

# Orthodox Heritage

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

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

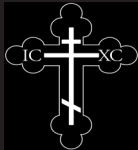
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## ON THE MURDER OF HIS MOST INNOCENT

*From the staff of "Orthodox Heritage."*

*Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremias the prophet, saying, "In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not."*

[Mt 2:17-18]

On December 29<sup>th</sup>, our Church commemorated the Massacre of the 14,000 Holy Innocent Infants, in Bethlehem and its borders. The Holy Rachel wept unceasingly when King Herod had ordered his soldiers to have all children two years old and younger to be massacred.

It seems that the loving Holy Rachel has not stopped weeping to this very hour, as we continue to see massacres of the infants, through abortions, being condoned and "legally" supported all around the world, often with the financial backing of governments, especially in the "progressive" West.

For us in America, on January 22, 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court "legalized" the atrocious act of abortion and thus brought within our lives the continuation of the murder of His most innocent and their daily sacrifice in the altar of

Satan and his dark angels.

The Orthodox Church cries out against this act of abortion. But is it not true that our ears often remain closed as we are afraid of the truth? We are allowing death to happen, murder, before our eyes! Death of innocent children!

On the eve of the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision that legalized the brutal murder of pre-born children in the wombs of their mothers, we wish to provide our readers with the Church's position on this murderous act.

May 2012 be the year that our Lord enlightens the reversal of this horrible 1973 Supreme Court decision.

† † †

**T**hou shalt not commit murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not commit *pederasty*, [Ed., the sexual abuse of an adolescent boy by an adult male outside his immediate family] thou shalt not commit fornication, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not practice magic, thou shalt not practise witchcraft, **thou shalt not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is begotten.** [*Ante-Nicene Fathers: Vol. VII, Apostolic Teachings & Constitutions: The 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment*].

**A**nd near that place I saw another a strait place into which the gore and the filth of those who were being punished ran down and became there as it were a lake: and there sat women having the gore up to their necks, and over against them sat many children who were born to them out of due time, crying; and there came forth from them sparks of fire and smote the women in the eyes: and these were the accursed

*The staff of "Orthodox Heritage" and the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN wish our readers a blessed and prosperous New Year. As we start our tenth 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 2012 subscription contributions. Please refer to the top of the next page 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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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who conceived and caused abortion. [*Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume X, The Apocalypse of Peter*]

Among surgeons' tools there is a certain instrument, which is formed with a nicely-adjusted flexible frame for opening the uterus first of all and keeping it open; it is further furnished with an annular blade, by means of which the limbs [of the child] within the womb are dissected with anxious but unflinching care; its last appendage being a blunted or covered hook, wherewith the entire fetus is extracted by a violent delivery. There is also [another instrument in the shape of] a copper needle or spike, by which the actual death is managed in this furtive robbery of life: They give it, from its infanticide function, the name of *embryosphaktes*, [meaning] "the slayer of the infant," which of course was alive..." [The doctors who performed abortions] all knew well enough that a living being had been conceived, and [they] pitied this most luckless infant state, which had first to be put to death, to escape being tortured alive. [210 AD, Tertullian, *The Soul*]

And now I should wish to meet him who says or believes that we are initiated by the slaughter and blood of an infant. Think you that it can be possible for so tender, so little a body to receive those fatal wounds; for any one to shed, pour forth, and drain that new blood of a youngling, and of a man scarcely come into existence? No one can believe this, except one who can dare to do it. And I see that you at one time expose your begotten children to wild beasts and to birds; at another, that you crush them when strangled with a miserable kind of death. There are some women who, by drinking medical preparations, extinguish the source of the future man in their very bowels, and thus commit a parricide before they bring forth. [*Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume IV, The Octavius of Minucius Felix*]

Christians marry, like everyone else, and they beget children, but they do not cast out their offspring, for it is of grave consequences. [250 AD, *Letter of Diognetus ch.5, vs. 6*]

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*]

He that kills another with a sword, or hurls an axe at his own wife and kills her, is guilty of willful murder; not he who throws a stone at a dog, and unintentionally kills a man, or who corrects one with a rod, or scourge, in order to reform him, or who kills a man in his own defense, when he only designed to hurt him. But the man, or woman, is a murderer that gives a *philtrum* (love potion), if the man that takes it die upon it; so are they who take medicines to procure abortion; and so are they who kill on the highway, and the *rapparees* (bandits). [374 AD, *Basil the Great, 1<sup>st</sup> Canonical Letter, canon 8*]

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*]

Thou shalt not use magic. Thou shalt not use witchcraft; for He says, *Ye shall not suffer a witch to live*. **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: Volume VII, Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, Book VII, Moral Exhortations*]

If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follows, then **you shall give life for life**. [*Exodus 21:22-23*]

In our case, a murder being once for all forbidden, we may **not destroy even the fetus in the womb**, while as yet the human being derives blood from the other parts of the body for its sustenance. To hinder a birth is merely a speedier man-killing; nor does it matter whether you take away a life that is born, or destroy one that is coming to birth. That is a man which is going to be one; you have the fruit already in its seed. [*210 AD, Tertullian, Apology*]

Let her that **procures abortion** undergo ten years' penance, whether the embryo were perfectly formed, or not. [*374 AD, Basil the Great, First Canonical Letter, Canon 2*]

Now we allow that life begins with conception because we contend that **the soul also begins from conception**; life taking its commencement at the same moment and place that the soul does. [*210 AD, Tertullian, Apology*]

The embryo therefore becomes a **human being in the womb from the moment that its form is completed**. The law of Moses, indeed, punishes with due penalties the man who shall cause abortion, inasmuch as there exists already the rudiment of a human being, which has imputed to it even now the condition of life and death, since it is already liable to the issues of both, although, by living still in the mother, it for the most part shares its own state with the mother. [*Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume III, Tertullian, A Treatise on the Soul, Chapter VII, On the Formation and State of the Embryo*]

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. [*Josephus, Flavius, The Works of Josephus, Against Apion, Book II*]

The second commandment of the teaching: You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not seduce boys. You shall not commit fornication. You shall not steal. You shall not practice magic. You shall not use potions.

You shall not procure [an] abortion, nor destroy a newborn child. [*150 AD, Didache 2:1*]

There are some [pagan] women who, by drinking medical preparations, extinguish the source of the future man in their very bowels and thus **commit a parricide** before they bring forth. And these things assuredly come down from the teaching of your [false] gods... To us [Christians] it is not lawful either to see or hear of homicide. [*226 AD, Minucius Felix Octavius 30*]

There are some women among you who by drinking special potions **extinguish the life of the future human** in their very bowels, thus committing murder before they even give birth. [*170 AD, Mark Felix, Christian Lawyer, Octavius ch. 30*]

Thou shalt **not slay the child by procuring abortion**; nor, again, shalt thou destroy it after it is born. [*Ante-Nicene Fathers: Vol. I, The Epistle of Barnabas, The Way of Light*]

Thou shalt not use magic. Thou shalt not use witchcraft; for He says, '*Ye shall not suffer a witch to live*' [Ex 22:18]. **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. [*400 AD, The Apostolic Constitutions, Apostolic Constitutions 7:3*]

What man of sound mind, therefore, will affirm, while such is our character, that we are murderers?... [W]hen we say that **those women who use drugs to bring on abortion commit murder**, and will have to give an account to God for the abortion, on what principle should we commit murder? For it does not belong to the same person to

regard the very fetus in the womb as a created being, and therefore an object of God's care, and when it has passed into life, to kill it; and not to expose an infant, because those who expose them are chargeable with child-murder, and on the other hand, when it has been reared to destroy it. [*177 AD, Athenagoras, A Plea for the Christians 35, Embassy ch. 5*]

What reason would we have to commit murder when we say that women who induce abortions are murderers, and will have to give account of it to God? For the same person would not regard the fetus in the womb as a living thing and therefore an object of God's care, and at the same time slay it, once it had come to life. [*177 AD, Athenagoras, Plea, ch. 35*]

The law of Moses, indeed, punishes with due penalties **the man who shall cause abortion** [*210 AD, Tertullian*]

When God forbids us to kill, he not only prohibits us from open violence, which is not even allowed by the public laws, but he warns us against the commission of those things which are esteemed lawful among men.. Therefore, let no one imagine that even this is allowed, to strangle newborn children, which is the greatest impiety; for **God breathes**



into their souls for life, and not for death. But men, that there may be no crime with which they may not pollute their hands, deprive [unborn] souls as yet innocent and simple of the light which they themselves have not given. Can anyone, indeed, expect that they would abstain from the blood of others who do not abstain even from their own? But these are, without any controversy, wicked and unjust. [307 AD, *Lactantius, Divine Institutes 6:20*]

Wherefore I beseech you, flee fornication... Why sow where the ground makes it its care to destroy the fruit? Where there are **many efforts at abortion**? Where there is murder before the birth? For even the harlot you do not let continue a mere harlot, but make her a murderess also. You see how drunkenness leads to prostitution, prostitution to adultery, adultery to murder; or rather to a something even worse than murder. For I have no name to give it, since it does not take off the thing born, but prevents its being born. Why then do thou abuse the gift of God, and fight with His laws, and follow after what is a curse as if a blessing, and make the chamber of procreation a chamber for murder, and arm the woman that was given for childbearing unto slaughter? For with a view to drawing more money by being agreeable and an object of longing to her lovers, even this she is not backward to do, so heaping upon thy head a great pile of fire. For even if the daring deed be hers, yet the causing of it is thine. [391 AD, *John Chrysostom, Homilies on Romans 24*]

Who does not reckon among the things of greatest interest the contests of gladiators and wild beasts, especially those which are given by you? But we, deeming that to see a man put to death is much the same as killing him, have abjured such spectacles. How, then, when we do not even look on, lest we should contract guilt and pollution, can we put people to death? And when we say that **those women who use drugs to bring on abortion commit murder**, and will have to give an account to God for the abortion, on what principle should we commit murder? [*Ante-Nicene Fathers: Volume II, The Epistle of Barnabas, Chapter V: The Christians Condemn and Detest All Cruelty*]

Women who were reputed to be believers began to take drugs to render themselves sterile, and to bind themselves tightly so as to expel what was being conceived, since they would not, on account of relatives and excess wealth, want to have a child by a slave or by any insignificant person. See, then, into what great impiety that lawless one has proceeded, by **teaching adultery and murder at the same time!** [228 AD, *Hippolytus, Refutation of All Heresies*]



Abortion, is skillfully marketed and sold to the woman at the crisis time in her life. She buys the product, finds it defective and wants to return it for a refund. But, it's too late...

Author unknown

## ORTHODOX HUMANITARIAN VISIT TO KOSOVO

DENVER COLORADO, 15 December 2011.

Even as national borders in the Balkans become unstable, the Decani Monastery Relief Fund remains committed to sending its President and Executive Director to Kosovo in February 2012 for a humanitarian relief visit.

Headquartered in Boise, Idaho, the Decani Monastery Relief Fund, a non-profit organization, is committed to rebuilding Kosovo by soliciting financial contributions to support its work there. Once contributions are collected, the monks of the Orthodox Christian Decani Monastery distribute donated funds directly for the benefit of Serbian individuals and families living in the war-ravaged communities of the region. The fund supports six soup kitchens, one bakery, assists in providing daily lunches to four schools as well as shoes and clothing for youth. Additionally, the fund provides sixty-one scholarships to the University of Northern Kosovo as well as scholarship assistance for Serbian youth attending Boise State University, and Hellenic College/Holy Cross Orthodox Theological Seminary.

On December 12<sup>th</sup>, in an attempt to enter the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), at the Medzitlija border-crossing, on the border with Greece, the Archbishop of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Skopje, Jovan, was arrested again and taken to the Idrizovo prison, near Skopje. Additionally, on December 13<sup>th</sup>, *The Voice of Russia* reported that the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo prevented a convoy of Russian humanitarian supplies from entering northern Kosovo via the Jarinje checkpoint on the Serbian border. The convoy consisted of 25 trucks, carrying food, blankets, cutlery, and portable electric generators; its passage was interrupted, without any explanation provided.

Archimandrite Nekatarios Serfes, President, and J. Basil Dannebohm, Executive Director, of the Decani Monastery Relief Fund are aware of the potentially dangerous situation in the region and the instability of the Balkan borders but remain optimistic they will cross the border and visit the region safely during the February 2012 trip. "I've been visiting the region for more than ten years and have been faced with danger several times," Serfes said.

On behalf of the fund, Serfes and Dannebohm hope to raise \$25,000 before their trip which will provide humanitarian aid to refugee centers, provide for the special needs of the elderly, pay electric bills, provide firewood, finance necessary medical and surgical procedures, help to purchase farm equipment and livestock and assist in the rebuilding of the seminary, monasteries and churches of the region.

Donations to the Decani Monastery Relief Fund can be made by mail to: 2618 West Bannock Street, Boise, ID 83702 or online at [www.decanifund.org/donate](http://www.decanifund.org/donate).

## DELIVER US FROM THE EVIL ONE

Source: *Orthodox America*, issue #73; Vol. VIII, #3 (edited for length).

Fair is foul and foul is fair; hover through the fog and  
filthy air.

[The three witches in opening scene of Macbeth]

† † †

It used to be that the subject of the occult was regarded by most people in this modern age as “hocus pocus.” It conjured up images of gypsies gazing into crystal balls at summer carnivals, of shamans beating out dances in distant pagan lands, of fairy tale sorcerers and witches muttering incantations over steaming cauldrons. Today, however, one has only to browse through the local bookstore to be awakened to the chilling fact of occultism’s rising popularity.

Some books are descriptive: *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*, *Ancient Egyptian Magic*, *A History of Secret Societies*, *The Serpent and the Rainbow: The Secret World of Haitian Voodoo and Zombies*. There are also reference books such as *Zolar’s Encyclopedia of Ancient and Forbidden Knowledge* and *The Book of Sacred Magic*.

What is more shocking is the number of “how-to” books which indicate that the interest goes beyond intellectual curiosity, as in *Invisibility*—mastering the art of vanishing; *The Modern Witch’s Spell Book*—everything you need to know to cast spells, work charms and love magic, and achieve what you want in life through occult powers; *Levitiation*—what it is, how it works, how to do it. In the introduction to *The Way of a Shaman*, author Michael Harmon offers the reader “an opportunity to acquire the experience of shamanist power and to help yourself and others.” The first exercise is “a simple journey of exploration down through the Tunnel into the Lower world.”

### The Games People Play

Fantasy role-playing games (RPGs), especially popular among adolescents, invite participants into this same occult world, stimulating a thirst for power and fostering a morally neutral orientation. A company which specializes in RPG (appropriately called *Chaosium, Inc.*) offers a variety of scenarios in games with titles such as “White Wolf—temples, demons and ships of war,” “Stealer of Souls—a quest for vengeance,” “Demon Magic,” “Superworld,” “Hawkmoon—whose hero is an incarnation of the Eternal Champion, one who lives on all planes of existence, in all ages and trees.”

Because these RPGs are masked as creative entertainment, parents whose children are involved in them are rarely aware of the harmful—even fatal—effects they can have. In fact, the model for these games, “Dungeons and Dragons (D&Ds),” has been linked to 62 murders and 26 suicides, as documented by the National Coalition on Television Violence (May 12, 1987). Described by one parent of a D&D adherent as an opiate “destroying the barrier between life and fantasy,” the game comes with a Player’s Handbook which lists a demonic

cast of characters whom the players may either impersonate or employ. According to the NCTV report, “Much of the material comes from demonology including witchcraft, the occult, and evil monsters.”

D&D manuals contain detailed descriptions of killing, including satanic human sacrifice and curses of insanity including suicidal and homicidal mania. Deaths linked with D&D provide grim evidence of its kinship with satanism outside the realm of fantasy. Among those cases recorded by the NCTV:

—James Egbert, 17, was “a gifted student at Michigan State University where he played D&D. Before committing suicide he wrote: ‘I will give Satan my mind and power.’ ”

—Louis Solomon, 15, “tried to commit suicide when his stepfather took away his D&D materials. He later developed a fascination with devil worship.’ On March 12, 1986 he shot himself.

—Sellers, 17, killed his mother, stepfather and a convenience store clerk. He “was heavily into D&D and satanism which followed. He wrote a note in blood stating, ‘I renounce God. I renounce Christ. I will serve only satan.’ ”

The secretive—or even illegal—nature of satanist activity makes it very difficult to gather reliable data on the subject, but there is every indication that we are witnessing a terrifying resurgence of outright satanism. It is no longer hiding behind ancient paganism, Far Eastern religions or psychic experimentation, but demonic beliefs and practices that are just that. Public awareness of this phenomenon was finally roused when, two years ago, ABC News aired a documentary on the subject before a stunned television audience. To quote from the transcript:

Across the country and Canada, satanic graffiti is turning up on public buildings and abandoned buildings, where police suspect secret meetings are being held by people calling themselves satanists, people who worship the devil. Most often found: the inverted five pointed satanic pentagram, the upside-down cross, the evil eye, references to Babylon and the devil’s number, 666. Vandals often target churches ...

“[Voice of commentator:] America is being affected. Nationwide we found that minor cases of satanic activity light up the map. Not a single state is unaffected. But even more frightening is the number of reported murders and suicides with satanic clues ...

“We found that satanism falls into three categories. One, self-styled satanists: a growing number of young people who dabble in devil worship. Two, religious satanists: people who publicly worship the devil, a right that’s protected by law. And three, satanic cults: what appear to be highly secretive groups committing criminal acts, including murder ...

“[Psychiatrist:] Children are involved in graveyards, in crematories, in funeral parlors, because one of the

primary focuses of these people is death. Everything is attempted to be destroyed and killed in that child and in society, everything of goodness.

[Commentator:] Cannibalism. It's difficult to believe, but in every case we examined children described it ...

[Grandmother:] The hearts were cut out, and the children were made to chew pieces of these children's hearts, pieces of their flesh ... The children have spoken about this in almost every instance. Also human feces, or drinking the urine or drinking human blood ..."

(20/20 TV show 11521, May 16, 1985)

Two elements in particular should be clear from the above quotations: the perversion of innocence and the emphasis on death—both of which are unmistakable hallmarks of Luciferian activity and should not be mistaken for anything else.

It's no wonder that more than one writer and researcher has spoken out: "It is necessary to warn decisively anyone of any participation in black magic, real and faked. Don't touch these things, and avoid like the plague all those who are engaged in it. Even if it were all trickery—as it often is—these are still dirty and savage things. They are so even if they are childish. They lead only to distortion and degradation of the soul. And when real powers appear, the results for the participants are indescribably terrible." (Douglas Hunt, *Researches in the Sphere of the Occult*)

### "Real" Powers of Darkness

What is behind this resurgence of satanism? How can one explain an 'enlightened' society's growing fascination with the world of darkness? How can one explain such spiritual recklessness? The impact of the well known German legend *Faust*—in which a man surrenders his soul to the devil in exchange for youth, knowledge and magical powers—once rested on the horrifying realization of the hero's self-inflicted damnation. Today, many people are reenacting the same scenario in real life. Have they no understanding of the eternal consequences? Dare they identify with the shocking truth expressed by a 19<sup>th</sup> century satanist in the following poem:

Thus heaven I've forfeited,  
I know it full well.  
My soul, once true to God,  
is chosen for hell.

(The author? Karl Marx, as cited in Richard Wurmbrand's, *Was Karl Marx a Satanist?*, p. 2).

To answer these questions we must begin with a correct understanding of satan's realm and its "principalities and powers," the rulers of darkness, their nature and activity.

We know from Scripture that evil had no part in God's

creation. All the inhabitants of the heavenly realm, the world of angels, were created as pure, fleshless beings ordained by God to be the most perfect reflections of His grandeur and glory, with inseparable participation in His blessedness. They were created individual, personal and rational.

Of their life before Adam and Eve we know one extremely important thing: there was a great rebellion in their ranks. One-third began to believe that they were somehow "self-existent" and "self-created." They were encouraged in this delusion by one of the greatest of all the angels, a cherub whose name has come down to us as Lucifer, also called Satan or Belial. In a revelation to the Prophet Ezekiel, the Lord God Himself addresses Lucifer and describes his former glory: *Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty... Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering... Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God... Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee... and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.* (Ezek 28:12-16)

And Isaiah: *How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!... For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.* (Isa 14:12-14)

In the words of the poet, Milton, this wicked cherub shouted out: *Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven!*

Under the leadership of Archangel Michael the good angels defeated the rebellious angels in a war. Satan "*was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him... neither was their place found anymore in heaven.*" (Rev 12:7-8). Where did they go? According to the testimony of Scripture, they dwell in *high places* (Eph. 6:12). This is also translated as *under the heaven*. St. Ignatius Brianchaninov defines this more clearly when he writes: *The spirits who refused obedience to God... creep over the earth and fill the space between earth and heaven; whence they are called the spirits of the air, since the air is their habitat.* (Arena, ch. 43). Indeed, St. Paul refers to Satan as the *prince of the power of the air.* (Eph 2:2).

The Holy Fathers describe the demons as immaterial and sleepless beings which *differ much among themselves* (St. Anthony the Great), i.e., *there are ruling demons and demons that are subordinate* (St. Macarius the Great). All these demons are united in one common purpose: *to destroy men's souls through*



*word, act and thought.* (St. Hilarion). What provoked such undying hatred? In place of the fallen angels, Bishop Ignatius explains, “*God created new intelligent creatures—men. He put them in Paradise, which was placed in the lowest heaven and had originally been governed by the fallen cherub [Lucifer] himself. But Paradise was now under the surveillance of the new creature, man. It is quite understandable that the new creature thereupon became the object of envy and hatred on the part of the fallen angel and his fallen companions. Led by their leader, the rejected spirits made the attempt to subvert the newly created human creatures and make them their partners in the fall... They succeeded in their purpose...*”

### The Father of Lies

By persuading Adam and Eve that by disobeying God and eating of the *forbidden fruit* they could *be as God* (Gen 3:5), the Serpent (Satan) convinced them to share in his own prideful sin: that they are self-existent; not creatures, but gods.

At this, a terrible change took place in man: his “*soul became like that of the fallen spirits, while his body became like that of an unreasoning animal. The crime committed by the fallen angels toward men ultimately decided the fate of the fallen angels. God’s grace completely left them and they became confirmed in their fall. They, being spirits, were now destined to persist in thoughts and feelings exclusively bodily and material.*” (Bishop Ignatius, quoted in *Eternal Mysteries Beyond the Grave*, by Archimendrite Panteleimon, ch. 6)

Because man fell *unconsciously, unintentionally, being deceived and seduced*, God took pity on man and, in His unspeakable goodness *gave fallen man a Redeemer and redemption. However, redeemed man has also been given freedom either to avail himself of the redemption granted him and return to Paradise. OR, to refuse redemption and remain in the company of the fallen angels. The time assigned to man to express his mind and choice is the whole of our life on earth.*” (*The Arena*, ch. 43)

### Evil Knowledge

The sin of the fallen angels, to which Adam and Eve had also succumbed, pride (*I am self-existent, self-sufficient, a ‘God’*), then became the fountainhead of all sin, all error, in the race of man. It became the great “secret” of the Evil One, the “forbidden knowledge” or gnosis, carefully preserved in the Kingdom of Hell and given to any man wanting this “wisdom.”

This became the great rival to God’s own revelation to man and was, according to Scripture and the Holy Fathers, transmitted in the following way: After the death of righteous Abel, in order that the whole human race might not spring from a wicked fratricide, Seth was born in the place of his brother. For many generations his descendents avoided all contact with the descendents of Cain so as not to be polluted by the wickedness of an evil offspring. Eventually, however, the sons of Seth, who were the *sons of God* (Gen 6:2) (or, in some translations, the *angels of God*) became inflamed with desire

for the daughters of Cain’s descendents. Taking them as wives, they were led astray from their innate holiness, being taught by these women the wickedness of their fathers.

After the line of Seth “*had been mingled with the evil generation [of Cain], it drew aside at the suggestion of devils to profane and harmful uses... taught by the curious arts of wizards and enchantments and magical superstitions, teaching its posterity to forsake the holy worship of the Divinity and to honor and worship either the elements of fire or the demons of the air.*” (St. John Cassian, *Conferences*) The demonic origin of magical arts is also indicated by St. Macarius: Once Adam “*had been deceived, he surrendered his lordship [over the material creation] to his deceiver. For this reason, sorcerers and magicians, through the use of diabolic energy become—with God’s allowance—‘miracle-workers’: they have power over poisonous snakes and they challenge fire and water, as was exemplified by the followers of Jannes and Jambres who opposed Moses, and by Simon who resisted the chief Apostle Peter.*”

### The Origin of Paganism and Heresy

All of the above is but a foundation for what follows, for it was precisely this sinful concourse between men and demons that gave birth to all of the old pagan religions: that of the ancient Egyptians, Hinduism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, the “Mystery Schools” of Greece and Rome, and so forth (which were but forerunners for today’s “secular humanism” on the one hand, and outright demonism on the other). For this reason the Holy Fathers testified with one voice: *The gods of the pagans are demons.* (Pss 95:5)

Thus began what we rightly call today satanism, the worship of self, of ego, the denial of God’s almighty and sovereign lordship, the “itching” after forbidden knowledge and god-like power over both animate and inanimate creation. Hence, the early gnostic heretics and those others who composed their own “mysteries” and scriptures, were separated from the only channel of all grace, wisdom and truth as established by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and clearly revealed by Him to be in His Church. It is in this manner that the secret fraternal organizations came into existence through the centuries: the Knights Templars, Freemasons, Rosicrucians, Illuminati, Theosophists, and numerous others. They are all predicated on an anti-Christian secret knowledge not given to the uninitiated masses, a “wisdom of the ages,” which, they claim, “the Church” had suppressed out of fear, ignorance, or bigotry. In fact, these fraternal sects have indeed preserved something ancient—but it is not the wisdom of Almighty God; rather, it is the gnosis of old, devised by the ancient enemy, the lord of evil and Prince of Darkness himself, who knows well how to flatter the pride of mortals with a whisper: “You shall be as God!” Truly, the Church knows this adversary very well.

Outside the Orthodox tradition, however, this correct understanding of the spiritual world was lost or corrupted. Already in the Renaissance there had developed a very sentiment-

tal and carnal idea of the angelic kingdom, embodied in the fat baby cupids—*putti*—carved all over European churches and cathedrals. As Western civilization passed through the Age of Enlightenment, its perception of spiritual reality grew even darker: the devil and his minions were consigned to the realm of allegory, while their benevolent counterparts invisibly shepherded little children through dangerous forests in the manner of a fairy tale. These rather vague and distorted conceptions remain popular, while many people today do not accept the objective reality of angels or demons at all.

### The Pleasure of Demons

Here, then, is the grand delusion of the Father of Lies, for what better way to overcome one's victim than to convince him that his adversary is but a figment of his imagination, the superstition of a less *enlightened* era. Indeed, it is all part of the Evil One's artful staging of the Apostasy. Astral travel, witchcraft, ouiji (Weegee) boards, tarot cards, voodoo magic—most people become involved “just for kicks,” or to provide their spiritually impoverished lives with a new *dimension*, or to acquire extraordinary powers (which the demons readily supply). They lust after this “forbidden fruit,” this “secret knowledge,” unaware of its poisonous effect. Believing themselves to be masters of their own lives, they unwittingly cooperate with the forces of darkness and fall into the invisible snare of the devil, *taken captive by him at his will*. (II Tim 2:6)

It is hard to understand how anyone can read the Scriptures and fail to grasp the existent reality of the powers of darkness. In the Gospels there is Christ's temptation in the wilderness, there are many examples of demon possession and the casting out of demons, a power Christ conferred on his disciples (Lk 9:1). The Epistles contain further teaching on the nature of demons and how the unseen warfare is to be waged against them. *Resist the devil*, writes St. James, *and he will flee from you. Put on the whole armor of God*, exhorts St. Paul, “...above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. (Eph 6:11, 17). And St. Peter warns: *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*. (I Pet 5:8).

The Orthodox tradition has preserved this very real sense of the aerial realm of spirits, their artful devices and their influence among men. There is, for example, the life of St. Cyprian (+258) the former sorcerer who was, as he himself later related, *a faithful slave of the prince of hell with whom he conversed face to face*. The Lives of the Desert Fathers contain many descriptions of demons who appeared to the saints in visible forms, whether as hideous wild beasts, as in the Life of St. Anthony, or in the guise of angels, as in the Life of his disciple St. Macarius the Great (+390). A vivid picture of the spiritual warfare waged over men's souls is presented in the Life of St. Andrew, Fool-for-Christ (10<sup>th</sup> century), who saw this warfare in a vision.

According to Orthodox tradition, man is assisted in this warfare by a holy guardian angel, given by God to each soul at Baptism. *So too*, writes Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, the Prince of Darkness *assigns to each person one of the evil spirits, who follows that person everywhere and tries to draw him into every form of sin*. (Arena, ch. 43)

The Orthodox Christian, through daily prayers, can develop a strong consciousness of the unseen warfare and of the very present reality both of the demons and of the guardian angels: *Deliver me from...every attack of the devil ... Drive away my foes who defeat me...expose me not to the pleasure of demons ... May Satan not seize me, O Word, and boast that he has torn me from Thy hand and fold ... O Holy Angel, interceding for my wretched soul...give no place for the subtle demon to master me*. (Orthodox Prayer Book)

Because the demons seldom appear visibly it takes great effort to develop the spiritual sensitivity necessary to discern their specific influence on one's soul. Sometimes, however, they reveal themselves quite dramatically, and there are numerous accounts of exorcisms performed even today which testify to this. Often the possessed will emit bloodcurdling screams and manifest a supernatural physical strength, just like the Gadarene described in the Gospel. It is very sobering to witness, or even to read about such cases of possession and deliverance, which so powerfully attest to the reality of demonic activity. During these exorcism services, the demons frequently express their anger at being forced to abandon their victim. They are possessive of those whom they regard as “theirs,” as illustrated by the following incident which occurred in this country some fifteen years ago.

A young man arrived at seminary to begin his first year of studies. He went to bed, tired after his long journey, but could not fall asleep. A sulfuric odor in the room made him vomit. He then became aware of a dark blob with multiple green eyes at the foot of his bed. “Go away,” came a voice. “Leave this place!” The young man began to pray but the blob persisted until finally the young man fell asleep.

When he reported this demonic visitation to the dean the next morning, he was asked if he had ever engaged in any occult activity. In fact, both sides of his family had for several generations been seriously involved in black magic. The young man's grandfather could “fly,” and he himself had been taught to cast spells and to read the past and future from cards, although he had abandoned the practice some years ago. The dean explained that the demon had, in all likelihood, been sent to lay claim to his soul, as part of “the family,” and to prevent him from pursuing a life dedicated to Christ.

### Guarding Against Evil

Today's growing popularity of the occult and the evident resurgence of satanism is a renewed confirmation of the need for “unseen warfare” that we must constantly and vigilantly wage on a day to day basis. Demons do not need to wait upon



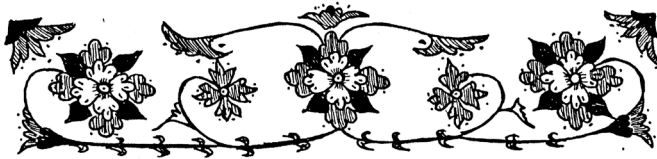
the invocation of a witch or a wizard in order to attack us and try to find some slight foothold in our lives. We see the results of their activity everywhere, every day.

It is wrong to assume that an Orthodox baptism is a sufficient safeguard against demonic influence. (It is a fact, for example, that several members of the rock group KISS—Kids in Satan's Service—belonged to Russian Orthodox families.) It is important, therefore, to consciously and prayerfully make use of those weapons provided by the Church since ancient times: to receive regularly the Holy Mysteries, to be diligent in prayer and fasting, to renew the priestly blessing of one's home each year on Theophany, to partake each morning of some proshphora and Holy Water, to make the Sign of the Cross whenever the occasion calls for it. And it is vitally important to teach these pious habits to our children: to encourage them to invoke the protection of their Guardian Angel, to pray with them at bedtime and bless them—and the corners of their room—with the sign of the Cross as they go to sleep, and also when they leave the house for school.

#### Where Is It All Going?

The great event for which Satan and his angels have been waiting throughout human history is drawing near: the coming of Antichrist. To quote from the late Hieromonk Seraphim Rose's important book, *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*: "In our age of apostasy preceding the manifestation of Antichrist, the devil has been loosed for a time (Rev 20:7), to gather in his hellish harvest of those souls who *received not the love of the truth*. (II Thes 2:10). How much, then, must Orthodox Christians walk in the fear of God, trembling lest they lose His grace, which by no means is given to everyone, but only to those who hold the true Faith, lead a life of Christian struggle, and treasure the grace of God which leads them heavenward .... Surely the last times are near, when there will come spiritual deception so persuasive as to deceive, if it were possible, even the very elect..."

*Little children, it is the last hour!* (I John 2:18)



Prayer is one of the foremost and strongest powers that causes him who prays to be born again, and it grants him bodily and spiritual well-being. Prayer is the eyes and wings of the soul; it gives us the boldness and strength to behold God.

My brother, keep praying with your mouth until divine grace enlightens you to pray also with your heart. Then a celebration and festival will take place within you in a wondrous way, and you will no longer pray with your mouth, but with the attention which works in the heart.

**Elder Ephraim**

*From Counsels from the Holy Mountain*

## RELIGIOUS FANATICS IN TAJIKISTAN KILLED MAN DRESSED AS SANTA CLAUS

*Source: Interfax – Religion, Dushanbe, January 4, 2012.*

A young man dressed as Santa Claus has been killed in a religious attack in Dushanbe, a high-placed source in Tajikistan's Interior Ministry told Interfax. The killing of Parviz Davlatbekov, 24, has been officially recognized, but religious motives have not been acknowledged.

"The young man wanted to congratulate his relatives and dressed up as Santa Claus. He was attacked by a crowd of about 30 young men when he approached his apartment building, and they stabbed him, shouting out: "Tu Kofiri!" (Infidel!) The man died in the hospital of the sustained stab wounds," the source said.

Later the Tajik police have detained three suspected murderers—third-years students of Tajik National University Sharif Davlatov, Farrukh Samiyev and Firus Nazrulloev. Tajik social networks link the murder with the fact that several days before New Year head of the Council of Ulamas of Tajikistan Saidmukarram Abdukodirzoda told journalists that decorating the Christmas tree, dancing and playing around was alien to Tajik culture and contradicted the laws of Islam.

But New Year's holidays are observed officially in Tajikistan. New Year's trees are decorated on squares and New Year's parties are held at schools and child-care centers with Santa Claus participating. President Emomali Rahmon traditionally conveys New Year's greetings to the nation several hours before midnight.

Meanwhile, experts note that there is a growing religious influence in Tajikistan. Disputes flare up in the press each December, whether Tajiks should see the New Year in as Christians do.



Never condemn anyone. Greet everyone with a good disposition, whoever he may be, with the hope of finding only good in him—seeing before you the image of God."

**St. Nikon (+1931)**

In the presence of God, a repentant sinner is more beloved than a conceited righteous person. Therefore, beware of judging!

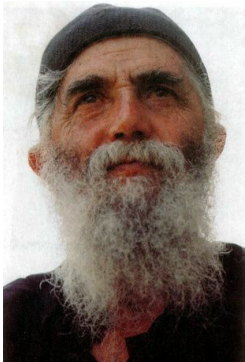
**St. Anatoly (+1894)**

Do not judge others, for this alone will intercede for us during any judgment before God.

**St. Macarius (+1860)**

## SPIRITUAL LIFE IS THE BASIC PREREQUISITE FOR A GOOD FUTURE

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



- Geronta, the girl who said to you that she is considering monasticism told me that a boy from class asked why she won't go out to the movies or out on dates with boys. What should she have answered?

- She should have said: "Not even my brother has ever asked me such questions, and now you are?"

- A few days later the boy found her outside of school—she hadn't seen him—and he went to take her arm.

She only said "hello" and immediately went inside.

- No, that's not good! In such a position she should have reacted, because as things went, she may have given him the impression that she is fine with this show of affection and now he'll do it again. The age she's at now is a little difficult and it's not good for her to keep company with boys. It is not even necessary for her to speak with them, unless perhaps they need help. If she decides to get married, when she meets a nice guy, she should tell her parents about it. They will evaluate whether the right prerequisites for starting a good family are there. For now, as she still hasn't decided which life she will follow, speaking with boys won't help; she'll just get dizzy for nothing and lose her peace. Those kids who do such things are extremely miserable souls, flighty and constantly troubled; they have no peace. Their face and eyes are wild.

The attraction of the female gender to the male—and vice versa—exists in the nature of man. But, you should tell her that it's not the time for that now; she instead needs to attend to her studies. Kids who nurture this attraction from a young age, spin like tops before the right time. Later, when the appropriate hour does come, the top is already spinning and they aren't able to be happy because they've already lived that happiness. On the other hand, those kids who are careful, rejoice all the more when the proper time comes, and until that time they have great serenity. You know those mothers who have lived purely, how peaceful they are, even though they've got heaps of worries?

I always stress that a young person before marriage should strive to live as spiritually as possible and to keep their purity intact. This ensures double health. Spiritual life is the basic prerequisite for whichever life one may follow. The world

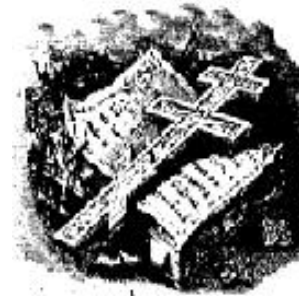
has become a field of wheat which, once the ears of grain sprouted forth, has entirely been trampled by pigs. Now all we see are weeds, mud and wheat thrown upside-down and, every once in awhile, off to the side, a lone, upright stalk.

The more spiritual work one puts into his or her adolescence the easier it will be later on, whichever life is chosen. The better one loads and prepares before the battle, the easier it will be in the midst of the war, when bullets are flying and bombs are landing all around. Until the time comes to decide, for example, if a girl will become a nun or a good mother, a pure life is essential. That's why, she must strive as much as she is able, to progress in her studies. When she guards her eyes and ears and rejects bad thoughts, she won't have far to go later.

When he meets a good girl, a young man should strive to have good thoughts; to see her as the living image of a saint. However, if he meets a girl who is a bit off track, to see her as a sister and be sorry for her, just as he'd be sorry to see his own sister fall, for we are all children of Adam.

- But today, Geronta, in the colleges, etc. there are many temptations for a young person.

- You must get connected with other spiritual people, so as to be helped and move about in a spiritual atmosphere. Let's not make things more difficult than they already are. I know a lot of kids who are in college and live in purity, by their own small effort and the great help of God.



**W**e humans both grieve and rejoice. But grief should not overpower us, because great sorrow brings despair; which is the greatest sin—it's a lack of trust in the power of God. You have many thoughts, and they tire your mind. Say the Creed, and the Supplicatory Canon to our Panagia. Learn [this Canon] by heart ... so that your mind adheres to it and our Panagia will help you. Our Panagia, and our Lord's Cross, guard man from the many snares of the devil.

Without fail, kneel half an hour a day and pray to God. When you have great affliction, pray without ceasing—do not stop until you're aware of some relief in your soul. God beholds our persistence and faith, and sends His help. If you do not receive it, do not depart from prayer. He is compassionate, and will give it; but He also wants us to seek it from Him.

