος καὶ στοὺς αἰῶνες.

Ἐνα (πρόσωπο) ἀπὸ δυὸ ἀντίθετα (φύσεις), σάρκα (ἀνθρώπινη φύση) καὶ Πνεῦμα (Θεῖα φύση), ἀπὸ τίς ὁποῖες ἡ μιὰ (ἡ Θεῖα) ἐθέωσε, καὶ ἡ ἄλλη (ἡ ἀνθρώπινη) ἐθεώθηκε. Ὡ τῆς καινούριας μίξεως! Ὡ τῆς παραδόξου συνθέσεως! Ὁ Ὡν δημιουργεῖται καὶ ὁ ἄκτιστος κτίζεται καὶ ὁ ἀχώρητος χωρεῖται διὰ μέσου νοερῆς ψυχῆς ποὺ μεσιτεύει στὴν Θεότητα καὶ (διὰ μέσου) τῆς ὑλικότητος τῆς σάρκα. Καὶ ὁ πλουτίζων πτωχεύει. Ἐπειδὴ πτωχεύει (λαμβάνοντας) τὴν δική μου σάρκα, γιὰ νὰ πλουτήσω ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τὴν δική Του Θεότητα. Καὶ ὁ Πλήρης ἀδειάζει, ἐπειδὴ ἀδειάζει ἀπὸ τὴν δόξα Του γιὰ λίγο, γιὰ νὰ μεταλάβω ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τὴν πληρότητά του.

Ποῖος ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς ἀγαθότητος; Τί εἶναι αὐτὸ τὸ μυστήριον (ποὺ ἔγινε) γιὰ μένα; Μετάλαβα τὴν εἰκόνα (του) καὶ δὲν τὴν ἐφύλαξα. Μεταλαμβάνει τὴν δική μου σάρκα, καὶ γιὰ νὰ σώσει τὴν εἰκόνα καὶ γιὰ νὰ ἀθανατήσει τὴν σάρκα. Δεύτερη πραγματοποιεῖ κοινωνία, πολὺ παραδοξότερη τῆς πρώτης (τῆς δημιουργίας). Τότε μετέδωσε τὸ καλύτερο (τὴν εἰκόνα του), ἐνῶ τώρα μεταλαμβάνει τὸ χειρότερο (τὴν σάρκα μου). Αὐτὸ εἶναι ἀπὸ τὸ προηγούμενον θεοπρεπέστερον. Αὐτὸ εἶναι σὲ ὅσους ἔχουν νοῦ ὑψηλότερον.

Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε, Χριστὸς ἐξ οὐρανῶν, ἀπαντήσατε, Χριστὸς ἐπὶ γῆς, ὑψώθηκε. Ἄσατε τῷ Κυρίῳ πᾶσα ἡ γῆ... Μ' ἕνα λόγο: Ἄς εὐφραίνονται οἱ οὐρανοὶ καὶ ἄς ἀγάλλεται ἡ γῆ γιὰ τὸν Ἐπουράνιον, ποὺ κατόπιν ἔγινε Ἐπίγειος. Ὁ Χριστὸς παρουσιάζεται

μὲ ἀνθρώπινο σῶμα, ἀγαλλιᾶσθε μὲ τρόμον καὶ χαρὰ. Μὲ τρόμον γιὰ τὴν ἐνοχὴ τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ μὲ χαρὰ γιὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τῆς σωτηρίας...

Πάλι διαλύεται τὸ σκοτάδι, πάλι ὑπάρχει τὸ φῶς. Πάλι τιμωρεῖται μὲ σκοτάδι ἡ Αἴγυπτος καὶ πάλι ὁ ἰσραηλιτικὸς λαὸς φωτίζεται μὲ τὸν πύρινον στύλο. Ὁ λαὸς ποὺ καθόταν στὸ σκοτάδι τῆς ἀγνοίας, ἄς δῆ τὸ μεγάλο φῶς τῆς θεογνωσίας.

Τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρήλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονε τὰ πάντα καινὰ. (Κορ. Β' 5:17). Τὸ νεκρὸ γράμμα ὑποχωρεῖ. Τὸ πνεῦμα ἐπικρατεῖ. Οἱ σκιεὶς τοῦ νόμου περνοῦν. Ἡ ἀλήθεια θριαμβεύει. Ὁ Μελχισεδέκ, ποὺ ἦταν ἕνας τύπος, τώρα δείχνει ποιὸν προεσήμαινε, δηλαδὴ τὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστό. Αὐτός, ποὺ ὡς Θεὸς δὲν ἔχει μητέρα, γεννιέται χωρὶς πατέρα. Γιατί στὸν Δημιουργὸ τῆς φύσεως δὲν ἰσχύουν οἱ φυσικοὶ νόμοι. Ὅλα τὰ ἔθνη χειροκροτήσατε, γιατί παιδίον ἐγεννήθη ἡμῖν υἱὸς καὶ ἐδόθη ἡμῖν οὗ ἡ ἀρχὴ ἐγενήθη ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄμου αὐτοῦ καὶ καλεῖται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ μεγάλης βουλής ἄγγελος, θαυμαστὸς σύμβουλος, Θεὸς

ἰσχυρὸς, ἐξουσιαστής, ἄρχων εἰρήνης, πατὴρ τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος ἐγὼ γὰρ ἄξω εἰρήνην ἐπὶ τοὺς ἄρχοντας εἰρήνην, καὶ ὑγίειαν αὐτῷ (Ἠσ. 9:6). Ἄς φωνάξῃ δυνατὰ ὁ Ἰωάννης Βαπτιστής: Ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν Κυρίου. Καὶ ἐγὼ θὰ φωνάξω τὴν δύναμη καὶ τὴ σημασία τῆς μεγάλης αὐτῆς τῆς ἀγίας ἡμέρας (τῶν Χριστουγέννων).

Αὐτὸς ποὺ εἶναι Ἄναρχος καὶ Αἰώνιος, τώρα λαμβάνει ἀρχή. Αὐτὸς ποὺ

εἶναι Αὐθύπαρκτος, δημιουργεῖται. Αὐτὸς ποὺ εἶναι Ἄπειρος, χωρεῖται στὴν περιορισμένη ἀνθρώπινη φύση. Αὐτὸς ποὺ πλουτίζει μὲ τὰ ἀγαθὰ Του τὸν κόσμον, γίνεται Φτωχὸς, παίρνοντας ἀνθρώπινο σῶμα, γιὰ νὰ πλουτίσω ἐγὼ μὲ τὴν θεότητά Του. Ποῖος μπορεῖ νὰ παραστήσει πόσος εἶναι ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς ἀγαθότητός Του;

Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ σὺ μαζὶ μὲ τὸν Ἄστὲρα τρέξε καὶ μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς Μάγους φέρε Του γιὰ δῶρα, χρυσὸ καὶ λιβάνι καὶ σμύρνα. Τίμησέ Τον ὡς Βασιλέα καὶ Θεὸ καὶ ὡς Λυτρωτὴ, ποὺ νεκρώθηκε γιὰ σένα. Μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς ποιμένες δόξασέ Τον, μὲ τοὺς ἀγγέλους ὕμνησέ Τον, μὲ τοὺς ἀρχαγγέλους σκίρτησε ἀπὸ χαρὰ. Ἄς εἶναι κοινὴ ἡ πανηγυρὶς τῶν οὐρανίων καὶ τῶν ἐπιγείων δυνάμεων...



**Ἡ ἀκριβὴς θέσις τῆς γεννήσεως τοῦ
Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
(Ναὸς τῆς Γεννήσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ—Ιερουσαλήμ)**

Τι Είναι Η Εκκλησία;

Του Μοναχού Μωυσέως Αγιορείτου, από την έφημερίδα «Μακεδονία», 9 Ιανουαρίου, 2011.

Η Ορθόδοξη εκκλησία δεν είναι ανθρώπινο κατασκεύασμα, αλλά θεοϊδρυτη οικοδομή. Η εκκλησία δε σώζεται, αλλά σώζει όσους θέλουν. Δεν κάνει επίδειξη ισχύος και δυνάμεως. Ανέχεται, υπομένει. Τη διώκουν, αλλά δεν διώκει. Είναι φιλεύσπλαχνη μητέρα και γνωρίζει μόνο να αγαπά. Ο κόσμος δεν γνωρίζει την αξία της γι' αυτό άδιαφορεί ή και την κτυπά. Η αγκάλη της εκκλησίας έχει αίγλη, θέρμη και εύρος. Μέσα της χωρά και αναπαύει όλους τους μετανοημένους.

Μπορεί ο κόσμος να ξέφυγε, όμως η δίψα και η πείνα για τον Θεό υπάρχει βαθιά στην καρδιά του σύγχρονου ανθρώπου. Υπάρχουν και στους δύσκολους καιρούς άνθρωποι γνήσια πιστοί, που δεν παρασύρθηκαν από την εύκολία και την κακία. Η πνευματική ζωή δεν θέλει μεγάφωνα και προβολείς, δημοσιότητα, διαφήμιση και επικρότηση. Αγαπά πολύ την άφωτη μυστικότητα και την ίερη σιγή. Ορθόδοξοι Χριστιανοί όσοι δεν φανατίζονται υπέρμετρα, δεν θυμώνουν με τους κακούς, δεν κυνηγούν τους άμαρτωλούς, αλλά την άμαρτία, δεν διαπομπεύουν και δεν γελοιοποιούν κανένα, δεν εύκολασκανδαλίζονται.

Η αποστολή των Χριστιανών στον κόσμο σήμερα δεν είναι καταγγελτική, ανατρεπτική και εισαγγελική. Οί πιστοί αισθάνονται συνυπεύθυνοι για το υπάρχον κακό στον κόσμο. Είναι ανεκτικοί, συμπαθείς και επιεικείς με τους άλλους. Κύριο έργο τους δεν είναι να καταλογίζουν ευθύνες, να παρατηρούν τους άλλους συνεχώς αύστηρά, να μεμψιμοιρούν και να μελαγχολούν για το πολύ κακό των καιρών μας.

Η Εκκλησία του Χριστού δεν φοβάται, δεν αισθάνεται ανασφαλής, δεν παύει επιθετική ή άμυντική στάση. Υπάρχει σε κάποιους μιὰ φοβία και μιὰ καχυποψία ότι όλοι μας έχθρεύονται και πολύ μας πολεμούν. Η υπερβολική καχυποψία είναι νοσηρή, έγωπαθής και φανερώνει άνθρωπο, που δεν έχει εμπιστοσύνη στο Θεό αλλά στον εαυτό του. Και θέλει κανείς συνεχώς να παρατηρεί τους άλλους, να τους κάνει όπως θέλει και φαντάζεται. Άνθρωπος που δεν αγαπά είναι δυστυχημένος. Η χριστιανική αγάπη είναι πάντοτε διφυής, προς Θεό και άνθρωπο. Η αγάπη αυτή είναι ανιδιοτελής, ουσιαστική και πασίχαρη.

Η εκκλησία ξέρει μόνο να αγαπά. Δεν δυσκολεύεται καθόλου να υποδεχθεί το απομακρυσμένο τέκνο της, αν θελήσει να τη πλησιάσει. Δεν τό μαλώνει, δεν τό επιτιμά, δεν τό φωνάζει, δεν τό κάνει να περιμένει, τό αγκαλιάζει άμέσως, τό καταφιλά. Τέτοια εκκλησία έχουμε, μάνα φιλόστοργη, καταδεκτική. Η εκκλησία

κινείται στον κόσμο, αλλά δεν είναι εκ του κόσμου τούτου. Κάθε φορά που επιχειρήθηκε να δοθεί στην Εκκλησία κοσμική δύναμη, είχαμε έκτροπη από την αποστολή της και άποτυχία από τον προορισμό της. Η Εκκλησία, θα μπορούσαμε να πούμε, είναι ένα πνευματικό φαρμακείο, θεραπευτήριο και ήσυχαστήριο. Θεωρούν ότι η Εκκλησία είναι υπερβολική, δύσκολη, απαιτητική, άπηρχαιωμένη, όλο άπαγορεύσεις, δικαιολογεί μόνο τους άλλους.

Φέρνουν οί άνθρωποι γνωστές ένστάσεις. Έχουμε κι έμεις καρδιά και δικαιώματα, όλο έμεις θα υποχωρούμε, θα ταπεινωνόμαστε, θα πηγαίνουμε με τό σταυρό στο χέρι; Οί άλλοι θα μάς φάνε λάχανο, θα μάς πατήσουν, θα μάς βγάλουν τό λάδι, θα μάς περιθωριοποιήσουν και θα μάς εκμεταλλευτούν. Έχουμε κι έμεις, βρε άδελφέ, τά όριά μας. Τά βάζουμε κάποτε και με τον Θεό, που δεν μάς καταλαβαίνει, δεν μάς άκούει, δεν έπεμβαίνει, σιωπά ένοχλητικά, δεν μάς ύπολογίζει.

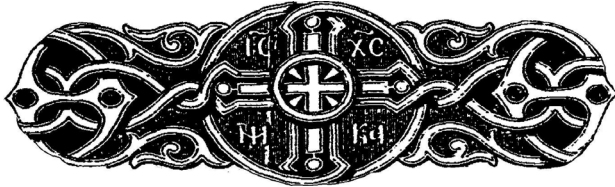
Ο Θεός είναι πάντοτε με άνοιχτή θύρα, καλεί όλους τους πεφορτισμένους και κεκοπιακότες να τους αναπαύσει άληθινά. Δεν έχει ώρες που δέχεται και άλλες όχι, δεν χρειάζονται μεσάζοντες, να κλείσεις συνάντηση από τά πριν, να έχεις τίτλους, να είσαι κάτι, να έχεις ιδιαίτερες γνώσεις. Είναι ένας Θεός υπέροχος, που ποτέ δεν κρατά κρατούμενα και δεν ξεσνερίζεται. Άπεχθάνεται τρομερά την ύποκρισία και τη ψευδοαγιότητα. Του άρέσουν τά ντόμπρα, τά γνήσια, τ' άληθινά, έλεύθερα και έγκάρδια πράγματα.

Η Εκκλησία δεν χάνει, έμεις χάνουμε. Δεν ζητά όπαδούς άλαλάζοντες και καταχειροκροτούντες. Είναι κατά των όπαδών. Ζητά και έχει παιδιά αγαπητά. Η εκκλησία τηρεί τις ύποσχέσεις της. Δεν ξεγέλασε ποτέ κανένα. Τά είπε όλα από την αρχή καθαρά και ξάστερα. Η Εκκλησία θεραπεύει, συγχωρεί, μεταμορφώνει τον λύκο σε άρνί, ανασταίνει, χαριτώνει, παραμυθεί, αγιάζει, σώζει και λυτρώνει. Η Εκκλησία εύλογεί και έμπνέει παντού και πάντοτε. Η Εκκλησία υπάρχει για όλους. Δεν εκβιάζει κανένα, δεν του τραβά τό αυτί.

Η Εκκλησία υπάρχει και θα υπάρχει. Πολλοί τη φθόνησαν, τη χτύπησαν, τη μίσησαν. Διατηρείται όμως άκέραια, νικηφόρα παρά την τόση πολεμική, άκόμη και κάποτε και αυτών των ίδιων των έκπροσώπων της. Ο κόσμος άγνόησε τον βαθύ πνευματικό πλούτο της Εκκλησίας και άσχολήθηκε με τά κτήματά της. Δεν ήθελε πολύ να μπερδεύεται καθημερινά στο πόδια του. Να την έχει για Χριστούγεννα και Πάσχα και για πολύ έκτακτες ανάγκες. Την Εκκλησία μερικοί σήμερα τη θέλουν μόνο για τό κοινωνικό της έργο, κάτι σαν παράρτημα του ύπουργείου κοινωνικής προνοίας.

Η Ορθόδοξη Εκκλησία όμως δεν πεισιμώνει, δεν κακιώνει, δεν εκδικείται. Συνεχίζει έναν θαυμαστό

τρόπο τὸ σωτήριο ἔργο της, ποὺ κανεὶς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀντικαταστήσει. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία δὲν θυμώνει ποὺ δὲν τῆς ἀναγνωρίζουν τὴν ἀξία της, ἀλλὰ λυπᾶται. Μπορεῖ νὰ τῆς πῆραν τὴν περιουσία της, νὰ τῆς πάρουν καὶ τὴν ὑπόλοιπη, νὰ εἶναι δίχως κανένα περιουσιακὸ στοιχείο, σὰν τὸν γυμνὸ Χριστὸ στὴ φάτνη καὶ ὅμως νὰ παραμένει ἀμύθητα πλούσια. Μπορεῖ κάποιοι ἐλάχιστοι ἐκπρόσωποί της νὰ λαθεύουν, ὅμως δὲν παύει νὰ δίνει ὀρθὸ νόημα βίου, ὑψηλοὺς στόχους, νὰ γεννᾷ Ἁγίους.



Περὶ τοῦ «Καζαντζάκη»

Τὸν Ἰούλιο τοῦ 2009, πολλὲς ἐφημερίδες ἐδημοσίευσαν ρεπορτάζ ἐκ τῆς Κρήτης, συμφώνως μὲ τὸ ὁποῖον ἐνεγκαινιάσθη τὸ μουσεῖον «Νικ. Καζαντζάκη» εἰς τὴν Μυρτιανὴν Ἡρακλείου μὲ τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ ὑπουργοῦ Ἐθνικῆς Ἀμύνης κ. Βενιζέλου, τῆς πρώην ὑπουργοῦ κ. Ντόρας Μπακογιάννη καὶ ἄλλων ἐπισήμων. Κατὰ τὴν διάρκειαν τῶν ἐγκαινίων ὅλοι ὠμίλησαν μὲ θαυμασμὸν διὰ τὸν ἅθειον Καζαντζάκη.

Σήμερον οὐδεὶς τὸν ἀμφισβητεῖ. Ἀκόμη καὶ θεολόγοι ὑποκλίνονται εἰς τὴν μνήμην καὶ εἰς τὸ ἔργον του. Τὰ παλαιότερα ἔτη τὰ πράγματα ἦσαν διαφορετικά, ἀφοῦ σύγχρονοι μορφαὶ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας τὸν ἀμφισβητοῦσαν. Μεταξὺ αὐτῶν ὁ π. Ἐπιφάνιος Θεοδωρόπουλος καὶ ὁ Γέρων Θεόκλητος Διονυσάτης. Ἴδου τί ἀπῆντων, ὅταν τοὺς ἔθετον ἐρωτήματα σχετικῶς μὲ τὰς πνευματικὰς ἀνησυχίας καὶ τὰς ἀναζητήσεις τοῦ θρησκευόντος Καζαντζάκη.

Ὁ πατήρ Ἐπιφάνιος εἶχεν ἀπαντήσῃ:

— Καὶ τί μ' αὐτό; Ποῦ κατέληξε; Ξέρετε τί ζήτησε ὁ ἴδιος νὰ γραφῇ στὸν τάφο του; «Δὲν ἐλπίζω τίποτα, δὲ φοβοῦμαι τίποτα, εἶμαι ἐλεύθερος». Καὶ ἐγράφη βεβαίως. Πηγαίνετε στὰ κοιμητήρια νὰ διαβάσετε ἐπιγραφὰς πάνω στοὺς τάφους πιστῶν ἀνθρώπων. «Προσδοκῶ ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν» ἢ «Ἀναστήσονται οἱ νεκροὶ καὶ ἐγερθήσονται οἱ ἐν τοῖς μνημείοις» ἢ «Χριστὸς ἐγήγερται ἐκ νεκρῶν, ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων» καὶ ἄλλα.

Ἡ τελευταία λέξις τοῦ Καζαντζάκη, ὀλίγον πρὶν ἀναχωρήσῃ ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς ζωῆς, ἦτο «Διψῶ». Ὁ πατήρ Θεόκλητος Διονυσάτης, ὅταν τοῦ ἐτέθη τὸ θέμα, ἔγραψεν ἄρθρον εἰς τὸ ὁποῖον ἐτόνιζε:

— Ἄραγε πρὶν ἀκόμη βγῆ ἡ ψυχὴ του νὰ προγευόταν τὴν βασανιστικὴ φλόγα τῆς καμίνου τοῦ πυρὸς τοῦ ἐξώτερου σὰν τὸν πλούσιο, ποῦ ὠδυνᾶτο ἐν τῇ φλογὶ ἐκεῖνη καὶ ἤθελε κάποιον νὰ τοῦ ἀναψύξει τὴν γλῶσσα;

Εὐλογημένη ἢ Εἴσοδος τῶν Ἁγίων σου, Πάντοτε...

Ἰωάννου Φουντούλη, Καθηγητοῦ Πανεπιστημίου.

Τί σημαίνει ἡ φράση *Εὐλογημένη ἢ εἴσοδος τῶν ἁγίων σου, πάντοτε...*, ποῦ λέγεται ἀπὸ τὸν ἱερέα κατὰ τὴν Μικρὰ Εἴσοδο; Ἡ ἐρμηνεία τῆς φράσεως αὐτῆς, τῆς κατὰ τὰ ἄλλα τόσο σύντομης καὶ ἀπλῆς, παρουσιάζει πάρα πολλὰς δυσχέρειες, γιατί δὲν εἶναι σαφὲς ποῦ ἀναφέρονται καὶ τὰ δυὸ σκέλη της: ποῖα εἶναι «ἢ εἴσοδος», ποῦ εὐλογεῖται, καὶ ποιοὶ εἶναι οἱ ἅγιοι ἢ τὰ ἅγια, γιὰ τοὺς ὁποίους ἢ γιὰ τὰ ὁποῖα ὁ λόγος στὸ δευτέρου μέρος της;

Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴν κρατοῦσα μορφή ποῦ σημειώνεται στὴν ἐρώτηση, στὰ χειρόγραφα ἀπαντοῦν διάφορες παραλλαγές, ποῦ ἴσως μποροῦν νὰ διευκολύνουν τὴν ἀναζήτησή μας: *Εὐλογημένη ἢ εἴσοδος τῶν ἁγίων σου, Κύριε...*, ἢ συνηθέστερη παραλλαγή, ἢ ἡ σπανιώτερη *Εὐλογημένη ἢ ἅγια εἴσοδος τῆς θείας λειτουργίας τῶν ἁγίων σου, Κύριε, πάντοτε...*

Στὴ δευτέρα αὐτῆ μορφή προφανῶς ἐπιδιώκεται ἡ διαφοροποίηση ἀπὸ τὴν εὐλογία τῆς εἰσόδου κατὰ τὸν ἔσπερινὸ ἢ ἀκόμη καὶ τὴν παρόμοια εὐλογία ποῦ ἀπαντᾷ σὲ κώδικα τοῦ 14^{ου} ἢ 15^{ου} αἰῶνος, στὴν ἀκολουθία τοῦ μικροῦ ἁγιασμοῦ: *Εὐλογημένη ἢ εἴσοδος διὰ τῆς τεκούσης σὲ Θεοτόκου, Χριστέ ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, πάντοτε...* Στὴν ἐνδιάμεση μορφή (*Εὐλογημένη ἢ εἴσοδος τῶν ἁγίων σου, Κύριε...*) τὴν συναντοῦμε καὶ στὴν ἀκολουθία τῆς ἀσματικῆς τριθέκτης, ἐνῶ σὲ μία ἄλλη παραλλαγή ἀπαντᾷ στὴν ἑναρξη τῶν λιτανειῶν ἢ στὴν λιτανευτικὴ μετάβαση ἀπὸ τὸν κυρίως ναὸ «ἐν τῇ πλαγίᾳ» γιὰ τὴν τέλεση τοῦ λυχνικοῦ κατὰ τὴν μαρτυρία τοῦ ἁγίου Συμεῶν Θεσσαλονίκης: *Εὐλογημένη ἢ δόξα Κυρίου ἐκ τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἁγίου αὐτοῦ, πάντοτε...*

Σὲ ὅλες τὶς περιπτώσεις ἡ φράση συνοδεύεται μὲ εὐλογία διὰ τῆς χειρὸς τοῦ ἱερέως, εἰσάγεται δὲ μὲ τὴν διακονικὴ παρακείμεση *Εὐλόγησαν, δέσποτα, τὴν ἁγίαν εἴσοδον*. Μόνο σὲ λίγους κώδικες διαφοροποιεῖται ἡ διακονικὴ προτροπὴ στὴν θεία λειτουργία: *Εὐλόγησον, δέσποτα, τὴν μικρὰν εἴσοδον*. Τέλος, χρῆσιμο εἶναι νὰ σημειωθεῖ ὅτι ἡ εὐλογία αὐτῆ τῆς εἰσόδου καὶ ἡ φράση ποῦ τὴν συνοδεύει δὲν ἀνήκει στὸ ἀρχικὸ κείμενο τῆς θείας λειτουργίας. Πρέπει νὰ ἔχει εἰσαχθεῖ κατὰ τὸ τέλος τοῦ 12^{ου} αἰῶνος, γιατί δὲν μαρτυρεῖται ἀπὸ τὶς παλαιότερες πηγές καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ ἀρχαία χειρόγραφα.

Σ' ὅλες τὶς περιπτώσεις (μικρὰ εἴσοδος τῆς θείας λειτουργίας, ἔσπερινος καὶ τριθέκτη) ὁ ἱερεὺς βρῖσκειται ἐπὶ κεφαλῆς μίας λιτανευτικῆς πομπῆς ποῦ κατευθύνεται πρὸς τὸ ἅγιο βῆμα, στέκεται δὲ στὸ μέσο του ναοῦ, «ἐν τῷ μεσονάφῳ» ἢ «ἐν τῷ συνήθει

τόπω», ἀτενίζοντας πρὸς ἀνατολάς. Ὁ δὲ διάκονος, λέγοντας τὸ *Εὐλόγησον, δέσποτα, τὴν ἁγίαν εἴσοδον*, «δείκνυσιν ἅμα καὶ πρὸς ἀνατολάς μετὰ τοῦ ὄραριου οὕτως, ὡς κρατεῖ αὐτό», καὶ ὁ ἱερεὺς τότε εὐλογεῖ «ποιῶν σταυρὸν κατὰ ἀνατολάς».

Ὁ ἱερεὺς καλεῖται νὰ εὐλογήσει «τὴν ἁγίαν εἴσοδον» καὶ εὐλογεῖ «τὴν εἴσοδον». Ἡ λέξις ἔχει δυὸ δυνατότητες ἐρμηνείας. «Εἴσοδος» μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι καὶ ἡ πύλη τοῦ ἁγίου βήματος, ποῦ βρίσκεται ἀκριβῶς ἐμπρὸς ἀπὸ τὸν ἱερέα, πρὸς τὴν ὁποία δείχνει ὁ διάκονος μὲ τὸ ὄραριο καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ὁποία ἐντὸς ὀλίγου θὰ εἰσέλθουν διάκονος, ἱερεὺς καὶ οἱ τυχὸν συλλειτουργοὶ στὸ ἅγιο βῆμα. Αὐτὴ σωστὰ χαρακτηρίζεται ἀπὸ τὸν διάκονο ὡς «ἁγία»—ἁγία εἴσοδος τοῦ ἱεροῦ βήματος. Προφανῶς ἡ εὐλογία τῆς εἰσόδου στηρίζεται σὲ μία πανάρχηια πράξις ἀναλόγου συμπεριφορᾶς, τῆς ὁποίας ἀπόηχο βρίσκουμε στὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη, στίς ὑποθήκες τοῦ Κυρίου πρὸς τοὺς ἀποστόλους του: *εἰς ἣν δ' ἂν οἰκίαν εἰσέρχησθε, πρῶτον λέγετε*

Εἰρήνη τῷ οἴκῳ τούτῳ (Λουκ. 10:5), ἡ ἀκόμη καὶ σὲ λειτουργικὰ κείμενα, ὅπως στὴν τελευταία εὐχὴ τοῦ γάμου *Ὁ Θεὸς ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν ... εὐλόγησαν αὐτῶν εἰσόδους καὶ ἐξόδους*.

Στὸ παράλληλο τῆς εὐλογίας τῆς εἰσόδου στὴν ἀκολουθία τοῦ ἁγιασμοῦ, ποῦ μνημονεύσαμε ἀνωτέρω, πρόκειται γιὰ εὐλογία εἰσόδου Θεομητορικοῦ ναοῦ, ἴσως τοῦ ναοῦ τῆς Παναγίας τῶν Βλαχερνῶν, ἀπὸ ὅπου πιθανότατα ἔλκει τὴν ἀρχὴ τῆς ἡ ἀκολουθία αὐτὴ (...*διὰ τῆς τεκούσης σὲ Θεοτόκου...*). Στὴν περίπτωση ὅμως τῆς εὐλογίας τῆς εἰσόδου τοῦ ἐσπερινοῦ, τῆς θείας λειτουργίας ἢ τῆς τριθέκτης εἶναι ἐξ ἴσου, ὄχι ὅμως περισσότερο, πιθανό, ὅτι δὲν ἐννοεῖται ἡ πύλη—ἡ ὠραία πύλη τοῦ ἱεροῦ—ἀλλὰ ἡ ἴδια ἡ πράξις τοῦ εἰσοδεῦν, ἢ εἰσοδεύουσα στὸ ἅγιο βῆμα πομπή.