**Elder Ieronymos of Aegina (+1966)**

## THE PAPIST HERESY & ITS DEEDS

By Vladimir Moss, from *"The Mystery of the Church: The Orthodox Church from Adam to the Second Coming of Christ."*

Papism amounted to a completely new view of the relationship between truth and authority in the Church. Instead of the Eastern view that authority is based on truth, which is the expression of apostolic tradition, the popes began to teach that truth is guaranteed by the authority of the pope alone. And this new teaching had a political dimension: the authority of the pope extended to the State as well as to the Church.

As pope Gregory VII, the real founder of the heretical papacy, put it in 1076: "The pope can be judged by no one; the Roman Church has never erred and never will err till the end of time; the Roman Church was founded by Christ alone; the pope alone can depose and restore bishops; he alone can make new laws, set up new bishoprics, and divide old ones; he alone can translate bishops; he alone can call general councils and authorize canon law; he alone can revise his judgements; he alone can use the imperial insignia; he can depose emperors; he can absolve subjects from their allegiance; all princes should kiss his feet; his legates, even though in inferior orders, have precedence over all bishops; an appeal to the papal court inhibits judgement by all inferior courts; a duly ordained pope is undoubtedly made a saint by the merits of St. Peter."

It was the Crusades of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries that opened the eyes of the faithful to the true nature of the monster that had been born in their midst. And it then became imperative to cast out this teacher of what was in effect a blatant form of idolatrous man-worship, lest the warning of the Lord to the Thyateira Church be realized: *I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts.* (Rev 2:20-23).

Already before the First Crusade, the previously unheard-of spectacle of wars between nations calling themselves Christian had become common. Thus, for much of the period 886-1018, the Greeks were fighting the Bulgarians; in 1043 the Russians attacked Constantinople; and between 1066 and 1081, the Normans conquered England and southern Italy and invaded Greece. Fortunately, in the East a shared religion and a com-

mon respect for the ideal of the Christian Empire ensured that the scars did not go deep. Thus, when the Bulgarians or Serbs waged war against the Empire, they did not seek to destroy it, but rather to replace the Greek Emperor with a Bulgarian or Serbian one. For Tsarigrad—"the city of the King"—remained unchallenged as the spiritual and political centre of Eastern Christendom.

In the West, however, the Norman Conquest of England, motivated as it was by religious as well as political considerations, and blessed by the pope, left deep scars which changed the religious, political, social and even linguistic character of England, and underlay the hostility between England and France for centuries to come.

And when the West as a whole marched to the Christian East during the Crusades, idealistic plans to free the Holy Places from the Mohammedan yoke soon degenerated, on the part of the knights—into lust for land and spoils, and on the part of the pope—into dreams of subduing "schismatic Romania" to himself. Thus, the only Orthodox nation really to benefit from the Crusades was Georgia, whose people under the leadership of King David the Restorer profited from the preoccupation of the Saracens with the Crusaders to liberate their land from the Mohammedan yoke.

But the ancient autocephalous Churches of Jerusalem, Antioch and Cyprus merely exchanged one heavy yoke for another, much more of a rapacious and religiously intolerant one. This process reached its bloody climax in 1204, when the Crusaders ravaged Constantinople, defiling

the sanctuary of Hagia Sophia and installing a Latin king and patriarch.

The honour of being the first Westerner decisively to condemn the Jezebel of the Roman papacy belongs to Bishop Ethelwine of the North English see of Durham, who solemnly anathematized the pope in 1070, after witnessing the terrible fruits of Papism in his own land. Shortly after, a flood of English refugees began arriving in Constantinople and Kiev (the daughter of the last English Orthodox king Harold married Grand-Prince Vladimir Monomakh), and English soldiers played a notable part in the Byzantine Emperor's wars against the West.

Sadly, however, England and the rest of the West gradually succumbed to the papist machine, and only occasionally did the Orthodox consciousness of the first thousand years of Western Christianity flicker into life, as when the English Proto-Protestant John Wiclif declared in 1383: "The pride of the pope is the cause why the Greeks are divided from the so-called faithful... It is we Westerners, too fanatical by far, who have been divided from the faithful Greeks and the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ..."



A reminder of what true Catholicism is was provided by the foundation, not long before the Western schism, of the multinational monastic community of Mount Athos, whose first coenobitic community had been founded by St. Athanasius of the Holy Mountain in the tenth century. "Following the lead of St. Athanasius," writes Vasiliev, "many new monasteries, Greek and others were founded. In the time of Basil II, there was already one Iberian or Georgian monastery; emigrants from Italy founded two, a Roman and an Amalfitan. Bishop Porphyrius Uspensky, a profound Russian student of the Christian East, asserted that when the aged Athanasius died (about 1000 A.D.) there were three thousand 'various monks' on Mount Athos. As early as the eleventh century there was a Russian Lavra on this mountain..."

After the schism, however, the Latin monasteries ceased to exist; and early in the thirteenth century, when the uniate John Beccus was patriarch in Constantinople, Catalan soldiers ravaged the Holy Mountain, putting to death many monks who refused to accept the pope. From that time until now, the Holy Mountain—which today has Bulgarian, Serbian and Romanian, as well as Greek, Georgian and Russian communities—has been at the heart of the Orthodox Church's struggle against the false unia with Rome.

"On October 7, 1207," writes Boyeikov, "pope Innocent addressed 'all the Russian bishops, clergy and the whole Russian people', demanding that they renounce Orthodoxy, since 'the land of the Greeks and their Church has almost completely returned to the recognition of the Apostolic see.' The Russian Church rejected the pretensions of the papacy, and the centre of Russian-Byzantine relations moved to Nicaea. The metropolitan of Kiev, who was himself a Nicaean Greek, in inspired manner led the struggle of the Russian Church in the name of the defense of Ecumenical Orthodoxy. The metropolitans of Kiev and all Russia cared for the unity and reconciliation of the warring princely groupings (of Kiev, Suzdal, Chernigov and Volhynia).

"Historians have paid a lot of attention to the Latin expansion in the Baltic. But they often forget that the other flank of the struggle in this period remained Southern Russia, while the field of battle was the Balkans. In 1205, the Bulgarians destroyed the crusading army of Baldwin II at Adrianople. The Second Bulgarian kingdom, which came into being in 1187, was historically drawn towards Orthodox Russia'. Tsar Ivan Asen II (1218-1241) was allied to Kiev and Nicaea, for which pope Gregory IX expelled him from the Catholic Church in 1236. This was on the eve of the Mongol-Tatar invasion.

"Then came 1238: Ryazan was burned to the ground, Vladimir was defeated, and the holy right-believing Princes Yuri Vsevolodovich and his sons, and Vasilko of Rostov fell in battle. It was in these circumstances that on August 9, 1238, the pope blessed the Hungarian king to undertake a crusade against Bulgaria.

"The Russian Church and the whole of the Russian land was overwhelmed by the flame of the Mongol-Tatar invasion. The prophecies of St. Avraam of Smolensk became clear. Many churches, monasteries, books and church utensils were captured and destroyed; in the taking of the Russian cities, many bishops, priests and monks were killed; the administration of the Church fell into disarray: Metropolitan Iosif disappeared without a trace, while Bishops Mitrophan of Vladimir and Simeon of Peryaslavl were killed. Kiev, the adornment and 'mother of Russian cities' was turned into ruins (1240) and lost its significance as a political and ecclesiastical centre. Russian state life became concentrated on the North-Eastern counties."

The thirteenth century represents a deep nadir in the history of the Orthodox Church. Beginning with the (temporary) fall of Constantinople to the Latins, and continuing with the (again temporary) apostasy of King John Asen of Bulgaria, the devastation of most of Russia and the second city of Christendom, Kiev, by the Mongols in 1240, and the signing of the unia with Rome by the Emperor Michael Paleologus at the council of Lyons in 1274, it shows Orthodoxy struggling to survive against enemies from East and West who were at the height of their power. Even the better rulers of the time, such as the Nicaean Emperor John Vatatzes, were forced into making alliances with heretics and infidels which would have horrified earlier generations.

Only the twentieth century can compare with the thirteenth in the depth and extent of its spiritual and physical destruction.

However, there were bright spots in the prevailing gloom. One was the gradual rise of Serbia under the inspired leadership of the holy King Stephen Nemanja and his son St. Sava. Another was the struggle of Novgorod, the last independent province of Russia, under St. Alexander Nevsky. This great prince decided, in spite of much opposition from his people, to pay tribute to the Mongols in order to concentrate all his forces in a successful war against what he considered to be his—from the spiritual point of view—more dangerous enemies, the papist Swedes and Teutonic Knights. It would have been good if other Orthodox—especially Greek—rulers of the time had imitated the priority St. Alexander placed on religious and spiritual over political freedom, and had taken heed to his saying: **Not in might, but in truth, is God.**



Let us strive to enter by the narrow gate. Just as the trees, if they have not stood before the winter's storms, cannot bear good fruit, so it is with us. This present age is a storm, and it is only through many trials and temptations that we can obtain an inheritance in the kingdom of heaven.

St. Theodora

## Ὁ Ἡγούμενος Ἐφραίμ Εἶναι Μόνο ἡ Ἀρχή. Ἀκολουθεῖ ὁ Διωγμός!

Τοῦ Νίκου Χειλαδάκη, Δημοσιογράφου.

**Παλιὰ ἂν ἓνας εὐλαβῆς ἀσχολεῖτο μὲ τὴν κατάσταση στὸν κόσμο δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἦταν καλὰ, ἦταν γιὰ κλείσιμο στὸν Πύργο. Σήμερα ἀντίθετα ἂν ἓνας εὐλαβῆς δὲν ἐνδιαφέρεται καὶ δὲν πονεῖ γιὰ τὴν κατάσταση ποὺ ἐπικρατεῖ στὸν κόσμο, εἶναι γιὰ κλείσιμο στὸν Πύργο.**

[Πατὴρ Παΐσιος ὁ Ἁγιορείτης]  
† † †

Τὸ σοκαριστικὸ θέαμα ἓνας ἡγούμενος ἀπὸ τὴν μεγαλύτερη μονὴ τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους νὰ σέρνεται στὶς φυλακὲς σὰν κοινὸς κατάδικος, προκαλώντας τὶς ἀνάλογες ἀλγεινὲς ἐντυπώσεις σὲ τοπικὸ, ἀλλὰ καὶ σὲ διεθνὲς ἐπίπεδο, δὲν εἶναι παρὰ ἡ ἀρχὴ μίας σειρᾶς ἐπιθέσεων κατὰ τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους, τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας στὴν χώρα μας. Ἴσως δὲν θὰ ἀργήσει ὁ καιρὸς ποὺ ἀκόμα καὶ ἡ ὁμολογία πίστεως θὰ θεωρεῖται ἀναχρονιστικὴ καὶ ἀξιόποινη πράξη: ἔτσι, καὶ ἡ ἀνάρτηση δημόσια τῶν ... εἰκόνων τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῆς Παναγίας, θὰ θεωρεῖται παραβίαση τῶν «δημοκρατικῶν» καὶ «ἀνθρωπίνων» δικαιωμάτων τῶν «ἐλεύθερα σκεπτόμενων» Ἑλλήνων πολιτῶν. Εἶναι φανερὸ πὼς τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ κράτος καὶ τὸ διεφθαρμένο πολιτικὸ σύστημα ποὺ τὸ κυβερνάει, σκοπεύει νὰ βάλει «χέρι» στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος.

Ἡ πρώτη κίνηση θὰ εἶναι ἡ ἀποστολὴ ἐλεγκτικοῦ σώματος γιὰ νὰ ἐλέγξει ποὺ πῆγαν τὰ κονδύλια ποὺ διέθεσε ἡ Εὐρωπαϊκὴ Ἐνωση στὶς διάφορες μονὲς τοῦ Ἄθω γιὰ ἔργα ἀνακαίνισης πολλῶν ἐτοιμόροπων κτιρίων. Ἡ ἀφορμὴ θὰ εἶναι ὁ ἔλεγχος, ἀλλὰ ὁ ἀπώτερος σκοπὸς θὰ εἶναι νὰ «βάλουν χέρι» στὰ ἔσοδα τῶν μονῶν, νὰ ἐλέγξουν ὅλες τὶς πηγὲς χρηματοδότησης τῶν εἴκοσι μοναστηριῶν τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους, τὶς δωρεὲς καὶ ὅποιες ἄλλες ἐπιχορηγήσεις, εἴτε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἑλλάδα εἴτε ἀπὸ τὸ ἔξωτερικόν. Ὁ σκοπὸς τους θὰ εἶναι ἡ οἰκονομικὴ ἐξόντωση τῶν μοναστηριῶν.

Δεύτερο βῆμα θὰ εἶναι ἡ κατάργηση κάθε χαρακτηρισμὸς αὐτοδιοίκησης καὶ αὐτονομίας τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους, ὅπως αὐτὴ καθιερώθηκε ἐδῶ καὶ χίλια περίπου χρόνια καὶ ἔγινε σεβαστὴ καὶ ἀπὸ ὅλους τοὺς σουλτάνους τῆς Ὀθωμανικῆς αὐτοκρατορίας.

Σὰν πρώτη κίνηση πρὸς αὐτὴ τὴν κατεύθυνση ἦταν καὶ ἡ ἀποστολὴ εἰσαγγελέα στὸ Βατοπέδι, χωρὶς νὰ

ἐρωτηθεῖ κανὴν ἡ ἱερὰ ἐπιστοασία, κατὰ παράβαση ὅλων τῶν μέχρι τώρα ἰσχυόντων.

Ἡ ἐπόμενη κίνηση θὰ εἶναι ἡ ἀνακήρυξη τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους σὰν παγκόσμιον τουριστικὸ ἀξιοθέατο καὶ ἡ καθιέρωση «εἰδικῶν ἐπιστημονικῶν – τουριστικῶν ἀποστολῶν», στὴν ἀρχὴ μὲ τὴν συμβολικὴ συμμετοχὴ καὶ τοῦ γυναικείου φύλου, σὲ «εἰδικὲς» ἐργασίες, ποὺ δῆθεν θὰ ἀνυψώνουν καὶ θὰ προβάλλουν τὴν πολιτιστικὴ κληρονομιά τοῦ ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ στύλου τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας. Μὲ τὸν διπλωματικὸ αὐτὸ τρόπο θὰ καταργηθεῖ σταδιακὰ τὸ ἄβατο καὶ πλέον γυναικὲς κρατικοὶ ἀξιωματοῦχοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκλεκτοὶ διεθνῶς ἐπισκέπτες τοῦ γυναικείου φύλου, θὰ μποροῦν νὰ ἔρχονται στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος μὲ «εἰδικὴ ἀποστολή», καταρρίπτοντας μὲ φανερὸ πλέον τρόπο κάθε ἱερὴ παρακαταθήκη τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους.

Κάτοπιν οἱ μονὲς θὰ ἀνακηρυχτοῦν σὰν οἰκήματα ποὺ ἀνήκουν στὴν διεθνή πολιτιστικὴ κληρονομιά καὶ δὲν ἀποκλείετε νὰ ἐπιβληθοῦν νόμοι γιὰ τὴν ξενοδοχειακὴ ἀξιοποίηση τῶν ἱερῶν μονῶν πρὸς ὄφελος ὑποτίθεται τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς οἰκονομίας, μίας οἰκονομίας ποὺ τὴν ἔχει ἤδη λεηλατήσῃ ἡ προδοτικὴ πολιτικὴ κλίκα ποὺ κυβέρνησε τὶς τελευταῖες δεκαετίες τὴν χώρα. Καὶ στὸ τέλος θὰ ἐπιβληθεῖ ἡ ἄποψη ὅτι τὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος «ἔχει πολὺ χρῆμα» καὶ πολλὲς προοπτικὲς οἰκονομικῆς ἀξιοποίησης γιὰ τὸ «καλὸ τῆς πατρίδας».

Ἀλλὰ δὲν εἶναι μόνο τὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος ποὺ εἶναι ὁ στόχος ὅλου αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἄθεου ἐκσυγχρονιστικοῦ καὶ ἀντιχριστιανικοῦ κατεστημένου ποὺ ἔχει ὀδηγήσει τὴν χώρα στὴν πλήρη ἐθνικὴ καὶ διεθνή ἀπαξίωση. Ἡ ἐκπαίδευση εἶναι ἤδη στὸ στόχαστρο. Ἔτσι πῦν πᾶμε, σὲ λίγα χρόνια μόνο γιὰ ἱστορικοὺς λόγους θὰ ὑπάρχει ἀναφορὰ στὰ σχολικὰ βιβλία γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία.

Τὰ παιδιά μας σὲ λίγα χρόνια θὰ ἀγνοοῦν ἀκόμα καὶ τὸ «Πάτερ Ἡμῶν» γιατί, ὅπως θὰ ἰσχυρίζονται οἱ ταγοὶ τῆς ἀπαξίωσης τῆς θρησκείας μας, ἡ δημόσια ἀπαγγελία του θὰ προσβάλλει τὴν «ἐλευθερία» καὶ τὰ ἀνθρώπινα δικαιώματα τῶν μὴ χριστιανῶν. Οἱ εἰκόνες θὰ κατέβουν ἀπὸ τὰ δικαστήρια γιατί θὰ προσβάλλουν κάθε ἔνδικο ποὺ δὲν πιστεύει καὶ δὲν θὰ θέλει νὰ ἔχει πάνω ἀπὸ τὸ κεφάλι του στὴν διάρκεια μίας δίκης τὸν Χριστό, ἢ τὴν Παναγία μὲ τὸν Χριστό.

Οἱ καμπάνες θὰ θεωρηθοῦν σὰν ἐνοχλητικὰ κατάλοιπα μιᾶς ὀπισθοδρομικῆς ἐποχῆς καὶ θὰ καταργηθοῦν. Ἦδη γνωστὸς μητροπολίτης μητροπόλης



της κεντρικής Ελλάδας, που είχε και έκπομπή στην κρατική τηλεόραση, έκανε συστάσεις στους ιερείς της μητροπόλης του να μην ένοχλούν με τις καμπάνες της ένορίας τους, τους... φιλήσυχους πολίτες που θέλουν να ξεκουράζονται τις Κυριακές...

Το ιερό ράσα θα πρέπει να μην εμφανίζοντας δημόσια, όπως γίνετε και στις άλλες κοσμικές και «σύγχρονες» χώρες, αλλά μόνο μέσα στην εκκλησία και μόνο κατά την διάρκεια της λειτουργίας. Οί ιερείς δεν θα πρέπει να ξεχωρίζουν έξωθεν από τους άλλους πολίτες προκαλώντας το δημόσιο αίσθημα, δηλαδή τα γένια τους θα πρέπει να είναι προσεγμένα, μόλις που θα φαίνονται για να είναι καί... της μόδας.

Φυσικά οί ένορίες θα έξοντωθούν οικονομικά καθώς κάθε οικονομική επιχορήγηση θα έλεγχετε και θα φορολογείται για να πηγαίνει το μεγαλύτερο μέρος στην κρατική κλίκα. Η εφαρμογή του Καλλικράτη στην εκκλησία θα καταργήσει πολλές μητροπόλεις που έχουν ιστορία πολλών αιώνων και τις όποιες ούτε η Όθωμανική αυτοκρατορία δεν τόλμησε να τις πειράξει.

Ούτε λόγος φυσικά για άναμετάδοση της Θείας Λειτουργίας τις Κυριακές από τα κρατικά ΜΜΕ, ενώ θα απαγορεύεται κάθε παρουσία ιερέων στις δημόσιες τελετές και φυσικά δεν θα υπάρχουν άγιασμοί και δημόσια ιερά μνημόσυνα. Άλλωστε ο πολιτικός γάμος θα έχει και συνέχεια με την πολιτική κηδεία.

Να μην μιλήσουμε τέλος για τις κάρτες και την ολοκληρωτική φακέλωση της προσωπικότητάς μας με σκοπό την κατάργηση του άυτεξουσίου μας, δηλαδή του πιδ ιεροϋ δώρου του Παντοδύναμου προς τον άνθρωπο. Όλα αυτά που ίσως για πολλούς φαντάζουν άπιθανα, δυστυχώς είναι μέρος του σχεδίου καταρράκωσης κάθε αξίας της Όρθοδοξίας στην πατρίδα μας όπου η Όρθοδοξία ύπηρξε για αιώνες ο φάρος της ύπαρξής της.

Φαινόμενα σαν αυτό του καθηγούμενου Έφραϊμ είναι μόνο η αρχή. Τό ζήτημα είναι αν έμεις οί ίδιοι θα αφήσουμε άπροκάλυπτα όλα αυτά να περάσουν έτσι πάνω από τις κεφαλές μας.



Όταν ή ψυχή είναι ταραγμένη, θολώνει τό λογικό και δε βλέπει καθαρά. Μόνο, όταν ή ψυχή είναι ήρεμη, φωτίζει τό λογικό, για να βλέπει καθαρά την αίτια κάθε πράγματος.

Όσκοπός μας δεν είναι να καταδικάζουμε τό κακό, αλλά να τό διορθώνουμε. Με την καταδίκη ο άνθρωπος μπορεί να χαθεί, με την κατανόηση και βοήθεια θα σωθεί.

**Γέρον Πορφύριος Κανσοκαλυβίτης (+1991)**

## Οί Δυνάμεις του Σκότους

*Γέροντος Παϊσίου του Αγιορείτου.*

### Οί Δαιμονισμένοι Άντιδροϋν σέ Ότιδήποτε Ίερό

Γέροντα, πώς μπορεί κανείς να καταλάβη αν κάποιος είναι δαιμονισμένος και όχι ψυχοπαθής; - Αυτό και ένας άπλος γιατρός, εύλαβής, μπορεί να τό καταλάβη. Όσοι πάσχουν από δαιμόνιο, όταν πλησιάσουν σέ κάτι ιερό, τινάζονται. Έτσι φαίνεται ξεκάθαρα ότι έχουν δαιμόνιο.

Λίγο άγιασμοδ αν τους δώσης ή με άγιο Λείψανο αν τους σταύρωσης, αντιδροϋν, επειδή στρυμώχονται μέσα τους τα δαιμόνια, ενώ, αν έχουν ψυχοπάθεια, δεν αντιδροϋν καθόλου. Άκόμη και επάνω σου αν έχης έναν σταυροδ και τους πλησίασης, ανησυχοϋν, ταραζονται.

Κάποτε σέ μιá άγρυπνία στο Άγιον Όρος μου είπαν οί πατέρες ότι έχουν τον λογισμό πως κάποιος λαϊκός που ήταν εκεί είχε δαιμόνιο. Κάθησα στο διπλανό στασίδι και άκούμπησα επάνω του τον σταυροδ μου που έχει Τίμιο Ξύλο. Τινάχθηκε επάνω σηκώθηκε και πήγε στην άλλη μεριά. Όταν έφυγε λίγο ο κόσμος, πήγα με τρόπο δίπλα του. Πάλι τα ίδια. Κατάλαβα ότι πράγματι είχε δαιμόνιο.

Όταν μου φέρνουν στο Καλύβι παιδάκια και μου λένε ότι έχουν δαιμόνιο, για να διαπιστώσω αν είναι δαιμονισμένα, μερικές φορές παίρνω ένα τεμάχιο άγιου Λειψάνου του Άγιου Άρσενίου και τό κρύβω στην χούφτα μου. Και να δήτε, ενώ έχω κλειστά και τα δυο χέρια μου, τό παιδάκι, αν έχη δαιμόνιο, κοιτάζει φοβισμένο τό χέρι με τό όποιο κρατώ τό άγιο Λείψανο. Αν όμως δεν έχη δαιμόνιο, άλλα λ.χ. κάποια άρρώστια έγκεφαλική, δεν αντιδρά καθόλου. Άλλοτε πάλι τους δίνω νεροδ στο όποιο προηγουμένως έχω βουτήξει τεμάχιο άγιου Λειψάνου, αλλά, αν έχουν δαιμόνιο, δεν τό πίνουν άπομακρύνονται.

Σέ ένα δαιμονισμένο παιδάκι έδωσα μιá φορα να φάη πρώτα γλυκά, για να διψάση πολύ, και μετά του έφερα από αυτό τό νεροδ. «Στον Γιαννάκη, είπα, θα δώσω πιδ καλοδ νεροδ». Μόλις ήπια λίγο, άρχισε να φωνάζη: «Αυτό τό νεροδ με καίει. Τι έχει μέσα;». «Τίποτε», του λέω. «Τι με κάνει; Με καίει», φώναζε. «Δεν καίει έσένα κάποιον άλλον καίει», του λέω. Τον σταύρωνα στο κεφάλι, και τινάζονταν τα χέρια, τα πόδια του... Έπαθε δαιμονική κρίση.

Τό δαιμόνιο τό έκανε ένα κουβάρι. Θυμάστε κι εκείνον τον φοιτητή που είχε έρθει έδώ παλιά; «Έχω μέσα μου δαιμόνιο, μου έλεγε, και με τυραννάει πολύ. Περνάω μαρτύριο από τον δαίμονα, γιατί με αναγκάζει να λέω και αισχρά. Έχω φθάσει σέ άπελπισία. Αισθάνομαι να με πιέζει μέσα μου, να

μὲ σφίγγη πότε ἐδῶ, πότε ἐκεῖ», καὶ ὁ καημένος ἔδειχνε τὴν κοιλιὰ του, τὸ στήθος, τὰ πλευρά, τὰ χέρια. Ἐπειδὴ ἦταν πολὺ εὐαίσθητος, γιὰ νὰ μὴν τὸν πληγῶσω καὶ γιὰ νὰ τὸν παρηγορήσω, τοῦ εἶπα: «Κοίταξε, δὲν ἔχεις μέσα σου δαιμόνιο· μιὰ ἐξωτερικὴ δαιμονικὴ ἐπίδραση εἶναι ἐπάνω σου».

Ὅταν πῆγαμε στὴν ἐκκλησία, εἶπα σὺς ἀδελφές ποῦ ἦταν ἐκεῖ νὰ κάνουν εὐχὴ γιὰ τὸ δυστυχημένο πλάσμα τοῦ Θεοῦ, κι ἐγὼ πήρα ἀπὸ τὸ Ἱερὸ ἕνα τεμάχιο ἁγίου Λειψάνου τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἀρσενίου, τὸν πλησίασα καὶ τὸν ξαναρώτησα: «Σὲ ποῖο σημεῖο σὲ πιέζει καὶ σὲ βασανίζει ὁ δαίμονας; Ποῦ νομίζεις ὅτι βρίσκεται;».

Μοῦ ἔδειξε τότε τὰ πλευρά του. «Ποῦ, ἐδῶ;», τὸν ρώτησα καὶ ἀκούμπησα ἐπάνω τὴν χούφτα μου μὲ τὸ ἅγιο Λεῖψανο. Βγάζει ἀμέσως ἕνα οὐρλιαχτό! «Μ' ἔκαψες, μ' ἔκαψες! Δὲν φεύγω...ὦχ! Δὲν φεύγω!». Φώναζε, ἔβριζε, ἔλεγε αἰσχροῦ. Τότε ἄρχισα μέσα μου νὰ λέω: «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, δίωξε τὸ ἀκάθαρτο πνεῦμα ἀπὸ τὸ πλάσμα Σου καὶ νὰ τὸν σταυρώσω μὲ τὸ ἱερὸ Λεῖψανο».

Αὐτὸ γινόταν ἐπὶ εἴκοσι λεπτά. Ὑστερα ὁ δαίμονας τὸν σπάρραξε, τὸν ἔρριξε κάτω. Ἐκανε τοῦμπες. Τὸ κουστοῦμι του ἔγινε μέσ' σὺς σκόνες. Τὸν σηκώσαμε ὄρθιο. Ἐτρεμε ὀλόκληρος καὶ ἔκανε ἔντονες σπασμωδικὲς κινήσεις. Πιάσθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ τέμπλο, γιὰ νὰ στηριχτεῖ. Ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια τοῦ ἔτρεχε κρύος ἰδρώτας, ὅπως εἶναι ἡ δροσιὰ στὰ χορτάρια. σὲ λίγο ἔφυγε ὁ δαίμονας καὶ ἠρέμησε. Ἐγινε καλὰ καὶ τώρα εἶναι μιὰ χαρά.

### Μὴ Δίνετε Σημασίαν στὰ Λόγια τοῦ Δαιμονισμένου

**-** Γέροντα, τί πρέπει νὰ προσέχη κανεῖς, ὅταν συζητᾷ μὲ ἕνα δαιμονισμένο;

- Νὰ λήη τὴν εὐχὴ καὶ νὰ τοῦ φέρεται μὲ καλωσύνη.

- Γέροντα, θυμοῦνται οἱ δαιμονισμένοι τί λένε πάνω στὴν κρίση τους;

- Ἄλλα τὰ θυμοῦνται καὶ ἄλλα δὲν τὰ θυμοῦνται.

Δὲν ξέρουμε πῶς ἐργάζεται ὁ Θεός. Μερικὲς φορὲς ἐπιτρέπει νὰ τὰ θυμοῦνται, γιὰ νὰ ταπεινωθοῦν καὶ νὰ μετανοήσουν.

Καὶ ὅταν ζητᾷ κάτι ὁ δαιμονισμένος, δὲν εἶναι εὐκόλο νὰ καταλάβῃ κανεῖς πότε αὐτὸ εἶναι ἀπὸ τὸν διάβολο καὶ πότε τὸ ἔχει ἀνάγκη ὁ ἴδιος. Εἶχα συναντήσει κάπου μιὰ δαιμονισμένη κοπέλλα. Αὐτὴ εἶχε διαβάσει Καζαντζάκη καὶ πίστευε κάτι βλάσφημα πράγματα μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα νὰ δαιμονισθῇ.

Ξαφνικὰ τὴν ἐπίασε τὸ δαιμόνιο καὶ ἔβαλε κάτι φωνές! «Καίγομαι, καίγομαι!». Οἱ δικοὶ τῆς τὴν κρατοῦσαν, γιὰ νὰ τὴν σταυρώσω. Μετὰ φώναζε: «Νερό, νερό!». Λέω: «Φέρτε τῆς νερό». «Ὅχι, ὄχι, μοῦ λένε, γιατί μᾶς εἶπε κάποιος νὰ μὴν κάνουμε ὑπακοὴ στὸν διάβολο». «Τώρα, λέω, ἡ καημένη διψάει. Φέρτε

νερό». Καταλάβαινα πότε ἦταν τὸ κάψιμο ἀπὸ τὸν διάβολο καὶ πότε ἦταν ἀπὸ δίψα. Ἦπτε ἡ καημένη κανα-δυὸ ποτήρια νερό. «Κάρβουνα, ἔλεγε, ἔχω μέσα μου, τόσο κάψιμο νιώθω. Καὶ ἕνα κουβὰ νερὸ νὰ ἔπινα, δὲν θὰ ἔσβηνε μέσα μου ἡ φωτιά». Τέτοιο κάψιμο ἔνιωθε!

- Ὅταν, Γέροντα, φωνάζη ἕνας δαιμονισμένος, πῶς καταλαβαίνουμε πότε μιλάει ὁ διάβολος μέσω τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ πότε ὁ ἄνθρωπος;

- Ὅταν μιλάη ὁ διάβολος, τὰ χεῖλη δὲν κινοῦνται κανονικά: κινοῦνται σάν μηχανή. Ἐνῶ, ὅταν μιλάη ὁ ἄνθρωπος, κινοῦνται φυσιολογικά. Ὅταν φωνάζη ἕνας δαιμονισμένος, τὴν ὥρα ποῦ τοῦ διαβάξουν ἐξορκισμούς ἢ οἱ ἄλλοι εὐχονται γι' αὐτόν, ἄλλοτε ἢ ἴδια ἡ ψυχὴ βασανίζεται καὶ λέει λ.χ. στὸν διάβολο: «φύγε, τί κάθου;» καὶ ἄλλοτε ὁ διάβολος βρίζει τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἢ τὸν ἱερέα ἢ βλασφημᾷ τὸν Χριστό, τὴν Παναγία, τοὺς Ἁγίους. Ἄλλοτε λέει ψέματα ἢ ἄλλοτε πιέζεται ἀπὸ τὴν δύναμη τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ νὰ πῇ τὴν ἀλήθεια.

Μερικὲς φορὲς πάλι ὁ δαιμονισμένος λέει δικὰ του ἀπὸ τὰ πνευματικὰ ποῦ ἔχει διαβάσει κ.λπ. Τί νὰ πῶ; Μπερδεμένα πράγματα. Γι' αὐτό, ὅταν συζητᾷτε μαζί του, νὰ προσέχετε πολὺ. Μὴ δίνετε σημασίαν στὰ λόγια του. Μπορεῖ νὰ λήη λ.χ. «μὲ καῖς». Ἄν πραγματικὰ τὸν καῖς καὶ πῆς «τὸν καῖω», κάηκες. Ἄν δὲν τὸν καῖς καὶ πιστέψης ὅτι τὸν καῖς, κάηκες δυὸ φορὲς. Ἦ μπορεῖ νὰ φωνάζη «βρωμιᾶρες» καὶ σὲ μιὰ νὰ πῇ: «Ἐσὺ εἶσαι καθαρὴ». Ἄν ἐκεῖνη τὸ πιστέψη, πάει, χάθηκε. Γι' αὐτὸ μὴν κάνετε πειράματα μὲ τὸν διάβολο.

Σὲ ἕνα μοναστήρι πῆγαν ἕνα δαιμονισμένο καὶ ὁ ἡγούμενος εἶπε στοὺς πατέρες νὰ πᾶνε στὴν ἐκκλησία νὰ κάνουν κομποσχοῖνι. Εἶχαν ἐκεῖ καὶ τὴν κάρα τοῦ Ἁγίου Παρθενίου, ἐπισκόπου Λαμπάκου, καὶ τὸ δαιμόνιο στρουμώθηκε πολὺ. Συγχρόνως, ὁ ἡγούμενος ἀνέθεσε καὶ σὲ ἕνα ἱερομόναχο νὰ διάβαση στὸν δαιμονισμένο ἐξορκισμούς.

Ὁ ἱερομόναχος αὐτὸς ἦταν εὐλαβὴς μὲν ἐξωτερικὰ, ἀλλὰ ἐσωτερικὰ εἶχε κρυφὴ ὑπερηφάνεια. Ἦταν ἀγωνιστὴς καὶ τυπικὸς σὲ ὅλα. Νουθετοῦσε πνευματικὰ τοὺς ἄλλους, γιατί ἦταν καὶ λόγιος. Ὁ ἴδιος ὅμως δὲν βοηθιόταν ἀπὸ κανέναν, γιατί οἱ ἄλλοι, ἀπὸ σεβασμό, ὅταν τὸν ἔβλεπαν νὰ κάνη κάτι στραβό, δίσταζαν νὰ τοῦ τὸ ποῦν. Μὲ ἄλλα λόγια, εἶχε δημιουργήσει ψευδαισθήσεις στὸν ἑαυτό του ὅτι εἶναι ὁ πιὸ ἐνάρετος τῆς μονῆς κ.λπ. Ὁ πονηρὸς βρῆκε εὐκαιρία ἐκεῖνη τὴν ἡμέρα νὰ τοῦ κάνη κακό. Ἐβαλε τὴν πονηριά του, γιὰ νὰ τοῦ δώσῃ τὴν ἐντύπωση ὅτι αὐτὸς διώχνει τὸ δαιμόνιο ἀπὸ τὸν δαιμονισμένο.

Μόλις λοιπὸν ἄρχισε νὰ διαβάξῃ τοὺς ἐξορκισμούς, ἄρχισε τὸ δαιμόνιο νὰ φωνάζη: «καίγομαι! ποῦ μὲ διώχνεις, ἄσπλαχνε;», ὁπότε νόμισε ὅτι καίγεται ἀπὸ

τὸν δικό του ἔξορκισμό—ἐνῶ ὁ δαίμονας ζοριζόταν, γιατί προσεύχονταν καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι πατέρες καὶ ἀπάντησε στὸν δαίμονα: «Νὰ ἔρθης σ' ἐμένα».

Τὸ εἶχε πει αὐτὸ ὁ Ἅγιος Παρθένιος σὲ ἓνα δαιμόνιο, ἄλλα ἐκεῖνος ἦταν ἅγιος. Μιὰ φορὰ δηλαδὴ ποὺ ἓνα δαιμόνιο φώναζε: «καίγομαι, καίγομαι, ποῦ νὰ πάω;», ὁ Ἅγιος τοῦ εἶπε: «Ἐλα σ' ἐμένα». Τότε τὸ δαιμόνιο εἶπε στὸν Ἅγιο: «καὶ μόνον τὸ ὄνομά σου μὲ καίει, Παρθένιε!», καὶ ἔφυγε ἀπὸ τὸν δαιμονισμένο ποὺ ταλαιπωροῦσε.

Πῆγε καὶ αὐτὸς νὰ κἀνῃ τὸν Ἅγιο Παρθένιο καὶ δαιμονίσθηκε. Ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνη τὴν στιγμή τὸν ἐξουσίαζε πιά ὁ δαίμονας. Χρόνια ὀλόκληρα βασανίζοταν καὶ δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ ἀναπαυθῆ πουθενά. Συνέχεια γύριζε, πότε ἔξω στὸν κόσμο καὶ πότε μέσα στὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος. Τί τράβηξε ὁ καημένος! Τοῦ εἶχε δημιουργήσει αὐτὴ ἡ κατάσταση ψυχικὴ κούραση καὶ σωματικὴ κόπωση μὲ τρεμούλα. καὶ νὰ δῆτε, ἐνῶ ἦταν καλὸς παπᾶς, δὲν μποροῦσε μετὰ νὰ λειτουργήσῃ. Βλέπετε τί κάνει ὁ διάβολος;

- Γέροντα, ἔχει κάποια σχέση ὁ καφὲς μὲ τὶς ἀντιδράσεις ἐνὸς δαιμονισμένου;

- Ὅταν τὸ νευρικὸ σύστημα εἶναι ταραγμένο καὶ πιῆ κανεὶς πολλοὺς καφέδες, κλονίζονται τὰ νεῦρα καὶ τὸ ταγκαλάκι ἐκμεταλλεύεται αὐτὴν τὴν κατάσταση. Δὲν εἶναι ὅτι ὁ καφὲς εἶναι κάτι δαιμονικό. Χρησιμοποιεῖ τὸ ταγκαλάκι τὴν ἐπίδρασή του στὰ νεῦρα, καὶ ὁ δαιμονισμένος ἀντιδράει χειρότερα.