Ποιὸ νόημα ὅμως θὰ δώσουμε στὴν συνέχεια τῆς φράσεως, τὸ «τῶν ἁγίων σου»; Κι ἐδῶ ὑπάρχει ἡ δυνατότητα διπλῆς ἐρμηνείας. Μπορεῖ νὰ νοηθεῖ ὡς οὐδέτερο («ἅγια τοῦ Θεοῦ»), δηλαδή ὁ ἅγιος ναὸς Του, τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων τοῦ ναοῦ Του, τὸ ἱερό, τὸ ἐπίγειο κατοικητήριο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Μ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἔννοια, «τὰ ἅγια» ἀπαντοῦν πάρα πολλές φορὲς στὴν Παλαιὰ ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν Καινὴ Διαθήκη, καὶ ἰδιαίτερος στὸ Ἐβρ. 10:19-20: *Ἐχοντες οὖν, ἀδελφοί, παρρησίαν εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ, ἣν ἐνεκαίνισεν ἡμῖν ὁδὸν πρόσφατον καὶ ζῶσαν διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος,*

τοῦτ' ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἱερέα μέγαν ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποῦ κατὰ λέξιν ἀπαντᾷ ὡς παράθεμα στὴν εὐχὴ τοῦ καταπετάσματος τῆς λειτουργίας τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰακώβου. Ἀπὸ τὸ χωρίο αὐτὸ εἶναι προφανές ὅτι εἶναι ἐμπνευσμένη ἢ εὐλογητικὴ φράσις («Εὐλογημένη» ἢ εἴσοδος τῶν ἁγίων (σου)).

Ἄν ὅμως, κατὰ τὴν ἄλλη δυνατότητα ἐρμηνείας, ἡ γενικὴ «τῶν ἁγίων» ἐκληφθεῖ ὡς γένους ἀρσενικοῦ, «ἅγιοι» τῶρα πρέπει νὰ ἐννοοῦνται οἱ εἰσοδεύοντες κληρικοί ἢ οἱ συνεισοδεύοντες ἄγγελοι, κατὰ τοὺς λόγους τῆς εὐχῆς τῆς εἰσόδου τῆς λειτουργίας ποῦ πρὸ ὀλίγου ἔχει ἀναγνωσθεῖ. Παλαιότερα μάλιστα, ποῦ ἡ εὐχὴ αὐτὴ τῆς εἰσόδου ἐλέγετο ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν βασιλικὴ πύλη τοῦ ναοῦ καὶ κληρὸς καὶ λαὸς εἰσερχόταν μετὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὴν στὸν κυρίως ναὸ γιὰ τὴν τέλεση τῆς θείας λειτουργίας (ὅπως γίνεται σήμερα κατὰ τὴν ἀκολουθία τῶν ἐγκαινίων), τὸ «τῶν ἁγίων» θὰ μπορούσε νὰ κυριολεκτεῖται στὸν ἅγιο λαὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὴν ἁγίαν

Ἐκκλησία Του.

Παρόμοια καὶ παράλληλη μὲ τὴν παροῦσα ἐρμηνευτικὴ δυσχέρεια παρουσιάζει ἡ εὐχὴ τοῦ τρισάγιου *Ὁ Θεὸς ὁ Ἅγιος ὁ ἐν Ἀγίοις ἀναπανόμενος...* καὶ ἡ ἐκφώνησις *Ὅτι Ἅγιος εἶ ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν καὶ ἐν Ἀγίοις ἐπαναπαύει*. Καὶ ἐδῶ ἡ δυνατότητα ἐρμηνείας εἶναι διπλή: Τὰ «ἅγια», στὰ ὁποῖα κατοικεῖ καὶ ἐπαναπαύεται ὁ Θεὸς μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι ὁ



ναὸς Του ἢ ὁ οὐρανός. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ ἅγιος λαὸς Του, οἱ «ἅγιοι», ἐρμηνεῖα πρὸς τὴν ὁποία συνηγορεῖ ἡ ἐκφώνηση τῆς εὐχῆς τῶν ἐγκαινίων τοῦ ναοῦ «Ὁ Θεὸς ὁ ἄναρχος καὶ ἀίδιος...», ποῦ ταυτίζει τοὺς ἁγίους μὲ τοὺς τίμιους μάρτυρας. Ἔτσι ὁ χειροποίητος ναὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ, μετατρέπεται σὲ σύμβολο καὶ τύπο τῆς ἀχειροποίητου σκηνῆς καὶ τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ, τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῶν ὁσίων τοῦ κατὰ τὸ Ψαλμικὸ ἢ αἰνεῖσις αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ ὁσίων (Ψάλμ. 149:1) καὶ τὸ ἀποστολικὸ *Ἵμεῖς γὰρ ναὸς Θεοῦ ἐστε ζῶντος, καθὼς εἶπεν ὁ Θεός. (Β' Κορ. 6:16).*

Καὶ γιὰ νὰ ἐπιστρέψουμε στὸ ἀρχικὸ ἐρώτημα. Ἀπὸ τίς δυὸ δυνατότες ἐρμηνείας τῆς φράσεως *Εὐλογημένη ἢ εἴσοδος τῶν ἁγίων σου*: «Εὐλογημένη ἢ πύλη τοῦ ἱεροῦ ναοῦ σου» ἢ «Εὐλογημένη ἢ εἴσοδος—ἢ εἰσοδεύση—τῶν ἁγίων ἱερέων σου ἢ τοῦ ἁγίου λαοῦ σου», πιθανότερη ἐρμηνεῖα εἶναι ἡ ἀπλούστερη καὶ λιγότερο θεολογικὴ. Πρόκειται δηλαδή γιὰ εὐλογία τῆς πύλης τοῦ ἱεροῦ, τῆς ὠραίας λεγομένης πύλης, ἀπὸ τὴν ὁποία θὰ εἰσοδεύσουν στὸ ἅγιο βῆμα οἱ λειτουργοί.

Ἡ Ἀξία τῆς Ἐξομολόγησεως

Αρχιμανδρίτη Δαμιανού Ζαφείρη.



Ἡ ἐξομολόγησις ἔχει μεγάλη σημασία γιὰ τὴ ζωὴ τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ, διότι:

(1) Εἶναι μέσον λυτρώσεως καὶ τὸν ὁδηγεῖ στὴ σωτηρία διὰ τῆς μετανοίας του. Ὁ Θεὸς *Μὴ θελήσει τὸν θάνατον τοῦ ἀνόμου, λέγει Κύριος, ὡς τὸ ἀποστρέψαι αὐτὸν ἐκ τῆς ὁδοῦ τῆς πονηρᾶς καὶ ζῆν αὐτόν.* (Ἰεζ. 18:23). Αὕτη ἡ ἐπιστροφή στὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι ἐπικοινωνία μαζί Του καὶ πνευματικὴ ἀναγέννησις τοῦ ὅλου ἀνθρώπου.

(2) Εἶναι μέσον ψυχολογικῆς θεραπείας τῶν ψυχικῶν τραυμάτων καὶ βοηθᾷ στὴν ψυχικὴ ἰσορροπία τοῦ ἀτόμου. Θλίψεις, καθημερινὲς ἀγωνίες, προβλήματα προσωπικά, κοινωνικά, οἰκογενειακά, ὠθοῦν τὰ ἄτομα σὲ πλῆθος ἐσωτερικῶν ψυχικῶν συγκρούσεων. Σ' ὅλα αὐτὰ ὁ ἱκανὸς ἐξομολόγος πρέπει νὰ βοηθήσει τὸ ἄτομο νὰ ξεφύγει ἀπὸ τὰ προσωπικά ἀδιέξοδα. Στόχος του εἶναι ἡ ψυχικὴ ὑγεία καὶ ἡ ὀλοκλήρωσις τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

(3) Εἶναι μέσον ἠθικῆς καὶ πνευματικῆς προόδου τοῦ πιστοῦ, διότι τὸν βοηθᾷ νὰ ἐπιλέγει τρόπους ζωῆς κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Γίνεται ὁ ἐξομολόγος σύμβουλος στὴ ζωὴ του, στίς διάφορες ἐπιλογὲς τῆς ζωῆς του. Τοῦ ἐξασφαλίζει τὴν ἐσωτερικὴν εἰρήνην τῆς ψυχῆς του. Τοῦ διδάσκει νὰ διακρίνει τὸ δίκαιο ἀπὸ τὸ ἄδικο. Τοῦ παρέχει ψυχικὴ ἀσφάλεια κοντὰ στὸ Θεό. Τὸν ἐνθαρρύνει στὴν προσωπικὴ ζωὴ του ἀπὸ τὰ διάφορα προβλήματα ποὺ τοῦ παρουσιάζονται καθημερινῶς. Τὸν προλαβαίνει νὰ μὴ κάνει οὐσιαστικὰ λάθη στίς διάφορες κινήσεις τῆς ζωῆς του. Τὸν κατευθύνει στὴν ὀρθὴ πνευματικὴ ζωὴ μὲ τὴν ἀποφυγὴ τῶν παθῶν καὶ τὴν ἐσωτερικὴν καρποφορία τῶν θείων ἀρετῶν.

(4) Εἶναι μέσον ἁγιαστικὸ καὶ ἀναγεννητικὸ, διότι τοῦ προσφέρει, μετὰ ἀπὸ μία εἰλικρινῆ ἐξομολόγησις, ἡ θεία χάρις, ἡ ὁποία τὸν ἀναγεννᾷ πνευματικῶς μὲ τὴν ἐξάλειψιν τῶν δηλωθέντων ἁμαρτημάτων του. Τὸν κάνει νὰ ἀπολαμβάνει τὴν εἰρήνην καὶ τὴν Ἀγάπην τοῦ Θεοῦ. Τὸν ἐνισχύει δὲ στὸν συνεχεῖ πνευματικὸ ἀγῶνα του.

(5) Εἶναι μέσον ἀποκτήσεως γαλήνης τῆς συνειδήσεως, διότι ἡ συναίσθησις τῆς ἐνοχῆς ὁδηγεῖ τὸ ἄτομο στὴ μετάνοια, στὴν εἰλικρινῆ ἐξομολόγησις καὶ στὴ συγχώρησις διὰ τοῦ θείου αὐτοῦ μυστηρίου. Ἡ ἀπόφασις τῆς διορθώσεως εἶναι καθοριστικὸς παράγοντας τῆς ἀπαλλαγῆς ἀπὸ τὶς ἐνοχές. Ἡ ἐξομολόγησις παίρνει χαρακτήρα μυσταγωγικὸ καὶ ἱερό, ποὺ ὁ ἄνθρωπος

ἀναζητᾷ τὴ θεία εὐσπλαχνία καὶ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη συμβουλή γιὰ τὴν διορθώσις τῆς ζωῆς του.

(6) Εἶναι μέσον αὐτογνωσίας τοῦ ἀτόμου. Τὸ ἱερό Μυστήριον τῆς ἐξομολόγησεως μᾶς βοηθᾷ νὰ ἐπιστρέψουμε στὸν ἑαυτὸ μας μὲ σκοπὸ νὰ ἀπαλλαγούμε ἀπὸ τὸν ἐγωισμό μας καὶ τὴν ἐσωτερικὴν δυσαρμονία ποὺ προξενοῦν οἱ ἐνοχές καὶ τὰ πάθη. Αὕτη ἡ εἰλικρινὴς στροφή πρὸς τὴν ἀπελευθέρωσις ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη, τὸ δρόμο τῆς ἀσκήσεως τῶν ἀρετῶν, μᾶς βοηθᾷ νὰ ἐπανεύρουμε τὴν πνευματικὴ καθαρότητα μας μὲ τὴν ἄφεσις τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν.

Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Νύσσης γράφει γιὰ τὴν ἀξία τῆς ἐξομολόγησεως: «Ἡ Γραφή συνηθίζει νὰ δίνει στὴν ἐξομολόγησις διπλὴ σημασία, ἡ ὁποία ἄλλοτε εἶναι ἡ ἐξαγόρευσις τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν καὶ ἄλλοτε πάλι ἡ εὐχαριστία. Ἐδῶ, καὶ μὲ τὶς δυὸ ἔννοιες ὁδηγοῦμαστε στὴν ἐνάρετη ζωὴ. Διότι ἡ ἐξαγόρευσις μὲν πραγματοποιεῖ χωρισμὸ καὶ ἀλλοτριώσις ἀπὸ τὰ κακά, ἡ προθυμία δὲ γιὰ εὐχαριστία αὐξάνει τὴ χάριν ἀπὸ τὸν εὐεργέτη γιὰ ὅποιους δέχονται μὲ εὐγνωμοσύνη τὶς εὐεργεσίες. Ὁ ψαλμὸς μετανοίας λοιπὸν σημαίνει αὐτό: ἂν σὲ κρυφοκαίει ἡ μνήμη κάποιας ἁμαρτίας, σὲ συμβουλεύει στὸν καθαρισμὸ μὲ τὴ μετάνοια. Ἄν ὅμως ἡ ζωὴ σου προχωρεῖ ἐπιτυχῶς πρὸς τὸ καλύτερο, σοῦ κάνει βεβαιότερη τὴ βελτιωμένη προαίρεσις, μὲ τὴν εὐχαριστία πρὸς τὸν Θεό.

Ὁ ἔχων ὅτα ἀκούειν ἀκούετω. (Ματθ. 13:9)



Ὁ ποῖος ἀγαπάει ἀληθινά τὸ Θεό, αὐτὸς ὅπωςδήποτε καὶ προσεύχεται ἀπερίσπαστα. Καὶ ὅποιος προσεύχεται ἀπερίσπαστα, αὐτὸς ἀγαπάει ἀληθινά τὸ Θεό. Ἀπερίσπαστα ὅμως δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ προσευχηθεῖ ἐκεῖνος ποῦ ἔχει τὸ νοῦ του προσηλωμένο σὲ κάτι ἀπὸ τὰ ἐπίγεια.

Ἁγίου Μαξίμου

Ἐκεῖνος ποῦ προσεύχεται μόνο σωματικά, χωρὶς νὰ ἔχει ἀκόμα γνώση πνευματικὴ, εἶναι τυφλὸς ποῦ φωνάζει: *Υἱέ Δαβὶδ, ἐλέησόν με.* (Μάρκ. 10:48).

Ὁ ἄλλοτε τυφλός, ὅταν θεραπεύθηκε ἡ τύφλωσή του καὶ εἶδε τὸν Κύριο, δὲν τὸν ἀποκάλεσε πιά «Υἱὸν Δαβὶδ», ἀλλὰ Τὸν ὁμολόγησε *Υἱὸν Θεοῦ* καὶ Τὸν προσκύνησε. (Ἰω. 9:38).

Ἀββᾶ Μάρκου

Πὼς πρέπει νὰ προσευχόμεστε; Δὲν εἶναι ἀνάγκη νὰ φλυαροῦμε, ἀλλὰ ν' ἀπλώνουμε τὰ χέρια μας καὶ νὰ λέμε: «Κύριε, ὅπως θέλεις καὶ ὅπως ξέρεις, ἐλέησέ με!». Κι ἂν βρισκόμαστε μπροστὰ σὲ πόλεμο (μὲ τὰ πάθη μας), νὰ λέμε: «Κύριε, βοήθησέ με!». Κι Ἐκεῖνος ξέρει τί μᾶς συμφέρει, καὶ αὐτὸ κάνει.

Ἀββᾶ Μακαρίου

Γιάννης ὁ Εὐλογημένος!

Ένα πρωτοχρονιάτικο διήγημα τοῦ Φώτη Κόντογλου.



Ὁ Ἅγιος Βασίλης, σὰν περᾶσανε τὰ Χριστούγεννα, πήρε τὸ ραβδί του καὶ γύρισε σ' ὅλα τὰ χωριά, νὰ δεῖ ποιὸς θὰ τότε γιορτάσει μὲ καθαρὴ καρδιά. Πέρασε ἀπὸ λογιῶν-λογιῶν πολιτεῖες κι ἀπὸ κεφαλοχώρια, μὰ σ' ὅποια πόρτα κι ἂν χτύπησε δὲν τ' ἀνοίξανε, ἐπειδὴ τὸν πήρανε γιὰ διακονιάρη. Κ' ἔφευγε πικραμένος, γιατί ὁ ἴδιος δὲν εἶχε ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, μὰ ἔνοιωθε τὸ πόσο θὰ πονοῦσε ἡ καρδιά κανενὸς φτωχοῦ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀπονιὰ πού τοῦ δείξανε κείνοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι.

Μιὰ μέρα ἔφευγε ἀπὸ ἓνα τέτοιο ἄσπλαχνο χωριό, καὶ πέρασε ἀπ' τὸ νεκροταφεῖο, κ' εἶδε τὰ κιβούρια πὼς ἦτανε ρημαγμένα, οἱ ταφόπετρες σπασμένες κι ἀναποδογυρισμένες, καὶ τὰ νιόσκαφτα μνήματα ἦτανε σκαλισμένα ἀπὸ τὰ τσακάλια. Σὰν ἅγιος πού ἦτανε ἄκουσε πὼς μιλούσανε οἱ πεθαμένοι καὶ λέγανε: «Τὸν καιρὸ πού εἴμαστε στὸν ἀπάνω κόσμο, δουλέψαμε, βασανιστήκαμε, κι ἀφήσαμε πίσω μας παιδιὰ κι' ἐγγόνια νὰ μᾶς ἀνάβουνε κανένα κερι, νὰ μᾶς καίγουνε λίγο λιβάνι μὰ δὲν βλέπουμε τίποτα, μήτε παπᾶ στὸ κεφάλι μας νὰ μᾶς διαβάσει παραστάσιμο, μήτε κόλλυβα, παρὰ σὰν νὰ μὴν ἀφήσαμε πίσω μας κανέναν».

Κι ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης πάλι στενοχωρήθηκε κ' εἶπε: «Τοῦτοι οἱ χωριάτες οὔτε σὲ ζωντανὸ δὲ δίνουνε βοήθεια, οὔτε σὲ πεθαμένον», καὶ βγήκε ἀπὸ τὸ νεκροταφεῖο, καὶ περπατοῦσε ὀλομόναχος μέσα στὰ παγωμένα χιόνια.

† † †

Παραμονὴ τῆς πρωτοχρονιάς ἔφατξε σὲ κάτι χωριὰ πού ἦτανε τὰ πιὸ φτωχὰ ἀνάμεσα στὰ φτωχοχώρια, στὰ μέρη τῆς Ἑλλάδας. Ὁ παγωμένος ἀγέρας βογκοῦσε ἀνάμεσα στὰ χαμόδεντρα καὶ στὰ βράχια, ψυχὴ ζωντανὴ δὲν φαινότανε, νύχτα πίσσα! Εἶδε μπροστά του μιὰ ραχοῦλα, κι ἀπὸ κάτω τῆς ἦτανε μιὰ στρούγκα τρυπωμένη. Ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης μπήκε στὴ στάνη καὶ χτύπησε μὲ τὸ ραβδί του τὴν πόρτα τῆς καλύβας καὶ φώναξε: «Ἐλεῆστε με, τὸν φτωχό, γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ τῶν ἀποθαμένων σας κι ὁ Χριστὸς μᾶς διακόνεψε σὲ τοῦτον τὸν κόσμο!».

Τὰ σκυλιὰ ξυπνήσανε καὶ χυθῆκανε ἀπάνω του, μὰ σὰν πήγανε κοντά του καὶ τὸν μυριστήκανε, πιάσανε

καὶ κουνούσανε τὶς οὐρὲς τους καὶ πλαγιάζανε στὰ ποδάρια του καὶ γρούζανε παρακαλεστικὰ καὶ χαρούμενα. Ἀπάνω σ' αὐτά, ἀνοίξε ἡ πόρτα καὶ βγήκε ἓνας τσομπάνης, ὡς εἰκοσιπέντε χρονῶν παλληκάρι, μὲ μαῦρα στριφτὰ γένεια, ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Μπαρμπάκος, ἄνθρωπος ἄθῶος κι ἀπελέκητος, προβατάνθρωπος, καὶ πρὶν νὰ καλοῖδεῖ ποιὸς χτύπησε, εἶπε: «Ἐλα, ἔλα μέσα. Καλὴ μέρα, καλὴ χρονιά!».

Μέσα στὸ καλύβι ἔφεγγε ἓνα λυχνάρι, κρεμασμένο ἀπὸ πάνω ἀπὸ μιὰ κούνια, πού ἦτανε δεμένη σὲ δυὸ παλούκια. Δίπλα στὸ τζάκι ἦτανε τὰ στρωσίδια τους καὶ κοιμότανε ἡ γυναίκα τοῦ Γιάννη. Αὐτός, σὰν ἐμπήκε μέσα ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης, κ' εἶδε πὼς ἦτανε γέρος σεβάσιμος, πήρε τὸ χέρι του καὶ τ' ἀνεσπᾶσθηκε κ' εἶπε: «Νὰ ἔχω τὴν εὐχή σου, γέροντα», καὶ τό ἔλεγε σὰν νὰ τὸν γνώριζε κι ἀπὸ πρωτύτερα, σὰ νὰ ἔτανε πατέρας του. Καὶ κείνος τοῦ εἶπε: «Βλογημένος νὰ ἴσαι, ἐσὺ κι ὄλο τὸ σπιτικό σου, καὶ τὰ πρόβατά σου ἢ εἰρήνη τοῦ Θεοῦ νὰ ἴναι ἀπάνω σας!».

Σηκώθηκε κ' ἡ γυναίκα καὶ πήγε καὶ προσκύνησε καὶ κείνη τὸν γέροντα καὶ φίλησε τὸ χέρι του καὶ τὴ βλόγησε. Κι ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης ἦτανε σὰν καλόγερος ζητιάνος, μὲ μιὰ σκούφια παλιὰ στὸ κεφάλι του, καὶ τὰ ράσα του ἦτανε τριμμένα καὶ μπαλωμένα καὶ τὰ τσαρούχια του τρύπια, κ' εἶχε κ' ἓνα παλιοτάγαρο ἀδειανό.

Ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Βλογημένος ἔβαλε ξύλα στὸ τζάκι. Καὶ παρευθύς, φεγγοβόλησε τὸ καλύβι καὶ φάνηκε σὰν παλάτι. Καὶ φανήκανε τὰ δοκάρια, σὰ νὰ ἔτανε μαλαμοκαπνισμένα, κ' οἱ πητιές πού ἦτανε κρεμασμένες φανήκανε σὰν καντήλια, κ' οἱ καρδάρες καὶ τὰ τυροβόλια καὶ τ' ἄλλα τὰ σύνεργα πού τυροκομοῦσε ὁ Γιάννης, γινήκανε σὰν ἀσημένια, καὶ σὰν πλουμισμένα μὲ διαμαντόπετρες φανήκανε, καὶ τ' ἄλλα, τὰ φτωχὰ τὰ πράγματα πού ἔχε μέσα στὸ καλύβι του ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Βλογημένος.

Τὰ ξύλα πού καιγότανε στὸ τζάκι τρίζανε καὶ λαλούσανε σὰν τὰ πουλιὰ πού λαλοῦνε στὸν παράδεισο, καὶ βγάζανε κάποια εὐωδιὰ πάντερπνη. Τὸν ἅγιο Βασίλη τὸν βάλανε κ' ἔκατσε κοντὰ στὴ φωτιὰ κ' ἡ γυναίκα τοῦ ἔθεσε μαξιλάρια νὰ ἀκουμπήσει. Κι ὁ γέροντας ξεπέρασε τὸ ταγάρι του ἀπὸ τὸ λαιμό του καὶ τό ἔβαλε κοντά του, κ' ἔβγαλε καὶ τὸ παλιόρασό του κι ἀπόμεινε μὲ τὸ ζωστικό του.

Ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Βλογημένος πήγε κι ἄρμεξε τὰ πρόβατα μαζί μὲ τὸν παραγιό του, κ' ἔβαλε μέσα στὴν κοφινέδα τὰ νιογέννητα τ' ἄρνια, κι ὕστερα χώρισε τὶς ἐτοιμόγεννες προβατίνες καὶ τὶς κράτησε



στο μαντρί, κι ὁ παραγιὸς τὰ βγαλε τ' ἄλλα στὴ βοσκή. Λιγοστὰ ἦτανε τὰ ζωντανά του, φτωχὸς ἦτανε ὁ Γιάννης, μὰ ἦτανε Βλογημένος. Κ' εἶχε μία χαρὰ μεγάλη, σὲ κάθε ὥρα, μέρα καὶ νύχτα, γιατί ἦτανε καλὸς ἄνθρωπος κ' εἶχε καὶ καλὴ γυναίκα, κι ὅποιος λάχαινε νὰ περάσει ἀπὸ τὴν καλύβα τους, σὰν νὰ ἔτανε ἀδελφός τους, τὸν περιποιόντανε. Γιὰ τοῦτο κι ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης κόνεψε στὸ σπίτι τους, καὶ κάθησε μέσα, σὰ νὰ ἔτανε δικό του σπίτι, καὶ βλογηθήκανε τὰ θεμέλιά του. Κεῖνη τὴ νύχτα τὸν περιμένανε ὅλες οἱ πολιτεῖες καὶ τὰ χωριά τῆς Οἰκουμένης, οἱ ἀρχόντοι, οἱ δεσποτάδες κ' οἱ ἐπίσημοι ἄνθρωποι μὰ ἐκεῖνος δὲν πῆγε σὲ κανέναν, παρὰ πῆγε καὶ κόνεψε στὸ καλύβι τοῦ Γιάννη τοῦ Βλογημένου.

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Τὸ λοιπόν, σὰν σκαρίσανε τὰ πρόβατα, μπῆκε μέσα ὁ Γιάννης καὶ λέγει στὸν ἅγιο:

—Γέροντα, ἔχω χαρὰ μεγάλη. Θέλω νὰ μᾶς διαβάσεις τὰ γράμματα τ' Ἄη-Βασίλη. Ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἄνθρωπος ἀγράμματος, μὰ ἀγαπῶ τὰ γράμματα τῆς θρησκείας μας. Ἐχω καὶ μία φυλλάδα ἀπὸ ἕναν γούμενο ἁγιονορίτη, κι ὅποτε τύχει νὰ περάσει κανένας γραμματιζούμενος, τὸν βάζω καὶ μοῦ διαβάξει ἀπὸ μέσα τὴν φυλλάδα, γιατί δὲν ἔχουμε κοντά μας ἐκκλησία.

Ἐπιασε καὶ θαμπόφεγγε κατὰ τὸ μέρος τῆς ἀνατολῆς. Ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης σηκώθηκε καὶ στάθηκε κατὰ τὴν ἀνατολή κ' ἔκανε τὸ σταυρό του, ὕστερα ἔσκυψε καὶ πῆρε μία φυλλάδα ἀπὸ τὸ ταγάρι του, κ' εἶπε:

—*Εὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν πάντοτε, νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.*

Κι ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Βλογημένος πῆγε καὶ στάθηκε ἀπὸ πίσω του, κ' ἡ γυναίκα βύζαξε τὸ μωρὸ καὶ πῆγε καὶ κείνη καὶ στάθηκε κοντά του, μὲ σταυρωμένα χέρια. Κι ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης εἶπε τὸ Θεὸς Κύριος καὶ τ' ἀπολυτίκιο τῆς Περιτομῆς *Μορφήν ἀναλλοιώτως ἀνθρωπίνην προσέλαβες*, δίχως νὰ πει καὶ τὸ δικό του τὸ ἀπολυτίκιο ποὺ λέγει *Εἰς πάσαν τὴν γῆν ἐξήλθεν ὁ φθόγγος σου.*

Ἡ φωνή του ἦτανε γλυκεῖα καὶ ταπεινὴ, κι ὁ Γιάννης κ' ἡ γυναίκα του νοιώθανε μεγάλη κατάνυξη, κι ἄς μὴν καταλαβαίνανε τὰ γράμματα. Κ' εἶπε ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης ὄλον τὸν Ὁρθρο καὶ τὸν Κανόνα τῆς Ἑορτῆς: *Δεῦτε λαοὶ ἄσωμεν ἄσμα Χριστῷ τῷ Θεῷ*, χωρὶς νὰ πει τὸ δικό του τὸν Κανόνα, ποὺ λέγει *Σοῦ τὴν φωνὴν ἔδει παρεῖναι, Βασίλειε*. Κ' ὕστερα εἶπε ὅλη τὴ λειτουργία κ' ἔκανε ἀπόλυση καὶ τοὺς βλόγησε.