Ὅποιος ἔχει ταπεινοφροσύνη, γλώσσα δὲν ἔχει γιὰ νὰ ἐλέγξει τὸν ἕναν ποὺ εἶναι ἀμελής ἢ τὸν ἄλλον ποὺ εἶναι ἀσεβής· οὔτε μάτια ἔχει, γιὰ νὰ παρατηρεῖ τὰ ἐλαττώματα ἄλλου· οὔτε αὐτιά ἔχει, γιὰ νὰ ἀκούει ὅσα δὲν ὠφελοῦν τὴν ψυχὴ του. Καὶ δὲν ἔχει νὰ μιλήσῃ σὲ κανέναν γιὰ τίποτε ἄλλο, παρὰ μόνο γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες του· ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἔχει εἰρηνικὲς σχέσεις ὄχι γιὰ κάποια φιλία, ἀλλὰ γιὰ χάρη τῆς ἐντολῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ (Μάρκ. 9:50): *Καλὸν τὸ ἄλλα ἐὰν δὲ τὸ ἄλλα ἄναλον γένηται, ἐν τίνι αὐτὸ ἀρτύσετε; ἔχετε ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἄλα, καὶ εἰρηνεύετε ἐν ἀλλήλοις.*

Ἄν κανεὶς δὲν βαδίζει τὸν δρόμο τοῦτο (τῆς ταπεινοφροσύνης), ἀκόμα κι ἂν νηστεύει (αὐστηρά, τρώγοντας κάθε) ἕξι μέρες ἢ ἐπιδοθεῖ σὲ (ὅποιοισδήποτε) μεγάλους ἀγῶνες, χαμένοι πηγαίνουν ὅλοι του οἱ κόποι.

**Ἀββᾶς Ἡσαΐας**

## Γιὰ Ὅσους «Σκοτώνουν» τὸν Πολύτιμο Χρόνο τους

Ἀπὸ ἓνα Ἑλληνορθόδοξο φυλλάδιο.



**Ζ**οῦσε στοὺς πρώτους Ζαῖώνας ἓνας Μοναχός, ὁ ὁποῖος ὅσες φορὲς τὸν ἐρωτοῦσε ὁ Ἡγούμενός του «πῶς πηγαίνεις στὴν ὑγεία σου, ἀδελφέ;», αὐτὸς πάντοτε παραπονιόταν ὅτι ἦταν κατάκοπος ἀπὸ τὴν πολλὴ ἐργασία.

Ἀκούγοντας καθημερινῶς ὁ Ἡγούμενος τὸ ἴδιο παράπονο ἐρώτησε κάποια ἡμέρα τὸν Μοναχό: «Τί εἶδους ἐργασία κάμνεις

καὶ κοπιᾶζεις τόσο πολύ, ἀδελφέ;» Καὶ ὁ Μοναχὸς ἀπάντησε:

«Ἄγιε Ἡγούμενε ἔχω τόσες ἐργασίες κάθε ἡμέρα καὶ νύκτα, ὥστε οἱ δυνάμεις μου δὲν θὰ ἔφθαναν γι' αὐτές, ἐὰν ὁ Θεὸς δὲν μὲ βοηθοῦσε.

**Πρῶτον**, ἔχω δυὸ γεράκια, τὰ ὁποῖα προσπαθῶ νὰ κρατῶ δέσμια καὶ νὰ τὰ ἐξημερῶνω. **Δεύτερον**, ἔχω δυὸ λαγούς, τοὺς ὁποίους φυλάγω γιὰ νὰ μὴ φύγουν. **Τρίτον**, ἔχω δυὸ βόδια, τὰ ὁποῖα ἐπιβλέπω γιὰ νὰ ἐργάζονται. **Τέταρτον**, ἔχω ἓνα λύκο τὸν ὁποῖον προσέχω διὰ νὰ μὴ βλάψῃ κανένα. **Πέμπτον**, ἔχω ἓνα λιοντάρι, τὸ ὁποῖο προσπαθῶ νὰ κατανικήσω. Καὶ **ἕκτον**, ἔχω ἓνα ἀσθενή, τὸν ὁποῖον πρέπει πάντοτε νὰ τὸν περιποιοῦμαι».

Ὁ Ἡγούμενος ἀφοῦ ἄκουσε αὐτὰ γέλασε λίγο καὶ εἶπε στὸν Μοναχό: «Αὐτά. παιδί μου, δὲν γίνονται, διότι εἶναι ἀδύνατον νὰ ἐκτελεῖ κανεὶς τόσες ἐργασίες».

«Καὶ ὅμως, σεβαστέ μου πάτερ», ἀπάντησε ὁ Μοναχός, «σοῦ εἶπα τὴν ἀλήθεια».

Καὶ ὁ Ἡγούμενος, ὁ ὁποῖος νόμιζε μέχρι ἓνα βαθμὸ ἐπιπόλαια καὶ χωρὶς περιεχόμενο τὰ λόγια τοῦ Μοναχοῦ, εἶπε: «Ἐξήγησέ μου, παιδί μου».

Καὶ ὁ Μοναχὸς ἀπάντησε:

«**Πρῶτον**, τὰ δυὸ γεράκια, Πάτερ μου, εἶναι τὰ δυὸ μάτια μου, τὰ ὁποῖα πετοῦν, πηγαίνουν ἀπὸ δῶ καὶ ἀπ' ἐκεῖ καὶ πρέπει νὰ φροντίζω γιὰ νὰ μὴ δοῦν κάτι, τὸ ὁποῖο θὰ μποροῦσε νὰ μὲ προτρέψῃ σὲ κάποια ἁμαρτία, πρῶγμα δυστυχῶς ποὺ ἔπαθε ὁ προφήτης καὶ βασιλιάς Δαβὶδ, βλέποντας τὴν γυναῖκα τοῦ Οὐρίου, τὴν Βηρσαβέε.

Δεύτερον, οἱ δυὸ λαγοί, εἶναι τὰ πόδια μου, τὰ ὁποῖα πρέπει νὰ ἐμποδίζω ἀπὸ τὸ νὰ τρέχουν στὶς ἡδονὲς καὶ τὸν δρόμο τῆς ἁμαρτίας διότι εἰς τὸ βάπτισμά μου, ὅταν ὁ ἱερεὺς ἔχρει αὐτὰ εἶπε: *Τοῦ πορεύεσθε τὰ διαβήματά*



Σου, δηλαδή του Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. Φαντάζεσαι λοιπόν, Πάτερ μου, πόσους κόπους χρειάζεται αυτό;

**Τρίτον**, τὰ δυὸ βόδια εἶναι τὰ χέρια μου, τὰ ὅποια ἐπιβλέπω μὲ μεγάλη προσοχή γιὰ νὰ ἐργάζονται. Νὰ ἐργάζονται ὅμως τὸ ἀγαθὸν ὡς τὰ χέρια τοῦ Κυρίου, ποὺ πάλι στὸ βάπτισμά μου γι' αὐτὰ ὁ ἱερεὺς εἶπε *Αἱ χεῖρες σου ἐποίησάν με καὶ ἔπλασάν με*.

**Τέταρτον**, ὁ λύκος εἶναι ἡ γλώσσα μου, ἡ ὁποία πάντοτε ἔχει ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ χαλινάρι, γιὰ νὰ μὴ δαγκάσει κανένα ἀδελφόν μου, μὲ τὴν κατηγορία, ποὺ εἶναι παρῶν ἢ ἀπῶν καὶ πεθάνει. Καὶ ἀντιλαμβάνεσαι, πάτερ μου, ὅταν τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα διὰ τοῦ Ἀδελφόθεου Ἰακώβου γιὰ τὴν γλώσσα λέγει: *Εἶ τις ἐν λόγῳ οὐ πταίει, οὗτος τέλειος ἀνὴρ, καὶ πάλιν: Ἡ γλώσσα πῦρ, ὁ κόσμος τῆς ἀδικίας. οὕτως ἡ γλώσσα καθίσταται ἐν τοῖς μέλεσιν ἡμῶν ἢ σπιλοῦσα (μολύνουσα) ὄλον τὸ σῶμα...*, καὶ πάλιν: *Τὴν δὲ γλῶσσαν οὐδεὶς δύναται ἀνθρώπων δαμάσαι ἀκατάσχετον κακόν, μεστὴ ἰοῦ θανατηφόρου. Ἐν αὐτῇ εὐλογοῦμεν τὸν Θεὸν καὶ πατέρα, καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ καταρώμεθα τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοὺς καθ' ὁμοίωσιν Θεοῦ γεγονότας...* (Ἰακ. 3:2, 6, 8-9). Τί πρέπει νὰ κάμνω ἐγὼ μὲ αὐτὸ τὸ θηρίο, τὸν λύκο ποὺ ἔχω στὸ στόμα μου;

Ἄλλα καὶ ἀκόμη, πῶς ἐγὼ, πάτερ μου, νὰ ἐπιτύχω αὐτὸ ποὺ λέγει ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος γιὰ τὴν γλώσσα, γιὰ νὰ μὴ λέγει περισσότερα ἢ λιγότερα, ἀλλὰ ὅλα μὲ τὸ ζῦγισμα νὰ λέγω, γιὰ νὰ εἶμαι δίκαιος χωρὶς κόπου μεγάλου; Λέγει ὁ Ἅγιος ὅτι: *Ζυγαριὰ νὰ ἔχομεν τὴν γλῶσσα μας ὥστε μὲ μεγάλη προσοχή νὰ ζυγίζομε τὰ λόγια μας καὶ νὰ μὴ λέμε περισσότερα οὔτε λιγότερα ἀλλὰ τὰ σωστὰ μὲ ἀκρίβεια. Διότι, ἐὰν ζυγίζομε μὲ ἀκρίβεια καὶ μεγάλη προσοχή τὸν χρυσὸ καὶ ἄλλα πράγματα, πρέπει, μὲ μεγαλύτερη προσοχή καὶ ἀκρίβεια, νὰ προσέχομε τὰ λόγια μας.*

Καὶ ἀκόμη, πάτερ μου, πῶς νὰ μὴ παλέψω μὲ τὸν λύκο αὐτόν, τὴν γλῶσσα μου, ποὺ διαβάζω τὸν Ἀββᾶ Σισώη καὶ λέγει: *Ἀδελφέ, ἔχω τριάντα χρόνια ὅπου δὲν κάμνω πλέον δέησιν εἰς τὸν Θεὸν περὶ ἁμαρτίας, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ μόνον λέγω εἰς τὴν προσευχήν μου... Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ σκέπασόν με ἀπὸ τῆς γλώσσης μου, διότι τόσους χρόνους ἔχω ἀσκητεύοντας καὶ πάλιν σκοντάπτω μὲ τὴν γλῶσσαν καὶ ἁμαρτάνω...*

**Πέμπτον**, ὁ λέων, πάτερ μου, εἶναι ἡ καρδιά μου, κατὰ τῆς ὁποίας διεξάγω νύκτα καὶ ἡμέρα πεισματώδη ἀγώνα καὶ δυστυχῶς μὲ ἔλκει μὲ μεγάλη βία σὲ ὅλα ὅσα βλάπτουν καὶ καταστρέφουν τὴν ψυχὴν μου. Βλέπεις, πάτερ μου, ὅτι ἔγκειται ἡ διάνοια τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπιμελῶς ἐπὶ τὰ πονηρὰ ἐκ νεότητος αὐτοῦ (Γέν. 8:21). Καὶ ἀκόμη, ὅτι ἡ καρδιά μου εἶναι ἀκάθαρτος ὡς εἶπεν ὁ Κύριός μου: *Ἐκ γὰρ τῆς καρδίας ἐξέρχονται διαλογισμοὶ πονηροί, φόνοι, μοιχεῖαι, πορνεῖαι, κλοπαί, ψευδομαρτυρίαι, βλασφημίαι.* (Ματθ. 15:19)

Πράγματι, ἔτσι εἶναι καὶ πρέπει νὰ κουρασθῶ νὰ τὴν καθαρῶ, μοῦ τὸ ἐπιβεβαίωσε ὁ Προφήτης Δαβὶδ ποὺ λέγει εἰς τὸν Κύριον: *Καρδίαν καθαρὰν κτίσον ἐν ἐμοὶ ὁ θεὸς καὶ πνεῦμα εὐθὲς ἐγκαίνισον ἐν τοῖς ἐγκάτοις μου.* (Ψαλμ. 50:12)

**Ἑκτον**, πάτερ μου, ὁ ἀσθενής, εἶναι τὸ σῶμα μου, τὸ ὁποῖον ποτὲ δὲν εὐρίσκεται στὴν ἴδια κατάσταση. Ἄλλοτε θέλει τροφή καὶ ἄλλοτε νηστεία. Ἄλλοτε ἀνάπαυση καὶ ἄλλοτε τυραννία. Ἄλλοτε περιθάλψη καὶ ἄλλοτε ὄχι, καὶ γιὰ τὸν λόγον αὐτὸν εἶμαι ἀναγκασμένος νὰ ἔχω τὴν προσοχή μου διαρκῶς γυρισμένη πρὸς αὐτό, γιὰ νὰ τὸ περιποιοῦμαι ὅσο εἶναι δίκαιο, ἐπειδὴ χρειάζεται καὶ αὐτὸ ὅπως τὸ τσόφλι γιὰ τὸ αὐγό».

Ἀφοῦ ἄκουσε αὐτὰ ὁ Ἠγούμενος ἀπὸ τὸν σοφὸ τοῦ Μοναχό, τὸν συγχάρηκε καὶ εἶπε: «Ἐὰν ὅλοι κάναμε ὅπως ἐσὺ τέκνον μου, δηλαδή νὰ ἐργαζόμαστε διὰ νὰ συγκρατήσομε τὰ πάθη μας καὶ ἐνημερώσομε τὸν κακὸν ἑαυτοῦ μας, ἡ γῆ θὰ γινόταν οὐρανὸς καὶ ὅλοι θὰ ἦμασταν εὐτυχισμένοι καὶ εἰρηνικοί».

Δυστυχῶς, ἀγαπητοί, ἐμεῖς δὲν ἐργαζόμαστε γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτοῦ μας, καὶ ἡ κοινωνία μας κατάντησε ζούγκλα, καίτοι στὴν Κυριακὴ προσευχὴ ὁ Κύριός μας προτρέπει νὰ λέμε: *Ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ, καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς...* Ἄλλα ποὺ ἐμεῖς νὰ βροῦμε τὸν χρόνο γιὰ τὴν ψυχὴ μας, τὴν ἀρετὴ, τὴν πίστη, τὸν Χριστό, τὴν σωτηρία τῆς ψυχῆς μας.

Βλέπετε τὸν κόσμον καὶ τὰ τοῦ κόσμου ἀνόητα καὶ ἁμαρτωλά: τὰ ἔχουμε περισπούδαστα, μόδα, καφενεῖο, χαρτί, γῆπεδο, ταβέρνα, διαφθορά, χορὸς καὶ γενικὰ ὅτι ἔχει σχέση μὲ τὴν σάρκα. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ φθάσαμε τόσο χαμηλὰ καὶ ζοῦμε σὰν νὰ μὴ γνωρίσαμε Χριστόν· καὶ ἔτσι, ἡμεθα ἄξιοι τῆς «τύχης» μας. Καὶ γι' αὐτὸ τιμωροῦμεθα ἀπὸ τὶς ἐπιλογὲς καὶ τὶς ἁμαρτίες μας.

Εἶθε νὰ θελήσουμε νὰ δεχθοῦμε τὸν Θεῖο φωτισμὸ, νὰ ἐργαστοῦμε γιὰ τὴν κάθαρση τῶν αἰσθήσεων καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη, καὶ τὴν ἀποκτῆση τῶν ἀρετῶν τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου γιὰ νὰ ἔχομε ἐλπίδα σωτηρίας, μὲ τὶς πρεσβεῖες τῆς Παναγίας καὶ ὅλων τῶν Ἁγίων.



Στὸ τέλος κάθε αἰτήματός μας νὰ λέμε: *Οὐχ ὡς ἐγὼ θέλω ἀλλ' ὡς Σὺ.* (Ματθ. 26:39). Μόνο σ' ἓνα αἶτημα δὲν χρειάζεται νὰ τὸ προσθέτομε αὐτό: σ' ἐκεῖνο τῆς σωτηρίας μας, διότι ὁ Θεὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους θέλει σωθῆναι καὶ εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας ἐλθεῖν. (Α' Τιμ. 2:4)

**π. Ἐπιφάνιος Θεοδωρόπουλος (+1989)**



εἴμεθα Θεανθρωπιστές. Ἀνεβήκαμε πιδ ψηλά.

Εἶναι κρῖμα, γιατί σήμερα κατόρθωσε ὁ διάβολος κι αἰχμαλώτισε τὶς ἡγεσίες. Κλαίω τὴν Ἑλλάδα. Δὲν ἔχει μείνει τίποτα ὄρθιο σήμερα. Ἡ Ἑλλάδα γιὰ νὰ σωθεῖ, πρέπει ὅλοι οἱ ἡγέτες της, ὅπου καὶ ἂν βρίσκονται, νὰ πᾶνε ἐξορία. Νὰ φύγουν, γιατί παρόντες μολύνουν.

Σήμερα πουλήθηκαν ὅλα. Σήμερα ὅμως ποὺ ὅλοι γονατίσαμε καὶ δὲν ὑπάρχει ἐλπίς, θὰ ἐπέμβει ὁ Θεὸς τῶν πατέρων μας γιὰ τὰ αἵματα τῶν Μαρτύρων μας καὶ τὰ λείψανα τῶν Ἁγίων μας. Τὸ αἷμα τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ ποὺ χύθηκε γιὰ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, ἐὰν ἐνωθεῖ σήμερα θὰ γίνεῖ πλωτὸ ποτάμι, νὰ πνίξει τοὺς κανίβαλους ποὺ λέγονται «μεγάλοι».

Ὅταν ἔγινε ἡ πρώτη διάσπαση τοῦ ἀτόμου καὶ κατασκευάστηκε ἡ ἀτομικὴ βόμβα, ἄκουσα ὁ ἴδιος τὸν Ἀϊζενχάουερ νὰ δηλώνει: «Σήμερα εὐρισκόμεθα στὰ προπύλαια τῆς ἐλληνικῆς μαθηματικῆς». Εἶπε τὴν ἀλήθεια ὁ κανίβαλος!

Οἱ ἐλπίδες μας εἶναι μόνο στὸν Θεό. Κι ἐσεῖς νὰ ζεῖτε Χριστιανικά, γιατί σας λέω ὑπεύθυνα—καὶ θὰ τὸ δεῖτε—ὅτι δὲν ἔχουμε πολλὲς μέρες. Αὐτὸ ποὺ ἀνάβει τώρα στὰ Βαλκάνια θὰ συνεχιστεῖ. Αὐτὸ θὰ εἶναι ἡ ἀφετηρία μέσω τῆς ὁποίας ὁ Θεός, μὲ τὸ δικό Του τρόπο, θὰ ἐλευθερώσει τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς καὶ θὰ τοὺς ὑψώσει πάλι στὴν γραμμὴ τους. Καὶ θὰ ἐπανέλθει τὸ Βυζάντιο. Καὶ ξέρετε γιατί; Διότι οἱ Εὐρωπαῖοι λαοὶ θὰ ξαναενωθοῦν. Ποιὸς θὰ τοὺς καθοδηγεῖ; Δὲν κρατᾶει κανεὶς. Μόνο ἐμεῖς κρατᾶμε τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη.



Ὅποιος κυνηγᾷ τὸν πλοῦτο, ἔχει πάντοτε ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ χρήματα. Ὅποιος ἀδιαφορεῖ γιὰ τὸν πλοῦτο, εἶναι πάντοτε πλούσιος. Γιατί ἀληθινὸς πλοῦτος δὲν εἶναι τὸ νὰ πλουτίζεις, ἀλλὰ τὸ νὰ μὴ θέλεις νὰ πλουτίζεις. Καὶ νὰ τί ἐννοῶ: Ὑπάρχει πλούσιος ποὺ ἀπ' ὅλους ἀρπάζει, καὶ ὑπάρχει πλούσιος ποὺ σ' ὅλους δίνει. Ὁ ἕνας πλουτίζει μὲ τὸ νὰ συνάζει, ὁ ἄλλος μὲ τὸ νὰ προσφέρει. Ὁ πρῶτος σπέρνει στὴ γῆ, ὁ δεῦτερος στὸν οὐρανό. Καὶ ὅσο καλύτερος εἶναι ὁ οὐρανὸς ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ, τόσο καὶ ἡ εὐφορία του εἶναι μεγαλύτερη ἀπὸ τὴν εὐφορία τῆς γῆς. Γι' αὐτὸ ὁ Κύριός μας παραγγέλλει: *Μὴ μαζεύετε θησαυροὺς πάνω στὴ γῆ. Νὰ μαζεύετε θησαυροὺς στὸν οὐρανό.*

Πουλήστε τὰ ὑπάρχοντά σας καὶ δώστε τὰ χρήματα στοὺς φτωχοὺς. Ἀποκτήστε πορτοφόλια ποὺ δὲν παλιώνουν, πλούτη μόνιμα στὸν κόσμον τοῦ Θεοῦ».

**Ἄγ. Ἰωάννης Χρυσόστομος**

## Τιμωρεῖ ὁ Θεός;

Τοῦ κ. Μιχαὴλ Ε. Μιχαηλίδη, Θεολόγου.

Ἐνα ἐρώτημα προβάλλεται συχνὰ καὶ ἀπὸ πολλούς: «Τιμωρεῖ ὁ Θεός»; Εἶναι δυνατό, ὁ Θεὸς τῆς ἀγάπης, νὰ τιμωρεῖ τὰ πλάσματά Του, εἴτε σὲ τοῦτο τὸν κόσμον, εἴτε στὴν κόλαση μὲ τὴν αἰώνια τιμωρία; Καὶ ἄλλοι μὲν ρωτᾶνε μὲ καλὴ προαίρεση, ἄλλοι, ἐπιστρατεύοντας τὴ λογικὴ καὶ ἀναζητᾶνε λύση, καὶ ἄλλοι κολλημένοι σὰ στρεῖδι στὴν πλάνη, παραμένοντες πεισματικά σὲ λάθος δρόμο.

Στὴν ἐρώτηση τούτη, ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη ἀπάντηση εἶναι, χωρὶς περιστροφές: Ἀσφαλῶς καὶ τιμωρεῖ ὁ Θεός. Ἀλλ' ἡ τιμωρία τοῦ Θεοῦ δὲν ἔχει καμιά σχέση μὲ τὴ νομικὴ ἔννοια τῆς ποινῆς.

Ὁ Θεὸς ἔχει ἄπειρη ἀγάπη, ἀλλ' εἶναι καὶ σὲ ἀπὸλυτο βαθμὸ δίκαιος. Ταυτόχρονα εἶναι καὶ ἄπειρη ἢ σοφία καὶ ἡ παντοδυναμία Του. Ἐπομένως, ὅταν μιλάμε γιὰ τιμωρία, ἐννοοῦμε στὴ θεολογικὴ γλῶσσα, τὰ παιδαγωγικὰ ἐκεῖνα μέτρα ποὺ λαμβάνει ἡ ἀπὸλυτη καὶ παντέλεια δικαιοσύνη τοῦ Θεοῦ, γιὰ ὅποιαδήποτε παράβαση, ποὺ ἐλεύθερα ἔπραξε ὁ ἄνθρωπος. Ὁ Θεός, καθὼς διδάσκει ὁ Μ.Βασίλειος, δὲν εἶναι αἴτιος τοῦ κακοῦ, ἀλλὰ τὸ αὐτεξούσιο τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ἡ ἐλευθερία του. Ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος, μάλιστα, φτάνει στὸ σημεῖο νὰ ὁμολογεῖ, ὅτι, *ὀλίγα ὧν ἡμάρτομεν μεμαστιγώμεθα*. Δηλαδή, λίγη εἶναι ἀκόμα ἡ τιμωρία μας, μπροστὰ στὶς τόσες παραβάσεις καὶ ἁμαρτίες μας.

Ὅ,τι ἐπιτρέπει ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀποβλέπει στὴ σωτηρία τῆς ψυχῆς μας. Ἡ τιμωρία εἶναι διδάσκαλος θεογνωσίας, λέγει ὁ Κύριος Θεοδώρητος. Ἰδιαίτερα στὸ θέμα τῶν τιμωριῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ, πολὺ σημαντικὲς εἶναι οἱ ἀπὸ ψεῖς τοῦ ἱεροῦ Χρυσοστόμου, ὁ ὁποῖος λέγει ὅτι, ὁ Θεὸς «τὴν τιμωρίαν ἔνεκεν νοθεσίας ἡμῖν ἐπάγει». Καὶ προσθέτει: «Αἱ τιμωρίαι αἱ παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, φιλανθρωπία μᾶλλον εἰσιν ἢ τιμωρία». Ἄν, δηλαδή, τὶς καλοξετάσουμε, θὰ διαπιστώσουμε τὴ φιλανθρωπία μᾶλλον τοῦ Θεοῦ. Μάλιστα, *ἕκαστον τιμωρίας εἶδος, ἀγαθότητος γέμει πολλῆς*.

Παντοῦ ὁ μέγας τοῦ ἄμβωνα κήρυκας, βλέπει καὶ ἀνιχνεύει τὴν ἀγάπη καὶ τὴ σοφία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἐπίκαιρος ὁ λόγος τοῦ Παύλου: *Τὶς ἔγνω νοῦν Κυρίου;* Ποιὸς γνωρίζει τὰ σχέδια τοῦ Θεοῦ; Εἶναι ἀνεξιχνίαστες οἱ βουλές Του. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ πάλι ὁ ἱερὸς Χρυσόστομος, θὰ προβάλλει ἰσχυρὰ τὰ ἐπιχειρήματά του: *Ἀπειλεῖ τὴν τιμωρίαν ἵνα φύγωμεν τὴν πείραν τῆς τιμωρίας, φοβεῖ τῷ λόγῳ, ἵνα μὴ κολάσῃ τῷ ἔργῳ*.

Ἀκόμα κι ὅταν ἀπειλεῖ ὁ Θεός, τὸ κάμνει γιὰ νὰ μᾶς προφυλάξει ἀπὸ τὸ κακὸ καὶ τὶς συνέπειες τῆς ἁμαρτίας. Καὶ πρέπει νὰ ξέρονμε, λέει, ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς οὔτε πάντας ὁμοῦ κολάζει, οὔτε πάντας κατ' ἀξίαν. τὰ

κριτήρια τοῦ Θεοῦ δὲν εἶναι γιὰ ὅλους τὰ ἴδια. Κάποτε, μάλιστα, *εἶδος εὐεργεσίας τὸ κολάζειν*.

Καταπληκτικὴ καὶ ἡ ἐπόμενη παρατήρησή του: *Ὡσπερ γὰρ διὰ τὰ νοσήματα τὰ φάρμακα, οὕτω διὰ τὰ ἁμαρτήματα αἱ κολάσεις*. Καὶ μὴ ξεχνᾶς, λέγει, ὅτι, δίδωσί σοι προθεσίαν ὁ Θεός, ὥστε ἀπονίφασθαι, ὅταν δὲ ἐπιμένῃς, ἐπάγει λοιπόν τὴν τιμωρίαν. Μὲ τὴν τιμωρία, δηλαδή, σοῦ δίνει ὁ Θεὸς εὐκαιρία γιὰ νὰ προσέξεις ἀπ' τὴν ἁμαρτία. Ὅταν ὅμως ἐσὺ ἐπιμένεις νὰ πράττεις τὸ κακό, τότε ἐπιφέρει τὴν τιμωρία. Καὶ αὐτά, σὲ σχέση μὲ τὴν τιμωρία τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ τὴν παραβάσει τῶν ἀνθρώπων, τὴν ὁποῖαν ἐπιτρέπει καὶ παραχωρεῖ ὁ Θεός, σὲ ὅσους καὶ ὅποιους κρίνει ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἡ πανσοφία Του.

Ἀλλὰ ἡ ἀποψη μερικῶν, ὅτι, ὁ Θεὸς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ τιμωρήσῃ τὸν ἁμαρτωλὸ ἀνθρώπο—καὶ μάλιστα, αἰώνια—εἶναι ἐσφαλμένη. Προσεγγίζει τὴ μεγάλη πλάνη τοῦ Ὁριγένη γιὰ τὴν «ἀποκατάσταση τῶν πάντων» ὅτι, δηλαδή, μετὰ ἀπὸ μιὰ μακρὰ περίοδο κάθαρσης τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν στὴν κόλαση, στὸ τέλος θὰ ἀποκατασταθοῦν καὶ θὰ σωθοῦν ὅλοι.

Σὲ τούτη τὴν ἀποψη, ὁ Καθηγητὴς Ἀνδρέας Θεοδώρου ἀπαντᾷ: «Ἀγάπη καὶ δικαιοσύνη εἶναι δύο βασικὲς θεῖες ιδιότητες, ποῦ ἡ μία δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ καταργήσῃ οὔτε ν' ἀναπληρώσῃ τὴν ἄλλη, ἀλλὰ ὑπάρχουν ἐνεργῆς καὶ συνταιριασμένες στὴ θεότητα, ὡς ἔκφραση ἐξωτερικὴ τῆς ἀπειρης θείας βουλής. Χρειάζεται προσοχή. Διότι, ὅταν λέμε ὅτι ὁ ἀγαθὸς Θεὸς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ τιμωρήσῃ τὸν ἁμαρτωλὸ ἀνθρώπο, κάνουμε σύγχυση τῶν θεῶν ιδιοτήτων, καταργοῦμε τὴν θεῖα δικαιοσύνη καὶ σὲ τελευταία ἀνάλυση, φθείρουμε τὴν ἔννοια τοῦ Χριστιανικοῦ Θεοῦ. Βέβαια, ὁ ἴδιος ὁ ἀνθρώπος, ὡς ἐλεύθερος, κολάζει τὸν ἑαυτό του, ἀνάλογα μὲ τὸν τρόπο ποῦ ὁ ἴδιος ἐπιλέγει καὶ ἀκολουθεῖ». Προσθέτει καὶ μιὰ ὠραία παρατήρηση, λέγοντας ὅτι, «ἂν καὶ ἡ θεωρία τῆς ἀποκαταστάσεως εἶναι πολὺ ἐλκυστικὴ, δὲν εἶναι, ὡστόσο, καὶ ἀληθινή». Καὶ καταλήγει: «Ὅτι ἡ κόλαση εἶναι αἰώνια, ἀποτελεῖ ἄρθρο βεβαίωτα τῆς πίστεως».

Ἐάν δὲν πρόκειται νὰ ὑπάρξῃ αἰώνια κόλαση, τότε, *φάγομεν καὶ πίωμεν, αὔριον γὰρ ἀποθνήσκομεν* (Α΄ Κορ. 15:32). Ἡ αἰωνιότητα τῆς κόλασης εἶναι ρητὴ διαβεβαίωση τῆς Γραφῆς: *Καὶ ἀπελεύσονται οὗτοι εἰς κόλασιν αἰώνιον, οἱ δὲ δίκαιοι εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον* (Ματθ. 25:46).

Ζωή, θάνατος, κρίση. Τὸ τρίπτυχο τοῦ ἀνθρώπου προσώπου. *Ἀπόκειται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἅπαξ ἀποθανεῖν, μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο κρίσις*. (Ἑβρ. 9:27). Μετὰ τὸ θάνατο ἀκολουθεῖ ἡ μερικὴ κρίση, καὶ στὴ συνέχεια, ἡ τελικὴ κρίση καὶ ἡ αἰώνια ζωὴ. Κατὰ τὸν ἱερὸ Χρυσόστομο: «Οὐκ ἔδωκας δίκην ἐνταῦθα. διὰ τοῦτο μάλιστα πίστευε γέενναν εἶναι καὶ κόλασιν,

ἐπειδὴ δίκην ἐνταῦθα οὐκ ἔδωκας». Καὶ σύ, ὁ ἀσεβὴς καὶ ἁμαρτωλός, λέγει, ἐπειδὴ δὲν δικάστηκες καὶ δὲν τιμωρήθηκες ἐδῶ, ὅσο ζοῦσες, γιὰ τοῦτο νὰ 'σαι βέβαιος, ὅτι θὰ ὑπάρξῃ γέεννα καὶ κόλαση αἰώνια.

Ἄς ἰκετεύουμε τὸν Κύριο, ὥστε ν' ἀξιωθοῦμε νὰ δώσουμε *καλὴν ἀπολογία τὴν ἐπὶ τοῦ φοβεροῦ βήματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ*.



### Οἱ Δοκιμασίαι Εἶναι Ὅπως ἡ Λάσπη καὶ τὸ Κερί

Γέροντα, βλέποντας κανεὶς τὴν ἐφημερίδα, τὴν εἰδήσει, τὸ τί συμβαίνει στὴ γειτονιά μας, στὸν κόσμον ὁλόκληρο, διαπιστώνει ὅτι εἶναι διάχυτος ὁ πόλεμος, ἡ ἀρρώστια, ὁ καρκίνος, οἱ δοκιμασίαι. Γιὰ τὴν ἁμαρτία ὁ Θεὸς τῆς Ἀγάπης αὐτά;

Νὰ ξέρετε ὅτι ὁ καλὸς Θεὸς δὲν θέλει νὰ ἐκδικηθεῖ κανέναν. Ὁ Θεὸς δὲν θέλει νὰ γίνῃ δῆμιος μὲ κανέναν. Ὁ Θεὸς πολλὰ φορὲς συλλαμβάνει καὶ παίρνει τὴν ἀσθένεια τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ τὸν βοηθᾷ νὰ ἔρθῃ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν. Νὰ μαλακώσῃ ἡ καρδιά του. Θυμᾶμαι τὸν Γερό-Παῖσιο ποῦ ἔλεγε: «Πολλὰ φορὲς οἱ δοκιμασίαι εἶναι ὅπως τὴ λάσπη καὶ τὸ κερί. Ὅταν ὁ ἥλιος δώσῃ πάνω στὴ λάσπη, ἡ λάσπη γίνεται πρὸς σκληρὴ. Ὅταν ὁ ἥλιος δώσῃ εἰς τὸ κερί, τὸ κερί λιώνει. Δὲν γίνεται σκληρό.» Ἐξαρτᾶται ὁ ἀνθρώπος σὲ ποῖαν ὁμάδα εἶναι καὶ πὼς φτιάχνει τὴν ζωὴν του γιὰ νὰ μπορέσῃ ἡ δοκιμασία νὰ μὴν τὸν σκληρύνῃ, ἀλλὰ νὰ τὸν μαλακώσῃ, νὰ τὸν ταπεινώσῃ. Νὰ τὸν φέρῃ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν καὶ νὰ καταλάβῃ τὴν δοκιμασίαν, ὅτι ὁ ἀνθρώπος ἔχει ὁρισμένους δυνατοὺς καὶ μόνον. Βλέπετε ἕνα ἀνθρώπο, μιὰ στάλα αἵματος νὰ μπεῖ στὸ μυαλό του, ἀχρηστεύτηκε ὁ ἀνθρώπος.

Γέρον Ἐφραίμ Βατοπαιδινὸς  
Καθηγούμενος I. M. Βατοπαιδίου Ἁγ. Ὁρους



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

## IDAHO TEEN SACRIFICES HER LIFE TO DELIVER HER SON

By Melanie Jones, *International Business Times*, December 28, 2011  
(another worthy story that “escaped” the eye of the mass media).



Jenni Lake, an Idaho teen who stopped her cancer treatments to avoid aborting her pregnancy, died just 12 days after she gave birth to a baby boy she named Chad Michael. She passed away with no regrets about the decision to choose her son’s life over her own, and to risk everything she’d hoped for in the new hope that he might be healthy.

Jenni Lake was diagnosed with cancer when she was 16 years old. She was a sophomore at Pocatello High School when she began to get painful migraines. After visiting her family doctor, she traveled to Salt Lake City for an MRI. There, a scan revealed a two-centimeter mass nestled in her brain. Her biopsy revealed stage three astrocytoma, a form of cancer centered in the brain and spinal cord that is almost always fatal. She had three tumors in her brain and three on her spine. Chemo and radiation treatments had to begin immediately.

Sometime later, she discovered that she was also pregnant. Jenni Lake was faced with a tremendous decision. Her oncologist told her that the cancer treatments keeping her alive could not be given to a pregnant woman without damaging or killing the fetus. She had two options: get an abortion and continue being treated for cancer, or keep her pregnancy and prepare to die. Her family believed and hoped that since the tumors had already starting to shrink, and the baby was ten weeks old, she had a strong chance of carrying the baby to term and then starting the cancer treatment again.

So Jenni Lake chose option two, and paid for it with her life. At the end of her pregnancy, Lake weighed only 108 pounds. Her cancer has come back with a vengeance in the many months since she stopped treatment, and she had already begun to reconcile herself to death.

“I’m done,” Lake told her nurse just before delivering a healthy baby boy. “I did what I was supposed to do. My baby is going to get here safe.”

A day after the November 9 birth, Mrs. Phillips learned that her daughter’s decision to forgo treatment for tumors on her brain and spine so she could carry the baby would have fatal repercussions. The cancer had marked too much

territory. Nothing could be done, Mrs. Phillips said. As Jenni Lake began to fade away, the returning astrocytoma ravaging her body and making her weaker by the day, family members report that she never showed any regret for her decision. Nor did her vision, sometimes a casualty of the final stages, fade in the final days of her illness.

When Jenni Lake’s baby son was placed beside her for the last time, her father says she smiled at Chad Michael, her pride and joy, the reason she was about to die.

“I can kind of see him,” she told her father. It would be the last words she ever said. It was only 12 days past the birth—half spent in the hospital and the other half at home—before Jenni was gone. She passed away on Nov. 21, 2011, shortly before Thanksgiving Day. She was not yet 18 years old.

In the month since her death, Jenni Lake’s family and friends continue to rightfully insist that her legacy is not one of tragedy, but of heroic sacrifice. And that is the legacy they will be passing on to her son Chad Michael. The family gathered at their ranch style home in Pocatello, Idaho this Christmas with a tree decorated with ornaments that reminded them of Jenni, who passed away in a bedroom just down the hall.

In the photograph, the baby’s ruddy cheeks and healthy weight offer a stark contrast to the frail girl who gave birth to him.



Worldly sincerity contains indiscretion. Truth is truth; but if, at some point, you speak the truth without discernment, this is not truth. For example, it is true that so and so is mentally disturbed. But if you go and tell this truth, you do not benefit anyone. Or, another person says, “In order to be sincere, I am going to sin in the public square.” This is not sincerity.

Anyone who has a great degree of discernment, also has: noble love, sacrifice and humility; and he speaks—even the bitterest truth—with great simplicity, sweetened with kindness. The benefits reaped are greater than those of sweet words, as bitter medicines do greater good than sweet syrups. Truth, when used without discernment, can be criminal. Some people act in the name of truth, and commit crimes. When someone has sincerity without discernment, he can do double harm—first to himself and then to others; because this sincerity is without compassion.

Whoever wants to be truly sincere, should start by being sincere with himself; for that’s where spiritual sincerity begins. When someone is not sincere with himself, he’s—at least—only fooling and wronging himself. But when he behaves without sincerity towards others, he sins mortally; because he fools others.

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

## A MUSLIM TURK IS BAPTIZED

By Fr. Zacharias Kerstyuk, the story was transcribed by Elena Verbenina and translated from Russian by Fr. Andrew Phillips (Source: [http://www.pravoslavie.ru](http://http://www.pravoslavie.ru))

*This story comes from Archpriest Zacharias Kerstyuk, who works for the external relations department of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. Fr Zacharias was the attending to the parishioners at St Andrew's Church at the Ukrainian Embassy in Tripoli in Libya, but now serves in Spain.*

† † †

He is Turkish, a ship's captain and travels all over the world. He is 49 years old and has spent 25 of those year at sea and has been in all sorts of difficult situations. He is a clever man and speaks five languages.