Καὶ σὰν καθήσανε στὸ τραπέζι καὶ φάγανε κι ἀποφάγανε, ἔφερε ἡ γυναίκα τὴ βασιλόπητα καὶ τὴν ἔβαλε ἀπάνω στὸ σοφρᾶ. Κι ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης πῆρε τὸ

μαχαίρι καὶ σταύρωσε τὴ βασιλόπητα, κ' εἶπε:

— *Εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος*, κ' ἔκοψε τὸ πρῶτο τὸ κομμάτι κ' εἶπε «τοῦ Χριστοῦ» κ' ὕστερα εἶπε «τῆς Παναγίας», κ' ὕστερα εἶπε «τοῦ νοικοκύρη Γιάννη τοῦ Βλογημένου».

Τοῦ λέγει ὁ Γιάννης:

—Γέροντα, ξέχασες τὸν ἅη- Βασίλη!

Τοῦ λέγει ὁ ἅγιος:

—Ναί, καλά!

Κ' ὕστερα λέγει:

—Τοῦ δούλου τοῦ Θεοῦ Βασιλείου...

Κ' ὕστερα λέγει πάλι:

—Τοῦ νοικοκύρη,... τῆς νοικοκυρᾶς,... τοῦ παιδιοῦ,... τοῦ παραγιουῦ,... τῶν ζωντανῶν,... τῶν φτωχῶν.

Τότε λέγει στὸν ἅγιο ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Βλογημένος:

— Γέροντα, γιατί δὲν ἔκοψες γιὰ τὴν ἀγιωσύνη σου;

Τοῦ λέγει ὁ ἅγιος:

—Ἐκοψα, Βλογημένε!

Μὰ, ὁ Γιάννης δὲν κατάλαβε τίποτα, ὁ μακάριος. Κ' ὕστερα, σηκώθηκε ὄρθιος ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλειος κ' εἶπε τὴν εὐχή του:

—*Κύριε ὁ Θεὸς μου, οἶδα ὅτι οὐκ εἰμὶ ἄξιος, οὐδὲ ἱκανός, ἵνα ὑπὸ τὴν στέγην εἰσέλθης τοῦ οἴκου τῆς ψυχῆς μου.*

Κ' εἶπε ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Βλογημένος:

—Πές μου, γέροντα, ποῦ ξέρεις τὰ γράμματα, σὲ ποιά παλάτια ἄραγες πῆγε σὰν ἀπόψε ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης; Οἱ ἀρχόντοι κ' οἱ βασιληάδες τί ἁμαρτίες νὰ ἔχουνε;

Ἐμεῖς οἱ φτωχοὶ εἶμαστε ἁμαρτωλοὶ, ἐπειδὴς ἡ φτώχεια μᾶς κάνει νὰ κολαζόμαστε.

Κι ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλης δάκρυσε κ' εἶπε πάλι τὴν εὐχή, ἀλλοιώτικα:

—*Κύριε, ὁ Θεὸς μου, οἶδα ὅτι ὁ δούλος σου Ἰωάννης ὁ ἀπλοῦς ἐστὶν ἄξιος καὶ ἱκανὸς ἵνα ὑπὸ τὴν στέγην του εἰσέλθης. Ὅτι νῆπιος ὑπάρχει καὶ τὰ μυστήριά σου τοῖς νηπίοις ἀποκαλύπτεται.*

Καὶ πάλι δὲν κατάλαβε τίποτα ὁ Γιάννης ὁ μακάριος, ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Βλογημένος...



Ὅταν ἁμαρτάνεις, νὰ μὴν ἀπελπίζεσαι. Μὲ θάρρος καὶ ἐλπίδα στὸ Θεὸ νὰ μετανοεῖς καὶ νὰ πηγαίνεις στὸν Πνευματικὸ πού σου ἔχω ὑποδείξει, ἂν δὲν μπορῶ ἐγώ, καὶ νὰ τὰ ἐξομολογεῖσαι. Ἐτσι μόνον θὰ σωθεῖς.

Γέροντας Πορφύριος

Περὶ τῆς Βλασφημίας κατὰ Τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος

Ἁγίου Νικολάου Βελμίροβιτς, «Δρόμος Δίχως Θεοῦ δὲν Ἀντέχεται...», 130 Ἱεραποστολικές Ἐπιστολές, Ἐκδ. «Ἐν Πλῶ», σ. 108-110.

Στὸν Πέτρο Σ. ποῦ ρωτᾷ: Τί εἶναι ἡ βλασφημία κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος;

Διάβασες στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο τοὺς λόγους τοῦ Χριστοῦ: *Διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν πᾶσα ἁμαρτία καὶ βλασφημία ἀφεθήσεται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἢ δὲ τοῦ Πνεύματος βλασφημία οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται. Καὶ ὅς ἐὰν εἴπῃ λόγον κατὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ ὅς δ' ἂν εἴπῃ κατὰ τοῦ Πνεύματος τοῦ Ἁγίου, οὐκ ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ οὔτε ἐν τούτῳ τῷ αἰῶνι οὔτε ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι.* (Ματθ.12:31-32). Καὶ ρωτᾷς τί σημαίνει βλασφημία κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος;

Εἶναι ἡ βλασφημία κατὰ τῆς ἀλήθειας καὶ τῆς ζωῆς, ποὺ προέρχονται ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὁ ἄπιστος ποὺ μισεῖ καὶ διώκει τὴν ἀλήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ, βλασφημεῖ κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Ὁ αὐτόχειρας ποὺ μισεῖ καὶ ἀφαιρεῖ τὴ ζωὴ του, βλασφημεῖ κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ἐφόσον τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα ἀποκαλεῖται καὶ Πνεῦμα τῆς Ἀληθείας καὶ τῆς ζωῆς.

Στὸ εὐαγγέλιο τοῦ Ἰωάννη γράφεται ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς τρεῖς φορὲς ἐπικαλέσθηκε τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα μετὰ τὴν σημασία τοῦ Πνεύματος τῆς Ἀληθείας:

Ὁ δὲ παράκλητος τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον, ὃ πέμψει ὁ πατήρ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι μου ἐκεῖνος ὑμᾶς διδάξει πάντα καὶ ὑπομνήσει ὑμᾶς πάντα ἃ εἶπον ὑμῖν ἐγώ. (Ἰωάν. 14:26).

Ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὁ παράκλητος ὃν ἐγὼ πέμψω ὑμῖν παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς, τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας ὃ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορεύεται, ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ. (Ἰωάν. 15:26)

Ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, ὀδηγήσει ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν ἀλήθειαν πᾶσαν· οὐ γὰρ λαλήσει ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ, ἀλλ' ὅσα ἀκούει λαλήσει καὶ τὰ ἐρχόμενα ἀναγγελεῖ ὑμῖν. (Ἰωάν. 16:13).

Ἐκεῖνος, λοιπόν, ποὺ ἀρνεῖται καὶ χλευάζει τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα, ἀρνεῖται καὶ χλευάζει τὸν Θεὸν ποὺ εἶναι τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς Ἀληθείας.

Ρωτᾷς γιατί αὐτὸ τὸ ἁμάρτημα δὲν συγχωρεῖται ἐνῶ κάθε ἄλλο ἁμάρτημα συγχωρεῖται. Κοίταξε, στὸν Ζαχαῖο συγχωρέθηκε τὸ ἁμάρτημα τῆς φιλαργυρίας, σὲ ἁμαρτωλὲς γυναῖκες τὰ σαρκικὰ ἁμαρτήματα, τοῦ ληστῆ στὸ σταυρὸ οἱ ληστεῖες, καὶ σὲ πολλοὺς ἄλλους πολλὰ ἄλλα ἁμαρτήματα. Γιατί λοιπόν νὰ μὴν συγχωρεῖται καὶ ἡ ἄρνηση, ἡ ἀπιστία, ὁ χλευασμὸς κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος; Ἐπειδὴ στὰ μὲν πρῶτα ὑπάρχει ντροπὴ καὶ μετάνοια ἐνῶ στὸ δεύτερο δὲν

ὑπάρχει. Στὰ μὲν πρῶτα, λοιπόν, ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἂν καὶ ἁμαρτάνει διαθέτει ντροπὴ καὶ φόβον τοῦ συνδέει μετὰ τὸν Θεόν, ἐνῶ στὸ δεύτερο ἡ σχέση μετὰ τὸν Θεὸν διακόπτεται καὶ ὁ ἀσεβὴς ἄνθρωπος ἀνεπίστρεπτα καὶ ἐντελῶς ἀπομακρύνεται ἀπὸ τὸν Θεόν. Στὰ μὲν ὑπάρχει ἀδυναμία στὸ δὲ ἐμμονή. Στὰ μὲν ἡ ψυχὴ ταξιδεύει στὸ σκοτάδι καὶ ἀποκαλεῖ τὸ σκοτάδι φῶς. Στὸ δὲ συμβαίνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ μὴν ἔχει τὴν παραμικρὴ διάθεση νὰ σωθεῖ καὶ εἶναι γνωστὸ ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς δὲν σώζει μετὰ τὴν βία.

Μιὰ ἄλλη βλασφημία πρὸς τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα εἶναι ἡ ἔχθρα πρὸς τὴ ζωὴ καὶ ἡ ἀφαίρεση τῆς ζωῆς ἀπὸ τὸν ἑαυτὸ σου. Τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα ἀποκαλεῖται καὶ χορηγὸς τῆς ζωῆς, δωρητὴς τῆς ζωῆς. Ἔτσι, ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος λαμβάνει ζωὴ ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα ἀλλὰ ἀγνοεῖ ἀπὸ ποῦ ἔλαβε τοῦτο τὸ δῶρο μὴ εὐχαριστώντας τὸν Θεόν, μπορεῖ νὰ τοῦ συγχωρεθεῖ. Ἄκόμα καὶ κάποιος ποὺ γνωρίζει ἀπὸ ποῦ ἔλαβε τὸ πολύτιμο αὐτὸ δῶρο καὶ παρόλα αὐτὰ δὲν εὐχαριστεῖ τὸν Θεόν, μπορεῖ νὰ τοῦ συγχωρεθεῖ. Ἀλλὰ ὅταν κάποιος λαμβάνει ζωὴ ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα καὶ μετὰ περιφρόνηση τὴν πετάει, αὐτὸς δὲν πρόκειται νὰ συγχωρεθεῖ. Γιὰ νὰ τὸ καταλάβουμε αὐτὸ πρέπει πρὶν ἀπ' ὅλα νὰ καταλάβουμε τί σημαίνει συγχώρεση. Συγχώρεση τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ σημαίνει νὰ τοῦ ἐπιστραφεῖ πλήρως ἡ ζωὴ. Ἀλλὰ ὅταν κάποιος δὲν θέλει τὴ ζωὴ πολὺ δὲ περισσότερο τὴ μισεῖ καὶ τὴν ἀρνεῖται, ὁ Θεὸς δὲν ἔχει τί ἄλλο νὰ τοῦ δώσει. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ τὸν διαγράφει ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον τῆς ζωῆς.

Προσευχήσου στὸν Θεὸν νὰ φυλᾷ ἐσένα καὶ τοὺς οἰκείους σου ἀπὸ ἀσυγχώρητα ἁμαρτήματα καὶ νὰ σταματᾷ τὸν ἀνόητο ξεσηκωμὸ τοῦ δημιουργήματος ἐναντίον τοῦ Δημιουργοῦ του.

Ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸν ὑγεία καὶ ἔλεος,
+Νικόλαος



Κάποτε ρώτησε ὁ Ἀββᾶς Μωϋσῆς τὸ νεαρὸ ὑποτακτικό του Ζαχαρία:

- Τί νὰ κάνω, παιδί μου, γιὰ νὰ σωθῶ;
- Ἐμένα τὸν ἀνίδεο ρωτᾷς, Ἀββᾶ μου; Τοῦ εἶπε ἐκεῖνος συνεσταλμένος.

- Πίστεψέ με ἀδελφέ, εἶδα τὸ Πνεῦμα τὸ Ἅγιον νὰ σ' ἐπισκιάξῃ κι αὐτὸ μ' ἀναγκάζει νὰ σὲ συμβουλευτῶ, ἀποκρίθηκε ὁ Γέροντας.

Ὁ νεαρὸς Ζαχαρίας τότε ἔβγαλε ἀπὸ τὸ κεφάλι τοῦ τὸν καλογερικὸ σκοῦφο του, τὸν πέταξε κατὰ γῆς κι ἄρχισε νὰ τὸν ποδοπατᾷ λέγοντας:

- Ἄν ὁ καλόγερος δὲν ποδοπατηθῇ κατ' αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο, Ἀββᾶ μου, δὲν βρῖσκει σωτηρία...

Ἀπὸ τὸ Γεροντικὸν

ON THE INCARNATION OF THE SON OF GOD

By Bishop Theophilos of Campania (+1795).

*Christ is born; glorify Him!
Christ comes from Heaven; go to meet Him!
Christ is on earth; be exalted!
Sing to the Lord, all the earth!
And praise Him in gladness, O people;
for He has been glorified!*

† † †



1. The Mystery of the Incarnation. God who is All-Powerful could have liberated the human race from the hands of the Devil by a single command. Had He done that, however, we would have known only His All-Powerfulness, which we already knew. We would not have known His Compassion and Love in spite of the fact that we are hostile to him.

The Incarnation (literally *Ensarkosis* = “En-flesh-ment”) of the Son of God is called such because of His extreme condescension and because it was out of love that He who is not separated from the Father came down to the lowest point, i.e., to the “flesh,” although when we speak about “flesh” here we understand the whole man who is denoted by the partial element of the “flesh.”

The Incarnation of the Son of God is the supreme dogma of the Christian Faith, because it was by these means that we were saved *by grace*. The whole Son of God became Man, personally (literally *hypostatically* = existentially). In other words, He was perfect God and perfect man, with two natures, Godhead and manhood, and one person (*hypostasis*), the divine.

This mystery, says St. Dionysios (the Areopagite) remains ineffable, although we denote it with words. It is also unknowable, although we put it in our mind. God Himself said to Moses: *Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish* (Exod 19:21), i.e., those who try to investigate God’s nature and mysteries fall into perplexity. This is why Gregory the Theologian says: *Before you grasp Him run away, and before you put Him in your mind escape*. Indeed he goes on to call those who try to investigate the mysteries babblers, imprudent, uncontrollable and chatterers.

2. Why Did the Incarnation Take Place at That Time? No one should examine why the Incarnation took place then, and not earlier or later, because only He knows it. He was incarnated *from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary* because there

was never before, nor will there appear again, such a Virgin in the human race as immaculate as the Virgin Mary, sanctified in the flesh and worthy to be united with the Godhead of the Son of God, the Son of God who assumed the entire man from her pure and immaculate blood.

As she conceived without a sperm, so Christ was born without corruption. In other words, the Holy Mary and Theotokos, who was a Virgin before the birth, remained a Virgin even after the birth. Thus Christ came out of her womb in an ineffable manner just as He entered into her in a manner, which involved no passion and cannot be explained.

This is exactly what Ezekiel’s prophecy stresses: *Son of Man, this gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut*. (Ezek 44:2).

3. This Mystery of the Incarnation is inconceivable according to the prophet Jeremiah who says: *And he is a man, and who shall know Him?* (Jer 17:9). The great Paul also declares the same: *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).

Through communion with the Godhead the entire man was deified *in Christ*. The humanity of Christ enjoyed all the charismas and benefits of the Godhead, since Christ is perfect God and perfect man after the union. This is similar to the initial light, which God created and which fell on the sun’s disk and the entire disk became full of dazzling light.

This Mystery of the Incarnation is inconceivable both to Angels and human beings. God Himself revealed it to Moses, when He showed him through the burning bush, namely His Incarnation. He did not show him His person, i.e., His Godhead, which no man can ever see, not even an angel. At the Incarnation, then, God did not change what He was, since He is unchangeable; rather He assumed what He was not, because He is a Lover of man.

One may ask, how did the humanity receive the Godhead without being burnt out? But is this not also the case with the burning bush, which was not burnt out? Where God is at work whatever is impossible becomes possible. The burning iron receives the entire nature of fire, and yet the iron remains iron and the fire, fire. It burns like fire, and like iron it undergoes changes, which an iron undergoes and has a cutting edge when it is used.

4. The Godhead Deified the Human Nature, which is now deified together with its soul, which is endowed with mind, reason, will and energy. As a man, Christ was exposed to the so-called natural but blameless passions. In others words, He felt pain, thirst, weariness, even faintheartedness in a natural way. He did not display, however, any blameworthy passions, i.e., those deriving from evil choice. This was the case because

He was united with God, who was the leader of His rational soul and preserved Christ sinless.

Some of the Fathers say that the babe was perfect already inside the belly of His mother. Others, however, say that He grew gradually like all babes. This is a matter of opinion and not a heresy that has an effect on the Mystery. The point is that just as Adam was made from the soil, so Christ was made from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. The Holy Spirit gave birth to the soul of Christ while His flesh was made from the blood of the Virgin.

5. The Manner of the Incarnation. Saint Maximus says that the Angels knew the impending Incarnation of the Son of God for the salvation of human beings. What, however, escaped their perception were the unthinkable Holy Conception and the manner of the Incarnation. How He could be entirely in the Father and entirely inside all things which He fulfilled, and also entirely inside the belly of the Virgin!

Nevertheless, Christ's becoming man differs from that of all other human beings. He is substantially a perfect man, yet He differs because He is seedless, and because He falls under a different law from that which pertains to the nature of composite beings. The Word of God was conjoined with the flesh by means of assuming it in an ineffable manner.

Thus, only when Christ was born was the message heard, *Peace on earth and good will among men.* (Lk 2:14). God had granted His peace many times and had called many human beings His sons. There was only one Person, however, in whom He *was well-pleased* and only one Peace that was perfect and saving for all human beings along with His perfect good-pleasure.

6. The Name "Jesus" and the Greek Alphabet. The Name Jesus, which is *the Name above every other name* (Phil 2:9), means Savior for the Jews and healer (*iomenos*) for the Greeks. And indeed, Christ is the Healer of our souls and of the bodies of those who believe in him. The curious point here, however, is that this great and divine Name was indicated beforehand, through the Greek Alphabet, which consists of 24 letters!

As is known, the first eight letters of this Alphabet from **A** to **Θ** specify 8 monads. The following eight letters from **I** to **Π** specify 8 decades, and the following eight letters from **P** to **Ω** specify 8 hundreds. If we add them all up we form the number 888. The same applies, however, if we add the numbers which are specified by the letters of the name **ΙΗΣΟΥΣ** (JESUS): **I**(=10)+**H**(=8)+**Σ**(=200)+**O**(=70)+**Υ**(=400)+**Σ**(=200)=888. This is exactly what the following verse stresses: *For if eight monads are to be added to eight decades and these to eight hun-*

dreds they will denote to the human unbelievers the Name of their Savior. (Oracula Sibyllina).

7. Witnesses of the Gentiles about the God-Man. Witnesses to Christ being God and Man are also found among many Gentiles:

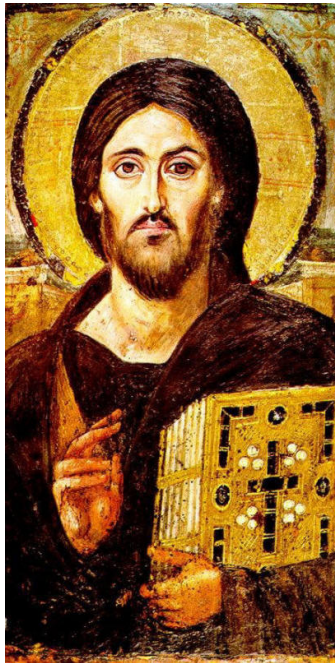
A) Josephus: The Jewish historian Josephus says this about Christ: "Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works—a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and other

wonderful mysteries concerning him; and the tribe of the Christians, so named from him are not extinct at this day." (Antiquitates Judaicae, Book 18, 64.2). In other words, Josephus wonders whether Jesus was only a man, since he did so many incredible things and taught in such a way that he made many Jews and Greeks believe in him. Also, when the leaders of the Jews delivered him to Pilate to be crucified, his disciples did not reject him, for he was resurrected on the third day and appeared to them according to the predictions of the prophets who had spoken about this and many more mysteries concerning his person. Indeed his followers took his name and came to be called Christians and their race has not ceased to exist to this day.

B) The Roman Emperor Augustus: Eusebius of Pamphilos (Metropolitan of Caesarea in Palestine) reports that the Roman Caesar Augustus went to the Oracle of Delphi and offered sacrifice there

as a Greek in order to ask Pythia who gave the oracles to tell him who would reign after him. Pythia gave him the following oracle: "A Hebrew child, who will reign over the blessed gods, orders me to leave this altar and return to Hades again. Depart, therefore, silent from my altars." (Oracula, or Suda, Lexicon alpha). When Caesar Augustus heard these things, he returned to Rome and erected an altar on which he inscribed: "An Altar to the firstborn God" (Johannes Malalas, Chronographia or Suda, Lexicon, alpha). It is truly amazing to think that the demon was forced by the divine power to witness to the Gentiles the divine birth of Christ the God-man!

C) Porphyry: The opponent of the Christians, Porphyry, says the following: "But now [the Gentiles] marvel how the disease has befallen the city for so many years and there has been no intervention either from Asclepius (the god of health) or from any other gods. Because the honor offered to Jesus



did not leave room for any common help from the gods.” (Porphyrius, *Contra Christianos* 80.3).

Their oracles ceased and their divinations from their false gods, the demons. What else did the thoughtless and blind gentiles wish to see in order to understand that the mighty power of the Lord and God Jesus Christ? But the sages of the Greeks had proclaimed Christ even before his incarnation.

D) Orpheus. Orpheus says: “Voice, I attest you, of the Father, which he uttered first. When he established the world on his own will” (Justin Martyr, *Cohortatio ad Gentiles*, 16). And the next verse says: “And when you look at the divine word, attach yourself to him.” (Ibid. *De Monarchia*, and Clement Alexandrinus *Protrepticus* and *Stromata*).

Just as the birth of Christ was seedless, so also the divine generation was without birth pangs. It is a mistake to speak of the birth pangs of the holy Virgin, i.e., that the feast on the day after Christmas is connected with greeting the mother that recovers from the birth pangs.

8. God Became Man in order to Conquer the Devil as Man. He was born in an indescribable and unutterable manner and received the homage of the Magi (and that unusual star appeared in the sky). Yet He was fed with human milk, and grew up, and went to the desert and fasted for forty days; as such, the Devil thought that He was only a man and could fall if tempted with hunger and so he started tempting Him hard. But Christ rebutted the enemy, putting forth the light of Scripture, not using the power and authority of His Godhead, but following the natural sequence of humanity. It was as a man, then, and not as God that Christ conquered the Devil, because the Devil had conquered the first man at the beginning not as God but as man. It was necessary, then, that the Devil should be conquered by man. This is why the divine Dionysius the Areopagite and Gregory the Theologian say, that *Christ conquered the Devil not by power but by right judgment and righteousness.* (Dionysius, *De ecclesiasticae Hierarchia*). Luke the Evangelist says that Christ sustained all temptations, because He scored victories over the three capital ones, gluttony, vainglory and avarice, which give birth to all others. Thus He put the Devil to shame.

9. The Public Ministry of the God-Man and its Conclusion in the Resurrection. When Christ came down from the desert and gathered together His disciples, He preached to the world for three years and produced many miracles, having first completed the thirtieth year of His age. After all these things His disciple Judas sold him by treachery, and Christ accepted it, because He wanted to redeem us human beings, who had been sold to the Devil through sin. He deliberately handed Himself over to those who pursued him, because He wanted to complete the divine economy and redeem the human race. He was crucified, died and buried, and the Third Day He rose and appeared to His disciples and to the women. Then, forty days later He blessed His disciples, and having

taught them about peace, He ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of the Father having fulfilled all things and having deified man.

Before the Resurrection of Christ took place, three human beings appear in the Old Testament to have been risen from the dead. The first one is the son of the widow from Zarephath or Sarepta (cf. Luke 4:26) who was raised by Elijah. The second was the son of the Somanite woman who was raised by Elisha (cf. 4 Kings 4:32ff). And the third is the case of the soldier who was buried near the tomb of Elisha and was raised from the dead (4 Kings 13:21). In the New Testament there are four cases of human beings who were raised from the dead by Christ: the daughter of the leader of the synagogue (Luke 8:49ff), the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11ff), Lazarus who had been buried for four days (John 11:43f) and those who arose at the resurrection of Christ (cf. Matt. 27:52f). All of these died again. Christ, however, who is the eighth case of a man that rose from the dead, is the only one who does not die again because death has no dominion over him. We too will rise again, on that Eighth Day, which has no end, without dying again.

10. Epilogue From the Words of Dionysius the Areopagite. We shall let Dionysius the Areopagite to close this chapter. And first of all we shall recall what he says about the darkness, which occurred when Christ was crucified. There is, he says, the witness of the Greek astronomer Phlegon who said: “In the second year of the 202nd Olympiad, a major eclipse of the Sun occurred, the like of which had not been seen earlier, so that the stars appeared in the sky” (Johannes Malalas, *Chronographia*). This is one additional witness of the Greeks, which is connected with the Crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is in this way, then, that we should believe in and worship Jesus Christ, as God who became man, because the Son and Word of God remains inseparable from His humanity. As God He is other than the Flesh, but also as Flesh He is other than the Word. Since, however, the Word of the Father, who is from God, Himself became man as well, this is not the case of “an other and an other” because of the indescribable union and summit. Thus, the Son is called: *One and Only*, both before the summit of the Incarnation and after His union with the Flesh. It is exactly for this reason that He said to the man who had been previously blind and was healed by Him: *Do you believe in the Son of man?* (Jn 9:35). And he answered, *And who is he Lord, that I might believe in Him* (Jn 9:36). And then, Christ said to Him, “And you have seen Him and He who is speaking with you, He is the one” (Jn 9:38). He speaks as man, He appears as man, and He is believed to be a God-Man, God’s Son Himself!

Truly, how incomprehensible and lofty is this Mystery of the Incarnation of Christ! Yet it is an absolute confirmation and revelation of God’s infinite love for us human beings.

THE RIGHTFUL OMISSION OF Gnostic WRITINGS

By Fr. Barnabas Powell, St. Michael's Orthodox Church.

From the Editor: As we had observed during past pre-Christmas periods, the mass media will once again stand ready to release (in whatever form they consider most effective) "new historically-based" stories or television specials that are based on so-called "ancient Christian manuscripts" that have "finally gained the exposure they deserve." They will tell us that their aim is to make the Bible text more understandable for all humans and to provide that "missing insight" into Jesus. It is our personal contention that their true aim is simply another form of attack on the truth of our Faith. The subject article correctly exposes one such "manuscript" and places it into the perspective that it deserves.

We appeal to all Orthodox Christians that they treat these "ancient Christian manuscripts" with the disrespect that they deserve; they are truly nothing more than religious trash-talk that is being utilized by the Dark Forces of our days. Their aim continues to be the instilling of doubt in the hearts and souls of our brethren towards the great mystery of His Incarnation and the salvific power of our Faith.

† † †

Perusing the religious sections of major bookstores over the years, I've noticed a growing fascination with material that fell to the cutting-room floor as the Church produced a biblical canon. In 100 back-cover endorsements, pop-scholars pose the provocative question "What doesn't the Church want you to know?"

Given our post-modern disillusionment with authority and penchant for conspiracy theories, obsession over "lost" books of the Bible is not surprising. Before we remove such works from the trash, however, it may be worthwhile considering why they were tossed in the first place.

As the apostles' successors continued their work of spreading the Gospel, they were shadowed by a group of revisionists who claimed to possess an arcane knowledge of God that the Church at large wasn't privy to. They were called Gnostics ("gnosis" is Greek for "knowledge"). They rejected the physical world and its Jewish Creator God, denied the incarnation of God in Christ, and promoted a puritanical spirituality that rejected the body and its redemption.

To promote their teachings, they attributed them to Christ by authoring "gospels" under apostolic pseudonyms. No Gnostic work has better captured popular imaginations than the Infancy Gospel of Thomas. Purporting to fill in the years of Jesus' Egyptian childhood, this work titillates us with the prospect of information not included in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We expect something cute, if not inspiring.