This spring his ship was in the Atlantic, when it suddenly broke down. The main engine stopped and the generators locked up. They drifted for a long time, unable to even send out an SOS. There was nothing to eat or drink and the crew began to get alarmed. Everything they tried ended in failure. Despair set in. There were over thirty in the crew, Georgians, Syrians, Turks and two Ukrainians. Their only hope was in God.

The Muslim captain began to pray for help. He also saw how sincerely the Georgian Orthodox prayed. Then, he himself turned to Jesus: "If Jesus helps me, then I'll become a Christian," he decided. The day was not over before the engines came back to life.

They reached Algiers on the smoky engines, but the port would not take them in. All they would allow was for them to bring food and drink on board and anchor in their territorial waters. They stood at anchor for a whole month there, waiting for spares from the shipping company. Refusing to wait any longer for help from the ship's owners, the IMO (International Maritime Organization) ordered them to proceed to the nearest European port. This was Cartagena in Spain. The ship stopped five miles from shore—it had run out of fuel. With great difficulty they were towed into port.

Since there were Ukrainians on board and I am a Ukrainian, I was at once contacted about the irregular situation in which our nationals were involved. I went aboard and met the Ukrainians who introduced me to the rest of the crew. I spoke at length with the captain about Orthodoxy, about God. I saw that the man had truly made a life-changing conscious decision.

I had three preparatory talks with the captain. Since this was a very important step, I received his wife's permission.

These people had been born into Islam but only kept it superficially, just like the many who among us call themselves Orthodox only because they were baptized in it in childhood.

The wife said that she accepted her husband's decision, as that was his will. The man said to me: "I want to be Orthodox, Jesus helped me, I'll keep everything that is asked of me because I believe." Seeing such a firm will in him, I baptized him in the Mediterranean Sea. He told me that he had never sensed or felt the presence of God in Islam, but he could feel Jesus in his heart. The next Sunday the captain came to communion for the first time.

The captain invited his friends to the service, six of whom also took communion. I have not seen people taking communion the way he did, with such devotion, for a long time. At that moment another two sailors in the crew also expressed their desire to get baptized. We are having preparatory talks and I hope to baptize them next week.

At my first talk with the captain, I asked: "Aren't you afraid that the Muslim sailors will cut your throat?" He answered: "So what, I'll lock the doors tighter at night."

During the talk Muslim sailors came along and looked at me in such a way that I felt frightened. The second meeting was much more pleasant and the third very easy. I answered their questions. We spoke about life, joked and I showed them crosses which I offered them. They took them, put them on and I heard them talking to each other: "Perhaps it's true and Jesus did help?"

After that I went to see them again and I saw them, Syrians and Turks, still wearing the crosses around their necks as before. Having been at death's door, these people can now make a lot more sense of life.



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 (+215)

## THE END OF THE WORLD AND THE ANTICHRIST

By Bishop Alexander Mileant (+2005).

In Holy Scripture the term Antichrist has a twofold meaning. In a broad and general sense this word indicates every person hostile to Christ's teaching (the Greek prefix *anti* signifies against). This is the meaning St. John the Theologian used to speak of many Antichrists in his epistles. In a particular sense the name Antichrist signifies a definite person—the leading adversary of Christ who is to appear before the end of the world. The appearance of this definite Antichrist on the world scene constitutes the final and decisive sign that the Second Coming of Christ is at hand.

Close to the end of the world, all the growing aversion towards God on the part of mankind will become, so to speak, concentrated in this definite man of sin, who will lead the final desperate battle against Christianity. Of the characteristics and actions of this Antichrist, we read in St. Paul's second epistle to the Thessalonians: *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. Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming. Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.* (2 Thes 2:3-12)

A number of external factors will have to play a significant role in strengthening the power of the coming Antichrist. Possibly, during his time the threat of nuclear and biological warfare, or the specter of a horrible political and economic crisis will hang over mankind. Governments will be on the verge of collapse, and nations in turmoil and revolt. Then, on the murky waters of a global cataclysm, a "brilliant" leader

will surface as the sole savior of mankind. Backing him will be a formidable organization with the goal of global domination. With its support, the Antichrist will emerge with a prepared program of socio-economic reforms, which will be actively supported and advocated by the mass media. What will be the secret of the Antichrist's persuasive power and his ability to direct world events? We can envision him as a gifted and inflammatory orator, like Lenin or Hitler. His ideas and propositions will be readily accepted because they will express the thoughts and feelings of the masses of his materialistic epoch.

One would think that many Jews, opposed to Christianity, will see in the Antichrist their long-awaited Messiah, while the majority of people will be inspired by hopes that he will put an end to wars and crises and will bring about a general prosperity. Having in mind such a blindness among people

who fail to see the catastrophe hanging over their heads, St. Paul wrote: *For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.* (1 Thes 5:2-6).

The Antichrist will not be content with mere political authority and outward transformations. Praised by all, he will become so conceited that he will regard himself as a superhuman endowed with divine power. He will proclaim a new world-view—a new religion and new morality in place of "outmoded" and "unsuccessful" Christian teaching. Possessed by delusions of grandeur, he will present himself as God and sit in the temple, (possibly in Jerusalem's rebuilt temple, where the King Solomon's temple used to be) demanding divine worship.

According to St. Paul, the activities of the Antichrist will be extremely successful, being supported by satan, and accompanied by lying signs, false miracles, and all kinds of unrighteous deception of the perishing. By the Antichrist's signs and miracles we should understand not only the deceptive tricks aimed to delight the crowd but also the highest accomplishments of science, which will be exploited to strengthen his rule (According to Rev 13:15, the false prophet will have the *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 be killed.*)



The most sophisticated form of surveillance on people will be used to control their activities. Those wishing to buy or to sell anything will have to present official permission to do so (According to Rev 13:17, *no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name*) Radio, TV programs, and the press will strive to shape the most favorable image of the world Leader in order to strengthen his political power and admiration among people. Any person daring to question the genius of this Leader, or disagreeing with his measures, will be ridiculed, persecuted, and ultimately destroyed as a public enemy.

An image of the coming Antichrist is portrayed by the prophet Daniel in the appearance of a minor horn. Here the prophet describes the characteristics of the Syrian King Antioch Epiphanos—the cruel persecutor of the faithful Jews about 175-164 BC—as a prototype of the Antichrist. In the book of Revelation, the Antichrist is depicted as a beast, coming out of the sea. Some of the characteristics of this monster remind us of the Roman emperors Nero and Domitian, fierce persecutors of Christians in the first century AD. These emperors were contemporaries of St. John who wrote the book of Revelation. To avoid confusion, one should bear in mind that in the book of Revelation, the term beast applies not only to the personal Antichrist but also to the whole governmental machine of his anti-Christian empire.

The distinctive features, personality and mode of operation of the Antichrist are described by St. Cyrill of Jerusalem in his Catechetical Letters (4 and 15) and by St. Ephraim the Syrian in his Homily on the Coming of the Lord and the Antichrist. The famous Russian philosopher Vladimir S. Soloviev attempted to depict the coming of the Antichrist in his *Tale of the Antichrist*, but his representation and occasionally joking style do not convey all the horror and utter gloom which will threaten mankind in its final period of existence. His tale is a naive idyll when compared to the horror which will dominate people who have lost God.

Studying the historical prototypes of the coming Antichrist, like the king Antioch Epithanos, emperors Nero and Domitian, Lenin and similar “genius” rulers, certain general traits come to mind. All of them in general were worthless people, both in the intellectual and the governmental arena. They came to power not because of their exceptional talents or achievements but because of favorable circumstances. They were more conspirators than governors. All of them suffered from disproportionate delusions of grandeur; in their personal lives they were liars, immoral and cruel. One may thus speculate that the final world Leader will be distinguished by similar traits.

If we take literally the time indicated by Holy Scripture regarding the rule of the beast, the activity of the Antichrist will last for about 3-1/2 years. It will end with the Second Coming of Christ, the General Resurrection of the Dead,

and the Last Judgment (Daniel 7:25; Rev 11:2-3, 12:13, 13:5). The Revelation of St. John mentions the appearance of two witnesses, who will proclaim the truth, perform miracles, and, upon completion of their witness, be killed by the Antichrist. These witnesses have been foreseen by some Fathers of the Church to be the two righteous of the Old Testament period—the patriarch Enoch (Gen 5:23) and the prophet Elijah (2 Kings 2:11)—because only these two men did not die but were taken alive to Heaven. They will have to return to earth to complete their earthly mission, to suffer for the Word of God and to die as all mortals should.

In summary, such is the teaching of the Word of God about the approaching times, and the behavior and sentiments of the people prior to the Second Coming of Christ. Although these signs are overt and clear, the ability to see and realize them nevertheless will depend on a person’s spiritual keenness. Most people, preoccupied with their material well-being, will be incapable of understanding what is happening before their eyes, or the point toward which the world is headed. For this reason the Savior warned His disciples: *And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.* (Lk 21:34-36)



Socrates was once asked to define or describe the term “Educated Man.” His response amazed many as he did not refer to the accumulation of scholastic knowledge. Here is what he said: “Education is a matter of an individual’s character as often exemplified through his behavior. Here is the type of men whom I consider to possess true education:

1. All those who are capable of controlling unpleasant situations instead of being controlled by them.
2. Men who confront all of life’s events bravely and logically.
3. All those who maintain the highest level of honesty and integrity in their dealings and transactions.
4. Those who consistently confront unpleasant events and unpopular people benevolently.
5. Men that consistently maintain life’s pleasures in check.
6. All those who never allow misfortunes or failures to defeat their spirit.
7. And, finally, those men who have not been corrupted by success, good fortune, glory, and wealth.”



## THE LAW OF LOVE

By St. John of Kronstadt.

*And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. [Lk 6:31]*



The Holy Evangelist Luke speaks in the Gospel about the teaching and commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ, about how we should be with people in society, so that we might please both God and people, make also a good name for ourselves, have a good conscience, and be made worthy of the promised, incorruptible Heavenly Homeland for our wise behavior in our earthly homeland (Lk. 6:31-36).

What wise, lofty, saving, and truly divine teachings and commandments! But how badly our daily life conforms to them. The Lord teaches us to treat people as we would have people treat us; that is, simple-heartedly, well-wishing, sympathetically, patiently. He set our own selves as a measuring stick for our relationship to other people; and this measuring stick, this scope, is love. *For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.* (Eph 5:29) But in community it often happens to the contrary—peoples' relationships to each other are often quite wrong, not distinguished by a spirit of simplicity and sincerity, love and good will, love of peace, meekness and condescension, purity and holiness, sympathy and compassion, and Christian patience. They are often distinguished by a spirit of insincerity and duplicity, coldness and haughtiness, deceit and ill will, or impurity and sensuality, low egoism and self-seeking.

The root, cause, or source of one or another way of treating one person or another is within a person's heart. *A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth evil things.* (Mt. 12:35) This occurs either from his natural character traits, or from an either good or bad upbringing; from various passions, inclinations, or habits—for example, of seeking certain pleasures; from either good or bad examples; from life circumstances; from more or less comfortable material standards; from the milieu in which he lives or his standing in society; from various life lessons or trials; and finally, from how much he has been or not been penetrated with the Gospel spirit of Christ.

Thus, the measuring stick of relationships to others is simplicity and sincerity, good will, and love for all—this is the best side of relationships to others. But not rarely, the nature of relationships to others is cunning, suspicion,

dislike, rudeness, envy, extreme selfishness, self-seeking, partiality, vanity, ambition, vainglory, sensuality, or extreme haughtiness; that is, a high opinion of one's self, which seeks to humiliate others.

In general, we can observe more insincere relationships amongst people than pure-hearted ones, because the whole heart is infected to a greater or lesser extent with the impurity of sin, covered with the corruption of the passions. For, *Who can say: My heart is clean, I am pure from sin?* (Prov 20:9), say the Scriptures. Therefore, some words are smooth as oil, and yet they are poison darts. Thus, according to the teaching of our Savior, the measure of our relationships to others should be correct love for our own selves. As we would like others to treat us, so shall we treat them—that is, simply, pure-heartedly, meekly, lovingly, trustingly, condescendingly, sympathetically, patiently.

The Lord offers Himself as an example to us, and we should ceaselessly look at it and learn from it. *Learn of me,* He says, *because I am meek, and humble of heart.* (Mt. 11:29) The Apostle Paul says, *Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.* (Heb. 12:14) He also teaches, *Let love be without dissimulation... Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another... Distributing to the necessity of saints (that is, to your brother Christians); given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink... Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good. Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.* (Rom 12:9-21; 13:1)

These are the rules of behavior for Christians amongst themselves, which the Apostle Paul wrote for us in his epistle to the Romans. Each of us is equally obligated to uphold them. Where is the highest motivation for us to treat each other this way? In the image and likeness of God, in which man is created, and in that we are the children of the One Heavenly Father, members of Christ, branches of the one vine of Christ, sheep of His one rational flock. We partake of the one life bread of Christ, and drink from the same chalice of His divine Blood. We have drunk of the same Holy Spirit, and we await the same incorruptible, eternal inheritance. This is our motivation for mutual, sincere, loving relationships!

*For if ye love them which love you,* says the Lord in the Gospel, *what thank have ye? For sinners (that is, idolaters), also*

*love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? For sinners also do even the same; that is, as long as they receive benefit, which means that they love only themselves—for they only love in their benefactors the benefit they receive.*

*And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? For sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again, and in this case you love only yourself, your own gain, and not the benefit of others, and do not satisfy his need perfectly. If Christians do not fulfill these natural virtues, then they are much worse than pagans, who do by nature the things contained in the law (Rom. 2:14), not having the power of grace; while Christians, as we know, have received all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue (2 Pet. 1:3), for the fulfillment of all Christ's commandments.*

Look, Christian, into the mirror of the divine commandments and know what you are. Do you at least love those who love you? Or do you not even love them at times? Do you do good to your benefactors? Do you lend to those who pay back loans? Do you tend towards self-interest and lack of trust? Many want to be satisfied with love only for those who love them, and do not want to force themselves to love those who hate them, or who have animosity toward them. O Christian, with such pagan love you will stand ashamed at the Last Judgment. *But love ye your enemies, the Lord continues, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.* (Lk 6:35).

It would seem that our Savior is giving us a difficult task by commanding us to love our enemies and to do good to them. The corrupt human heart says, "This is impossible, this is against nature and common sense!" It is really only difficult for the corrupted heart, a heart not renewed or strengthened by grace. But for the heart reborn by grace, this is an easy thing, for the Lord helps the believer in everything; and we can see many such examples in the lives of the saints.

But to whom should we give, not expecting anything in return? To poor people, those of lowly station, for whom repaying a debt is extremely difficult and often impossible. But wealthy people should always repay their debts; lenders do not sin if they seek repayment of debt by honest means or lawsuits. Otherwise, this would be harmful pandering to unconscionable people, who think to get rich easily at the expense of others. *Be ye therefore merciful, says the Lord, as your Father also is merciful.* (Lk 6:36)

The Lord requires mercy from Christians, His children by grace, like unto the mercy of the Heavenly Father. Truly, if Christians are the children of the Heavenly Father, bought

with the blood of His Son, and they are promised incorruptible, eternal blessedness in the Heavenly Homeland, then they should manifest love and mercy in this life towards their brothers, corresponding in greatness to the love and mercy which God has toward them, and to the boundless greatness of incorruptible blessings, the great honor and heavenly crowns that have been promised them.

*Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another,* says the holy Apostle John the Theologian (1 Jn 4:11).

Amen.



However, it is important to come to an understanding about the hearing of the word of God. Years ago many people were not able to read. Today the opposite is true. Almost everyone can read. So in the past, the basic source of knowledge leading to the truths of God was the sense of hearing, the ear. People could not read. However, even today the hearing of the word is very basic for all people because the word is offered through a living tongue. And much like the word of God, it is alive; so when the word of God is heard through a living tongue, this makes it especially graceful. The word of God in this case can be presented along with the personal experiences of the speaker. And this can be a source of courage to listeners as far as the application of the word of God goes. It is not the same if you hear it on the radio, or if you read it in a book. It is something very different. This is why we go to hear the word of God and we do not rely on reading alone. Reading does not replace the spoken word. And the hearing of the spoken word does not replace reading. These two parallel things are equally important.

I must also tell you that the hearing of the word of God presupposes the presence of other people. The word of God is connected with the presence and vision of other people. In other words, it is connected with the Church. And this is very important, to have the word of God be heard in the Church, very beneficial and of great value. On the other hand, if I sit by myself listening to a cassette, it is like eating canned food according to the holy one of Florina, Metropolitan Avgoustinos Kantiotis. The canned word of God does not have the same freshness as the live participation. Of course I will listen to my cassettes; I will read my books; but I will also make it a point to go and hear the living word of God, to get together with the other faithful, my other brothers and sisters in Christ. This is so I can become a presence and show forth the Church, not only in its liturgical worship but also in the hearing of the word of God.

Elder Athanasios Mitilinaios (+2006)

## THE MYSTERY OF BAPTISM

By Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, from "Orthodox Dogmatic Theology: A Concise Exposition," St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood Press, 1994.

### The Establishment of the Mystery of Baptism

In the first place in the series of Mysteries of the Holy Church stands the Mystery of Baptism. It serves as the door leading into the Kingdom of Grace, or the Church, and it grants access to participation in the other Mysteries. Even before the establishment of the Mystery of Baptism, the Lord Jesus Christ in His conversation with Nicodemus indicated the absolute necessity of it for salvation: *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of Heaven.* When Nicodemus expressed his perplexity, How can a man be born when he is old, the Saviour replied that the new birth would be accomplished by water and the Spirit: *Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit.* (Jn 3:3-6)

The establishment of this grace giving Mystery occurred after the Resurrection of Christ. Having appeared to His disciples, the Lord said to them that He had received from His Father all authority in Heaven and on earth, and He continued: *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the World.* (Mt 28:19-20) And to this He added: *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.* (Mk 16:16).

On the day of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, when after the speech of the Apostle Peter his listeners asked what they should do, the Apostle Peter said to them: *Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.* In the same book of the Acts are recorded several instances of baptism performed by the Apostles. Thus, the Apostle Peter baptized Cornelius (ch. 10), the Apostle Paul baptized Lydia and those of her household (ch. 16), as well as the guard of the prison with his whole household.

### The Meaning of the Mystery

The mystical grace-given aspect of baptism is indicated in the above-cited passages of Sacred Scripture; baptism is a

*new birth*, and it is performed *for the salvation of men* (Mk 16: 16). Moreover, setting forth the grace-given significance of Baptism, the Apostles in their Epistles indicate that in it we are *sanctified, cleansed, justified*; that in baptism we *die to sin* so as to walk in renewed life; we are *buried with Christ*, and we arise with Him. Christ loved, the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word (that is, baptism with the utterance of the words instituted to accompany it: Eph 5:25-26). *Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God* (I Cor 6:11).

We are buried with Him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4), baptism is called the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5). As for the subjective side—the state of soul of the person being baptized—it is indicated by the Apostle Peter, who calls baptism the promise of a good conscience toward God (1 Pet 3:21). Through baptism at the same time one is joined to the Church.

### The Means of the Performance of the Mystery

The comparison of baptism with a washing by water, with the grave, and other such things indicates that this Mystery is to be performed through immersion. The Greek word βαπτίζω (vaptizo) itself signifies "to immerse." Concerning the baptism of the eunuch by Philip, we read in

the book of Acts: They went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip (Acts 8:38). As an exception, the Church acknowledges the Christian martyrdom of the unbaptized as a "baptism of blood." Baptism by sprinkling the Church acknowledges but does not approve it; it is considered as being not canonical.

The immersion in water is done three times with the pronouncement of the words: "*The servant of God (name) is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,*" in accordance with the commandment given by Christ Himself (Mt 28:19). Thus was it performed in the ancient Church. The Epistle of the Apostle Barnabas already mentions this, and Tertullian directly indicates that *the manner of baptism is prescribed*, indicating the words of the Savior concerning baptism; Tertullian also testifies to the triple immersion and likewise indicates one particularity:



that the one being baptized is asked to renounce satan and his angels, and then to confess the Faith.

In certain passages of Sacred Scripture there is mention of baptism *in the Name of the Lord Jesus* (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48). According to the interpretation of the ancient Fathers, the expression *in the Name of the Lord Jesus* means *according to the command and tradition of Christ*, or as a testimony of one's faith in Christ. Thus, this expression does not deny the fact of baptism *in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*, as it has seemed to certain historians of Christianity who are of the "rational school." It is entirely natural that the writer of the book of Acts, the Holy Apostle Luke, and St. Paul as well (Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27; 1 Cor 1:13), when speaking of baptism, *in Christ* have in mind the differentiation of this baptism from the baptism of John or anything similar to it; baptism, *in Christ* is THE the baptism into Christianity. Thus even now there is sung at Baptism, "*As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ*" (Gal 3:27).

### The Indispensability of Baptism

Since in baptism a man receives (in place of the old existence he had) a new existence and life and becomes a child of God, a member of the Body of Christ or the Church, an inheritor of eternal life, it is therefore evident that baptism is indispensable for all, including infants, so that growing in body and spirit they might grow in Christ. In the Apostolic Scriptures many times there is mention of the baptism of whole families (the house of Lydia, the house of the prison guard, the house of Stephan—1 Cor 1:16), and nowhere is it mentioned that infants were excluded from this. The Fathers of the Church, in their instructions to the faithful, insist upon the baptism of children. St. Gregory the Theologian, addressing Christian mothers, says, *Do you have an infant? Do not give time for harm to increase. Let him be sanctified in infancy, and from youth dedicated to the Spirit, Do you fear the seal because of the weakness of nature, as someone fainthearted and small in faith? But Anna even before giving birth promised Samuel to God, and after his birth she quickly dedicated him and raised him for the sacred garment, without fearing human weakness, but believing in God.*

However, it is indispensable in this matter that the persons who offer the infant for baptism should recognize all their responsibility for the raising up of the baptized infant in Christian faith and virtue. We read an instruction concerning this, for example, in the work *On the Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, known under the name of St. Dionysius the Areopagite, which has always been highly respected by the Church: *It was pleasing to our divine instructors to allow infants also to be baptized, under the sacred condition that the natural parents of the child should entrust him to someone among the faithful who would instruct him well in divine subjects and then take*

*care for the child as a father, given from above, and as a guard of his eternal salvation. This man, when he gives the promise to guide the child in pious life, is compelled by the bishop to utter the renunciations and the sacred confession.*

How important for us is this instruction which comes from the ancient Christian Church! From it we see what responsibility the sponsor or godfather of the baptized person takes upon himself. How careful the parents of the child must be in choosing a sponsor! Of course, in a normal Christian family, the parents themselves usually teach their children the truths of faith and their moral duty. But the contemporary breakup of the foundations of social life compel one to be on guard so that the child will not remain without Christian guidance. And even under favorable conditions, a sponsor should keep close spiritual contact with his godchild and be ready at any needful moment to come to him with heartfelt Christian help.

The tenth paragraph of the Symbol of Faith reads: *I confess one baptism for the remission of sins.* This signifies that **baptism in the Orthodox Church, as a spiritual birth, if it has been performed as a sacred rite correctly through triple immersion in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, cannot be repeated.**

### Baptism: the Door to the Reception of Other Grace-giving Gifts

As we see from the above-cited statements of the holy Apostles, and likewise from the whole teaching of the Church, baptism is not only a symbol of cleansing and washing away the defilement of the soul, but in itself is the beginning and source of the Divine gifts which cleanse and annihilate all the sinful defilements and communicate a new way of life. All sins are forgiven, both original sin and personal sins; the way is opened for a new life; opened is also the possibility to receive the gifts of God.

Further spiritual growth depends upon the free will of man. But since temptation is capable of finding sympathy in the nature of man who from the day of his first fall into sin has had an inclination to sin, therefore moral perfection cannot be accomplished without battle. A man finds help for this inward battle in the whole grace-given life of the Church...

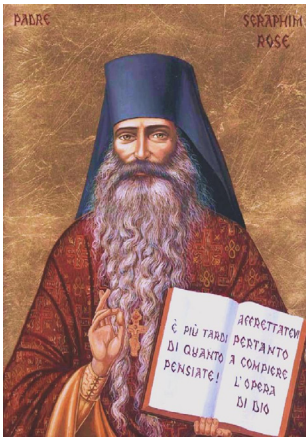


**A**gainst impure thoughts, use the spiritual sword: the name of [Jesus]. You must offer repentance to the Lord, and you must not hide anything from your spiritual father. Wounds that are exposed heal quickly.

St. Joseph the Hesychast (+1959)

## WHY STUDY THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES?

By Blessed Hieromonk Seraphim Rose.



The subject of this article is watching for the signs of the times.

First of all, we have to know what is meant by the phrase “signs of the times.” This expression comes straight from the Gospel, from the words of our Savior in Matthew 16:3. Christ tells the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to Him, *Ye can discern the face of the sky*, that is, tell what the weather will be; *but*

*can ye not discern the signs of the times?* In other words, He’s telling them that this has nothing to do with science, or with knowing our place in the world, or anything of the sort. It’s a religious question. **We study the signs of the times in order to be able to recognize Christ.**

During the time of Christ, the Pharisees and Sadducees did not study the signs of the times in order to see that Christ had come, that the Son of God was already on earth. There were already signs that they should have recognized. For example, in the book of Daniel in the Old Testament, there is a prophecy concerning the seventy weeks of years, which means that the Messiah was to come about 490 years from the time of Daniel. Those Jews who read their books very carefully knew exactly what this was all about, and at about the time that Christ came they knew that it was time for the messiah.

But this is an outward sign. More importantly, the Pharisees and Sadducees should have been watching for the inward signs. If their hearts had been right with God, and if they had not been merely trying to fulfill the outward commandment of the law, their hearts would have responded and recognized God in the flesh when He came. And many of the Jews did—the apostles, the disciples, and many others.

This same passage in the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. Matthew speaks further about signs. Our Lord told the Jews, *An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah.* The events of the Old Testament contain prefigurations of events in the New Testament. When Jonah was three days in the belly of the whale, this was a prefiguration of our Lord’s being three days in the tomb. And this sign—the sign of Jonah—was given to the people of Christ’s time.

Our Lord was telling the Pharisees and Sadducees that an evil and adulterous generation seeks for spectacular events,

that is, fire coming down from heaven, or the Romans being chased away, angels manifesting themselves and banishing the foreign government of the Romans, and things of that sort. Christ told them this kind of sign would not be given. An evil and adulterous generation seeks after this, but those who are pure of heart seek rather something more spiritual. And the one sign that is given to them is the sign of Jonah. Of course, it is a great thing that a man should be three days in the grave and then rise up, being God.

Thus, from our Savior’s words, we know that we are not to watch for spectacular signs, but we are rather to look inwardly for spiritual signs. Also, we are to watch for those things which according to Scripture must come to pass.

*He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*



Your greatest joy is to have a son who sanctifies the Precious Gifts, whose honor it is to forgive sins, and who intercedes constantly for your family. Had he become a king, he would not have obtained the glory of a priest. During the Divine Liturgy the priest is higher than the angels because even the angels at that hour tremble as they serve at the Mystery of the Holy Eucharist.

**Elder Amphilokhios of Patmos (+1970)**

The priest’s cassock is superior to trousers. A cassock has double grace!

**Blessed Papa-Dimitri Gagastathis (+1975)**

When one bishop asked Hieromonk Callistratus, the saintly abbot of the Monastery of Mileseva, “What is the most important thing for a priest?”, he answered, “The most important thing for a priest is to communicate—first with the Master, afterwards with the lords of the Master’s servants, and finally with the Master’s servants. The Master is He who is called the Christ, the lords of the Master’s servants are the Saints, and the Master’s servants are the people of this world. For it has been said, he who communicates only with the Master’s servants does not care about the Master, and provokes the wrath of the Master.”

**St Nikolai Velimirovich (+1956)**

God lights the priest up as a lamp and places him upon the lamp stand of His light-bearing throne.

**Saint Isidore of Pelusium (+449)**

## THE FUNCTION OF THE PROPHET

*By Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas (OCA), August 9, 1995.*

The function of the prophet of the Old Testament was twofold: to foretell the future, the coming of the Messiah and the fulfillment of the vocation of the Hebrew people; to call them to account for their sins and disobedience and for their departures from God's righteousness. The prophets called them to repentance for their transgressions, chief among which was being influenced by the idolatrous and barbarous religions of their neighbors and adopting their ways.

Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, in His own prophetic ministry, condemned false religion and false thinking about religion, and, in doing so, He deeply offended the self-righteous religious leaders who were responsible for guiding the people of Israel.

Throughout her history, the Church has been beset by the assaults of the Evil One, heresies that would undermine the doctrine of the person of the Lord Himself (Arianism, Nestorianism, Monophysitism, etc.), surrender to pressures for conformity (iconoclasm), and politically motivated alliances (the false union of Florence). Many Christians, at times a majority of them, were attracted by these destructive movements, and were offended at the prophetic voice, which was never lacking, that perceived the real dangers in them. The Church, by God's grace, overcame them all and reached the twentieth century intact.

It is my opinion that many Orthodox Christians today are willing for the Church to surrender to the temptation to conform to the role that contemporary society assigns to religion: to bless this world's so-called progress in the moral and spiritual spheres, to reject all exclusivity or uniqueness in the interest of unity, and to concern itself with the world of the here and now rather than with the world to come. Many are unaware of the primary danger that the Church faces: the gradual infiltration of materialistic, humanistic and secularist thinking, that the ground is being laid for a western captivity far worse than those of the past, latinizations and protestantizations.

Prophetic voices are needed to call us all back to the realization that the forces of this world still want to destroy the Church, the precious Truth that has been entrusted to her—to understand that what the Church has is essential for the life of the world and its salvation and that this cannot be mitigated. These voices will offend—so be it!

One such voice is that of the author of "Letters to Father Aristotle." Frank Schaeffer has come to us from where that secularism has already done a great deal of its damage, and he is in a unique position to discern the signs of the times. He is an intensely loyal Orthodox layman, loyal also to his local church and the jurisdiction to which it belongs. He is one of us, and we American Orthodox should give heed to what he has to say.

## ELDER EPHRAIM OF VATOPAIDI ON RUSSIA, THE ANTICHRIST AND THE BELT OF THE THEOTOKOS

*November 29, 2011, Interfax News Service.*

The Abbot of the Vatopaidi Monastery, Archimandrite Ephraim, who accompanied the Belt of the Mother of God from the Monastery to Russian cities, believes in Russia's special spiritual mission. "Russia won't collapse. On the contrary, it will strengthen and play the leading part in saving Orthodoxy on Earth," the Bulletin of St. Andrew the First-Called Foundation quoted Father Ephraim as saying.

As was reported, a week after the Belt of the Mother of God departed from Russia, belts blessed on the holy relic will be distributed in one of Moscow's churches. Father Ephraim advised to wear them as a usual belt. "You can wash it, but it's better not to pour the first water down the drain, but rather to water a tree as the belt is blessed," he said.

Addressing some Orthodox believers who are expecting the apocalypse soon, the priest recommended to study "Christ, rather than Antichrist." He said, "You know, it's an unhealthy spiritual condition when people talk much of the Antichrist, the end of the world, and so on. Some people are too much involved in the topic," he said.

After visiting St. Petersburg the relic was taken to other Russian cities. The last destination was Moscow. The belt returned to Athos on November 28. The shrine has left Greece for the first time in the history of its stay in the Vatopaidi Monastery.

For many years Vatopaidi monks have made small belts, blessed them on the belt of the Mother of God and distributed them among believers. They take a bobbin with 300 meters of ribbon, which is blessed on the reliquary with a special prayer. Then the bobbin is handed over to the monks: they divide the fabric for a meter and a half belts, twist them and put them into plastic bags together with a text telling them about the shrine and instructions how to pray and observe a fast.

Orthodox believe that thanks to the intercession of the Holy Virgin these belts help cure female infertility, and bear and give birth to a healthy child. As the belt of the Mother of God is kept on Athos where women are not allowed, Russian women have a rare chance to kneel down before the shrine, pray for granting children, health for relatives and friends, and bring prosperity to Russia.



Christ the Lord called that Church the Catholic Church which maintains the true and saving confession of the faith.

St. Maximus the Confessor

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## THE ANGELS AS STARS IN HEAVEN

By St. John of Kronstadt (+1908).

*Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire*

[Pss 104:4]

These are the words of the King and Prophet David. With these words, he said that God created the wisest minds, the fleshless spirits, servants loyal to Him, who burn with eternal love for God, fulfill God's will and abide in the unapproachable light of the Throne of Glory. The Lord created the angels as wise, powerful, eternally holy, pure and within Divine truth. Ponder this, dear brothers and sisters, delve into this with your minds. The Lord divided all the angels into nine orders, or ranks: Thrones, Dominions, Principalities, Powers, Authorities and others; they all obey each other—the lower orders obey the higher orders. In the likeness of the heavenly hierarchy, the Lord established three ranks in the Church Militant: the bishops, priests and deacons, who also obey each other.

God created an innumerable multitude of angels. When you came to liturgy this morning, maybe someone among you looked into the sky and saw how many stars fill the heavens. There are so many stars that it seems that the sky is filled with poppy seeds. No mortal can count them all. Likewise, one cannot count the number of holy angels. One star shines brighter, another less so, but each of them is greater than our world, larger than the Earth; this is known and has been proven.

The countless multitude of angels abide in the heavens, in the presence of God, fulfill God's will and eternally glorify God.

Some of them are appointed by God to humans, these are our guardian angels who protect people throughout their lives, from baptism until death, keep evil away from them and direct them to all truth and goodness. If a person lives righteously, lives well, he will feel this himself. Think, dear brothers and sisters, how close the angels are to us!

You know or have heard of the miracle performed by Archangel Michael. A few impious people had decided to kill St. Archippus and the destroy the church he built; they channeled a great river towards the church, but Archangel Michael appeared to Archippus, consoled him, split a cliff asunder, and directed the river towards the rocky chasm, so that the water did not flood the church, and the church and Archippus were saved.

Angels are not prone to sin, they cannot even think sinful thoughts—their notions and desires are pure. They are imparted with all perfection, they are always wise, always strong, always good. They firmly established themselves in love for God, in holiness and truth and do not fall into sin, only some of them, a third overall, saddened the Lord with their disobedience and could no longer be citizens of the heavens; they were cast down by God.

And you, my friends, should emulate the angels loyal to God, and after being citizens of the earthly fatherland, you will become co-citizens with them of the heavenly fatherland. Emulate the angles, especially since you are created in the image of God; this gift is common to angels and men. Honor the angels, my friends, imitate their holiness, their love and devotion to God, and you will be worthy of the blessed live in heaven together with them. 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]

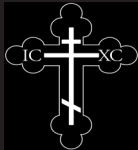
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## MAN IS SENTENCED TO IMMORTALITY

*By the Blessed Father St. Justin (Popovich), Archimandrite Of Chelije (+1979).*

Man sentenced God to death; by His resurrection, God sentenced man to immortality. In return for a beating, He gives an embrace; for abuse, a blessing; for death, immortality. Man never showed so much hate for God as when he crucified Him; and God never showed more love for man than when He arose. Man even wanted to reduce God to a mortal, but God by His resurrection made man immortal. The crucified God is risen and has killed death. Death is no more. Immortality has surrounded man and all the words.

By the resurrection of the God-Man, human nature has been led irreversibly onto the path of immortality, and has become dreadful to death itself. For before the resurrection of Christ, death was dreadful to man, but after the resurrection of Christ man has become more dreadful to death. When man lives by faith in the risen God-Man, he lives above death, out of its reach; it is a footstool for his feet: *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?* (I Cor 15:55) When a man belonging to Christ dies, he simply sets aside his body, like clothing, in which he will again be vested on the day of dreaded judgement.

Before the resurrection of the God-Man, death was the second nature of man: life first, death second. But by His resurrection, the Lord has changed everything: immortality has become the second nature of man, it has become

natural for man; and death is now unnatural. As before the resurrection of Christ, it was natural for men to be mortal, so after the resurrection of Christ, it is natural for men to be immortal.

By sin, man became mortal and transient; by the resurrection of the God-Man, he became immortal and perpetual. In this is the power, the might, the all-mightiness of the resurrection of Christ. Without it, there would have been no Christianity.

Of all miracles, this is the greatest miracle. All other miracles have it as their source and lead to it. From it grow faith, love, hope, prayer, and love for God. Behold: the fugitive disciples,



having run away from Jesus when He died, return to Him because He is risen. Behold: the centurion confessed Christ as the Son of God when he saw the resurrection from the grave. Behold: all the first Christians became Christian because the Lord Jesus is risen, because death was vanquished. This is what

no other faith has; this is what lifts the Lord Christ above all other gods and men; this is what, in the most undoubted manner, shows and demonstrates that Jesus Christ is the One True God and Lord in all the worlds.

Because of the resurrection of Christ, because of His victory over death, men have become, continue to become, and will continue becoming Christians. The entire history of Christianity is nothing other than the history of a unique miracle, namely, the resurrection of Christ, which is unbrokenly threaded through the hearts of Christians from one day to the next, from year to year, across the centuries, until the dreaded judgement.

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Man is born, in fact, not when his mother brings him into the world, but when he comes to believe in the risen Christ, for then he is born to life eternal, whereas a mother bears children for death, for the grave. The resurrection of Christ is the mother of us all, all Christians, the mother of immortals. By faith in the resurrection, man is born anew, born for eternity.

"That is impossible!" says the skeptic. But you listen to what the risen God-Man says: *All things are possible to him that believeth!* (Mk 9:23). The believer is he who lives, with all his heart, with all his soul, with all his being, according to the Gospel of the risen Lord Jesus.

Faith is our victory, by which we conquer death, faith in the risen Lord Jesus. Death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin. The Lord has removed the string of death. Death is a serpent; sin is its fangs. By sin, death puts its poison into the soul and into the body of man. The more sins a man has, the more bites through which death puts its poison in him.

When a wasp stings a man, he uses all his strength to remove the sting. But when sin wounds him, this sting of death, what should be done? One must call upon the risen Lord Jesus in faith and prayer, that He may remove the sting of death from the soul. He, in His great loving-kindness, will do this, for He is overflowing with mercy and love. When many wasps attack a man's body and wound it with many stings, that man is poisoned and dies. The same happens with a man's soul, when many sins wound it with their stings: it is poisoned and dies a death with no resurrection.

Conquering sin in himself through Christ, man overcomes death. If you have lived the day without vanquishing a single sin of yours, know that you have become deadened. Van-

quish one, two, or three of your sins, and behold: you have become younger than the youth which does not age, young in immortality and eternity. Never forget that to believe in the resurrection of the Lord Christ means to carry out a continuous fight with sins, with evil, with death.