Yet there's nothing endearing about this Gnostic Jesus. An all-powerful brat with a vindictive streak, he strikes a playmate dead for bullying him. When the boy's parents complain to Joseph and Mary, they're struck blind for their trouble. When a rabbi tries teaching Jesus the alphabet, the boy declares his omniscience and mocks his pedagogue. The rabbi raises a hand to rebuke the arrogant cur, and winds up dead. When Jesus channels five mud puddles into a single pool, a Pharisee stamps out his project because it constitutes work on the Sabbath. You guessed it. He, too, ends up dead.

Like the child demigods of Greek mythology and Far Eastern demonology, this Jesus is no innocent babe, but a malevolent and capricious trickster. Why would the Gnostics depict him thus? Their goal was to cast his humanity as mere illusion, a thin cloak barely concealing the divine being within. He only seems to be as we are, only seems subject to human limitations.

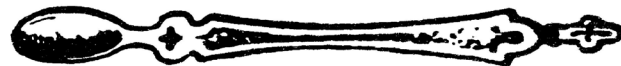
The canonical Gospels depict a God who empties himself to the point of suffering and death. The Gnostic deity would never stoop to such depths. Even his childhood is a facade.

Modernist scholars urge us to include such works in our understanding of the "historical Jesus." They accuse the early Church of deliberately covering them up in a prejudiced desire for orthodoxy over diversity. As a member of that same Church, I plead guilty. I'm glad such twisted icons were rejected, because Jesus is, after all, not simply an object of worship. He's the perfect man we seek to become. Imagine if the Gnostic Jesus were part of that model. What kind of Christians would that produce? What kind of Church? Vengeance would be next to godliness; a martyr not so much one who dies for his faith as one who kills for it.

Although secularists exploit isolated, historic aberrations to accuse Christianity of fitting that bill, let's get real. There are other faiths in which such a paradigm is no aberration at all. Their claim to secret knowledge continues to inspire Gnosticism's spiritual successors, who focus today on the secret sex life of Jesus, or whatever the latest cultural psychosis dictates.

Gnosticism may inspire Hollywood blockbusters and New York Times best-sellers, but has never inspired love of neighbor. It produced no saints. Gnostic writings are an interesting read, but there's a reason they didn't make the biblical cut. Christ didn't leave a text. He left a Church, which compiled a text.

Perhaps we can all be convinced now that the Mother Church truly knew what She was doing...



What does it mean to sincerely confess? To hide nothing, speak plainly and not beat around the bush.

St. Ambrose of Optina

WAS CHRIST BORN ON DEC. 25TH?

By John Eidsmoe and Ben DuPré, from *WorldNetDaily*, 12/24/2009.

The secularizers commonly defend the de-Christianization of Christmas by noting that America is a much more diverse nation than we used to be, that we shouldn't offend others, that saying "Merry Christmas" might be bad for business and that public Christmas observances might even violate the First Amendment. Then they deliver their crowning blow: "Besides, everybody knows Jesus wasn't born in December."

But saying "everybody knows" begs the question, as saying "all scholars agree" defines anyone who doesn't agree as a non-scholar. At the risk of flying in the face of this collective modern wisdom, we suggest that there is substantial, though not conclusive, evidence that Jesus was born in December.

The Biblical Evidence

What does the Bible say about the date of Jesus' birth? Luke 2:6 tells us that *the days were accomplished that she should be delivered*, so we assume Jesus was a full-term baby, born nine months after His conception. Luke 1:26 says the angel Gabriel announced the conception of Jesus to Mary in the sixth month of her cousin Elizabeth's pregnancy with John the Baptist. So Jesus was conceived about six months after John the Baptist was conceived.

So when was John the Baptist conceived? That's more difficult, but the Scriptures suggest some answers. John's father was Zacharias, a Levite priest *of the course of Abia [Abijah]* (Lk 1:5). According to I Chronicles 24:7-19, King David had divided the priests into 24 orders, and these orders took turns serving in the temple for a period of eight days twice a year, separated from their wives and children. During their time Zacharias and the other priests of the course of Abia served during the 10th and 24th weeks of the Jewish year.

The angel of the Lord spoke to Zacharias *while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course* (Lk 1:8), that is, while he was performing his service in the temple. After his course was finished he left the temple, returned to his wife, Elizabeth, and John was conceived (Lk 1:23-24). If this was after the second course, that is, the 24th week of the year, John would have been conceived around September or October and born around June or July. Jesus' conception six months later would have occurred around March or April and His birth around December or January.

There is no certainty to this theory, especially given that the Jewish calendar (of only 360 days) may have been different from King David's time to Jesus' time. But based on the scriptural account of Zacharias's service in the temple, it is well within the realm of possibility that Jesus was born in December.

The Extrabiblical Evidence

St. John Chrysostom (347-407 A.D.), argued strongly for a Dec. 25th birthdate because of the course of Zacharias' priestly service. But he also based his conclusion on the findings of Pope Julius. Bishop Cyril of Jerusalem (348-386 A.D.) had asked Pope Julius to ascertain the date of Christ's birth *from the census documents brought by Titus to Rome* after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Julius then determined the date of Christ's birth to be Dec. 25th.

Julius, Cyril and Chrysostom were not alone in their reliance upon the census documents. St. Justin Martyr (100-165 A.D.), in a detailed statement of the Christian faith addressed to Emperor Marcus Aurelius, stated that Jesus was born in Bethlehem *as you can ascertain also from the registers of the taxing*. (Apology, I, 34). Likewise, Tertullian (160-250 A.D.) wrote of *the census of Augustus—that most faithful witness of the Lord's nativity, kept in the archives of Rome* Contra Marcion, Bk 4, 7).

Unfortunately, we do not have access to these census records today. But perhaps the better part of wisdom bids us to assume that these church fathers had access to information that we do not possess, and that they knew what they were talking about.

Some have said that Jesus couldn't have been born in December because shepherds did not keep their sheep in the fields past late autumn. But Alfred Edersheim, in his classic work *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (1883), cites ancient Jewish sources to the effect that flocks of sheep "remain in the open alike in the hottest days and in the rainy season, i.e., all the year round" (Book 2, p. 186). There was also a special class of Levitical shepherds who kept sacrificial lambs in the field all year round because they were used for sacrifice every month of the year.

Winters can be cold in Palestine, but they vary greatly, and some Decembers are rather mild. A recent study of stalagmites and stalactites in caves near Jerusalem strongly suggests that the average annual rainfall dropped nearly 50 percent from about 3 feet in 100 A.D. to about 1.6 feet in 700 A.D. Average winter temperatures may have varied as well. If Mary could have given birth to a baby in a Bethlehem stable, then hardy shepherds could have watched their flocks in the fields at the same time.

Edersheim concludes, "There is no adequate reason for questioning the historical accuracy of this date (Dec. 25th). The objections generally made rest on grounds, which seem to me historically untenable."

In the end, no one's Christian faith should depend upon whether Dec. 25th is the date of Jesus' birth, nor do such questions give us any reason to take Christ out of Christmas. We'd welcome responses from anyone who can prove or disprove this thesis. But sometimes it is comforting, and even fun, to learn that ancient scholars and ancient traditions may have been right all along.

And Merry Christmas, one and all—on Dec. 25th!

HOLY PROPHET DANIEL [COMMEMORATED ON DECEMBER 17TH]

From "Orthodox America," vol. VI, No. 5, December, 1985.

Among those who foretold the Birth of the promised Messiah was the holy Prophet Daniel. He was of royal lineage from the tribe of Judah. As a youth he was taken captive by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar (607-562 BC). As he was handsome and of a good family, he was chosen together with several others to be trained for service in the palace. They were taught the Chaldean language as well as various sciences. The king ensured that they were well provided for and given food from his own table.

Among the chosen youths Daniel had three friends: Ananias, Azarias and Misail. All four steadfastly preserved their faith in the one true God and together refused to eat the king's food for fear breaking one of Moses' laws. They asked their overseer to give them only bread and vegetables, but the overseer was afraid that they would become thin and he would be made to suffer the king's wrath. Daniel persuaded him to make a test and allow them to observe this regimen for ten days. At the end of this period all could see that not only had Daniel and his friends not lost weight—they had grown still healthier and more handsome than before. And so they were permitted to eat as they pleased. The Lord God rewarded them for their faithfulness, granting them various talents and success in their studies. And to Daniel was given the special gift of interpreting dreams and visions.

Now in the second year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar saw an unusual dream which troubled his spirit; when he awoke, however, he couldn't recall the content of the dream. He summoned together all the wise men, astrologers, magicians and soothsayers of the land, and demanded an explanation of his dream. But they were astonished at such a task. Who, they asked, could begin to interpret a dream which the king himself could not remember! Nebuchadnezzar grew angry and ordered all these sages to be put to death.

Daniel heard of their dilemma and requested some time to think it over. That night he prayed fervently to God, and in his sleep the Lord revealed to him the king's dream and its significance. All this Daniel explained to the king—how he had been thinking of the future and beheld in a dream a terrible statue whose head was of fine gold, *his breast and his arms were of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs*

of iron and part of clay. Then from a mountain a stone was cut out without hands and struck the image, breaking it to pieces; and the stone became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. [1]

In explaining this dream Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that as a king of kings to whom God had given a kingdom, power, strength and glory, he was this head of gold, and after him would arise another kingdom, less powerful, and then a third; and finally these would all be consumed by an everlasting, kingdom of the God of heaven, which kingdom would spread over the entire earth unto the ages of ages.

Nebuchadnezzar arose and, bowing down before Daniel, said: *Truly, your God is the God of gods and King of kings!* In reward for his interpretation Daniel was given authority over all the wise men of Babylon, and his three friends—Ananias, Azarius and Misail—were made rulers of the land. [2]

Nebuchadnezzar, however, did not remain steadfast in confessing the God of Daniel to be God of gods and King of kings. In the 18th year of the Babylonian captivity, Nebuchadnezzar had an enormous golden idol erected in a field. All the wise men and the learned members of Babylon gathered to witness its unveiling. It was announced that at the sound of the trumpets and the musical instruments everyone was to bow down before the idol. Anyone who failed to observe the king's decree would be thrown into the furnace.

At the given moment, all bowed down—with the exception of Ananias, Azarias and Misail. Hearing of their refusal, the king flew into a rage and com-

manded that the flames be increased seven-fold and that the three obstinate young Israelites be bound and thrown into the furnace. It was made so hot that the soldiers who threw the victims into the fire themselves fell dead, and even those Chaldeans standing nearby were scorched. The three godly youths, however, remained unharmed. The Lord had sent His angel to guard them from the flames, and they stood in the midst of the furnace singing praises to God.

Nebuchadnezzar, who was seated on a high throne facing the furnace, turned to his counselors: *Were there not three youths bound and thrown into the furnace? How is it that I see four, freely walking, unharmed, amidst the flames; and the fourth has the appearance of the Son of God.* Approaching the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar called the youths out. When they came forth it could be seen that the flames had not touched them: neither their clothing nor their hair was even singed. Seeing this Nebuchadnezzar said: *Blessed is your God Who sent His angel and preserved his servants who trusted in Him.*



And he forbade his subjects, on penalty of death, to mock the God of the Israelites.

After Nebuchadnezzar's death, the throne passed through his son and his son-in-law to his grandson Belshezzar. And all these years Daniel continued to interpret dreams and himself to have dreams which were significant in foreshadowing future events. He foretold to Belshezzar that because he had forgotten the example of his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar and had scorned the true God, he would be killed and his kingdom would be divided. That very night the prophecy was fulfilled and the Babylonian empire was taken over by the Medes and Persians.

The Median king Darius looked with favor upon Daniel and raised him up to be one of the three kings under his sovereignty. Daniel's popularity roused the envy of the Chaldean wise men who plotted to have him killed. They knew that three times a day Daniel prayed before a window opened towards Jerusalem. They proposed the king make a decree that for 30 days no one petition any god or man, save the king, for any reason whatsoever. Breaking this decree would cause the offender to be thrown to the lions. King Darius agreed.

The holy prophet Daniel continued as before to pray to God and ask His mercy. When his enemies denounced Daniel, the king realized it was all a ruse, but he could not annul his decree and was forced to have Daniel thrown into the lions' den.

Early the next morning, Darius hurried to the den, *Daniel, servant of the living God, he shouted, has your God been able to save you from the lions? ... King, answered Daniel, my God sent His angel to close the jaws of the lions, for I have been found pure in His sight, and before you, O king, I have not transgressed.*

The king was overjoyed and ordered Daniel released from the lions' den and his accusers to take his place. These men had scarcely entered the den when they were attacked by the lions and torn to pieces.

Then Darius wrote the following to be spread abroad: *I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for He is the living God... and His dominion shall be even unto the end.*

And so the Prophet Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian. Among his prophecies, he foretold the year of Christ's Birth, and that the Messiah would be given over to death; this would be followed by the destruction of the temple and all Jerusalem, and the Old Testament sacrifices would cease. And so it came to pass.

† † †

[1] According to the Holy Fathers, the stone uncut by human hands, which broke away from the mountain and crushed the image—signifies Christ, born of a Pure Virgin

without the participation of a man. Overruling all temporal kingdoms, He raised up a kingdom which is never to be destroyed, a spiritual kingdom. Because this prophecy foretells the Saviour's Birth, it is read during Vespers on the eve of the Feast of Nativity.

[2] Daniel's prophecy was fulfilled precisely. The Babylonian kingdom was succeeded by three more great empires: the Persian Medean, the Greek-Macedonian, and the Roman; each of these ruled over the Jewish people. During the Roman Empire the Lord Jesus Christ appeared on earth, the Saviour of the world, and established His everlasting and universal kingdom—His holy Church.



BAPTISM AND EMERGENCY BAPTISM

“Regular” Baptism The Absolute Requirements.

- Always performed by a priest/bishop
- Water, Oil of gladness, Chrism
- Person ALWAYS present. Godparent must be present.
- Full immersion, ALWAYS three times. “Baptism” is from the Greek Word “baptizo” which means to immerse.
- *The servant of God ____ is baptized in the name of Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit* – immerse fully at the mention of each person. Never “I baptize ...”

Emergency Baptism Some Basic Rules and Guidance

- By whom can it be performed? Any Baptized Orthodox Christian. Principle: you cannot give what you do not have.
- When is it “allowed”? When it is believed a person that has not been baptized is in danger of imminent death and there is no time for usual baptism.
- How is it performed?
 - As many prayers as possible. Trisagion, Creed.
 - Water – make the sign of the cross over it
 - Immerse if possible, or pour, with the proper formula: *The servant of God ____ is baptized in the name of Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit*
- Contact a priest as soon as possible to complete the baptism.