If a man fights with sins and passions, this demonstrates that he indeed believes in the risen Lord; if he fights with them, he fights for life eternal. If he does not fight, his faith is in vain. If man's faith is not a fight for immortality and eternity, then tell me, what is it? If faith in Christ does not bring us to resurrection and life eternal, then what use is it to us? If Christ is not risen, that means that neither sin nor death has been vanquished, than why believe in Christ? For the one who, by faith in the risen Lord, fights with each of his sins there will be affirmed in him gradually the feeling that Christ is indeed risen, has indeed vanquished the sting of sin, has indeed vanquished death on all the fronts of combat. Sin gradually diminishes the soul in man, driving it into death, transforming it from immortality to mortality, from incorruption to corruption. The more the sins, the more the mortal man. If man does not feel immortality in himself, know that he is in sins, in bad thoughts, in languid feelings. Christianity is an appeal: Fight with death until the last breath, fight until a final victory has been reached. Every sin is a desertion; every passion is a retreat; every vice is a defeat.

One need not be surprised that Christians also die bodily. This is because the death of the body is a sowing. The mortal body is sown, says the Apostle Paul, and it grows, and is raised in an immortal body. (I Cor 15:42-44) The body dissolves, like a sown seed, that the Holy Spirit may quicken and perfect it. If the Lord Christ had not been risen in body,

what use would it have for Him? He would not have saved the entire man. If His body did not rise, then why was He incarnate why did He take on Himself flesh, if He gave it nothing of His Divinity?

If Christ is not risen, then why believe in Him? To be honest, I would never have believed in Him had He not risen and had not therefore vanquished death. Our greatest enemy was killed and we were given immortality. Without this, our world is a noisy display of revolting stupidity and despair, for neither in Heaven nor under Heaven is there a greater stupidity than this world without the resurrection; and there is not a greater despair than this life without immortality. There is no being in the world more miserable than a man who does not believe in the resurrection of the dead. It would have been better for such a man never to have been born.

In our human world, death is the greatest torment and inhumane horror. Freedom from this torment and horror is salvation. Such a salvation was given the race of man by the Vanquisher of death—the risen God-Man. He related to us all the mystery of salvation by His resurrection. To be saved means to assure our body and soul of immortality and life eternal. How do we attain this? By no other way than by a Theanthropic life, a new life, a life in the risen Lord, in and by the Lord's resurrection.

For us Christians, our life on earth is a school in which we learn how to assure ourselves of resurrection and life eternal. For what use is this life if we cannot acquire by it life eternal? But, in order to be resurrected with the Lord Christ, man must first suffer with Him, and live His life as his own. If he does this, then on Pascha he can say with Saint Gregory the Theologian: *Yesterday I was crucified with Him, today I live with Him; yesterday I was buried with Him, today I rise with Him.* (Troparion 2, Ode 3, Pascha Matins)

Christ's Four Gospels are summed up in only three words. They are: Christ is risen! Indeed He is risen! In each of these words is a Gospel, and in the Four Gospels is all the meaning of all God's worlds, visible and invisible. When all knowledge and all the thoughts of men are concentrated in the cry of the Paschal salutation, "Christ is risen!", then immortal joy embraces all beings and in joy responds: "Indeed He is risen!..."



When a person does not sharpen his mind thinking about God, but instead spends his time plotting and sharpening various schemes, he surrenders himself to the devil. It would have been better for him to have lost his mind completely. Then, at least, he would have some extenuating circumstances on the day of judgment.

Elder Paisios the Athonite

## THE FEAT OF REFRAINING FROM JUDGING

By Fr. Inok Vsevolod (Filipiev).

The venerable Maximilian the Confessor says: "Should we not be horrified and trembling... for God the Father, not judging anyone, *but hath committed all judgment unto the Son Himself* (Jn 5:22), the Son: *Judge not, lest ye be judged.* (Mt 7:1); *Do not judge and you will not be judged* (Lk 6:37), and likewise an Apostle: *Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes.* (1 Cor 4:5) and also: *...for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself...* (Rom 2:1), when I say it, it is so: people, crying about their sins, took judgment from the Son's hands and began to judge and condemn one another, as if they were sinless! Heaven is horrified by this, and the earth trembles." (*Christian life on The Philokalia*, Harbin, 1930).

Centuries pass, but still people stand before the very same unassailable wall of condemnation and cannot overcome it. Adam in Paradise, justifying himself before God, condemned Eve; Cain, having condemned his brother Abel in his soul, killed him; the crime of condemnation brought the Jews to the killing of the Messiah; and for us, the new Canaanites and Pharisees, condemnation pushes us to the daily spiritual murder of our brothers.

Condemning tortures even those very ones who condemn, denies them peace, forces them to constantly monitor the actions of those around them and poisons their souls with bitterly venomous suspicion.

One modern elder said: "Getting up onto the path of salvation is easy: one must just firmly resolve to never judge anyone from this moment forth." The mind can understand these words, but how to put them into effect? For this it is absolutely necessary to understand where the reason for the condemnation lies. And the reason is in our false self-appraisal: those who judge others consider themselves to be in the right, place themselves about their brother, and see themselves as being rid of those sins which they accuse those around them of. **He who has not acknowledged his own personal spiritual corruption will never cease condemning his neighbors.**

However, we are all infected with sin, aren't we? There is no person who could live and not sin—we all languish in the prison of our own flaws, all pray for relief in the life of the next era, and all need Godly aid. Again, many know this in theory, but when it comes down to it, withholding judgment becomes painfully difficult; we are driven to condemn. Why? Because condemnation has become our passion, and like any passion, it brings us a great reward, a fascinating, thinly-veiled pleasure. How "nice" it is to condemn someone in a friendly conversation, laugh at

someone's shortcomings, harbor malicious sentiments and engage in similar innuendo... But surely we don't disbelieve the Bible warning us that someday we will have to answer for every single word, and thus even for this false joy, intent to condemn.

The battle with the passion of condemnation, as with any other passion, cannot be theoretical; it must be every minute of every day, for all our lives; it must be based on tight self-discipline and on being attentive of our words and thoughts. In other words, without smart behavior, without spiritual feats, one cannot succeed here. What, in this case, must the said behavior and feats consist of? They must consist of attentive servitude in all facets of life. We will also definitely notice that during the course of the day the paths to condemnation, veritably invisible underwater rocks, surround us on all sides and threaten to shipwreck our soul. With God's help, we can gradually learn to avoid encounters with these submarine rocks; in those places where we used to be overcome with irritation and annoyance, we will be calm; where we used to be angry, we will be silent, where we tried to justify ourselves, we will be calm.

Where we judged our neighbors—we will pray for them and for ourselves, so that we do not fall into similar sins. Very quickly we will notice that our souls are not weighed down with condemnation, that they experience genuine spiritual happiness and lightness of being; and we are wiser—the chains and fetters of other's sins no longer anger us.

And as judging others brings with it other forms of corruption: anger, discord, and murder, so will victory over condemnation reveal the true path to those who would do good: clean prayer, peace, harmony, full awareness of one's sins. It is for this very reason that all manner of demons try to catch the soul in a net of condemnation and barriers to the cleansing of this passion. In turn, and for the same reason, we do not have the right to put down the fight with condemnation, but must immediately begin carefully watching after ourselves.

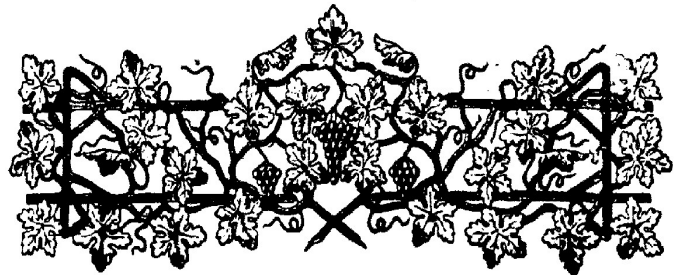
“Watching after ourselves” is the golden rule of Christian morality, but so often scorned by Christians. How much effort we exert on external affairs, and how little strength we leave for our own selves. But without these internal affairs, nothing on the outside could possibly lead to salvation...

Let's say that Russian Orthodox patriots fight for the rebirth of Orthodox tsarist Russia, and this is good; but at the same time we cannot forget that the rebirth of Russia and the tsar will not bring the light of Christ into our souls if we are weighed down by corruption. Can one imagine a sadder ending: in Russia there would rule an Orthodox tsar, but in our hearts become a hellish dusk! But this is exactly what will happen to those Christians, even if they

are patriots, who do not watch after themselves, do not lead invisible battles with their own passions, and do not care for their souls.

The Most Holy Seraphim of Sarov said that the goal of Christian life is reaching for the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit is in fact called the Heavenly King. Both are confirmations in our souls of the power of this King and it should be our top priority. For this it is necessary to step onto the path of smart action, the path of spiritual conflict with passions; and to conquer them one by one, with God's help. And the battle can begin with the very passion of condemnation and judging.

In conclusion, I will once more repeat the wise words of the elder: **“Getting up onto the path of salvation is easy: one must just firmly resolve to never judge anyone from this moment forth.”**



Our holy God lets temptations come upon those who love Him in order to teach them the art of war. The grace of God withdraws and then clouds of temptation rise and one reaches the point of saying, “See! God has abandoned me!” Then he has myriads of thoughts, strangulation of soul, and darkness and lapses everywhere!

Holy Wisdom, our holy God, causes all these, and we learn that only God is able to save us and that without God all our own works are rubbish and chaff, which all scatter with the slightest wind of temptation, and it becomes apparent that we are rusty things, feeble and unable to face any temptation whatsoever without the aid of our holy God's grace.

Through such things the grace of divine providence teaches us the lesson of self-knowledge; that is, of true, cognizant, solid, bedrock humility; for without it, it is impossible to build a spiritual house. He abandons us to the point of despair, so that we are compelled to cry out to Him mournfully and lamentably, so that our mouth and heart may be sanctified.

Temptations, therefore, bring about all these things. Indeed, let us pray that God will protect us from temptations, but when they come, we must pass through them with patience and wisdom to profit from them. Therefore, have patience in all things and thus save yourself.

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

## CONSCIENCE: THE VOICE OF GOD IN MAN

By ROCOR Bishop Alexander (Mileant) of Buenos Aires and South America (+2005).

### The Action of Conscience in Man

One woman, by reason of poverty, took something from a store and carried it away surreptitiously. No one saw her. But from that moment a certain unpleasant feeling gave her no peace. She had to go back to the store and return what she had taken. Having done this, she came home with a feeling of relief. Such cases, in which people are forced to act contrary to their advantage or their pleasure, are impossible to enumerate.

Each individual is acquainted with his inner voice which at times reproaches and persecutes him as it were, and at other times encourages and gladdens him. This refined, innate moral feeling is called conscience. Conscience—it is a kind of spiritual instinct which differentiates between good and evil more quickly and more clearly than the mind. He who follows his conscience will not regret his actions.

In the Holy Scriptures the conscience is also referred to as the heart. In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord Jesus Christ likens the conscience to the eye, by means of which a person sees his moral state: *The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.* (Mt 6:22). He also likens it to an adversary with whom a man must make peace before he appears before the Judge: *Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison.* (Mt 5:25). This last comparison reveals the distinguishing characteristic of the conscience: to oppose our bad actions and intentions.

Our personal experience likewise proves that this inner voice, called the conscience, is located outside our (fallen human) control and expresses itself independently, quite apart from our desire. Just as we cannot convince ourselves that we are full when we are hungry, or that we are rested when we are tired, so, too, we cannot convince ourselves that we have done something good when our conscience tells us that we have done something bad.

Some see in Christ's words concerning the worm that dieth not, which will torment sinners in the life to come, a reference to the gnawing of the conscience: *Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.* (Mk 9:44).

Similar torments of the conscience were expressively and colorfully described by A. S. Pushkin in his dramatic work, *The Avaricious Knight*: "Conscience—A clawed beast, scraping the heart; conscience is an uninvited guest, a tiresome interlocutor, a churlish creditor; it is a witch, before whom the moon and the tombs grow dim." And further the knight with terror recalls the pleading and the tears of all those whom he pitilessly robbed.

### A Common Natural Law

The presence of the conscience gives evidence that indeed, just as the Bible relates, in the very process of creating man, God placed within the depths of his soul His image and likeness: *And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.* (Gen 1:26). For this reason it is customary to call conscience the voice of God in man. As a moral law written directly on man's heart, it acts in all people, independent of age, race, upbringing and level of development.

Anthropologists who study the morals and customs of various underdeveloped and primitive peoples testify that to this day they have yet to find, even among the wildest savages, a people lacking some form of an understanding of good and evil. Furthermore, many tribes not only place a high value on good and despise evil, but for the most part their views agree on the essence of the one and the other. Many even primitive tribes stand just as high in their understanding of good and evil as many cultured peoples. Even among those tribes which place a positive value on certain deeds which are unacceptable according to prevailing opinion, there is in general a marked consensus in the moral consciousness of all people.

In the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans, St. Paul writes in some detail concerning the actions of the inner moral law in man. The Apostle reproaches the Jews who, knowing the written law of God, often transgress it, whereas the pagans, which have not the [written] law, do by nature the things contained in the law: *For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.* (Rom 2:14-15).

Apostle Paul also explains how this law of conscience sometimes rewards and at other times punishes a man. Each person, therefore, no matter who he may be, Jew or Gentile,



has a feeling of uneasiness, of distress and oppression, when he does something wrong or indulges in licentiousness; an inner feeling gives him to know that such actions will incur God's punishment: *Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.* (Rom 1:32). At the coming Dreaded Judgment, God will judge people not only according to their faith, but also according to the witness of their conscience. For this reason, as the holy Apostle Paul teaches, the faithful may attain salvation if their consciences bear witness before God of a life of good deeds.

The conscience has a highly refined sense of good and evil. If man were not marred by sin, he would have no need of the written law. His conscience could rightly guide all his actions. The need for a written law arose after the Fall, when man, darkened by passions, ceased to hear clearly the voice of his conscience. But in essence, both the written law and the inner law of the conscience speak about the same thing: *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.* (Mt 7:12).

In our daily relations with people we subconsciously place greater trust in a man's conscience than in written laws and rules. After all, one cannot track down every violation, and even in matters of the law "something drew a breath, you turn around, it's gone." Whereas the conscience contains in itself the eternal and immutable law of God; and because of this, normal relations between people are possible only as long as people have not lost within themselves the voice of conscience.

#### Examples of the Action of the Conscience Described in the Bible

**N**o book explains so precisely all the various manifestations of the conscience in man as does the Bible. We shall cite here some cases in which the conscience is most apparent.

In examining negative examples we see how evil deeds evoke in man feelings of shame, fear, grief, guilt and even despair. Adam and Eve, for example, having tasted the forbidden fruit, felt ashamed and hid with the intention of concealing themselves from God: *And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons... and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.* (Gen 3:7-8).

Cain, having killed his younger brother Abel out of jealousy, afterwards began to be afraid that some passerby would kill him: *Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me.* (Gen 4:14).

King Saul, persecuting the innocent David, wept from shame on learning that David, instead of taking revenge, had defended his life (I Kgs 26). The proud Scribes and Pharisees, who brought to Christ the woman caught in adultery, began to depart in shame when they saw their own sins written by Christ in the ground (Jn 8). When Christ chased the merchants and money-changers out of the temple, they left without protesting, knowing that it was wrong to turn the temple into a market-place (Jn 2).

Sometimes the pangs of conscience become so unbearable that a man prefers to cut short his life. The clearest example of this sharp gnawing of the conscience we see in the traitor Judas, who hung himself after he had betrayed Christ to the chief priests of the Jews (Mt 27:5). In general, sinners—both believers and unbelievers—subconsciously feel responsible for their actions. Thus, according to Christ's prophetic words, before the end of the world sinners, seeing the approach of God's righteous judgment, will ask the earth to swallow them up and the hills to cover them (Lk 23:30; Rev 6:16).

It sometimes happens that a man compassed about by anxieties does not hear the voice of his conscience. But later, when he comes to himself, he feels its pangs with double intensity. Thus:

—The brothers of Joseph, having fallen onto hard times, remembered how they had sold their younger brother into slavery and understood that they had been justly punished for this sin (Gen 42:21).

—King David, carried away with the beauty of Bathsheba, understood his sin of adultery only after he had been called to account by the prophet Nathan (II Kgs 12:13).

— Out of fear the fiery Apostle Peter renounced Christ, but upon hearing the cock crow he recalled Christ's prophecy and wept bitterly (Mt 26:75).

— The wise thief, hanging on the cross next to Christ, understood only just before he died that sufferings were sent to him and his comrade for their previous crimes (Lk 23:40).

—The publican Zaccheus, moved by Christ's love, remembered how he had offended people through his greed and resolved to recompense all those whom he had cheated (Lk 19:8).

On the other hand, when a man knows he is innocent, he finds in the clean witness of his conscience an unshakable support for hope in God. The righteous Job, for example, knew that the reason for his cruel suffering lay not with him but in the higher designs of God, and he hoped in God's mercy (Job 27:6). Similarly, when the righteous King Hezekiah lay dying from an incurable disease, he began to entreat God to heal him for the sake of those good deeds which he had earlier performed, and he became well (II Kgs 20:3). Apostle Paul, whose life was dedicated to God and the salvation of others, not only did not fear death, but, on

the contrary, he desired to depart from his perishable body in order to be with Christ (Phil 1:23).

There is no greater relief or happiness for the sinner than to receive forgiveness of sins and peace of conscience. The Gospel is filled with such cases as the sinning woman who with gratitude washed Christ's feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair (Lk 7:38).

On the other hand, disdain for the voice of the conscience and repeated falls into sin darken the soul to such an extent that a man can expect, as the Apostle Paul warns, the *shipwreck of his faith* (I Tim 1:19); i.e., he can become irrevocably immersed in evil.

### The Psychological Side of the Conscience

Psychology is concerned with the study of the nature of conscience and its relation to man's other moral capabilities. Psychology, when applied properly, tries to ascertain two things:

(a) Is conscience a natural human trait innate to man, or is it the result of upbringing and conditioned by those circumstances of life which affect man's formation?

(b) Is conscience a manifestation of the mind, the senses or the will of man, or is it a manifestation of some independent power?

In answer to the first question, a careful observation of the presence of the conscience in man convinces us that the conscience is not the fruit of upbringing or physical instincts, but possesses a higher, inexplicable origin.

For example, children give evidence of having a conscience before receiving any [moral] instruction from adults. If physical instincts dictated the conscience, it would prompt people to do what was pleasant and to their advantage. The conscience, however, very often forces a person to do precisely that which appears unpleasant and to his disadvantage. No matter how much the wicked may revel if they go unpunished, or how much good people may suffer, the conscience tells everyone that there exists a higher justice. Sooner or later each will receive a reward according to his deeds. For this reason, the most convincing argument for many people in support of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul is the presence of a conscience in man.

Concerning the mutual relationship of the conscience and man's other faculties—his mind, senses and will—we see that not only does the conscience tell a man what in and of itself is morally good or bad, but it obliges him to do without fail what is good and to avoid what is bad, accompanying the good deeds with a feeling of joy and blessedness, and wrong doings with a feeling of shame and torment. In these actions, which are proper to the conscience, are manifest rational, sensual and volitional aspects.

Of course, on its own the mind cannot discern some actions as morally bad and others as morally good. The mind can only distinguish between which of our or another's

actions are intelligent or stupid, expedient or inexpedient, advantageous or disadvantageous, and that is all. Meanwhile, for some reason the mind sometimes urges us to oppose the most seemingly intelligent or advantageous opportunities with morally good actions, to condemn the first and approve the latter. It deters in certain of man's actions not only a calculation or mistake, similar to an error in mathematical calculations, but also something vile, criminal. May we not therefore conclude that the conscience, acting upon the mind, sets before it purely moral reasons, independent from it in essence?

In turning to the manifestations of the conscience in the area of the will, we see that in and of itself the will is the ability in man to desire something, but that this ability does not command a man what to do. The human will, inasmuch as we know it in ourselves and in others, very often struggles against the moral law and strives to tear itself loose of its binding fetters. If the commanding power of the conscience were merely a manifestation of man's will, this struggle would not exist. Whereas the summons of the moral law certainly weigh upon our will. Inasmuch as it is free, the will can refuse to fulfill these summons, but never is it able to renounce them. However, even in its non-fulfillment of the demands of the moral law, the will does not go unpunished.

Finally, the sensory power of the conscience also must not be regarded solely as the sentient faculty of man's heart. The heart seeks pleasant feelings and turns away from what is opposed to these. Meanwhile, violations of the demands of the moral law are frequently accompanied by the most severe torments which cause the heart to be rent in two, and from which we can in no way escape, no matter how much we want or try. Clearly, the sentient power of the conscience also must not be regarded solely as a manifestation of the normal sensual faculty.

In view of all this, should we not acknowledge that the conscience appears to be a power independent of us, standing higher than man and reigning over his intellect, will and heart, although it is both contained and lives within him?

### On Preserving Purity of Conscience

**K**eepest thine heart with utmost care; for out of it are the issues of life. (Prov 4:23). With these words the Holy Scriptures summon man to preserve his moral purity.

But what is a sinful man to do? Having sullied his conscience, is he forever doomed? Fortunately, no! An enormous advantage that Christianity has over other religions lies in the fact that it opens the way and provides the means to a complete purification of the soul. This way consists in a repentant laying down of one's sins before the mercy of God, with the sincere intent to change one's life for the better. God forgives us for the sake of His Only-begotten Son,

Who on the Cross offered the redeeming sacrifice for our sins. In the Mystery of Baptism, and again in the Mystery of Confession and Holy Communion, God completely cleanses the conscience of a person from dead works (Eph 9:14). This is why the Church attaches such great significance to these Mysteries.

In addition, Christ's Church possesses that grace-giving power which gives the conscience the possibility to perfect itself, to become highly refined and manifest itself with great clarity. *Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God* (Mt 5:8). Through a clean conscience God's light begins to operate, ruling man's thoughts, words and deeds. In this blessed light a man becomes a vessel of God's Providence. Not only does he perfect himself spiritually and attain salvation, but he also contributes to the salvation of others, those who have contact with him. We recall Sts. Seraphim of Sarov, John of Kronstadt, Elder Ambrose of Optina and saints like them.

Finally, a clean conscience is a source of inner joy. People with clean consciences are calm, pleasant, desiring the good of others, thinking well of others. People with clean consciences have a foretaste already in this life of the blessedness of the Kingdom of Heaven!

*Neither greatness of authority, instructs St. John Chrysostom, nor wealth of riches, nor extensive power, nor physical might, nor a sumptuous table, nor elegant clothes, nor anything else a man may possess can give joy and peace of soul; this comes only from spiritual well-being and a good conscience.*



## IOCC SHOULD RECONSIDER SENATOR PAUL SARBANES AS HONORARY CHAIRMAN

By Ronda Wintheiser.



*From the Editor: We applaud the position taken by an Orthodox housewife on the atrocious act of abortion and the politically motivated appointment of Mr. Paul Sarbanes as the honorary chairman for Inter-*

*national Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC). Mr. Sarbanes is well known for his strong pro-abortion position and the many associated pro-death votes he cast as an influential Washington, DC politician. Abortion supporters have no business in the governance of the Orthodox Church or any of Her organizations.*

*We hope that Orthodox faithful will express similar dismay to the governance of the IOCC (and the Archdiocese) on this and any other similarly motivated position that stands in such strong contradiction with the dogma and the canons of His Church.*

† † †

**D**ear Mr. Triantafilou, board of directors, and the staff at IOCC:

I did finally receive a response to the e-mail and the letter I wrote recently asking you to reconsider your selection of Senator Sarbanes as an honorary chairman for the upcoming gala planned for May 8th. Thank you for it.

The letter read, in part, that: "Senator Sarbanes was selected as an honorary co-chairman for the event for his steadfast commitment and support for IOCC's ongoing humanitarian mission. While we recognize that you do have concerns about his participation, we hope you will not allow it to overshadow a 20-year legacy of positively impacting the lives of so many people."

I'm sure you hoped that such a carefully crafted letter would smooth this over and make me go away. But it's Great Lent, and one of the Scripture readings selected by the Church for Clean Monday just happens to be a warning from God about coming to worship Him with blood on our hands (Isaiah 1) — and I take that very seriously.

Do you realize that the argument made in the letter written by Rada Tierney for why I should continue to support IOCC is the same argument used to defend Planned Parenthood? "So what if they are the largest abortion provider in the world? They do so much good! Why allow your concerns about abortion to overshadow their legacy of positively impacting the lives of so many people?"

In Romans 16, St. Paul admonishes Christians to "associate with the lowly". As far as I can tell, there are none as lowly as unborn children, nor as needy, isolated, and vulnerable, and as we are about to celebrate on March 25th, Christ deigned to become an unborn Child Himself.

It isn't my choice to overshadow your "20-year-legacy" with the spectre of abortion—it's yours. You have made it clear it doesn't matter to you whether Senator Sarbanes supports killing unborn children as long as he keeps giving his money to you. That makes it painfully obvious that you prefer to associate with rich, powerful, politically correct figures than with lowly unborn children — or with nobody housewives like me, for that matter.

You have Senator Sarbanes' support, so you surely don't need mine; therefore, I am writing to request a refund of the \$100 check I wrote to IOCC on February 5th during the Super Bowl of Caring drive. It's not very much; I'm sure you won't miss it, and if you do, perhaps Senator Sarbanes will make up the difference.

Lord, have mercy on me, and on you all as well.

Ronda Wintheiser



## ST. MARY OF EGYPT: AN INSPIRATION TO ALL

*Adapted from various sources and articles.*

*From the Editor: There are a few of the many saints of our Church whose lives shine as great examples for all to follow. Studying them aids us in acquiring the motivation and ability to strive in our life-long struggle towards the attainment of salvation. This is the case with the breathtaking life story of St. Mary of Egypt. We “remember” her twice per year, once on her feast day (April 1<sup>st</sup>) and once on the fifth Sunday of Great Lent. Her life story is one that leaves us all with a great hope and understanding that some day, by the grace of God, we too can be saved, in spite of our sinful and unworthy state. She, against any and all reasonable odds, tamed and transformed the desert from a place of death to a place where everlasting life was attained. She truly is a spectacle before us all; she is there to remind all of what can be accomplished if prayer and fasting and labor are applied. May she serve as an inspiration to all of us and, through her intercessions, may we all achieve the desired fruit of salvation.*

† † †

### St. Mary's Life Story



One day she saw the crowds of pilgrims preparing to go to Jerusalem, to celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. She went along, announcing to her fellow travelers, “I have a body and that will serve as both fare and food for me.”

The trip was an eventful one, as Mary explored the outer limits of lust and passion with her companions (both those who were willing and those who were not). In Jerusalem, when the day of the Feast came around, Mary too set off for the church, drawn by the energy of the crowds thronging to venerate the True Cross. At the doors of the church, at its very threshold, Mary was driven back “by some kind of force.” Trying with all her might, she could not enter, although those around her went in with no difficulty at all. Then she understood: It was her own self that prevented her entrance, the sinfulness of her life that held her captive outside the church.

Scared and praying fervently to the Virgin Mary, with her heart open and clear, Mary begged forgiveness and again sought entry at the church. Guided then by a vision of the Theotokos, Mary left at once for the desert beyond the Jordan River, for there, her vision told her that she would find rest. On the way, she stopped at a church built on the river banks; there she was baptized and partook of Holy Communion. From there, she came to the desert, led still by the vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The desert became her home, the place where she found her rest. Her conversion and turn to the life of solitude were unknown to any other living being, until after forty-eight years the priest Zosimas came and found her. When Zosimas first found Mary he did not know who she was, and she had never seen him. But she knew him before he had even spoken to her, and addressed him by name, “Father Zosimas, forgive me.”

The priest was struck with dread: was she an angel? Mary, for her part, was alarmed because of her nakedness (her clothes had worn along time ago...), and begged him to lend her his cloak so that she could stand in modesty before him. He was alternately terrified and wonderstruck as he watched and listened to her.

She knew all about him—about his life as a priest and the monastery in which he lived, and she clearly understood it all better than himself. When she prayed she levitated. Although illiterate and unschooled in Christianity (she had, after all, fled to the desert as soon as she converted) she was able to quote scriptural proofs for her teachings. But most of all, there was the enormity of her story.

Zosimas drew out from her (much against her will) the details of her former life and her conversion; and he questioned her closely on the hardships of her desert life through those many years. She described her harlotry openly, as well as her life in the desert; how hard it had been, the suffering from cold and heat, hunger and thirst, temptation, longing for company and comfort; and yet her determination to live out her repentance in a manner suitable to her sin. She did not see, though Zosimas could, that **she had attained a degree of sanctity that could only be measured by the degree of sinfulness she had known. For unlike him, she had no illusions about her accomplishments. She knew only the truth of God, and her love for Him.**

Then she asked a favor, for she understood that the Lord had sent Zosimas for a purpose. She asked him to return to his monastery and tell no one about her, but in a year's time return to her on Holy Thursday, the night of the Last Supper, and bring her the Eucharist, of which she had not partaken of since her conversion many years ago. Reluctantly, Zosimas left her presence in the desert for the monastery. At last he returned at the appointed time, yearning for her presence. She came to him, walking on water to cross the Jordan while he again gave way to awe. As he knelt to reverence her she reproved him saying, “What are you doing, Father Zosimas, you who are a priest of God and carrying the holy mysteries?” And at once he obeyed her, resuming to his priestly duties with fumbling fervor.

Mary received the life-giving gifts of the sacrament, groaning and weeping with her hands held up to heaven, and she cried out, *Lord now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word: for my eyes have seen your salvation.*

Again she sent him away, to return again the following year at the same time. But when the time came and Zosimas hastened on his journey, he found his beloved guide dead, with a letter to him written in the sand beside her body. From this he learned that she had died within an hour of receiving the sacrament the previous year—the fulfillment of her hope. He learned, also, for the first time her name: she signed herself “Mary the sinner.” Grieving and marveling, Zosimas buried the holy woman helped by a lion who came to venerate the body of the saint. Then, he went back to the world to give the gift of her story to others, just as she had given it to him.

### St. Mary’s Significance to the Orthodox Faithful

Nothing is impossible for anyone of us, if prayer and fasting and labor are applied. This we know thanks to the example, the spectacle, before us of holy mother Mary of Egypt—a woman that knew whom Zosimas was from afar, who knew God’s will for Zosimas to fulfill one last wish of hers that she would have the Mysteries the following year; a woman who, when she prayed, stood in the air. We can’t even lift up our eyes to heaven, and she was standing in the heavens when she prayed. She walked upon water as if on dry land. And she called herself a miserable sinner.

She struggled for many, many, many years. She spent a total of 17 years in great, terrible struggles after she had repented. She had lived a life of total, complete debauchery and depravity. Her modesty precluded her from completely fulfilling the command of Zosimas and she couldn’t tell him everything that she did, but suffice it to say that she was a most wretched and sinful one. Everything that is possible to do to defile one’s self she did. But when she repented, she understood something that we would do well to understand.

**Labor!** This is the key to the Christian life: *Laboring in Christ*. And the church understands this. The church makes the connection between St. Mary and the sinful woman who was also a prostitute, a repentant prostitute of whom our Savior would later say, *The harlots and the tax-collectors are coming into heaven before you* (Mt 21:31), when speaking to the Pharisee.

He is in the home of the Pharisee and a prostitute comes in, and she begins to anoint his feet with her tears, and with ointment. Why? Because of love. Because previously she

had been forgiven. She knew this in her soul. It changed her. She lived with this reality. And she was thankful in the depths of her being. That’s what made her anoint His feet. Love. But this anointing, this coming to the house—is labor! **Without labor you can’t be saved.** Without demeaning yourself and remembering what God has done for you, you won’t be saved.

St. Mary of Egypt realized what God had done, and what the Mother of God had done, by praying to her Son, and helping her. She spent her repentful years in the desert alone, coldness, nakedness, hunger, longing, desire that could not be fulfilled. She said she would even go and bite the ground and lay on the ground until these feelings would go away from her. Oh, yes, she still had impure feelings, for many, many years. But she had great love, and labored because of this love. Just like this woman who anointed our Lord’s feet.

This is the key to the Christian life. This is why the Church presents this woman, great among women, and St. Mary of Egypt, great among the saints, as examples for us. And we’ve been given everything they’ve been given. Read what our Savior says about *he who has little forgiven, loveth little, but he who has much forgiven loveth much.* (Lk 7:77). Then He refers to the sinful woman.

We can take this two ways. If you have very little forgiven, then you don’t have much to be thankful for. We have little forgiven if we do not repent and strive to learn the commandments, and live the Christian life. But when you realize what’s been done for you, then you realize that you have had much forgiven. For really everyone,

everyone—has had much forgiven them. And so he should love much. He should turn to His Savior. But a man who doesn’t turn to our Savior is not a Christian whether he calls himself a Christian or not. I don’t care about all the “trappings”—I don’t care how many hymns you know—I don’t care about any of that. It’s all part and parcel of the life of the church. It’s critical for our salvation—but the knowledge of things doesn’t save. **Action based on knowledge: that’s what saves.**

So when a man knows what Christ has done for him, he loves much. When a man doesn’t care, when he’s all filled up with pride, or filled up with the life that he’s living, or filled up with lust or avarice or whatever else, then how can he love? He has no room in his heart to love. He’s already chosen the object of his love. And he will have his reward,



right here, such as it is: *For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?* (Mt 5:46). And even the richest man is a pauper, compared to the lowest in the kingdom of heaven.

This woman and St. Mary sealed their repentance by action, by activity. St. Andrew compares Leah and Rachel to activity and contemplation. (St. Andrew makes a reference to Gen 29:16-30, 31-40: *Because of his crying need the Patriarch endured the scorching heat of the day, and he bore the frost of the night, daily making gains, shepherding, struggling, slaving, in order to win two wives. By the two wives understand action and direct knowledge in contemplation: Leah as action, for she had many children, and Rachel as knowledge, which is obtained by much labor. For without labors, my soul, neither action nor contemplation will achieve success.*) He said that without activity and contemplation you cannot be saved. This woman who anointed our Lord's feet, she contemplated what our Lord had done for her; He had forgiven her. Perhaps she was the one who had been caught in adultery and was about to be stoned (Jn 8:4-11). Perhaps she was just another nameless, faceless prostitute that saw Divinity and cleaved to it and changed. And when she contemplated what He had done her heart was filled, and this is what caused the activity, action, desire, longing to be with her Savior, to caress him, to kiss his feet, to be close to Him, to be in His presence.

Do we have this longing? If we don't then we should fear greatly for our souls. The church presents us extravagance here, extravagant repentance, and without it we can't be saved. For there exist no such thing as partial repentance. If you have something that ails you, then you must lament it, you must pound your breast about it. You must prostrate with tears over it. You must do whatever you have to do, labor in order to eradicate it, and in the process of doing that, at the same time, you must renew yourself with Who God is.

St. Mary of Egypt knew. This was a woman who could neither read nor write. This was a woman who, the only time she had darkened the door of the church was at her baptism, save two other times, the day she saw the holy cross, and received the holy mysteries at the monastery of the Forerunner before she went into the desert. And in the end of her days, she knew the entire scripture by heart, and she lived the entire scripture by heart. The church speaks of her as an angel. She had so transcended the flesh that she previously had lived with in such a base way. None of us probably can claim to have been as sinful as she was. That's the truth. But none of us can claim to have one tiny grain of repentance compared to her.

The Christian life is simple. If you know that which you've been forgiven of, you should love much, but the only way to know is to open your eyes and to pray with your heart. God

will fill you. He will show you. You will be overwhelmed by it. You won't want anything but ... Christ. The key to the Christian life is thus to constantly contemplate what God has done for you, and act upon it.

These women are the examples we have before us today. But what does the world tell us? It tells us all manner of garbage. Probably all of us have had this secular saying said to us, when one or the other of our parents said, "I don't care what the other kids do. You don't do it that way." The world tells you so many things, and the church says, "I don't care what the world tells you. God your Savior tells you to do something else." In fact, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said this to His apostles, didn't he, when they had been jousting about who would be greatest? (Mk 9:33). They had forgotten Who He was. He tells them a very important saying: *He who will be greatest must be the servant.* But before then what did He say? He described the way the world is, how the greatest, the chiefest among people are the ones who grind people in the mud, and lord things over people, and the boastful pride of life in the extravagance of power and authority. And then He said that it *shall not be so among you.* (Mt 20:25-27). Instead, the church gives us the example of the sinful woman, formerly sinful woman—two formally sinful women, the unnamed woman who is great among the saints, and Mary, who is great among the saints.

Don't listen to the world. Listen to what the church says. Be renewed!



And then, you also want not to have woes? It can't be. God loves us, but we often do not understand it. If we enjoy everything here on earth, then we will forget God. God gives us opportunities to know Him, if only we take hold of the messages. He finds a thousand ways to make us come to know Him. St. Basil says somewhere, *Make weakness material for virtue.* No matter what evil comes upon us, if we have patience, it is possible that what we see as evil, will guide us to virtue. The greatest evil is to become estranged from God.

In all things have measure. Only have humility without measure. Do not leave off prayer. No matter how tired you are, you can pray for half an hour. **Feed your body as if you were going to live a hundred years, but feed your soul as if she were going to die tomorrow.**

Elder Ieronymos of Aigina

## CASES OF CHILDLESSNESS

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

—Geronda, a husband and wife that both have *Mediterranean anemia*<sup>(1)</sup> asked us if they should try to have children. We told them to ask their spiritual father.

—Spiritual fathers should not tell such couples not to have children. They must guide them in *philotimo*<sup>(2)</sup>, so as to struggle in abstinence (to abstain), and with discernment grant them *economia*.

—Geronda, there are couples who, although they live very spiritually and want to have children, are not able.

—The reason God does not give children to some is so that they will love all the children of the world as their own and help in their spiritual rebirth. There was once a man without children but, when he would walk out of his house, all the children of his neighborhood would run to him and surround him with such love. They wouldn't let him leave and go to his job. See, God didn't give him his own children but graced him with the blessing of loving all the children of his neighborhood as a father and in his own way to help them spiritually. The judgments of God are fathomless.

In addition, God may not give children so that an orphaned child might be helped. I once met a good Christian man who was a lawyer. Once, when I passed through the city he lived, I paid him a visit and in his great kindness he forced me to stay over and receive hospitality at his house. I also met his spouse who likewise resembled him in virtue. And, while from the wife I learned of the spiritual life of her husband, from the husband I learned of the spiritual state of his wife. Later, I learned about the both of them from many other Christians who know them well and whom they have helped. This man of God honorably worked as a lawyer. If he saw that someone was deceitful not only would he not take his case but he would sharply renounce them in hopes that they would come to their senses. If he saw someone who was guilty but repentant, he would try somehow to reconcile things or to reduce the sentence. If he saw a poor man unjustly accused, he wouldn't take any money and would try to vindicate him in court. He lived very simply and therefore the little money he made was enough for him with enough left over to help poor families. The house of this faithful lawyer was literally a spiritual oasis in the Sahara of the city. The poor, wounded, unemployed, and those with domestic problems would gather there and he would support them all as a good father. He had acquaintances in different places so that, whomever he called on the phone with a need—to help with those who were sick, etc.—never told him 'no,' because everyone loved and honored him. His wife also worked in her own way. She would help poor children or children who had difficulties

in their studies. They thought of her as a mother. She once, however, expressed to me a complaint. "Father, when we married" she told me, "I resigned my job as a professor because I said I'd now become a good mother. I even asked Christ to give me twenty children, but unfortunately He didn't even give me one." Then, I told her: "Sister, you have more than five-hundred children and still you are complaining? Christ saw your good intention and will reward you. Now that you're helping with the spiritual rebirth of so many children, you've become a better mother than many other mothers and have passed up even mothers of many children.<sup>(3)</sup> You will also have a greater reward, because with the spiritual rebirth the children are reassured eternal life." In the meantime they had adopted a little girl and had signed over their inheritance to her. She cared for them in their old age and, when they reposed, went off to a monastery—although their house was like a monastery, reading all the services as they did. For vespers and compline they had other brethren in Christ but midnight office and orthros the three read themselves.

These blessed souls gave rest to so many suffering souls. May God also grant them rest. That's why I say that the greater and better parents of big families are those who were spiritually reborn and who help in the spiritual rebirth of children all over the world, to ensure their souls in Paradise.

—Geronda, some people who aren't able to have children of their own, think about adopting a little child.

—Yes, it's better to adopt. They shouldn't insist on their own will (i.e., persisting in the hope that the mother will one day conceive). That which man wants is not always the will of God.

—Geronda, should the adoptive parents tell the child that they adopted him at a certain age?

—It is better to tell the child once he is old enough. But what matters is to love the child greatly and appropriately. There are children who live with their actual parents but who love other people more because their own parents don't have love.

† † †

(1) *Mediterranean anemia* (also known as *thalassemia*) is a genetic (inherited) blood disease, particularly prevalent among Mediterranean peoples. In Europe, the highest concentrations of the disease are found in Greece, Italy, Cyprus and Crete.

(2) *Philotimo* (also spelled *filotimo*) (Greek *φιλότιμο*) is a Greek noun translating to "friend of honour" or "love of honour." However, *philotimo* is almost impossible to translate sufficiently as it describes a complex array of virtues.

(3) A family with many children (Greek *πολύτεκνη οικογένεια*) in Greece is seen as greatly blessed. As is said in the Orthodox sacrament of marriage: "Bless this marriage, granting to Your servants long life, purity, mutual love in the bond of peace, enduring prosperity, the blessing of children and the unfading crown of glory".

## Τὰ οναστήρια καὶ ἡ Παλιγγενεσία

Τοῦ Σαράντου Καργάκου.

**Ἄ**ν δὲν ὑπῆρχαν μοναχοὶ σὰν τὸν Νεκτάριο Τέρπο καὶ τὸν Πατροκοσιμᾶ—πού ἔβαλαν τὸ κεφάλι τους στὸν «ντορβά»—δὲν θὰ βλέπαμε ποτὲ λευτεριά.

Τὰ μοναστήρια καὶ οἱ μοναχοὶ ἔπαιξαν ρόλο καθοριστικὸ στὴν πνευματικὴ προετοιμασία τοῦ Ἀγώνα τῆς Ἐθνικῆς Παλιγγενεσίας. **Πρῶτον**, διότι ὅτι γινόταν ἐκεῖ δὲν ἦταν ἄμεσα ὁρατό. Πολλὰ γίνονταν ἐν κρυπῶ, ἐξ οὗ καὶ ἡ παράδοση γιὰ τὸ «Κρυφὸ Σχολεῖο». **Δεύτερον**, τὰ περισσότερα ἦσαν σὲ μέρη ἀπρόσιτα. **Τρίτον**, διότι ἐκεῖ αἰῶνες εἶχαν συγκεντρώσει μεγάλους πνευματικούς θησαυρούς (σπάνια βιβλία, χειρόγραφα κ.ά.). **Τέταρτον**, διότι κάποιοι ζωηροὶ νέοι, πού ἤθελαν νὰ ξεφύγουν ἀπὸ τὴν ραγιαδοσύνη, γίνονταν μοναχοὶ (Διάκος, Παπαφλέσσας). **Πέμπτον**, διότι σπουδαῖοι δάσκαλοι, ὅπως ὁ Ἀναστάσιος Γόρδιος ἀπὸ τὰ Βρανιανὰ τῶν Ἀγράφων καὶ ἄλλοι πολυμαθεῖς μοναχοὶ εἶχαν καταφύγει σὲ δύσβατες περιοχές καὶ εἶχαν δημιουργήσει περιώνυμες σχολές (π.χ. Μονὴ Φιλοσόφου στὴ Δημητσάνα). Ὅσον σημειωθεῖ ἀκόμη ὅτι δύο σχολές, πανεπιστημιακοῦ θὰ λέγαμε ἐπιπέδου, ἦταν σὲ μοναστήρια: ἡ Ἀθωνιάς καὶ ἡ Πατιμιάς. **Χωρὶς σπιθα παιδείας, κανεὶς λαὸς δὲν ὁραματίζεται καὶ δὲν ἀγωνίζεται γιὰ τὴν ἐλευθερία.**

Ἀκόμη, πολλὰ μοναστήρια εἶχαν γίνει μεγάλες μονάδες παραγωγῆς καὶ ἀπετέλεσαν βάσεις ἀνεφοδιασμοῦ τοῦ ἐπαναστατικοῦ στρατοῦ. Μερικὰ στὴ διάρκεια τοῦ Ἀγώνα λειτούργησαν ὡς θεραπευτήρια, ὅπως ἡ Μονὴ Προυσοῦ στὴν Εὐρυτανία.

Ἐνα χρόνον πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν κήρυξη τῆς Ἐπαναστάσεως, ὅλοι οἱ ἠγούμενοι καὶ διακεκριμένοι μοναχοὶ τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν μοναστηριῶν εἶχαν μνηθεῖ στὴν Φιλικὴ Ἐταιρεία. Κανεὶς δὲν πρὸδωσε τὸ μυστικόν, παρόλο πού κάποιοι εἶχαν ἕναν δικαιολογημένο σκεπτικισμό. Εἶχαν ὑποστει τὰ πάνδεινα στὰ Ὀρλωφικὰ καὶ στὴν περίοδο τῆς Ἀλβανοκρατίας.

Κατὰ τὴν Ἐπανάσταση, ὅπως φαίνεται ἀπὸ τὸ Ἀρχεῖο Ἀγωνιστῶν τοῦ 1821, περίπου 2000 μοναχοὶ συμμετείχαν στὶς συγκρούσεις. Πολλοὶ βέβαια ἦσαν ἱερεῖς, ὅπως ὁ γιγάντιος Παπα-Τούρτας, ὁ μπροστάρης τοῦ Παπαφλέσσα, πού σήκωνε γιὰ σημαία ἕναν τεράστιο σταυρό. Ρόλο ἀρνητικὸ ἔπαιξε μόνον ἕνας μοναχός, ὁ Γεράσιμος ἀπὸ τὴν Καλαμάτα, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸς γιὰ λόγους θεωρητικο-θεολογικοῦ θεωροῦσε, ὅπως κάποιοι «μοντέρνοι» ιστορικοί, τὴν Ἐπανάσταση «ἔργο τοῦ Διαβόλου». Διότι, ὅπως ἔγραψε στὸ

δυσεύρετο βιβλίον του, «μᾶς ἔβγαλε ἀπὸ τὸν παράδεισον τῆς Ὀθωμανικῆς αὐτοκρατορίας!»...

Στὰ περισσότερα μοναστήρια ὑπῆρχαν πρὸ τοῦ 1821 πλούσιες βιβλιοθήκες. Μετὰ τὴ λήξη τοῦ Ἀγώνα, σὲ ὅλα σχεδὸν τὰ μοναστήρια τῆς Ρούμελης καὶ τοῦ Μορηᾶ, εἶχαν ἐλάχιστα βιβλία—κυρίως λειτουργικά. Τὰ ἄλλα, καθὼς καὶ πολύτιμα χειρόγραφα, εἶχαν χρησιμοποιηθεῖ γιὰ τὴν κατασκευὴ «χαρτουσιῶν», δηλαδὴ φυσεκίων.

Ὅσον ἔλθουμε, ὅπως ἐνδεικτικὰ, καὶ στὴν πολεμικὴ δράση. Ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος—κυρίως ἀπὸ τὴν Μονὴ Ἐσφιγμένου, ξεκίνησε ἡ Ἐπανάσταση στὴν Μακεδονία μὲ τὸν Ἐμμ. Παπᾶ. Στὴν Μονὴ Δοβροᾶ, κοντὰ στὴ Βέροια, εἶχαν οἱ Μακεδόνες ἀγωνιστὲς (Καρατάσος, Γάτσος κ.ά.) τὴν μεγαλύτερη στρατιωτικὴ τους ἐπιτυχία. Καὶ τὸ σημαντικότερον κατ' ἐμέ: Ὅταν ἡ Ἐπανάσταση εἶχε σβῆσει παντοῦ, ὁ Καραϊσκάκης εἶχε σκοτωθεῖ, ὁ στρατός του τὴν ἐπομένη τῆς θανῆς του εἶχε καταστραφεῖ στὸν Ἀνάλατο (24 Ἀπριλίου 1827)



καὶ ὁ Θεόδ. Κολοκοτρώνης μὲ τὰ δόντια ἀγωνιζόταν στὸν Μορηᾶ νὰ κρατήσει τὸν Ἀγώνα, δίνοντας μάχες συνεχεῖς κατὰ τοῦ Ἱμπραήμ, τότε σ' αὐτὲς τὶς τραγικὲς στιγμὲς εἶχαμε ἕναν στρατιωτικὸ θρίαμβον πού παρορᾶται ἀπὸ πολλοὺς ἱστορικοὺς, ἴσως διότι ὀφείλεται σὲ μοναχούς.

Τὸ Μέγα Σπήλαιον καὶ οἱ πέριξ αὐτοῦ λόφοι εἶχαν μεταβληθεῖ σὲ φρούριον. Ὁ Ἱμπραήμ ἀπὸ τὴ Μονὴ τῆς Σάλμαινας (μετόχι τοῦ Μ. Σπηλαίου) κάλεσε μὲ ἐπιστολὴ τοὺς μοναχοὺς νὰ παραδοθῶν. Αὐτοὶ ἀπάντησαν ἀρνητικὰ. Τοὺς κτύπησε μὲ τὸ πεζικὸν καὶ πυροβολικόν του στὶς 24 Ἰουνίου 1827. Τὴν Μονὴ καὶ τοὺς γύρω χώρους ὑπεράσπιζαν 600 παλληκάρια ὑπὸ τὸν Νικόλα Πετμεζᾶ. Μικρὴ ἐνίσχυση ἔστειλε καὶ ὁ Κολοκοτρώνης ὑπὸ τὸν Φωτάκο. Στὶς δυνάμεις αὐτὲς προστέθηκαν καὶ 100 ὀπλοφόροι μοναχοί, πού ἔβγαλαν τὸ ρᾶσον καὶ φόρεσαν τὴν συνηθισμένη Ἑλληνικὴ στολή. Ἡ μάχη κράτησε ὅλη τὴν ἡμέρα καὶ ἦταν πεισματικὴ. Ὁ Ἱμπραήμ ἀπέτυχε καὶ ντροπιασμένος ὑποχρεώθηκε νὰ ἀποσυρθεῖ. Τὸ Μέγα Σπήλαιον ἔμεινε ἀπάτητον. Αὐτὸ ἔδωσε νέα πνοὴ στὸν Ἀγώνα. Πολλὰ χωριά ξεπροσκύνησαν καὶ ὁ Κολοκοτρώνης συνέχισε μὲ νέο σθένος τὴν ἀγωνιστικὴν του προσπάθειαν.

Στὴν Ἀχαΐαν ὑπάρχει ἀκόμη καὶ μία ἄλλη μονὴ μὲ τεράστια προσφορά. Εἶναι τῆς Παναγίας τῆς Χρυσοποδαρίτισσας, πού κάνει θαύματα πολλὰ. Μακάρι νὰ ἔκανε καὶ τώρα τὸ θαῦμα, νὰ μᾶς δώσει μὲ τὸ χρυσοῦ ποδάρι τῆς μιὰ γερὴ ...κλωτσιά!

## Ὁμιλία πρὸς Γυμνασιόπαιδες

Τοῦ Γέρου τοῦ Μορηᾶ, Θεόδωρου Κολοκοτρώνη.

**Π**αιδιά μου!  
Εἰς τὸν τόπο τοῦτο, ὅπου ἐγὼ πατῶ σήμερα, ἐπατοῦσαν καὶ ἐδημηγοροῦσαν τὸν παλαιὸν καιρὸ ἄνδρες σοφοί, καὶ ἄνδρες μὲ τοὺς ὁποίους δὲν εἶμαι ἄξιος νὰ συγκριθῶ καὶ οὔτε νὰ φθάσω τὰ ἴχνη των. Ἐγὼ ἐπιθυμοῦσα νὰ σᾶς ἰδῶ, παιδιά μου, εἰς τὴν μεγάλη δόξα τῶν προπατόρων μας, καὶ ἔρχομαι νὰ σᾶς εἰπῶ, ὅσα εἰς τὸν καιρὸ τοῦ ἀγῶνος καὶ πρὸ αὐτοῦ καὶ ὕστερα ἀπ' αὐτὸν ὁ ἴδιος ἐπαρτήρησα, καὶ ἀπ' αὐτὰ νὰ κάμωμε συμπερασμοὺς καὶ διὰ τὴν μέλλουσαν εὐτυχίαν σας, μολονότι ὁ Θεὸς μόνος ἠξεύρει τὰ μέλλοντα. Καὶ διὰ τοὺς παλαιοὺς Ἑλληνας, ὁποίας γνώσεις εἶχαν καὶ ποία δόξα καὶ τιμὴν ἔχαιραν κοντὰ εἰς τὰ ἄλλα ἔθνη τοῦ καιροῦ των, ὁποίους ἤρωας, στρατηγούς, πολιτικοὺς εἶχαν, διὰ ταῦτα σᾶς λέγουν καθ' ἡμέραν οἱ διδάσκαλοί σας καὶ οἱ πεπαιδευμένοι μας. Ἐγὼ δὲν εἶμαι ἀρκετός. Σᾶς λέγω μόνον πὼς ἦταν σοφοί, καὶ ἀπὸ ἐδῶ ἐπήρασαν καὶ ἐδανείσθησαν τὰ ἄλλα ἔθνη τὴν σοφίαν των.

Εἰς τὸν τόπον, τὸν ὁποῖον κατοικοῦμε, ἐκατοικοῦσαν οἱ παλαιοὶ Ἑλληνες, ἀπὸ τοὺς ὁποίους καὶ ἡμεῖς καταγόμεθα καὶ ἐλάβαμε τὸ ὄνομα τοῦτο. Αὐτοὶ διέφεραν ἀπὸ ἡμᾶς εἰς τὴν θρησκείαν, διότι ἐπροσκυνοῦσαν τὲς πέτρες καὶ τὰ ξύλα. Ἀφοῦ ὕστερα ἦλθε στὸν κόσμον ὁ Χριστὸς, οἱ λαοὶ ὅλοι ἐπίστευσαν εἰς τὸ Εὐαγγέλιόν του, καὶ ἔπαυσαν νὰ λατρεύουν τὰ εἰδῶλα. Δὲν ἐπῆρε μαζί του οὔτε σοφοὺς οὔτε προκομμένους, ἀλλ' ἀπλοὺς ἀνθρώπους, χωρικοὺς καὶ ψαράδες, καὶ μὲ τὴ βοήθεια τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος ἔμαθαν ὅλες τὲς γλώσσες τοῦ κόσμου, οἱ ὅποιοι, μολονότι ὅπου καὶ ἂν ἔβρισκαν ἐναντιότητες καὶ οἱ βασιλεῖς καὶ οἱ τύραννοι τοὺς κατέτρεχαν, δὲν ἠμπόρσε κανένας νὰ τοὺς κάμη τίποτα. Αὐτοὶ ἐστερέωσαν τὴν πίστιν.

Οἱ παλαιοὶ Ἑλληνες, οἱ πρόγονοί μας, ἔπασαν εἰς τὴν διχόνοια καὶ ἐτρώγονταν μεταξύ τους, καὶ ἔτσι ἔλαβαν καιρὸ πρῶτα οἱ Ρωμαῖοι, ἔπειτα ἄλλοι βάρβαροι καὶ τοὺς ὑπόταξαν. Ὑστερα ἦλθαν οἱ Μουσουλμάνοι καὶ ἔκαμαν ὅ,τι ἠμποροῦσαν, διὰ νὰ ἀλλάξῃ ὁ λαὸς τὴν πίστιν του. Ἐκοψαν γλώσσες εἰς πολλοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἀλλ' ἐστάθη ἀδύνατο νὰ τὸ κατορθώσουν. Τὸν ἕνα ἔκοψαν, ὁ ἄλλος τὸ σταυρὸ του ἔκαμε. Σὰν εἶδε τοῦτο ὁ σουλτάνος, διόρισε ἕνα βιτσερὲ [ἀντιβασιλέα], ἕναν πατριάρχη, καὶ τοῦ ἔδωσε τὴν ἐξουσία τῆς ἐκκλησίας. Αὐτὸς καὶ ὁ λοιπὸς



κληρὸς ἔκαμαν ὅ,τι τοὺς ἔλεγε ὁ σουλτάνος. Ὑστερον ἔγιναν οἱ κοτζαμπάσηδες [προεστοὶ] εἰς ὅλα τὰ μέρη. Ἡ τρίτη τάξη, οἱ ἔμποροι καὶ οἱ προκομμένοι, τὸ καλύτερο μέρος τῶν πολιτῶν, μὴν ὑποφέροντες τὸν ζυγὸ ἔφευγαν, καὶ οἱ γραμματισμένοι ἐπήρασαν καὶ ἔφευγαν ἀπὸ τὴν Ἑλλάδα, τὴν πατρίδα των, καὶ ἔτσι ὁ λαὸς, ὅστις στερημένος ἀπὸ τὰ μέσα τῆς προκοπῆς, ἐκατήντησεν εἰς ἀθλίαν κατάστασιν, καὶ αὐτὴ αὐξάνει κάθε ἡμέρα χειρότερα· διότι, ἂν εὐρίσκετο μεταξὺ τοῦ λαοῦ κανεὶς μὲ ὀλίγην μάθησιν, τὸν ἐλάμβανε ὁ κληρὸς, ὅστις ἔχει προνόμια, ἢ ἐσύρτετο ἀπὸ τὸν ἔμπορο τῆς Εὐρώπης ὡς βοηθὸς του ἢ ἐγίνετο γραμματικὸς τοῦ προεστοῦ. Καὶ μερικοὶ μὴν ὑποφέροντες τὴν τυραννίαν τοῦ Τούρκου καὶ βλέποντας τὲς δόξες καὶ τὲς ἡδονὲς ὅπου ἀνελάμβαναν αὐτοὶ, ἄφηναν τὴν πίστην τους καὶ ἐγίνοντο Μουσουλμάνοι. Καὶ τοιοῦτοτρόπως κάθε ἡμέρα ὁ λαὸς ἐλίγνευε καὶ ἐπτώχαινε.

Εἰς αὐτὴν τὴν δυστυχισμένην κατάστασιν μερικοὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς φυγάδες γραμματισμένους ἐμετάφραζαν καὶ ἔστελναν εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα βιβλία, καὶ εἰς αὐτοὺς πρέπει νὰ χρωστοῦμε εὐγνωμοσύνη, διότι εὐθὺς ὅπου κανένας ἄνθρωπος ἀπὸ τὸ λαὸ ἐμάνθανε τὰ κοινὰ γράμματα, ἐδιάβαζεν αὐτὰ τὰ βιβλία καὶ ἔβλεπε ποίους εἶχαμε προγόνους, τί ἔκαμεν ὁ Θεμιστοκλῆς, ὁ Ἀριστείδης καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοὶ παλαιοὶ μας, καὶ ἐβλέπαμε καὶ εἰς ποίαν κατάστασιν εὐρισκόμεθα τότε. Ὅθεν μᾶς ἦλθεν εἰς τὸ νοῦ νὰ τοὺς μιμηθοῦμε καὶ νὰ γίνουμε εὐτυχέστεροι. Καὶ ἔτσι ἔγινε καὶ ἐπροόδευσε ἡ Ἐταιρεία.

Ὅταν ἀποφασίσουμε νὰ κάμωμε τὴν Ἐπανάστασιν, δὲν ἐσυλλογισθήκαμε οὔτε πόσοι εἴμεθα οὔτε πὼς δὲν ἔχομε ἄρματα οὔτε ὅτι οἱ Τούρκοι ἐβαστοῦσαν τὰ κάστρα καὶ τὰς πόλεις οὔτε κανένας φρόνιμος μᾶς εἶπε «ποῦν πᾶτε ἐδῶ νὰ πολεμήσετε μὲ σιταροκάραβα βατσέλα», ἀλλὰ ὡς μία βροχὴ ἔπεσε εἰς ὅλους μας ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς ἐλευθερίας μας, καὶ ὅλοι, καὶ ὁ κληρὸς μας καὶ οἱ προεστοὶ καὶ οἱ καπεταναῖοι καὶ οἱ πεπαιδευμένοι καὶ οἱ ἔμποροι, μικροὶ καὶ μεγάλοι, ὅλοι ἐσυμφωνήσαμε εἰς αὐτὸ τὸ σκοπὸ καὶ ἐκάμαμε τὴν Ἐπανάστασιν.

Εἰς τὸν πρῶτον χρόνον τῆς Ἐπαναστάσεως εἶχαμε μεγάλη ὁμόνοια καὶ ὅλοι ἐτρέχαμε σύμφωνοι. Ὁ ἕνας ἐπῆγεν εἰς τὸν πόλεμον, ὁ ἀδελφὸς του ἔφερεν ξύλα, ἡ γυναῖκα του ἐζύμωνε, τὸ παιδί του ἐκουβαλοῦσε ψωμὶ καὶ μπαρουτόβολα εἰς τὸ στρατόπεδον καὶ ἐὰν αὐτὴ ἢ ὁμόνοια ἐβαστοῦσε ἀκόμη δυὸ χρόνους, ἠθέλαμε κυριεύσει καὶ τὴν Θεσσαλίαν καὶ τὴν Μακεδονίαν, καὶ

ἴσως ἐφθάναμε καὶ ἕως τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη. Τόσον τρομάξαμε τοὺς Τούρκους, ὅπου ἄκουγαν Ἑλληνα καὶ ἔφευγαν χίλια μίλια μακρὰ. Ἐκατὸν Ἑλληνες ἔβαζαν πέντε χιλιάδες ἐμπρός, καὶ ἓνα καράβι μίαν ἀρμάδα...

Ἐγώ, παιδιά μου, κατὰ κακὴ μου τύχη, ἐξ αἰτίας τῶν περιστάσεων, ἔμεινα ἀγράμματος καὶ διὰ τοῦτο σὰς ζητῶ συγχώρηση, διότι δὲν ὀμιλῶ καθὼς οἱ δάσκαλοί σας. Σὰς εἶπα ὅσα ὁ ἴδιος εἶδα, ἤκουσα καὶ ἐγνώρισα, διὰ νὰ ὠφεληθῆτε ἀπὸ τὰ ἀπερασμένα καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ κακὰ ἀποτελέσματα τῆς διχονοίας, τὴν ὁποίαν νὰ ἀποστρέψετε, καὶ νὰ ἔχετε ὁμόνοια. Ἐμᾶς μὴ μᾶς τηρᾶτε πλέον. Τὸ ἔργο μας καὶ ὁ καιρὸς μας ἐπέρασε. Καὶ αἱ ἡμέραι τῆς γενεᾶς, ἡ ὁποία σὰς ἀνοιξε τὸ δρόμο, θέλουν μετ' ὀλίγον περάσει. Τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς ζωῆς μας θέλει διαδεχθῆ ἡ νύκτα τοῦ θανάτου μας, καθὼς τὴν ἡμέραν τῶν Ἁγίων Ἀσωμάτων θέλει διαδεχθῆ ἡ νύκτα καὶ ἡ αὐριανὴ ἡμέρα. Εἰς ἐσᾶς μένει νὰ ἰσάσετε καὶ νὰ στολίσετε τὸν τόπο, ὅπου ἡμεῖς ἐλευθερώσαμε· καί, διὰ νὰ γίνῃ τοῦτο, πρέπει νὰ ἔχετε ὡς θεμέλια τῆς πολιτείας τὴν ὁμόνοια, τὴν θρησκεία, τὴν καλλιέργεια τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τὴν φρόνιμον ἐλευθερία.



## Τὸ Χέρι τοῦ Παπᾶ

*Τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου Ἀχρίδας Ἁγίου Νικολάου Βελμιρόβιτς.*

Ὁ ἱερέας σας μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι μόλις 25 χρονῶν. Μὰ ἡ ἱεροσύνη του εἶναι ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου. Ὄταν, λοιπόν, τοῦ ἀσπάζετε τὸ χέρι, προσκυνᾶτε τὴν ἱεροσύνη του, ποὺ φθάνει διαδοχικὰ ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστὸν καὶ τοὺς Ἀποστόλους μέχρι τὸν ἱερέα σας.

Ὄταν φιλάτε τὸ χέρι τοῦ παπᾶ σας, φιλάτε ὀλόκληρη τὴν ἀλυσίδα τῶν ὁσίων καὶ ἁγίων ἱερέων καὶ ἱεραρχῶν, ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἀποστόλους μέχρι σήμερα. Ἀσπάζετε καὶ προσκυνᾶτε τὸν Ἅγιο Ἰγνάτιο τὸν Θεοφόρο, τὸν ἅγιον Νικόλαο, τὸν ἅγιον Βασίλειο, τὸν ἅγιον Σάββα καὶ ὅλους τοὺς «ἐπίγειους ἀγγέλους καὶ οὐρανίους ἀνθρώπους», πού, ὅταν ἦταν στὴ γῆ, κοσμοῦσαν τὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ τώρα στολίζουν τὸν οὐρανό. Εἶναι φίλημα ἁγίων, ὅπως γράφει στοὺς Κορινθίους ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος. Νὰ ἀσπάζετε, λοιπόν τὸ χέρι τοῦ ἱερέα ποὺ σὰς εὐλογεῖ. Εἶναι εὐλογημένο ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Μὲ τὴν χάρη τῆς ἱεροσύνης. Μὲ τὴν χάρη τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Νὰ τὸ φιλάτε τὸ χέρι τοῦ ἱερέα σας. Ὅσο νέος καὶ ἂν εἶναι. Καὶ νὰ τὸν ἀκοῦτε.

## Θούριος Ὀρμητικὸς Πατριωτικὸς Ὕμνος

*Ρήγας Φεραῖος (1757-1798).*

Ὁ Ρήγας Φεραῖος, ὁ ἐπονομαζόμενος Βελεστινλῆς, θεωρεῖται ἔθνομάρτυρας καὶ πρόδρομος τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Ἐπανάστασης τοῦ 1821.

Τὸ πραγματικὸ του ὄνομα ἦταν Ἀντώνιος Κυριαζῆς, ὁ ἴδιος ὑπέγραφε ὡς Ρήγας Βελεστινλῆς ἢ Ρήγας Ὁ Θεσσαλός. Ὁ Ρήγας καὶ ἑπτὰ σύντροφοί του, μὲ συνοδεία τῶν Αὐστριακῶν ἀρχῶν, παραδόθηκαν στὶς 10 Μαΐου 1798 στοὺς Τούρκους τοῦ Βελιγραδίου καὶ φυλακίστηκαν στὸν πύργο Neboisa, παραποτάμιο φρούριο τοῦ Βελιγραδίου. Ἐκεῖ, ὕστερα ἀπὸ συνεχῆ βασανιστήρια, στὶς 24 Ιουνίου τοῦ 1798, στραγγαλίστηκαν καὶ τὰ σώματά τους ρίχτηκαν στὸν Δούναβη.

† † †

Ὡς πότε παλικάρια νὰ ζοῦμεν στὰ στενά,  
Μονάχοι σὰ λιοντάρια, σταῖς ράχαις στὰ βουνά;  
Σπηλαιὶς νὰ κατοικοῦμεν, νὰ βλέπωμεν κλαδιά,  
Νὰ φεύγωμ' ἀπ' τὸν Κόσμον, γιὰ τὴν πικρὴ σκλαβιά.  
Νὰ χάνωμεν ἀδέλφια, Πατρίδα, καὶ Γονεῖς,  
Σοὺς φίλους, τὰ παιδιὰ μας, κι' ὅλους τοὺς συγγενεῖς.  
Καλλιῶναι μίας ὥρας ἐλεύθερη ζωὴ,  
Παρὰ σαράντα χρόνοι σκλαβιά, καὶ φυλακί.

Σί σ' ὠφελεῖ ἂν ζήσης, καὶ εἶσαι στὴ σκλαβιά,  
Στοχάσου πὼς σὲ ψένουν καθ' ὥραν στὴ φωτιά.  
Βεζύρης, Δραγουμάνος, Ἀφέντης κι' ἂν σταθῆς,  
Ὁ Σύρανος ἀδίκως, σὲ κάμει νὰ χαθῆς.  
Δουλεύεις ὄλ' ἡμέρα, σὲ ὅ,τι κι' ἂν σοὶ πῆ,  
Κι' αὐτὸς πασχίζει πάλιν, τὸ αἷμα σου νὰ πιῆ.  
Ὁ Σουτζος, κι' ὁ Μουζούρης, Πετράκης, Σκαναβῆς,  
Γύγκας, καὶ Μαυρογένης, καθρέπτης, εἶν' νὰ ἰδῆς.

Ἀνδρεῖοι Καπετάνοι, Παπάδες, λαϊκοί,  
Σκοτώθηκαν κι' Ἀγάδες, μὲ ἄδικον σπαθί.  
Κι' ἀμέτρητ' ἄλλοι τόσοι, καὶ Σοῦρκοι, καὶ Ρωμιοί,  
Ζωὴν, καὶ πλοῦτον χάνουν, χωρὶς καμιὰ φορμῆ.  
Ἐλάτε μ' ἓναν ζῆλον, σὲ τοῦτον τὸν καιρόν,  
Νὰ κάμωμεν τὸν ὄρκον, ἐπάνω στὸν Σταυρόν.

Συμβούλους προκομμένους, μὲ πατριωτισμόν,  
Νὰ βάλλωμεν εἰς ὅλα, νὰ δίδουν ὀρισμόν.  
Οἱ νόμοι νάν' ὁ πρῶτος, καὶ μόνος ὁδηγός,  
Καὶ τῆς πατρίδος ἓνας, νὰ γένη Ἀρχηγός.  
Γιατί κ' ἡ ἀναρχία, ὁμοιάζει τὴν σκλαβιά,  
Νὰ ζοῦμε σὰ θηρία, εἶν' πλιὸ σκληρὴ φωτιά.  
Καὶ τότε μὲ τὰ χέρια, ψηλὰ στὸν Οὐρανόν,  
Ἄς ποῦμ' ἀπ' τὴν καρδιά μας, ἐτοῦτα στὸν Θεόν.

† † †

**Ἐδῶ σηκώνονται οἱ Πατριῶται ὀρθοί,  
καὶ ὑψώνοντες τὰς χεῖρας πρὸς τὸν Οὐρανόν,  
κάμνουν τὸν Ὄρκο κατὰ τῆς Τυραννίας...**

## Ἡ Μυρωδιά τοῦ Λιβανιοῦ

Τοῦ Σπύρου Χιόνη, ἀναδημοσίευση ἀπὸ τὴν «Ἁγία Ζώνη».



Ἦταν πολὺ κουραστικὸ αὐτὸ τὸ ταξίδι. Εἶχε, ἐξάλλου, πολὺ καιρὸ νὰ τὸ κάνει. Θυμόταν τὸν ἑαυτό του στὸ Λύκειο, ὅταν πῆγε νὰ ἐπισκεφτεῖ γιὰ τελευταία φορὰ τὴν γιαγιά του, τὴν κυρὰ-Θοδόσαινα στὰ Τρόπαια τῆς Γορτυνίας. Καὶ τώρα, τριτοετῆς φοιτητῆς τῆς Φιλοσοφικῆς, νὰ ποῦ ξαναπαίρνει τὸν ἴδιο δρόμο. Τί τὸν ἔκανε νὰ φύγει ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀθήνα, τὴ

«Βαβυλώνα τὴ μεγάλη»; Οὔτε καὶ ὁ ἴδιος ἤξερε.

Πάντως ἓνα εἶναι σίγουρο, πὼς πνιγόταν. Πνιγόταν ἀπὸ τοὺς φίλους, τὰ μαθήματα, τοὺς γονεῖς, ἀπ' ὅλους. Ἐνιωθε πὼς κανεὶς δὲν τὸν καταλάβαινε, κανεὶς δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ γίνῃ κοινῶνς στὴν ἀναζήτησή του γιὰ πλέρια ἀλήθεια καὶ γνησιότητα. Κι αὐτὴ ἀκόμη ἡ χριστιανικὴ του παρέα τὸν ἔπνιγε. Ὅλοι τους ἦταν τακτοποιημένοι, ὅλοι τους εἶχαν ταμπουρωθεῖ πίσω ἀπὸ κάποιες συνταγές, κάποιες ρετσέτες σωτηρίας καὶ δὲν ἔλεγαν νὰ κουνηθοῦν ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ. Μὰ αὐτός... Αὐτὸς ἦταν διαφορετικὸς.

Δὲν βολευόταν σὲ σχήματα καὶ σὲ κουτάκια. Ἦθελε νὰ βιώσει τὸν Χριστιανισμὸ ἀληθινά, ὄχι κιβδηλα. Νὰ μπεῖ στὸ νόημα παρευθὸς καὶ ὄχι νὰ καμαρώνεται τὸν εὐσεβῆ. Ἐξάλλου, τοῦ φαινόταν τόσο ἀπλοῖκὸ καὶ ἀνόητο νὰ υἱοθετήσῃ μιὰ τυποκρατικὴ καὶ εὐσεβιστικὴ χριστιανικὴ βιωτὴ τὴ στιγμὴ ποῦ ἡ ἴδια του ἡ ἐπιστήμη, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ ἔμφυτη τάση του γι' ἀναζήτησι, γιὰ ψάξιμο καὶ ψηλάφησι τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ τὸν ὠθοῦσε πρὸς μιὰ ἄλλη ζωὴ.

Μά, πόσο δύσκολο ἦταν, Θεέ μου! Πόσο βασανιζόταν! Κάποια στιγμὴ ἔνιωσε πὼς εἶχε φτάσει στὸ ἀπροχώρητο. Τὸ κεφάλι του πήγαινε νὰ σπάσει...

Πάω στὴν γιαγιά μου στὰ Τρόπαια, φώναξε μιὰ μέρα στὸ σπίτι καὶ ἀφήνοντας πίσω του φωνὲς γιὰ μαθήματα καὶ ἐξετάσεις, μῆτε ὁ ἴδιος ξέρει πότε, βρέθηκε στὸ λεωφορεῖο. Καὶ νὰ ποῦ ζύγωνε στὸ σπίτι τῆς γιαγιάς του. Ντάλα ὁ ἥλιος πάνω ἀπὸ τὸ κεφάλι του κι ἀπὸ παντοῦ νὰ ῥχονται χίλιες εὐωδιὲς ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνοιξιὰτικη, ἀρκαδικὴ φύση. Δὲν πρόλαβε ὅμως ὁ ἄμοιρος νὰ ρουφήξῃ λίγο βουνίσιο ἀέρα, ὅταν ἀκούστηκε ἡ γνῶριμη τσιριχτὴ φωνὴ τῆς γειτόνισσας:

- Μαριγώωωω! Τρέξε καλέ, ἦρθε ὁ Ἀλέκος!

Τὴν ἐπόμενη στιγμὴ εἶδε νὰ ξεπροβάλλει ἀπὸ τὸ πλινθόκτιστο σπιτάκι ἡ γιαγιά του σκουπίζοντας τὰ παχουλά της χέρια στὴν ποδιά της καὶ λέγοντας:

- Καλῶς τὸν πασά μου, καλῶς τὸν γιόκα μου, καλῶς ἦρθες, Ἀλέκο μου! Κι ἀμέσως βρέθηκε στὴν ἀγκαλιά της.

Τί ἦταν αὐτός; Σὰ νὰ μπῆκε σὲ λιμάνι ἀπάνεμο, σὰ νὰ τοῦ ἔφυγε ὅλη ἡ ἀντάρα τοῦ μυαλοῦ του. Ξαφνικὰ

ἀδείασε καὶ τὴν ἀγκαλιάσε κι αὐτός.

- Καλῶς σὲ βρῆκα, γιαγιά.

- Κοπίασε, γιέ μου, νὰ ξεποστάσεις.

Μόλις μπῆκε στὸ χαμηλοτάβανο σπιτάκι, τὸν συνεπῆρε ἡ μυρωδιά τῆς σπανακόπιτας καὶ τοῦ λιβανιοῦ. Σίγουρα ἡ γιαγιά εἶχε φουρνίσει ἀπὸ τὸ πρωὶ ἀκόμη καὶ εἶχε λιβανίσει τὸ σπίτι τρεῖς-τέσσερις φορές.

- Πάλι λιβάνι γιαγιά;

- Ἄ! Ὅλα κι ὅλα, ἅμα δὲν κάνω τὰ θεοτικά μου τρεῖς φορές τὴν ἡμέρα, δὲν μπορῶ νὰ κοιμηθῶ.

- Καὶ σὰν τί λές;

- Μνήστητί μου, Κύριε! Ὅ,τι λέει ἡ Σύνοψη.

- Καὶ τὰ ἐννοεῖς;

- Γιέ μου, αὐτὰ εἶναι μυστήρια τοῦ Θεοῦ, ποιὸς νὰ τὰ ἐννοήσει; Ἀλλὰ μὴ γνοιάξῃσαι, σὰ δὲν καταλαβαίνω ἐγώ, νογὰ ὁ Θεὸς καὶ βλέπει τὸν κόπο μου, νογὰ κι ὁ Διάλογος καὶ καίγεται.

- Χμ, καλὰ τὰ λές, εἶπε συγκαταβατικά.

- Στάσου, νὰ σοῦ φέρω λίγη σπανακόπιτα, μόλις τὴν ἔβγαλα ἀπὸ τὸ φούρνο. Κι ἔφυγε ἀμέσως γιὰ τὴν κουζίνα, τὸ βασιλειό της.

Ὁ Ἀλέκος ἔμεινε μόνος του στὸ καθιστικὸ. Αἰσθανόταν ἄνετα καὶ ζεστὰ ἐκεῖ, μολονότι ἤξερε πὼς, ἐὰν ἔκανε τὴ ζωὴ τῆς γιαγιάς του σὲ τοῦτο τὸ χωριό, σίγουρα θὰ τρελαινόταν. Ἡ καημένη! Δὲν ἤξερε πολλὰ γράμματα, ἀλλὰ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο δὲν ἔλεγε νὰ τὸ ἀφήσει ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια της. Μέρα - νύχτα τὸ διάβαζε. Ὅταν λέει «γιαγιά Μαριγὼ» τοῦ ῥχεται πάντα ἡ ἴδια εἰκόνα στὸ μυαλό: Μιὰ γριουλά παχουλή, μὲ σφιχτοδεμένο κότσο νὰ κάθεται στὴν πολυθρόνα καὶ νὰ διαβάξῃ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο ψιθυριστά. Δυστυχῶς, ἡ γιαγιά δὲν ἤξερε τίποτα ἀπὸ Φιλοσοφία. Θυμᾶται μιὰ φορὰ ποῦ τῆς ἀνέφερε τὸν Heidegger. Τὸν κοίταξε μὲ τρόμο στὰ μάτια καὶ εἶπε:

- Παναγιά μου, οἱ Γερμανοί, ὁ Θεὸς νὰ φυλάει τὴν Ἑλλάδα μας!