“Completing” the Emergency Baptism

- In the case that the newly baptized survives.
- Never any “re-baptism”.
- Priest performs the baptism service, omitting the blessing of the water and immersion.
- All other parts are said.
- Always chrismation is performed.
- Godparent must be present, as possible.

GRACE ILLUMINING THE SOUL

By Fr. Valery Lukianov, St. Alexander Nevsky Church, Lakewood, New Jersey.

In every man there are two aspects—the outward man and his inward content; or, on the contrary, these two aspects are bound together in complete harmony.

What is the outward man? It is the facade or “image” with which I appear before the world and society. Here, of course, if we show ourselves to others, it is with our most attractive side. Even without inward harmony, the outward man can seem very well brought up, orderly, correct, and polite. But this is only outward “self-control.” Just take away the “world” before which one finds it necessary to show off, and there is revealed the inward content of a man’s heart, which does not at all correspond to his attractive outward image.

This can be seen best of all at home with one’s family, where a man feels himself no longer obliged to restrain his passions. And how sad it is for a spiritual father to find out that in outwardly happy and model families there are often fighting, irritability, crudity, and the storm of passions!...

But what do we see in a man whose outward image is in harmony with his hidden spiritual life? Here we see the beginning of the positive action of God’s grace on a man’s soul, the beginning of a reflection of the light of Tabor about which St. Gregory Palamas teaches. He explains that just as once the Divine light appeared visibly to the Prophet Moses on Mt. Sinai, and just as this light appeared on Mt. Tabor when our Lord Jesus Christ was transfigured, so also this reflection of the light of Tabor can appear even outwardly in a man, but under the unflinching condition that his life is sanctified by the grace of prayer, fasting, and other labors of self-renunciation.

The clearest example of such grace-given illumination of the soul was manifested by the wondrous St. Seraphim of Sarov who was truly “a heavenly man and an earthly angel.” This flaming wonderworker of the Russian Church, who devoted his whole life to acquiring the Holy Spirit, was granted even here on earth the special gift of shining with the light of Tabor—to such an extent that, as Motovilov testifies, it was impossible to look at his face, for it shone and burned like the sun. The same reflection of inward peace and spiritual beauty was shown by the last Tsar-Martyr, Nicholas II, who, as is well known, had especially radiant eyes that won over not only his well-wishers, but even people who, out of spiritual faint-heartedness, were disposed against him.

If one looks attentively at the world around us, we see that God’s Providence has placed an image of spiritual transfiguration even in inanimate nature. Let us remember nature as it is in winter—could anyone imagine that the naked branches of trees, when spring comes, would suddenly awake from a death-like sleep, become covered with new green

leaves, and that on them splendid fruits would come forth to rejoice and feed men? And who has not experienced a special feeling of grace in those wondrous moments of dawn when a man observes how the night ends and a new day begins? What a wondrous, blessed stillness! What a remarkable peace! What joy settles then in the heart of a man when he sees the darkness transformed unnoticeably into light. And, if a sensitive person can take so close to his heart such purely outward manifestations of nature, then how deeply and brightly must a Christian experience those hidden secrets of spiritual existence which open up when there are planted in the heart the grace-given gifts of prayer, repentance, and forgiveness, accompanied by fasting and good deeds.

With our bodily eyes we follow the natural course of life; everything passes away: every happiness, family and social well-being, glory and honor, one’s voice and hearing, memory and intelligence. With the setting of the sun, spring passes over into dead winter! But with our spiritual gaze we follow our earthly pilgrimage—life is not fading away, but on the contrary, an ascent from strength to strength, the acquisition of the spiritual gifts bountifully distributed by the Lord to those who seek Him, given through the Church of Christ.

How sweet is the awareness that still here on earth we have the promise of the victory of good over evil, the pledge of a joyful resurrection. How splendid and consoling is our existence in the Church where a man receives the wondrous opportunity to renew his soul, to tear sin out of his heart with tears, and to be in communion with the spiritual world, in union with Christ.

Let us, then, treasure our joyful communion with the Church, for perhaps the day is not far distant when the Lord will call His faithful children to be confessors. And let us hope that if in this life, because of our unworthiness, the Lord does not illumine our gaze with the clear light of His mercy, then at least He does so during our death. In that frightful hour when the soul is to be separated from the fragile remains of its earthly vessel, and when all sorrows and every vain thing remain behind, our soul might then be illumined by the wondrous light of Tabor so as eternally to be washed in the rays of God’s grace and eternally to send up praise to its Creator together with the angels. Amen.



The priest’s cassock is the flag of the Church of our Christ: for this reason we must try hard to honor it, we who wear it, with a holy life, so that those who don’t wear it will honor and respect it.

Blessed Elder Amphilochios of Patmos

THE VISION OF SAINT PETER, BISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA

[FEAST DAY - NOVEMBER 24TH]

From the "Mystagogy" webpages, by J. Sanidopoulos.

Saint Peter illustriously occupied the throne of Alexandria for twelve years, and, as Eusebius says, *was a divine example of a bishop on account of the excellence of his life and his study of the Sacred Scriptures*. He excommunicated Arius for his sympathy with the Meletian schism. Melitius, Bishop of Lycopolos, rejected the idea that the lapsed could return to the Church and thus created a schismatic group.

When Arius learned that Saint Peter had been imprisoned, he sent many priests and deacons to him, asking that he receive him back into the communion of the Church before his martyrdom (he did this in the hope of becoming Bishop of Alexandria). When the ambassadors of Arius, among whom were Achilles and Alexander the presbyters—who had not, like Saint Peter, perceived the ruin he would engender—were astonished at the assertiveness and intensity with which Saint Peter refused to receive Arius again, he revealed to them a dread vision he had seen.

In the vision the Master Christ had appeared to him as an adolescent of 12 years of age wearing a white garment torn from head to foot which He held with His hands to His breast to cover His nakedness. When Saint Peter asked the Lord who rent His garment, the Lord answered that it was Arius, and that he must not be received back into communion because he rent and tore asunder His people in the Church. The Lord also told Peter to bless Achilles as his successor and Alexander as Achilles' successor so as to prevent Arius from coming to the episcopal throne of Alexandria. Eventually, the motif of the torn garment became a metaphor for schisms and for the Arian misinterpretation of the Trinity (see the Vespers for the Feast of the Fathers of Nicaea in the Pentekostarion).

The holy hieromartyr Peter was beheaded during the reign of Maximinus in the year 312; he is called the *Seal of the Martyrs* because he was the last Bishop of Alexandria to suffer martyrdom under the pagan Emperors. His successors to the throne of Alexandria, Saints Alexander and Athanasius the Great, brought to final victory the battle against Arius' heresy and Meletius' schism, battles which Saint Peter had begun.

Liturgical Connotation of the Vision

The earliest surviving depiction of the vision of St. Peter of Alexandria is in the famed Menologion of Basil II (c. 1000) accompanying the commemoration of St. Peter of Alexandria on the 24th of November.

But in the 11th century, the account took on a liturgical connotation, at a time when there was an increase in the number and expansion of liturgical thematic scenes in general.

An image of the Vision appears in an 11th century liturgical roll (Jerusalem, Stavrou 109) where it forms the initial letter of the priestly prayer recited just before the "Our Father" which refers to receiving the Eucharist in a proper manner (i.e., unlike Arius, but like Bishop Peter, faithful even unto death).

Peter is presented as a liturgical bishop and the young Christ appears on an altar as the real presence of the Eucharist. Both allude to the theme of Sacrifice and Offering—the purifying sacrifice of martyrdom and the sacrifice of Christ—themes echoed in the Cherubic Hymn (of offering and being offered). The image of the young Christ at this time parallels similar contemporary depictions of the young Christ in the scenes of the Melismos that were often placed in sanctuaries from this point onward. The fracturing (melismos) of the Eucharist at the time of receiving was also likened to the fractured garment of Christ in the image.



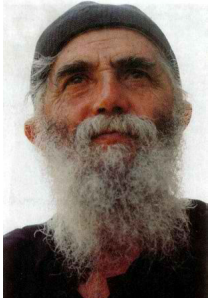
**St. Peter of Alexandria
(Feast Day - November 24)
[fresco from Dionysiou Monastery
on Holy Mountain]**

A Few Fresco Examples of the Vision

1. Church of the Savior, Nereditsa, Novgorod (end of 12th cent.), on north wall of prothesis.
2. Church of St. Clement of Ochrid (1295), in the prothesis.
3. Church of the Virgin Olympiotissa, Thessaly (1295/96), in the diakonikon. The image in Holy Cross Chapel at Holy Cross School of Theology is modelled on this image and also placed in the diakonikon.
4. Church of the Virgin, Gračanica, Serbia (1321), in the diakonikon.
5. Chilandari, Mount Athos (14th cent.), in the diakonikon.
6. Church of St. Nicholas of Tzotza, Kastoria (14th cent.), north wall of prothesis area.
7. Church of the Holy Cross, Cyprus (15th cent.), north wall of prothesis.
8. Holy Trinity, Manasija, Serbia (15th cent.), in the prothesis.
9. Great Lavra, Mount Athos (1535), north wall of prothesis.
10. Dionysiou, Mount Athos (16th cent.), on north wall of prothesis.

WESTERN RATIONALISM AND EASTERN ORTHODOXY

By Elder Paisios the Athonite, from "With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man."



Unfortunately, western rationalism has had its influence on certain Eastern Orthodox leaders, who are members of the Eastern Orthodox Church, but only in body. In spirit, they really belong to the West, which they consider to "reign" over the secular world. But if they were to view the West spiritually, to see it in the light of the East, in the light of Christ, then, they would be able to

discern its spiritual twilight. For the light of the intelligible Sun, the light of Christ Himself is disappearing from the West and a deep darkness is slowly setting in.

All these gatherings and conferences are the work of the evil one; the leaders are engaging in endless discussions on issues that need no discussion, issues that even the Holy Fathers never addressed in the past. All these are meant to confuse and scandalize the faithful and drive some of them to heresies and others to schisms, so that he can gain more ground. Ah! The misery and confusion they bring to people!

When holy Martyrs did not know how to explain the doctrines of the Church, they would often say, *What I believe is what the Holy Fathers have taught.* That was enough to lead them to martyrdom. You see, they could not defend their faith with arguments and persuade those that persecuted them, but they trusted the Holy Fathers. A martyr would reason to himself, *How can I not trust the Holy Fathers? They were far more experienced and virtuous and holy than we are. How can I accept this nonsense and not protest when people insult the Holy Fathers?*

We must trust Holy Tradition. The problem today is that so many embrace European courtesy and try to appear nice. They want to be viewed as open-minded and tolerant and end up bowing to the two-horned devil. "We don't need many religions," they say, "one, universal religion will do." This way they want to level everything.

Some of my visitors actually think this way. "Those of us who believe in Christ should form one religion," they once told me. "What you are suggesting," I replied, "is that we take eighteen carat gold that has been purified and separated from copper and mix it with copper again. Does this make any sense? Ask a jeweler, 'Does it make sense to mix base metals with gold?' So many have struggled to keep our Orthodox dogma pure and make it shine."

The Holy Fathers were right to forbid relations with heretics. But today people don't see that, "We should pray together with the heretic, the Buddhist, the fire-worship-

per, even the demon-worshipper," they say. "The Orthodox should participate in joint conferences and prayer sessions. It's important that we are present." What kind of presence are they talking about? They try to approach everything with logic and end up justifying the unjustifiable. If we follow the European spirit, we'll end up putting spiritual matters under a Common Market...

A few among the Orthodox, who are rather superficial individuals, seeking self-promotion in a "self-appointed mission," organize conferences with the heterodox to create a stir. They are supposedly promoting Orthodoxy, but all they do is bring in the heterodox and make a "mixed salad." This gets the super-zealots angry and they go to the other extreme; they blaspheme against the Mysteries of the New Calendar Orthodox, and so on and thoroughly scandalize souls who are full of devotion and Orthodox sensitivity. The heterodox on the other hand, come to these conferences, behave as if we all have to learn from them, and then take whatever good spiritual material they find in Orthodoxy, process it in their lab, add their own color and label and present it as an original idea. And there are all kinds of strange people who are moved by such ventures, and end up spiritually damaged.

The time will come, however, when the Lord will bring forth great figures like Saint Mark the Evgenikos and Saint Gregory Palamas. They will gather together all our scandalized brothers and sisters, to confess the Orthodox faith and secure the Orthodox Tradition, bringing great joy to the Mother Church.



The truly rich are not those who keep their riches to themselves but those who give to others. Happiness comes not from possessing wealth but from giving it away. Whatever is generously given away becomes a fruit of the soul. It therefore becomes the soul's wealth.

Saint Clement of Alexandria



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THE POST-NATIVITY VIRGINITY OF THE THEOTOKOS

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

The Holy Mother conceived the Lord Jesus on a Friday, just as His passion was on a Friday, and she gave birth to Him on the first day of the week. On the first day of the week God said, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3); on the first day of the week, manna fell from heaven; on this day the Lord and Savior was born; and on this day He was baptized in the Jordan.

At that time, there lived in Bethlehem the aged Salome, a kinswoman of Joseph and Mary. She was unable to receive her kinfolk at her house but visited them in the shepherd's cave. When the Most-holy Virgin immaculately gave birth to the Lord and Savior, Salome came to visit her. She was amazed that such a young girl could give birth without the aid of a midwife, swaddle the Child herself, and beside all of that still be on her feet.

When it was explained to Salome that this birth was of God and not man, that it was immaculate and without pain, and that the Virgin Mother remained a Virgin after birth as she was

before birth, Salome did not believe it, but rather she stretched out her hand to the body of the Most-holy Virgin to examine it, after the custom of a midwife, and to find out if this was indeed so. And because of her unbelief and insolence, a punishment befell her: her hand was seized and withered.

The aged woman was greatly frightened by the miracle and lamented over her withered hand. However, when she touched the Divine Child later, her hand was restored to health like it was before. Thus, Salome believed in the virginity of the Most-pure Virgin Mary and in the Divinity of Christ.



Thus after forty days, when according to custom the Most-pure Virgin came with the young Child to the Temple in Jerusalem, Zacharias the high priest placed her in the area reserved for virgins. The Pharisees and priests were disturbed by this and wanted to remove her to the place reserved for married women, but the discerning Zacharias did not allow this, claiming, that she was a virgin even though she had given birth. Because of this, the Jewish elders hated Zacharias and sought from Herod that he be killed. Immediately after she left the Temple, the Theotokos and Joseph left from Jerusalem to Nazareth and then to Egypt.