Ἡ καημένη ἦταν ἀδαής. Δὲν ἀναζητοῦσε καμιά ἀλήθεια. Δὲν σκοτιζόταν γιὰ καμιά ψυχολογικὴ σχολή.

Ὁ Ἀλέκος ἔριξε μιὰ ματιὰ στὸν τοῖχο, ἀμέτρητες εἰκόνες. Ἡ γιαγιά εἶχε μαζέψει ὅλους τοὺς Ἁγίους τῆς οἰκογένειας.

- Γιαγιά, τί τίς θές τόσες εἰκόνες;

- Μνήστητί μου, Κύριε! Καὶ πὼς θὰ παρακαλέσω τὸν Ἁγιαλέξανδρο, σὰν δὲν ἔχω τὴν εἰκόνα του; Ἄσε τὸ ἄλλο, κάθε φορὰ ποῦ γιορτάξῃ Ἅγιος μὲ εἰκόνα, τὸ σπίτι ἔχει πανηγύρι. Ἄσε ὅμως αὐτά, πές μου τὰ δικὰ σου, παλικάρι μου.

Καὶ τότε, ἄγνωστο γιατί, ὁ Ἀλέκος ἀνοιξε τὴν καρδιά του ὅπως δὲν τὴν εἶχε ἀνοίξει ποτέ, οὔτε στὸν πνευματικὸ του, οὔτε καὶ στοὺς γέροντες στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος ὅπου βρισκόταν συχνὰ - πυκνὰ. Τῆς εἶπε γιὰ τίς ἀγωνίες του, τὴν βασανιστικὴν του πορεία γιὰ ἀνεύρεση τῆς ἀλήθειας, τὴν προσπάθεια ἐλευθερώσεως τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ του ἀπὸ τὰ



δεσμιὰ τῆς συμβατικότητος καὶ τοῦ ἠθικισμοῦ, ὥστε νὰ ῥθει σὲ κοινωνία ἀληθινὴ μὲ τὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ πλησίον. Τῆς εἶπε ἀκόμη γιὰ τὴν ἀδυναμία του νὰ σταθεῖ μπροστὰ στὸ Θεὸ χωρὶς τὴ μάσκα τοῦ εὐσεβῆ πού τὸν στοιχειώνει ἀπὸ τὰ παιδικὰ του χρόνια. Τῆς εἶπε, τῆς εἶπε, τῆς εἶπε ... καὶ τί δὲν τῆς εἶπε. Ἀκολούθησε μία μεγάλη παύση. Ἡ κυρὰ-Θοδόδαινα ἔκανε τὸν σταυρὸ τῆς ἀργὰ - ἀργὰ καὶ εἶπε:

- Μνήσθητί μου, Κύριε! Δὲν κατάλαβα γρὶ. Μπερδεμένα μου τὰ λές, ματάκια μου. Καὶ θαρρῶ πὼς τὰ ἔχεις καὶ στὸ μυαλό σου μπερδεμένα. Εὐαγγέλιο διαβάξεις;

- Ὅριστε;

- Ἐκκλησία πᾶς;

- Δὲν καταλαβαίνω ...

- Τὴν προσευχὴ σου τὴν κάμεις;

- Τί ἐννοεῖς, γιαγιά;

- Τὸν πλησίον σου τὸν συντρέχεις;

- Θαρρῶ πὼς δὲ μὲ κατάλαβες.

- Ἄχ παιδάκι μου, ἐσὺ ἐννοεῖς νὰ καταλάβεις πὼς τὰ πράγματα τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι ἀπλά. Δὲ χρειάζονται πολλὲς θεωρίες μήτε ἀξημέρωτες συζητήσεις. Μονάχα τοῦτο χρειάζεται, νὰ ξαστερώσεις ἀπὸ τὶς φιλοσοφίες καὶ νὰ πιαστεῖς ἀπὸ τὸ ροῦχο τοῦ Χριστοῦ σὰν ἐκείνη τὴ γυναῖκα στὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, νὰ δεῖς πὼς τὴ λένε ... τὴν ξέχασα, δὲν πειράζει. Τὰ ἄλλα ὅλα θὰ τὰ κανονίσει ὁ Χριστός. Εἶναι δικές Του δουλειές. Ἄσε Τον. Ξέρει τί κάνει.

Δὲν κάθισε πολὺ στὰ Τρόπαια, στὸ σπίτι τῆς γιαγιάς του. Μία - δυὸ μέρες. Ἦταν ἀρκετές. Εἶδε πράγματα πού θὰ τὸν συνόδευαν γιὰ πολὺ καιρό. Εἶδε τὴ γιαγιά του νὰ κάνει ἀτελείωτες μετάνοιες. Τὴν εἶδε νὰ συντρέχει τὴ χήρα μὲ τὰ τρία βυζανιάρικα παιδιά. Τὴν εἶδε νὰ μαζεύει στὸ σπίτι τῆς κάθε λογιῆς κουρασμένο στρατοκόπο καὶ νὰ ἀποθέτει στὰ χέρια τῶν φτωχῶν ὀλάκερη τὴ σύνταξη τοῦ μακαρίτη. Τὴν εἶδε νὰ κοινωνᾷ τὴν Κυριακὴ καὶ νὰ λάμπει σὰν τὸν ἥλιο ὅλη τὴ μέρα. Μυστήρια τοῦ Θεοῦ!

Σὰν ἔφυγε μὲ τὸ λεωφορεῖο γιὰ τὴν Ἀθήνα, στριμωγμένος σ' ἓνα κάθισμα, κρατώντας κεφτεδάκια (πεσκέσι τῆς γιαγιάς), σκεφτόταν ὅσα ἔζησε τοῦτες τὶς λίγες μέρες. Μία μυρωδιὰ λιβανιοῦ τοῦ ῥθε στὴ μύτη καὶ μία φωνὴ νὰ τοῦ ὑπενθυμίζει: «Τὰ πράγματα τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι ἀπλά».

- Λὲς νὰ ἔτσι; Μνήσθητί μου, Κύριε!



Ὅταν καλλιεργοῦμε τὴν προσευχὴ, χρειαζόμαστε ὅπωςδήποτε τὸν σωματικὸ πόνου πού προξενεῖ ἡ νηστεία, ἡ ἀγρυπνία καὶ τὰ παρόμοια»

Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς

## Ἡ Νέα Τουρκοκρατία

Τοῦ κ. Δημ. Νατσιοῦ, Δασκάλου.

Κρίση. Μικρὴ λέξη, δυσύλλαβη, ἡ ὁποία κρύβει στὸ κέλυφός της τρομακτικὴ καὶ τρομερὴ δύναμη. Οἱ περισσότεροὶ ἐννοοῦμε ὑλικὴ κατάρρευση καὶ οἰκονομικὴ χρεωκοπία. Ὅμως μιᾶς ὑλικῆς κατάρρευσης προηγεῖται μιὰ πνευματικὴ ἥττα.

Ἡ κρίση εἶναι πνευματικὴ, ἠττηθήκαμε κυρίως στὸ θέμα τῆς Παιδείας, πού κατάντησε στείρα καὶ ἄγονη Ἐκπαίδευση. «Ἐκπαίδευση εἶναι νὰ μαθαίνεις τὰ πράγματα. Παιδεία εἶναι νὰ τὰ ἐρωτεύσαι. Ἡ πρώτη ὁδηγεῖ στὸ θάνατο τοῦ πνεύματος. Ἡ δευτέρη ὁδηγεῖ στὴ ζωὴ τοῦ πνεύματος», γράφει ὁ Χρ. Μαλεβίτσης.

Ἡ Παιδεία εἶναι ζωὴ, φῶς καὶ «Φῶς Χριστοῦ πού φαίνει πᾶσι». Ὅμως: «Ἀπὸ πολλὰ τώρα χρόνια γίνεται συστηματικὴ προσπάθεια, διαρκῶς αὐξανόμενη, νὰ πολεμηθεῖ ἡ πίστη. Νὰ βγεῖ ἀπὸ τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ σχολεῖα ὁ Χριστός. Νὰ διαστρεβλωθεῖ ἡ ἱστορία μας. Νὰ εὐτελισθεῖ ἡ σημασία τῶν μεγάλων ἐορτῶν τῶν Χριστουγέννων καὶ τοῦ Πάσχα, πού τόσο ζεῖ ὁ λαός μας. Νὰ παύσει ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία νὰ ἐπηρεάζει τὴ ζωὴ τοῦ Γένους μας, δηλαδὴ νὰ παύσει ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ Γένους μας νὰ ζωογονεῖ τὸ εἶναι μας. Νὰ μείνει ὁ λαός ἀπροστάτευτος, ἔκθετος, ἀναμικτός, ἔτομη λεία καὶ τροφὴ ὁποιοῦδήποτε αἰσθητοῦ ἢ νοητοῦ θηρίου». (περιοδικὸ «Σύναξη», 10/1984).

Τὸ σιωπηλὸ καὶ ἡσύχιον Ἅγιον Ὅρος ἔκρουσε τὸν κώδωνα τοῦ κινδύνου ἀπὸ παλιά. Πλὴν εἰς μάτην. Ποιὸς ἀκούει τοὺς καλόγερους...

Παιδεία εἶναι καὶ γλῶσσα, πού διαβάζουνε οἱ ἀγράμματοι κι ἀγιάζουνε. Ἡ γλῶσσα μας, φυλακτῆριο τῶν τιμαλφῶν ἀξιών τοῦ Γένους μας. Ὅμως: «Ὅλα γίνονται στὴν Ἑλλάδα σὰ νὰ μᾶς κινεῖ ἓνα θανάσιμο μῖσος γιὰ τὴ λαλιά μας. Τὸ κακὸ εἶναι τόσο μεγάλο πού μόνο σὰν ἓνα φαινόμενο ὁμαδικῆς ψυχοπάθειας θὰ μπορούσε κανεὶς νὰ τὸ ἐξηγήσει. Ἴσως, ποιὸς ξέρει, οἱ ἀπωθήσεις, πού προκάλεσε μιὰ δασκαλοκρατία πολλῶν αἰώνων, ἔπρεπε νὰ καταλήξουν στὶς σημερινές μας νευρώσεις. Στὰ χρόνια μας, πρέπει νὰ μὴ τὸ ξεχνᾶμε, τὸ ζήτημα δὲν εἶναι πιά ἂν θὰ γράφουμε καθαρεύουσα ἢ δημοτικὴ. Τὸ τραγικὸ ζήτημα εἶναι ἂν θὰ γράφουμε ἢ ὄχι Ἑλληνικά, ἂν θὰ γράφουμε Ἑλληνικά ἢ ἓνα ὁποιοῦδήποτε Ἑλληνόμορφο ἔσπεράντο. Δυστυχῶς ὅλα γίνονται σὰ νὰ προτιμοῦμε τὸ ἔσπεράντο. Σὰν νὰ θέλουμε νὰ ξεκάνουμε μὲ ὅλα τὰ μέσα τὴ γλῶσσα μας» (Γ. Σεφέρης).

Παιδεία εἶναι καὶ μνήμη: «Μνήμη τοῦ λαοῦ μου σὲ λένε Πίνδο καὶ σὲ λένε Ἄθω» (Ἐλύτης). Ὅμως: «Τέτοια κληρονομιά πού μᾶς ἔχει ἀφήσει ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν ἔχουμε δικαίωμα νὰ τὴν ἐξαφανίσουμε στὶς μέρες μας. Θὰ δώσουμε λόγο στὸ Θεό. Ἐμεῖς, τὸ μικρὸ

αὐτὸ ἔθνος, πιστέψαμε στὸν Μεσσία, μᾶς δόθηκε ἡ εὐλογία νὰ διαφωτίσουμε ὅλον τὸν κόσμο. Ἡ Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη μεταφράσθηκε στὴν Ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα ἕκατὸ χρόνια πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἔλευση τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Οἱ πρῶτοι Χριστιανοὶ τί τράβηξαν! Κινδύνευε συνέχεια ἡ ζωὴ τους. Τώρα τί ἀδιαφορία ὑπάρχει!... ἐνῶ ἀνώδυνα σήμερα, χωρὶς νὰ κινδυνεύει ἡ ζωὴ μας μποροῦμε νὰ διαφωτίσουμε τὰ ἔθνη, νὰ γινόμαστε πῶς ἀδιάφοροι;

Ἄν σήμερα ἔχουμε λιγάκι εἰρήνη, ξέρεις τί ἔχουν τραβήξει οἱ παλιοί; Ξέρεις πόσοι θυσιάστηκαν; Τώρα τίποτε δὲν θὰ εἶχαμε, ἂν δὲν θυσιάζονταν ἐκεῖνοι. Καὶ κάνω μία σύγκριση, πῶς τότε, ἐνῶ κινδύνευε ἡ ζωὴ τους, κρατοῦσαν τὴ πίστη τους, καὶ πῶς τώρα, χωρὶς καμμία πίεση, ὅλα τὰ ἰσοπεδώνουν! Ὅσοι δὲν ἔχουν χάσει τὴν ἐθνικὴ τους ἐλευθερία, δὲν καταλαβαίνουν. «Τοὺς λέω! Ὁ Θεὸς νὰ φυλάξῃ νὰ μὴ ἔρθουν οἱ βάρβαροι νὰ μᾶς ἀτιμάσουν! Καὶ μοῦ λένε: Καὶ τί θὰ πάθουμε; Ἀκοῦς κουβέντα; Ἄντε νὰ λείψετε, χαμένοι ἄνθρωποι! Τέτοιοι εἶναι οἱ ἄνθρωποι σήμερα. Δῶσ' τους χρήματα, αὐτοκίνητο, καὶ δὲν νοιάζονται οὔτε γιὰ τὴν πίστη, οὔτε γιὰ τὴν τιμὴ, οὔτε γιὰ τὴν ἐλευθερία» (Γέροντας Παῖσιος ὁ Ἁγιορείτης).

Παιδεία εἶναι καὶ παράδοση ποὺ σημαίνει παραλαβή. Παράδοση σημαίνει συνέχεια. Εἶναι μία λαμπαδηφορία, κατὰ τὴν ὁποία ἡ μιὰ γενεὰ παίρνει τὴν φλόγα ἀπὸ τὴν προηγούμενη, γιὰ νὰ συνεχίσει τὴν δική της πορεία μέχρι νὰ τὴν παραδώσει στὴν ἄλλη. Ἡ λαμπάδα αὐτὴ τῆς παραδόσεώς μας ἔπεσε ἀπὸ τὰ χέρια μας, ὅταν γίναμε κράτος, τὸ λυμφατικὸ Ἑλλαδικὸ κρατίδιο τῶν «Μπαναρέζων».

Ἀπὸ τὸ 1453 μέχρι σήμερα διαπιστώνουμε ὅτι ἡ παρουσία τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ στὴν ἱστορία σημαδεύεται ἀπὸ μία παραδοξότητα. Ἡ δουλεία, παρὰ τὸ καταθλιπτικὸ της βάρος, δὲν ἐπέφερε τὴ νέκρωσή του. Γιατί, ὅπως ἀποδείχτηκε, τὸν ὑπέταξε μόνο σωματικά. Οἱ ψυχὲς καὶ τὸ φρόνημα ἔμειναν ἀδούλωτα. Ἀντίθετα, ἡ ἀπελευθέρωση ἀπέδειξε ὅτι ἡ ἐλευθερία μπορεῖ νὰ φανεῖ καταστροφικὴ, ἂν ἡ ψυχὴ χάσει τὴν αὐτοσυνειδησία της καὶ τὸ φρόνημα ἀλλοτριωθεῖ.

Σὲ στιγμὲς συναισθηματικῆς ἑξαερσης ἀπὸ τὴ διαπίστωση αὐτὴ σημείωνε ὁ στρατηγὸς Ἰ. Μακρυγιάννης στὰ Ἀπομνημονεύματά του: «Ἄν μᾶς ἔλεγε κανένας αὐτὴν τὴ λευτεριά, ὅπου γευόμαστε, θὰ περικαλοῦσαμε τὸν Θεὸν νὰ μᾶς ἀφήσει εἰς τοὺς Τούρκους ἄλλα τόσα χρόνια, ὅσο νὰ γνωρίσουν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τί θὰ εἰπεῖ πατρίδα, τί θὰ εἰπεῖ θρησκεία, τί θὰ εἰπεῖ φιλοτιμία, τί ἀρετὴ καὶ τιμιότη».

Ὁ Μακρυγιάννης ἄφησε νὰ ἀκουστεῖ ὁ σπαραγμὸς τῆς καρδιάς του, ὅταν εἶδε νὰ κινδυνεύει τὸ Γένος, νὰ χάσει στὴν ἐλευθερία ὅ,τι δὲν ἔχασε στὴ δουλεία, ἀποβαίνοντας μεταπρατικὸς χῶρος τῶν δυνάμεων ἐκείνων, ποὺ μὲ τόση ἀποτελεσματικότητα εἶχε

ἀποκρούσει στὴ δουλεία. «Ὁ λόγος τοῦ Στρατηγοῦ Μακρυγιάννη εἶναι μία βαρὴ ὑπόμνηση, ποὺ ὁ σημερινὸς Ἑλληνισμὸς, δὲν μπορεῖ ποτὲ νὰ παραβλέψει» (π. Γεώργιος Μεταλληνός).

Θυμᾶμαι ὁ Μάνος Χατζιδάκης ὀνόμαζε τὴν Εὐρωπαϊκὴ Ἑνωσι, μιὰ νέα μορφή Τουρκοκρατίας καὶ μακάριζε ἑαυτὸν, διότι δὲν θὰ βίωνε τὴν νέα καὶ ὑπουλὴ σκλαβιά. Λοιπόν. Ἐφ' ὅσον ἡ «εὐρωπαϊκὴ» Τουρκοκρατία μᾶς ἀπειλεῖ ἀπροκάλυπτα καὶ κινδυνεύουμε νὰ βουλιάξουμε μέσα σ' αὐτὴν τὴν βαρβαρότροπη χοάνη, ὁ μόνος τρόπος γιὰ νὰ ἐπιβιώσουμε ὡς λαὸς ἱστορικός, εἶναι νὰ ἀναστήσουμε τὴν Παιδεία, μὲ τὴν ὁποία παιδεύε τὰ Ἑλληνόπουλα τὸ ἐν αἰχμαλωσίᾳ Γένος μας. Νὰ ξαναγράψουμε τὸ ἐκπαιδευτικὸ μοντέλο, μὲ τὸ ὁποῖο μόρφωνε τὰ παιδιὰ τοῦ ὁ λαὸς μας τὴν περίοδο τῆς Τουρκοκρατίας.

Ἐπειδὴ κάποιοι «προοδευμένοι» ἐνδέχεται νὰ παρανοήσουν, ἐξηγῶ. Δὲν θὰ κλείσουμε τὰ αὐτιά μας καὶ τὰ μάτια μας, σ' ὅλα ὅσα συμβαίνουν στὰ πεπολιτισμένα ἔθνη. «Ὅ,τι καλὸν ὅ,τι χρήσιμον» τό υἱοθετοῦμε, ἢ οὐσία (ἢ φιλοσοφία) ὅμως τῆς Παιδείας μας θὰ ἐξετάζει, θὰ «βλέπει τί ἔχασε, τί ἔχει, τί τῆς πρέπει». Ἐξω «μαυροφῶρ' ἀπελπισιὰ» καὶ «χειροπιαστὸ σκοτάδι» καὶ μέσα «στὴ θολόκτιστη ἐκκλησιὰ», τὰ σχολειὰ τῆς πατρίδας μας, θὰ θεριεύουν τὴν «ἀποσταμένη ἐλπίδα».



**Ε**ἰς τῶν Φράγκων ὑποσχέσεις μὴ στηρίζετε ἐλπίδας, Ἐμπορος ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν ἀγοράζει καὶ πωλεῖ! Εἰς τῶν τέκνων σας τὰς λόγχας καὶ ἀσπίδας καὶ κοπίδας, Εἰς αὐτά, αὐτὰ καὶ μόνον ἡ ἐλπίς ἄς στηριχθεῖ.

Ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀγροίους Τούρκους καὶ τοὺς πονηροὺς Λατίνους Ὅσο δυνατοὶ κι ἂν εἴσθε δεινοὺς τρέχετε κινδύνους...

**Κ. Σαρδέλη**

**«Ἡ Ρωμηοσύνη καὶ ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου»**



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

## Ὁμιλία 25<sup>ης</sup> Μαρτίου

*Αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια ἀπηύθυνε ἕνας φωτισμένος δάσκαλος στοὺς μαθητές του, στὸ 2<sup>ο</sup> ΕΠΑΑ Ἀχαρνῶν, γιὰ τὴν ἐπέτειο τῆς 25ης Μαρτίου... Ἀπολαύστε καὶ σεῖς αὐτὰ ποὺ εἶπε σὲ 17χρονα παιδιὰ καὶ κάντε τὶς συγκρίσεις...*

**Σ**κέφτηκα νὰ σοῦ μιλήσω γιὰ τὸν Καραϊσκάκη, ἀλλὰ τὸ μῦθό σου θὰ πάει στὸ γῆπεδο. Σκέφτηκα νὰ σοῦ μιλήσω γιὰ τὸ 21, ἀλλὰ ὁ νοῦς σου θὰ πάει στὴν Ὁριζιναλ.

Συλλογίστηκα πολὺ, γιὰ νὰ καταλήξω ἂν ἀξιῶ νὰ σὲ ταλαιπωρήσω γιὰ κάτι τόσο μακρινό, τόσο ξένο. Δυὸ αἰῶνες πίσω κάποια γεγονότα. Τὶ νὰ λένε σὲ σένα; Σὲ ἐσένα ποὺ νοιάζεσαι νὰ φύγεις, νὰ πᾶς γιὰ τσιγάρο, γιὰ καφέ ἢ γιὰ κάτι ἄλλο.

Θὰ σοῦ μιλήσω λοιπὸν προσωπικά.

Ἐγὼ ὁ δάσκαλος ποὺ δούλεψα ἕνα χρόνο σὲ αὐτὸ τὸ σχολεῖο καὶ σὲ δεκαπέντε μέρη φεύγω γιὰ ἄλλοῦ, σὲ ἐσένα ποὺ εἶσαι ἐδῶ ἕνα, δυό, τρία ἢ καὶ περισσότερα χρόνια, θὰ σοῦ μιλήσω σταράτα, γιὰ νὰ σοῦ ἐκφράσω δυὸ σκέψεις μου.

Οἱ μᾶθητές ποὺ συνάντησα μέσα στὶς τάξεις, οἱ μᾶθητές ποὺ δίδαξα φέτος, στὴν συντριπτικὴ τους πλειονότητα μὲ σεβάστηκαν, ἂν καὶ δὲν ἀνταποκρίθηκαν στὶς ἀπαιτήσεις τοῦ μαθήματος.

Πολλοὶ ὅμως ἀπὸ τοὺς ὑπόλοιπους μᾶθητές δὲ μὲ σεβάστηκαν, μὲ προσέβαλαν κατ' ἐπανάληψη. Μὲ ἔργα, μὲ λόγια, μὲ ὕβρεις, δείχνοντας ἕνα χαρακτήρα καὶ ἕνα ἦθος ποὺ μὲ σόκαρε, ποὺ μὲ ἔβαλε σὲ μελαγχολικὲς σκέψεις.

Αὐτὸ τὸ φαινόμενο ἀποδεικνύει πὼς κάτι σάπιο ὑπάρχει σὲ αὐτὸ τὸ σχολεῖο, πὼς ἐκτὸς τοῦ γνωστικοῦ ἐλλείμματος, τὸ συγκεκριμένο σχολεῖο χωλαίνει δραματικά.

Καὶ στὸ ἠθικοπλαστικὸ τοῦ ἔργου, στὴ διαμόρφωση δηλαδὴ τῶν μαθητικῶν ψυχῶν καὶ πνευμάτων. Καὶ ἡ εὐθύνη γιὰ αὐτὴν τὴν ἀποτυχία εἶναι εὐθύνη ἀποκλειστικὰ δική μας, τῶν δασκάλων σας καὶ τῶν γονιῶν σας. Δὲν ἔχουμε κατορθώσει νὰ σᾶς δείξουμε πὼς χωρὶς ἀρχὲς ἡ ζωὴ σας αὔριο θὰ εἶναι μία κόλαση, πὼς χωρὶς ὄνειρα καὶ στόχους θὰ χρειαστεῖτε ὑποκατάστατα, θὰ καταφύγετε πιθανὸν σὲ ἐπιλογὲς ποὺ θὰ σᾶς ξεφτιλίσουν, θὰ σᾶς κάνουν νὰ σιχαίνεστε τὸν ἑαυτό σας, θὰ σᾶς γεμίσουν τὴ ζωὴ πλήξη καὶ κούραση, θὰ σᾶς γεράσουν πρόωρα.

Ἄν ὅμως θέλετε μία συμβουλή ἀπὸ ἕνα δάσκαλο, σκεφτεῖτε τὸ παράδειγμα τοῦ Μακρυγιάννη, ποὺ ἔφτασε ἀγράμματος μᾶχρι τὰ πενήντα σχεδόν, γιὰ νὰ καταλάβει τότε πὼς ἡ μόρφωση, ἡ καλλιέργεια, ἦταν τὸ ὄπλο ποὺ ἔλειπε ἀπὸ τὴν προσωπικὴ του θήκη. Καὶ κάθισε μὲ πολλὴ δυσκολία καὶ χωρὶς δάσκαλο καὶ ἔμαθε πέντε κολλυβογράμματα, γιὰ νὰ μᾶς πεί τὴν

ἱστορία τοῦ βίου του, τὸ παραμῦθι τῆς ἐπανάστασης τῶν ὑπόδουλων Ρωμιῶν.

Αὐτὸ τὸ παράδειγμα εἶναι γιὰ σένα τὸ πιὸ κατάλληλο, καὶ μπορεῖς τριάντα χρόνια νωρίτερα ἀπὸ τὸν στρατηγὸ Μακρυγιάννη νὰ ἀκολουθήσεις τὸ δρόμο ποὺ ἐκεῖνος ἔδειξε, τὸ μονοπάτι τῆς καλλιέργειας, τὸ δρόμο τῆς παιδείας, τὴ λεωφόρο τῆς προσωπικῆς σου προκοπῆς.

Δὲν εἶστε σὲ τίποτε λιγότερο ἱκανοὶ ἀπὸ τὸν μπάσταρδο γιὸ τῆς καλογοριᾶς, τὸν Ἀρβανίτη Γιώργη Καραϊσκάκη. Ἦταν κι αὐτὸς ἀθυρόστομος σὰν κι ἐσᾶς, ἀλλὰ εἶχε αὐτὸ ποὺ ἀπὸ τὰ ἄλβανικὰ μάθαμε σὰν μπέσα, ἦταν πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα μπεσαλῆς.

Αὐτὸ θὰ 'θελα νὰ ἔχετε κι ἐσεῖς. Ὑπευθυνότητα, μπέσα, τσίπα. Νὰ ἀναλαμβάνετε τὶς εὐθύνες σας, νὰ ἀπεχθάνεστε τὴν ὑποκρισία, νὰ σιχαίνεστε τὸ συμφέρον, νὰ μίσητε τὸ ψέμα καὶ τὴν εὐθυνοφοβία.

Ἡ ἀγάπη γιὰ τὸν τόπο του, ἡ λατρεία γιὰ τὴν πατρίδα του ἦταν αὐτὸ ποὺ χαρακτήριζε τὴ ζωὴ τοῦ Νικήτα Σταματελόπουλου, τοῦ Νικηταῖ. Ἀγωνίστηκε στὴ διάρκεια τῆς ἐπανάστασης, συνέβαλε στὴν ἀπελευθέρωση τῆς πατρίδας του κι ἔπειτα φυλακίστηκε, γιὰ νὰ χαθεῖ σ' ἕνα στενοσόκακο τοῦ Πειραιᾶ, σχεδὸν τυφλωμένος, πάμπτωχος καὶ ἐγκαταλειμμένος ἀπὸ ὄλου δὲ ζήτησε τίποτε ἀπὸ τὴν ἐλεύθερη Ἑλλάδα, κι ὅταν οἱ γύρω του τὸν παρακινούσαν νὰ ἀπαιτήσῃ ἀπὸ τὴν κυβέρνηση μία πλούσια σύνταξη, ἀπαντοῦσε πὼς ἡ πατρίδα τὸν ἀμείβει πολὺ καλά, λέγοντας ψέματα, γιὰ νὰ μὴν προσβάλλει τὴν πατρίδα του.

Εἶναι δύσκολο, τὸ κατανοῶ, τὸ παράδειγμα τοῦ Νικηταῖ. Ἀλλὰ νομίζω πὼς κι ἐσεῖς εἶστε ἱκανοὶ γιὰ τὰ δύσκολα, μπορεῖτε νὰ ἀκολουθήσετε τὸ δρόμο τῆς ἀξιοπρέπειας, νὰ προσπαθήσετε τίμια καὶ μὲ ἀγωνιστικότητα γιὰ ἐσᾶς καὶ γιὰ τὸ μέλλον τῆς οἰκογένειας ποὺ αὔριο θὰ κάνετε.

Ξέρω, καταλαβαίνω, ἀντιλαμβάνομαι πὼς σᾶς προτείνω μία διαδρομὴ ζωῆς δύσκολη καὶ ἀπαιτητικὴ, ὅταν δίπλα σας κυριαρχεῖ ὁ εὐκόλος δρόμος τῶν γονιῶν, τῶν δασκάλων, τῶν πολιτικῶν, τῆς ἐποχῆς στὴν ὁποία μεγαλώνετε.

Ὅμως κάθε ἐποχὴ ἐλπίζει στοὺς νέους της, περιμένει ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς νὰ σηκώσουν ψηλὰ καὶ μὲ ἐπιτυχία τὴ σημαία τοῦ ἀγώνα καὶ νὰ ὀδηγήσουν τὴν πατρίδα τους, τὸν τόπο τους σὲ καλύτερες μέρη, σὲ πιὸ φωτεινὲς σελίδες.

Κι ὅταν βλέπω τὴν ἐποχὴ μας, νὰ μᾶραζώνει χωμένη στὴν ἀλλοτρίωση, νὰ ξεψυχᾷ ἀπὸ τὴν τηλεοπτικὴ ἀνία, νὰ μοῦχλιάζει ἀπὸ τὸ κυνήγι τῆς εὐκολίας, μόνο σὲ ἐσᾶς ἐλπίζω, στὴν εἰλικρινή σας διάθεση νὰ ἀγωνιστεῖτε, νὰ ἀντισταθεῖτε, νὰ πολεμήσετε, νὰ νικήσετε.

Μὴ μᾶς ἀπογοητεύσετε...

## Ἡ Ἄδικία θὰ τοῦ Γίνει Δόξα!

Τοῦ Μοναχοῦ Μωυσέως Ἀγιορείτου, ἀπὸ τὴν ἐφημ. «ΜΑΚΕΔΟΝΙΑ».



**Ἡ**προφυλάκιση τοῦ ἡγούμενου Ἐφραὶμ δημιουργεῖ σοβαρὰ καὶ μεγάλα προβλήματα καὶ ἐρωτήματα. Εἶναι ἄσχετο τ' ὅτι ὑπουργοποιήθηκαν ὅλοι οἱ ὑπουργοὶ ποὺ ἀναμείχθηκαν στὴν ὑπόθεση Βατοπεδίου; Γιατί, γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ ἀπὸ τὴν σύσταση τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ κράτους, ἔχουμε

ὑφυπουργὸ Δικαιοσύνης; Ὁ συγκεκριμένος ὑφυπουργὸς ἔχει ἀσχοληθεῖ μὲ τὴν ὑπόθεση τῆς Μονῆς ἀρνητικά. Πῶς μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι στὴ θέση αὐτή;

Ὁ ἡγούμενος Ἐφραὶμ εἶναι ὁ πλέον ὕβρισθεις, γλευσασθεις, εἰρωνευθεῖς καὶ διαπομπευθεῖς Νεοέλληνας. Γιατί; Ἀποδείχθηκε ἡ ἐνοχή του; Ὁ ἡγούμενος κατέστρεψε τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ οἰκονομία; Πρόκειται γιὰ τὸ πιὸ ἄθλιο ὑποκείμενο τῆς Ἑλλάδος; Ἔνας Ἀγιορείτης ἡγούμενος ἱστορικῆς Μονῆς μὲ πλούσια προσφορὰ καὶ 120 μοναχοὺς ἄξιζε αὐτῆς τῆς τύχης;

Ἐμεῖς δὲν θέλουμε νὰ κρίνουμε καὶ νὰ κατακρίνουμε τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ δικαιοσύνη. Πιστεύουμε στὴν ἀκριβοδικία τῆς δικαιοσύνης, στὸ ὕψος καὶ τὴν ἀξιοπιστία της. Ὅμως ὀρισμένες φορὲς μᾶς λυπεῖ, μᾶς στεναχωρεῖ καὶ μᾶς προβληματίζει. Δὲν μιλοῦμε συναισθηματικά. Ἀνώτατοι δικαστικοί, ἔγκριτοι νομικοὶ μιλοῦν γιὰ «δικαστικὸ πραξικόπημα». Γιατί νὰ προφυλακιστεῖ ὁ ἡγούμενος; Μόνο αὐτὸς ἔφταιγε, ἂν ἔφταιγε; Ὁ ἡγούμενος ἦταν κάποιος αἰσχροὺς κακοποιὸς καὶ μεγαλοπατεώνας; Νὰ ἔλθουν νὰ τὸν συλλάβουν δεκάδες ὄπλοφόροι ἀστυνομικοί; Νὰ καταπατηθεῖ ἀπὸ ἐκπροσώπους τοῦ νόμου ὁ Καταστατικὸς Χάρτης τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους ἐπιτρέπεται; Ἦταν τόσο ἐπικίνδυνος ὁ ἡγούμενος κι ἔπρεπε ἄμεσα νὰ προφυλακισθεῖ; Παραμονὴ τῶν Χριστουγέννων ἔπρεπε νὰ γίνεῖ κάτι τέτοιο; Μήπως ἤθελαν νὰ καλύψουν μία τῆς προηγούμενης ἡμέρας ἀπόφαση τῆς γερμανικῆς δικαιοσύνης γιὰ πρώην ὑπουργό;

Μὲ τὴν προφυλάκιση τοῦ ἡγούμενου ἐπῆλθε ἡ κάθαρση; Λύθηκαν τώρα ὅλα τὰ προβλήματα; Γιὰ ἄλλη ὑπόθεση κατηγοροῦνται δικαστικοὶ γιατί ἔκαναν τὸν καθῆκον τους. Ἄρα συμβαίνει ἡ ἐπιρροὴ τῶν πολιτικῶν στοὺς δικαστικούς; Ἄλλοι θὰ εἶχαν προφυλακιστεῖ νωρίτερα. Γιατί τόσο μένος; Μήπως θεώρησαν ὀρισμένοι ἰθύνοντες πὼς θ' ἀνεβάσουν τὰ χαμηλὰ ποσοστὰ τους μὲ τὴν προφυλάκιση αὐτή; Πάντως κατάφεραν νὰ τὰ μειώσουν περισσότερο αὐτὰ τὰ χαμηλὰ ποσοστὰ. Ἄνθρωποι ποὺ εἶχαν ἐπηρεασθεῖ

ἀρνητικὰ ἀπὸ τὰ μέσα ἐνημερώσεως γιὰ τὸν ἡγούμενο ἄλλαξαν γνώμη. Μήπως χρειάζεται ἀναθεώρηση;

Ἐπῆρξε μία ἀντίδραση πολλῶν προσώπων καὶ προσωπικοτήτων. Ἀνώτατων καὶ ἀνωτέρων κληρικῶν, ἡγουμένων, μοναχῶν καὶ λαϊκῶν. Ἐκπρόσωποι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Κύπρου, τῆς Ἑλλάδος, τῆς Σερβίας, τῆς Βουλγαρίας, τῆς Ρουμανίας, τῆς Οὐκρανίας καὶ τῆς Ρωσίας καὶ ἄλλοι. Δὲν πρόκειται γιὰ ἄπρεπη παρέμβαση, ἀλλὰ γιὰ συγκινητικὲς φωνὲς συμπαράστασης καὶ δικαιολογημένης διαμαρτυρίας. Δύο μὲ τρεῖς ἱεράρχες— πρόκειται, λένε, γιὰ ὑποψήφιους ἀρχιεπισκόπους— ἔκαναν ἀρνητικὲς δηλώσεις. Φυσικὰ εἶναι δικαίωμά τους. Δὲν γνωρίζω πόσο εἰλικρινεῖς, φιλάδελφες καὶ θεάρεστες εἶναι. Μήπως ὑπάρχει κάποια σκοπιμότητα;

Πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι χάρηκαν ἰδιαίτερα γιὰ τὸ σχετικὸ ἀνακοινωθὲν τῆς Ἱερᾶς Συνόδου τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδος, καθὼς καὶ γιὰ τὴν ὁμόφωνη ἐπιστολὴ συμπαράστασης τῆς Ἱερᾶς Κοινότητος.

Δὲν θὰ θέλαμε νὰ ἔχουμε ὑποψίες, πικροὺς λογισμοὺς καὶ ἀμφισβητήσεις. Δυστυχῶς ὅμως τὰ ὅσα συμβαίνουν τελευταῖα στὴν καψερὴ πατρίδα μας μᾶς κάνουν νὰ ἐπιβεβαιώσουμε τὶς ὑποψίες μας. Κατηγοροῦνται οἱ ξένοι ποὺ κατέθεσαν διαμαρτυρίες γιὰ τὴν προφυλάκιση. Δὲν ἀκούγεται λέξη γιὰ ὅσους ἐνοχλήθηκαν ἀπὸ τὶς διαμαρτυρίες; Γιατί; Γιατί μεροληπτοῦν τὰ μέσα ἐνημερώσεως; Πλὴν ἐλαχίστων ἐξαιρέσεων.

Ὁ ἡγούμενος Ἐφραὶμ προφυλακίστηκε. Ταπεινά, καρτερικὰ καὶ ἐλπιδοφόρα παραμένει στὸ κελὶ τοῦ Κορυδαλλοῦ. Ἡ ἀδικία θὰ τοῦ γίνεῖ δόξα. Ἄν σὲ κάτι ἔφταιξε μὲ τὸν τρόπο του ἦταν γιὰ φυλάκιση; Τότε θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ εἶναι φυλακισμένοι ὅλοι οἱ Ἕλληνες γιὰ κάποια λάθη τῆς ζωῆς τους. Δὲν ἀποδείχθηκε ἐσκεμμένη ἀπάτη. Κατηγορηθήκαμε γιὰ τὴν ὑποστήριξή μας. Δὲν πειράζει. Εἶναι χαρούμενοι καὶ μὲ γαλήνιο ὕπνο ὅσοι συνήργησαν γι' αὐτὴ τὴν προφυλάκιση; Καὶ μάλιστα γνωστοὶ ρασοφόροι.

Εἶναι σημαντικὰ αἰσιόδοξο μήνυμα ἡ σύμπτωση τῆς πλειοψηφίας τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς ἱεραρχίας. Δὲν γνωρίζω ἂν εἶναι ἓνας ἄμεσος πόλεμος τοῦ μοναχισμοῦ καὶ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ἔνας πάντως τρόπος ὑπουλῆς πολεμικῆς σαφῶς εἶναι. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι πανάρχαιος, δυνατὸς καὶ ἐνοπιὸς θεσμός. Ὁ μοναχισμὸς ἔχει πολὺτιμη προσφορὰ ἔργων ἀρετῆς, ἀγιότητος, φιλοκαλίας καὶ ἱερότητας. Τὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος ὅπωςδήποτε θέλει μία ἄλλη ἀντιμετώπιση. Εἶναι κρίμα γι' αὐτὴ τὴν κατάπτωση, τὴν ἀποϊεροποίηση τῶν πάντων. Λαθεύω, ὑπερβάλλω ἢ ἀστοχῶ; Νὰ μὲ συγχωρεῖτε ποὺ ἐπιμένω. Ἔχω μία διαίσθηση ὅτι αὐτοὶ ποὺ θέλησαν νὰ διαβάλουν τὸν ἡγούμενο Ἐφραὶμ τοῦ ἔκαναν τὸ μεγαλύτερο καλὸ ἀπὸ πνευματικῆς ἀπόψεως.

Αὐτὸ ἔχει καὶ τὴ μεγαλύτερη σημασία. Δὲν νομίζετε;

## PALM SUNDAY

By St. Ignatius (Brianchaninov).

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion; proclaim it aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, the King is coming to thee, just, and a Savior; he is meek and riding on an ass, and a young foal. [Zech 9:9]*

The prophet of God pronounced this prophecy over four hundred years before the event that we commemorate and celebrate today. Having completed His preaching on the earth, our Lord Jesus Christ made His triumphant entry into the royal city of Jerusalem, into the city where the true God was worshipped, a city in most ways Godly. The Lord made this entry as the King and victor, in order to finish His service by a decisive exploit: destroying death by death; removing the curse from the human race by taking this curse upon Himself. He made His entry into the royal city on the colt of an ass, *whereon yet never man sat* (Lk 19:30), in order to restore to mankind the royal dignity which our forefather had wasted; to restore this dignity by ascending the cross.

The unbroken colt was tamed beneath the wondrous Rider. The Apostles placed their garments upon the colt; great multitudes of people ran ahead to meet the Lord and walk alongside Him, shouting in their

ecstasy, *Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he [the king (Lk 19:38)] that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.* (Mt. 21:9) The Lord is proclaimed King in the name of the Lord at His own beckoning—not accidentally, and not by conscious human will. In the course of four days, those same people who that day proclaimed Him King will cry, *Away with him, away with him, crucify him... We have no king but Caesar!* (Jn 19:15)

What is the significance of the Lord's riding into Jerusalem on an unbroken colt? According to the explanation of the holy fathers, this has a deep, prophetic meaning. The all-seeing Lord already saw the Jews' approaching final apostasy from God. He announced this apostasy even back when the Law was given to the Israelites on Mt. Sinai, through the lips of the inspired Law-giver. *They have sinned*, said Moses of the Jews' future sin against the God-Man, as if he were speaking of something already done. *They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of His children: they are a perverse and crooked generation. Do ye thus recompense the Lord? (Deut. 32:5–6) It is a nation that has lost counsel, neither is there understanding*

*in them. They had not sense to understand: let them reserve these things against the time to come. (Deut 32:28–29) For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and their vine-branch of Gomorrha. (Deut 32:32). While to the contrary: Rejoice, ye heavens, with Him—the Son of God—and let all the angels of God worship Him; rejoice ye Gentiles, with His people, and let all the sons of God strengthen themselves in Him. (Deut 32:43).*

Thus, the entry into Jerusalem upon an unbroken colt is a repetition of Moses' prophecy—not in words, but in symbol. Moses foretold that the Gentiles would rejoice in the Lord, but the Jews would be rejected. Here, the unbroken colt, *whereon yet never man sat* (Lk 19:30), is an image of the Gentiles. The Apostles' garments are Christ's teachings by which they would instruct the Gentiles, and the Lord seated Himself spiritually upon the Gentiles, making them God. He led them into Jerusalem, to the bosom of the Church, to the eternal city of God not made by the hands of men, to the

city of salvation and blessedness. The rejected Jews were also present there. With their lips they cried, "the King of Israel," but in their soul, their Sanhedrin, they had already resolved to kill the Savior.

Here is another meaning of the *colt of an ass*. It is an image of every person who is led by irrational desires, deprived of spiritual freedom, attached to the passions and habits of fleshly

life. Christ's teaching looses the ass from its attachment; that is, from fulfilling its sinful and fleshly will. Then the Apostles lead the ass to Christ, place their garments upon it; the Lord seats Himself upon it and makes His entry upon it into Jerusalem. This means that the person who has left his sinful life is led to the Gospels, and is clothed as if in apostolic vestments, in the most detailed and refined knowledge of Christ and His commandments. Then the Lord seats Himself upon him by spiritually appearing to him and spiritually abiding in him, as it was His good will to promise: *He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him. (Jn. 14:21) And My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him. (Jn. 14:23)*

The Lord's coming is accompanied by peace surpassing words and comprehension; peace that is full of grace, and worthy of the one Who grants it—the Lord. This peace is not to be compared with the natural rest of fallen man, who may feel rest and pleasure from fleshly delights, and who



may consider his own insensibility, his own eternal death, to be rest. The Lord is seated upon the natural qualities of the person who has submitted to Him and has assimilated His all-holy teachings; and He leads that person into the spiritual city of God, the city of peace—into the Jerusalem created by God, and not by man.

The soul that upholds the Lord is greeted by the Holy Spirit, Who offers that soul spiritual joy which is incorruptible and eternal. *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion*, the daughter of the Holy Church—because you belong to no one but God. *Proclaim it aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, the King is coming to thee, just, and a Savior; he is meek and riding on an ass, and a young foal* (Zech 9:9). You have felt the grace-filled peace of Christ, and become a daughter of this peace; you have been renewed with spiritual youth and have come to know Christ's Kingdom by experience. The passions are tamed in you by the grace-filled power of our Lord Who steers you; your natural qualities cannot break their natural laws, they cannot go beyond their boundaries and be transformed into uncontrolled passions!

Taking all your thoughts, feelings and actions from the Lord, you can and must proclaim the Name of the Lord to your brethren, and hymn Him *in the midst of the Church*. (Pss 21:22) As one born of the Holy Spirit and a daughter of the Spirit, you are able to behold the spiritual procession of your King, you are able to behold the righteousness of your King. *He is meek and lowly in heart* (Mt 11:29), and *He will guide the meek in judgment, He will teach the meek His ways* (Pss 24:9). Our God is a Spirit which is incomparable to any created spirit, as He is in all aspects infinitely different from all creatures. The holy created spirits are His thrones and chariots. He is seated and rides upon the Cherubim; He is seated and rides upon those blessed human souls who have submitted to Him and brought all their natural qualities to Him as a whole burnt offering. The King rides upon such souls, and enters the holy city of God, bringing holy souls into it also. *Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh.*

Amen.



If the truth of something has been revealed in the Word of God, has been investigated and explained to us by the Divinely enlightened mind of the saints whom God has glorified, and has been recognized by the heart in its light and life-giving effect, then it is a great sin and diabolical pride of the intellect and heart to doubt it and to be perplexed about it.

St. John of Kronstadt

## TWO KINDS OF FAITH

By Rev. John S. Romanides (+2001).

Human beings can have two kinds of faith. The first kind of faith, which has its seat in the mind, is the reasonable faith of acceptance. In this case, a person rationally accepts something and believes in what he has accepted, but this faith does not justify him. When Holy Scripture says, *man is saved by faith alone* (Eph 2:8), it does not mean that he is saved merely by the faith of acceptance. There is, however, another kind of faith, the faith of the heart. It is referred to in this way because this kind of faith is not found in the human reason or intellect, but in the region of the heart. This faith of the heart is a gift of God that you will not receive unless God decides to grant it. It is also called *inner faith*, which is the kind of faith that the father of the young lunatic in the Gospel asked Christ to give him when he said, *Lord, help my unbelief*. (Mk 9:24). Naturally, the father already believed with his reason, but he did not have that deep inner faith that is a gift of God.

Inner faith is rooted in an (empirical) experience of grace. And since it is an experience of grace, what would this make inner faith as far as an Orthodox Christian is concerned? Inner faith is noetic prayer. When someone has noetic prayer in his heart, which means the prayer of the Holy Spirit in his heart, then he has inner faith. Through this kind of faith and by means of prayer, he beholds things that are invisible. When someone has this kind of vision, it is called *theoria*. *Theoria*, in fact, means vision.

As a rule, there are two ways for vision to take place.

When a person has not yet attained to *theosis*, it is still possible for him to see by means of the prayer that the Holy Spirit is saying within his heart. After attaining to *theosis*, however, he can see by means of *theosis*, in which both this inner faith (i.e., prayer of the heart) and hope are set aside, and only love for God remains (as a gift of God). This is what St. Paul means when he says: *But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away*. (I Cor 13:10 & 13:13). Note that since faith and hope have fulfilled their purpose and man has reached the point of seeing God, the source of his faith and hope, he now simply knows and loves the One Who is Love.

When the perfect is come, faith and hope are thus done away, and only love remains. And this love is *theosis*. In *theosis*, knowledge comes to an end; prophecy is set aside; tongues, which are in noetic prayer, cease; and only love remains. St. Paul says this in passages of great clarity and beauty. The Church Fathers in turn offer interpretations of these subjects that are indisputably correct. These interpretations are found throughout the entire Philokolia.

## CHRIST IS RISEN!

*Paschal Epistle of St. John Maximovitch, 1940, translated by Nun Cornelia (Rees).*

*Pascha, 1940, Shanghai: A large Russian diaspora, forced to leave behind their homeland; many had lost their dear ones, and everything they owned, and now lived in want, in a foreign land. But God gave them a saintly bishop to comfort them, and keep them in remembrance of the grace and strength of Holy Orthodoxy.*

*A member of St. John's Shanghai flock, Nicholas Feodorovich Tsepitov, of Revda, Russia, preserved this Paschal Epistle all his life, even after his return to the Soviet Union in 1947. It gave him comfort there also, where more trials awaited him. He gave this epistle for publication to the Fund for the Canonization of St. John Maximovitch in Russia, and it is presented here, in English translation, as a comfort to all.*

† † †

*Let us arise in the deep dawn,*

*And instead of myrrh offer a hymn to the Lord.*

**W**e forestall the rising of the sun, and hasten in the depth of night to meet the Sun of Righteousness.

The present night is not an ordinary night! Brighter than day, it fills our souls with light! The rays of the Sun of the world illumine us and the whole universe, enlightening all who come to His light. The warmth poured out through His rays penetrates all our members, filling our souls with deep peace, even healing our bodily illnesses. This warmth melts away our sorrows, and our passions are burned away as by fire.

Enmity and hatred disappear from us, we forget our bitterness, and we do not feel our impoverishment. The whole world becomes different in this holy and only night!

All nature is changed, and everything is filled with warmth and light. Just as birds of prey hide at the rising of the sun, and wild beasts disappear into their dens, so does evil flee from every heart illumined today by the Light which radiates from the tomb.

Like the morning dew, now are our tears dried away! As blossoms unfold at the onset of day, enlivened by the sun's rays, so do virtues return to us as the Sun rises upon us this morning.

Let us strive to be wholly illuminated by this wondrous light! When spring comes, we open all the windows and doors of our homes, that the warmth may enter and dry the dankness within. Now the Divine Light can also enter; but it cannot shine within souls that have closed themselves, and do not want to be illumined by that Light.

Let us open our souls and hearts! Let us hasten with the myrrh-bearers, *let us come bearing our lamps to Christ, Who has come forth from the tomb!* Even if you are burdened by sins, do not turn away; for today even *those in the bonds of hell hasten to the Light with joyful feet.* Even if you are poor

and haven't the means to buy candles and myrrh, do not turn away. Let our hearts and souls burn in place of candles. There is no impoverishment in the world!

In these past days, we were all called to bring our material offerings and bodily ascetic labors as myrrh. Now we all are called to partake of spiritual joy. *This is the day which the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!*

Instead of myrrh and material offerings, *let us bring a hymn to the Lord.* Let us sing the praise of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, God!

Let us open now the doors and windows of our souls and hearts, that they might be warmed by the rays of the Sun of Righteousness!

*From the outermost border of heaven is His going forth, and His goal is unto the outermost part of heaven, and there shall no man hide himself from His heat (Pss 18:6). Now all things are filled with light: heaven and earth and the nether regions (Ode 3 of the Paschal Canon). Only we are impenetrable if we do not want Him!*

If you do not feel this radiant joy today, seek the reason within yourself only.

It would be insane for a man to claim that the sun does not exist, only because he does not see it from within his tightly closed and shuttered dwelling. Pitiably is the blind man who keeps telling everyone that there is no such thing as light, only because he does not see it! It would look very foolish for a man to insist that spring has not come, only because no warmth has penetrated into his locked cellar!

We praise the gentle light, the holy glory of the immortal Heavenly Father—the Resurrected Lord, crying out to Him from the depth of our souls, *meet it is for Thee at all times to be hymned!*

Then the light of Christ that enlightens all will enlighten even us, and we shall behold Christ the Sun of Righteousness, Who shines upon all life!

Christ is Risen!

The Bright Resurrection of Christ,  
+ JOHN, Bishop of Shanghai



**T**he perfect man will certainly become the equal of the angels, as the Lord affirms; but He will do so in the resurrection of the dead, and not in this present world. Even then the perfect will not be angels, but *equal to the angels* (Lk 20:36). This means that men cannot forsake their own nature, though like angels they can become changeless through grace and released from all necessity, free in everything they do, possessing ceaseless joy, love of God, and all that *the eye has not seen, and the ear has not heard.* (I Cor 2:9).

St. Peter of Damaskos

## DAVID NOW HAS A VOICE...

*Printed with permission from Judy Charest, Nashville, TN.*

I know there is a law against coerced abortions... on the books anyway. This is my story of what happened to me in April of 1972. I know there are countless others, who like me, have been forced into an abortion. My story is unfortunately not unique.

I was a 16 year old girl from Nashville in a long term relationship with my boyfriend Steve, and living with my mother and step father. My mother was very ill and my stepfather made all the family decisions. When I found out I was pregnant, I knew my stepfather would force me to have an abortion. But Steve and I had a plan. We hid the pregnancy until I was past the stage for abortions, or so we thought. We managed to hide it until I was 5 1/2 months along. Just as we thought, my step father took me to a doctor for an abortion. He told my father I was too far along so we thought our baby was safe.

When I was 7 1/2 months, I was awakened at 4:00 AM and driven in the dead of night to a hospital in Cookeville, TN. I knew this had something to do with the baby but he was kicking, rolling and very much alive. There was nothing they could do now!

I was wrong... a nurse came in to listen for a heartbeat, and found a very strong heartbeat. What music to a mother's ears to hear the heartbeat of her baby! But this would be the first and last time I would hear his heartbeat. No one would answer my questions about what was going on. I was becoming very agitated and scared.

Finally a doctor came in and explained in a harsh voice that he was going to perform a salt saline abortion. I became uncontrollably upset, I said NO, I screamed NO, I tried to make the deal that if they would just let my baby live I would give him up at birth, I tried to get off of the bed, I did all a 16 year old could until they sedated me and started the procedure. My labor was 12 painful hours of knowing what was happening to my baby.

When I gave birth to my son, I begged to hold him but I was denied even that. Before they took his little burned body away, I caught a glimpse of his little leg and foot. That is all I saw of my son. He was dead...

Less than 24 hours later I was taken back to Nashville to inform my boyfriend they had killed our baby; that I couldn't save our son. I was consumed with guilt and sorrow. Being denied the opportunity to mourn, I was told this was my fault and I must never tell anyone about this; no one would

understand or ever love me if they knew what "I" had done... I believed what they told me.

I left Nashville a pregnant teenager, I returned a broken woman, girlfriend, sister, friend, daughter, but most of all a broken mother.

Steve and I named our son David.

As time passed my world grew darker, the relationship didn't make it, I spiraled down into my very own private hell. Years passed and the birthdays and dreams of what David could have been haunted me. The maternal instinct that longed to hold and protect him never left me.

In 2009, after much prayer, I made the decision to find a way to heal. I wanted to acknowledge that my son existed, even if for a short time. God was in control and I was headed for the journey of my life.

God's perfect timing... the journey begins.

My research on the issue of abortion led me to TN Right to Life. There I met so many remarkable people who were dedicated to the cause of life and helping women and men just like

me. As I became more involved, I found out that their legislative liaison was working on a piece of legislation along with two great sponsors called "Freedom from Coercion Bill" sponsored by Representative Susan Lynn and Senator Jack Johnson. This legislation would require specific signs in facilities performing abortions that no one was allowed to coerce a woman into an abortion against her will regardless of her age and



there is help for them.

Many are unaware that there is a law against coercion to protect a mother when she said NO to abortion. This was all about what happened to me and my son! I was so excited and wanted to be a part of this historic event. What better way to heal than to educate the public and legislators about the need for this bill. I was now bold enough to go public.

I became concerned about finding David's father and informing him of my actions. I realized that this bill and my story might get attention in the media. I knew reading about this in the papers might cause him pain. I had looked for him over the years without success but amazingly found him just in time on Facebook. We spoke for the first time in over 30 years, I was able to tell him my plans for the upcoming bill and my planned involvement. I told him I wanted to give our son a voice... a voice that had been denied him and save other babies from the horrible death he had suffered against the wishes of his own parents. To my relief, he told me that he supported me 100% and would stand with me though the process!! We would stand together for our son.



For the next 3 months we walked the halls of the Legislative Plaza and told our story to anyone who would listen. We sat through countless meetings in the House and Senate to follow this bill. I went to many county chapter meetings of Right to Life to tell our story and encourage their work. I spoke at their annual Rally for Life reliving the story I hid for years...the time was right. The story must be told and the truth uncovered. Finally I felt I was able to act on behalf of my son.

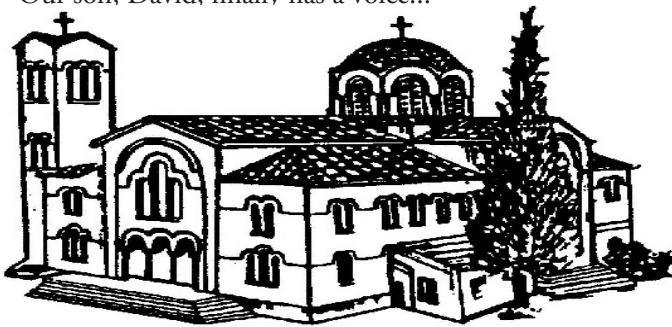
On March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2010 both the House and the Senate passed the Freedom From Coercion Act in a historic vote!

For the first time in 37 years Steve and I felt that we had given a sort of rebirth to our son. David's voice had been heard! On April 19th, two days after the date of David's birth and death, the TN Governor signed the bill into law.

David's voice will now be heard in every abortion facility, doctor's office and hospitals that perform abortions. As women read the required sign that...

**It is against the law for anyone, regardless of the person's relationship to you, to coerce you to have an abortion. By law, we cannot perform an abortion on you unless we have your freely given and voluntary consent. It is against the law to perform an abortion on you against your will. You have the right to contact any local or state law enforcement agency to receive protection from any actual or threatened criminal offense to coerce an abortion.**

Our son, David, finally has a voice...



**I**f a fierce storm of tribulations fall upon us, let us not be terror stricken as if we had to overcome the disaster in our own strength; both our counsel and our strength is Christ, and through Him we can do all things, and without Him nothing. It is He Who, to confirm the preachers of the Gospel and the ministers of the mysteries, says, *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* (Mt 28:20). And again He says: *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.* (Jn 16:33).

Thus, the promises, which are as plain as they can be, we ought not to let any causes of offense to weaken, lest we should seem ungrateful to God for making us His chosen vessels, since His assistance is powerful as His promises are true.

St. Leo the Great

## BEARING THE " FEAR OF SHAME" IN CONFESSION

From the book, "Remember Thy First Love" by Archimandrite Zacharias Zacharou.



**Question:** In taking the steps which you have presented to us, the most difficult thing, I think, is to overcome the fear of shame. This is what I try to do in my parish. People will not come to confession although

their souls are burdened and things are driving them crazy, because they cannot overcome the shame to admit their sins. How do you lead people in this direction?

**Answer:** I think that the strength to bear shame is a gift from God. When I was a young and inexperienced spiritual father, Elder Sophrony told me to encourage the young people to confess precisely the things of which they are ashamed, for if they learn to do so, shame is transformed into strength against the passions, and they will overcome sin.

This is precisely what occurred in the person of Zacchaeus. He bore shame voluntarily, and the Lord, Who was on His way to Jerusalem in order to suffer the Cross of shame, saw Zacchaeus bearing shame for His sake and recognized in him a kindred spirit. Zacchaeus had put himself prophetically in the way of the Christ, in the way of the Cross, and in a prophetic way the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ was activated in the heart of Zacchaeus. His heart was enlarged and he was able to enter into the power of faith. Christ has saved us through the Cross of shame, so when we suffer shame for His sake He considers this as gratitude, and in return He transmits to us His grace which regenerates our life.

This is exactly what happens in confession. Those who confess sincerely and take upon themselves the same for their sins are regenerated. But those who shrug their shoulders and say, "Nothing special, the usual things...", they do not bear any shame, their heart remains unmoved, and they hardly receive any benefit. But those who, with shame and a contrite heart, strip their souls naked before God and before another mortal, *of like passions* (Acts 14:15) with them, that shame of theirs really finds the heart, humbles it and brings it to the surface. This then, opens the heart to receive the grace of regeneration, of consolation.

We see this in the life of many that come to us: the greater the shame they bear with contrition, accusing themselves before God, the greater the grace they receive to amend their lives and make a new beginning.

## THE CUP OF CHRIST

By St. Ignatii Brianchaniov, from "Saint Ignatii Brianchaniov, vol. 1, p. 544 [re-printed by request—originally published in the April 2005 issue of "Orthodox Heritage"].

Two beloved disciples asked the Lord for thrones of glory. He gave them His cup: *Ye shall drink indeed of my cup.* (Mt 20:23)

The Cup of Christ is suffering. To those who drink from it on earth, the Cup of Christ grants participation in Christ's Kingdom of grace; it prepares for them the thrones of eternal glory in heaven.

We stand in silence before the Cup of Christ; no man can complain about it or reject it; for He who commanded us to taste it, first drank of it Himself.

O tree of the knowledge of good and evil! You killed our ancestors in Paradise, you deceived them by the delusions of sensual pleasure and the delusions of reason. Christ, the Redeemer of the fallen, brought His Cup of salvation into this world, to the fallen and to those who are exiled from Paradise. The bitterness of this Cup cleanses the heart from forbidden, destructive and sinful pleasure; through the humility flowing from it in abundance, pride of understanding on the carnal level is mortified. To him who drinks from the Cup with faith and patience, the eternal life which was and still is lost to him by his tasting of forbidden fruit will be restored.

I will accept the Cup of Christ, *the cup of salvation.* (Pss 116:13). The cup is accepted when a Christian bears earthly tribulation in the spirit of humility learned from the Gospel. St. Peter turned swiftly with a naked sword to defend the God-Man, who was surrounded by evil doers; but the meek Jesus said to Peter: *Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup My Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?* (Jn 18:11). So you too, when disaster surrounds you, should comfort and strengthen your soul, saying: *The Cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*

The Cup is bitter: at first sight all human reasoning is confounded. Surmount reason by faith and drink courageously from the bitter Cup: it is the Father who gives it to you, He who is all good and all wise. It is neither the Pharisees, nor Caiaphas, nor Judas who prepared the Cup; it is neither Pilate nor his soldiers who gave it! *The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*

The Pharisees think evil, Judas betrays, Pilate orders the unlawful killing, the soldiers of the government execute his order. Through their evil deeds all these prepared their own

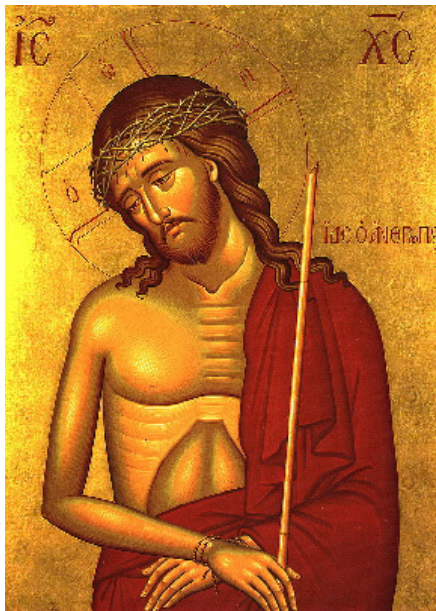
true perdition. Do not prepare for yourself just such perdition by remembering evil, by longing for and dreaming of revenge, and by indignation against your enemies. The heavenly Father is almighty and all-seeing: He sees your afflictions, and if He had found it necessary and profitable to withdraw the Cup from you, He certainly would have done so.

The Lord, as the Scriptures and Church history testify, has often allowed afflictions to befall His beloved, and often warded off afflictions from them, in accordance with the unfathomable ways of Providence. When you are faced with the Cup, turn your gaze from the people who give it to you; lift your eyes to Heaven and say: *The Cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*

I will take the cup of salvation. I cannot reject the Cup, the promise of heavenly and eternal good. The apostle of Christ teaches me patience when he says: *...we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God.* (Acts 14:22). How can one reject the Cup which is the means of attaining this Kingdom and growing within it? I will accept the Cup the gift of God. The Cup of Christ is the gift of God. The great Paul writes to the Philippians: *For unto you it is given in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.* (Phil. 1:29).

You receive the Cup which seemingly comes from the hand of man. What is it to you whether the bearer of the Cup acts righteously or unrighteously? As a follower of Jesus, your concern is to act righteously; to receive the Cup with thanksgiving to God and with a living faith; and courageously to drink it to the dregs. In receiving the Cup from man, remember it is the Cup of Him who is not only innocent but all-holy. Thinking on this, remind yourself and other suffering sinners of the words that the blessed and enlightened thief spoke when he was crucified on the right hand of the crucified God-man: *for we receive the due reward of our deeds... Lord, remember me when thou comest into Thy Kingdom.* (Lk 23:41-42). And then, turning to the people, you will say to them: *Blessed are you who are instruments of the righteousness and of the mercy of God, blessed are you henceforth and forever more!* And if they are not in a fit state to understand and receive your words, do not cast your precious pearls of humility under the feet of those who cannot value them, but say these words in thought and heart. By this alone will you fulfill the commandment of the Gospel which says: *Love your enemies, bless them that curse you...* (Mt 5:44).

Pray to the Lord, on behalf of those who have insulted and outraged you, that what they have done for you should be



repaid by a temporal blessing and eternal reward of salvation, and that when they stand before Christ to be judged, it should be counted to them as if it had been an act of virtue. Although your heart does not wish to act in this way, compel it to do so: because only those who do violence to their own heart in fulfilling the commandments of the Gospel can inherit Heaven. If you have not the will to act this way, then you have not the will to be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Look deep within yourself; consider searchingly: have you not found another teacher, the teacher of hatred the devil and fallen under his power?

It is a terrible transgression to offend or to oppress one's neighbor; it is a most terrible transgression to commit murder. But whoever hates his oppressor, his slanderer, his betrayer, his murderer, and whoever thinks ill of them and takes revenge on them, commits a sin very near to their sin. In vain does he pretend to himself and others that he is righteous. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer of man, proclaimed Saint John, the beloved disciple of Christ: *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.* (1 Jn 3:15).

A living faith in Christ teaches one to receive the Cup of Christ, and the Cup of Christ inspires hope in the heart of him who receives it; and hope in Christ gives strength and consolation to the heart. What torment of hell to complain or to murmur against the pre-destined Cup from above! Murmuring, impatience, faintheartedness and especially despair are sins before God; they are the ugly children of sinful disbelief.

It is sinful to complain of neighbors when they are the instruments of our suffering; still more sinful is it when we cry out against the Cup that comes down to us straight from Heaven, from the right hand of God. He who drinks the Cup with thanksgiving to God and blessings on his neighbor, achieves holy serenity, the grace of the peace of Christ. It is as if already he enjoys God's spiritual Paradise. Temporal suffering has no importance in itself; we lend it significance because of our attachment to the earth and to all corruptible things, and through our coldness towards Christ and eternity.

You are prepared to bear the bitter and repellent taste of medicines, the painful amputation and cauterization of your limbs, the long drawn out suffering of hunger, and prolonged seclusion in your room; you are prepared to bear all this to restore lost health to your body, which after it is healed will certainly become ill again, and will certainly die and become corrupt. Bear then the bitterness of the Cup of Christ which brings healing and eternal beatitude to your immortal soul.

If the Cup appears to you to be unbearable, deadly, then it reveals that, although you bear Christ's Name, you do not belong to Christ. For the true followers of Christ, the Cup of Christ is the Cup of joy. Thus the holy apostles, after having

been beaten before the gathering of the elders of the Jews, went out from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name of the Lord Jesus: *And when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.* (Acts 5:40-41).

The righteous Job heard bitter news. Tiding after tiding came to pierce his steadfast heart; the last of these was the hardest all; his sons and daughters had been struck down suddenly by a cruel and violent death. In his great sorrow, the righteous Job rent his clothes and sprinkled his head with ashes. And then, in submissive faith, he fell down upon the ground, and worshipped the Lord saying: *I myself came naked from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, the Lord taketh away: as it seemed good to the Lord, so has it come to pass; blessed be the name of the Lord.* (Job 1:21).

Entrust your heart in simplicity to Him by whom all the hairs of your head are numbered. He knows the measure of the healing Cup that you should be given. Look often on Jesus standing before those who put Him to death; He was delivered to death, to be slain as a defenseless sheep. Do not take your eyes from Him, and your suffering will be transformed into heavenly spiritual sweetness. The wounds of your heart are healed with the wounds of Jesus. *Suffer ye thus far,* said the Lord to those who wished to defend Him in the garden of Gethsemane, and He healed the ear that had been struck off. (Lk 22:51). *Thinkest thou,* replied the Lord to him who had tried to take the Cup from Him, *that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?* (Mt 26: 53).

In the time of misfortune do not seek the help of man; do not lose precious time. Await help from God: by His command and in His own time will people come to your help. The Lord remained silent before Pilate and Herod, He made no attempt to justify Himself. You must imitate His holy and wise intention of certain conviction.

Whether the cup comes to you as a gradual gathering of clouds, or as suddenly as a furious whirlwind, say to God, *Thy will be done.* You are a disciple, follower and servant of Jesus. Now Jesus said: *If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be.* (Jn 12:26). But Jesus spent His life on earth in sufferings; He was persecuted from His birth to the grave; from the time of His swaddling clothes malice was preparing for Him a violent death. Nor was malice satisfied by achieving such an aim, but tried to uproot the very remembrance of Him from the earth.

In following Him, all the chosen of our Lord pass by the road of temporary suffering to blessed eternity. While bodily pleasures dominate us, it is impossible that a spiritual state

should also prevail in us. That is why our Lord ceaselessly offers His Cup to those He loves, so as to keep them in deadness to the world and to enable them to live the life of the Spirit.

St. Isaac the Syrian said: *The man who is sent unceasing sorrow is known to be especially under God's care.* Pray to God, that He may avert all calamities and every trial from you; but when sorrows come of themselves, do not be afraid of them, do not think that they have come by chance, or by force of circumstance. No, they are allowed by the inscrutable Providence of God. Filled with faith, and the fortitude and magnanimity born of it, swim fearlessly amidst the darkness and howling storm into the peaceful harbor of eternity; the unseen hand of Jesus Himself will guide.

With reverent and deep reflection, learn the prayer which our Lord offered to His Father in the garden of Gethsemane during the heavy hours of suffering that came to Him before His Passion and Death on the Cross. With this prayer, meet and conquer every sorrow. *O my Father, prayed our Savior, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.* (Mt 26:39) Pray to God to avert misfortunes, and at the same time renounce your own will, as being a sinful, blind will; entrust those nearest to your heart to the all-holy and all-wise will of God. *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.* (Mt 26:41) When you are surrounded by afflictions, pray more often, that you may draw the special grace of God towards you. Only with the help of special grace are we able to surmount temporal misfortunes.

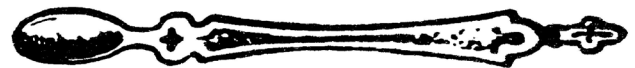
When you receive from Heaven the gift of patience, be attentive and vigilant over yourself, so as to hold and keep within yourself the grace of God, lest sin should creep unnoticed into your soul or body and drive away this grace. But if with carelessness and inattention you let sin enter within you, and particularly the one sin to which your weak flesh is specially addicted, and which stains the body and soul, then grace will depart leaving you stripped and lonely. Then sorrow, given to you for your salvation and perfection, will trample heavily on you, will crush you with sadness, depression, despair, and like someone who holds the gift of God without due reverence to the gift.

Hasten to bring back your heart to purity in true and resolute repentance, and through purity to the gift of patience, since this gift of the Holy Spirit reposes only in the pure. The holy martyrs sang a song of joy in the midst of the fiery furnace, when walking on nails, on sharp swords, sitting in cauldrons of boiling water or oil. So also will your heart rejoice when by prayer you have drawn to yourself the comfort of grace, and kept it within by constant watch over yourself. Then your heart will sing amidst misfortunes and terrible misery, with a joyful song of praise and thanksgiving to God.

The mind, purified by the Cup of Christ, is endowed with spiritual vision; it begins to see the all-embracing Providence of God, invisible to the carnal mind; to see the law of corruption in all things mortal; to see near at hand the immensity of eternity; to see God in His great works, in His creation and re-creation of the universe. The earthly life then comes to seem like a quickly-ending pilgrimage, whose events are dreams, whose blessings are but brief visual delusions, short-lived because of the perilous misconceptions of the mind and heart.

What fruit does temporary suffering bear for eternity? When Heaven was shown to the Apostle John, with an innumerable gathering of bearers of light dressed in white and celebrating their salvation and blessedness before the throne of God, one of the dwellers in Heaven asked him: *What are these arrayed in white robes? And whence came they? And I said unto him, says Saint John the Divine, my Lord, Thou knowest.* Then the dweller in Heaven answered St. John, *These are they which came out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.* (Rev 7:13-17)

Withdrawal from God is eternal torment in hell, eternal contact with the devil and devilish people; with flames, bitter cold, the gloom of Gehenna; that is what may be truly described as suffering. That is torment, great, terrible and insupportable. Over-indulgence in the sweetness of earthly pleasures leads to great eternal suffering. The Cup of Christ saves from this torment whoever drinks from it with thanksgiving and praise to the all-blessed God who, through the bitter Cup of temporal suffering, gives man His boundless and eternal mercy.



The four affections of the soul (anger, desire, pleasure, and fear) are like four horses that are unmanageable when the chariot begins to move. Similarly the soul, weighed down by its perishable body, hardly knows herself. It is as if brute beasts seized control of a chariot, and its powerless occupant, amid flying fears, is hurled and jolted about until the bodily passions are taken in hand and calmed by the power of the Word. This foresight of the Word is like that of a skilled driver; without it the soul, although not in itself liable to death, can experience difficulties from disturbance in the mortal body conjoined to it.

**St. Ambrose of Milan**

## HIEROMARTYR GREGORY V OF CONSTANTINOPLE (+1821)

*Commemorated April 10<sup>th</sup>.*

St. Gregory V, Archbishop of Constantinople was the 234<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of Constantinople and occupied the Patriarchal throne three times (1797-1799, 1806-1808, 1819-1821 AD). During this time Greece was under the harsh Turkish yoke, but many Greek patriots lived in the hope of winning national independence. They found a brave champion for freedom, the Holy Patriarch Gregory V.

In 1818, St. Gregory became a member of the *Filiki Eteria* (Friendly Society) that was preparing for a revolt against the Turkish rule. However, when Alexander Ypsilantis crossed the Prut River, starting the Greek revolt in Romania, Gregory felt it necessary to excommunicate him to protect the Greeks of Constantinople from reprisals by the Ottoman Turks.

For modern Greece, March 25<sup>th</sup> is both the Feast of the Annunciation and Greek Independence Day. A review of archives for American accounts of the Greek War of Independence in 1821 uncovered quite a few reports from various newspapers and journals; the single event, however, that received the most attention seems to have been the martyrdom

of Patriarch Gregory V of Constantinople. This took place at the very outset of the Greek Revolution, and was a direct Turkish response to the initial rebellion.

Patriarch Gregory was murdered on Pascha, in April, but the news didn't start to trickle into the United States until the summer. Here's the first report discovered, from the Connecticut Gazette (7/11/1821): "*Constantinople is a scene of disturbance and massacre. The grand Seigneur, to revenge the insurrection in his northern provinces, has had recourse to the most dreadful reprisals. The Greek Patriarch has been strangled, and four Archbishops have been massacred.*"

The Religious Intelligencer (8/4/1821) soon published a fuller report. This account was sent from Vienna on May 17<sup>th</sup>, and later appeared in several other American periodicals.

Letters from Constantinople on the 25<sup>th</sup> April, give a deplorable picture of the state of things there. On Pascha Sunday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>, when Gregory, the patriarch of Constantinople, 74 years of age, was just going to serve Liturgy in the Patriarchal Chapel, he was seized by order of the Sultan, and hanged at the door of the temple; a mode of death which in the eyes of all the Greeks is the most infamous, and must therefore excite boundless hatred.

The letters inform that all the Archbishops and Bishops who were in the Church on account of the celebration of Easter, were either executed or thrown into prison. The congregation fled out of the Church to the neighboring houses of the priest, but many were murdered by the enraged populace.

The cruel fate of the Patriarch appears to be less merited, as he had, only on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March, solemnly proclaimed in the Chapel, "encouraging" the ban of the Church against all the Greeks who attempted to withdraw from the Turkish yoke. In the formal anathema published on this occasion, he had (by compulsion) made use of the Holy Gospel to impress upon the Greeks that their Turkish Governors were appointed by God.

Nothing particular was proved respecting the motives for the execution of the Patriarch. But as Bishop Nicholas, of Trepolis, in the Moria, leader of the Greeks and Maniotes there in arms against the Turks, is brother to the murdered Patriarch, it is supposed that the Turks also suspected the venerable old man. But it is certain that this execution would excite the utmost desperation among the Christians throughout Greece. It is worthy of remark, that all the Greek bishops who concurred in signing the anathema, languished in prisons, and several shared the fate of their Patriarch.

A note that follows the letter adds, "*Several have since done so, and the Greek churches at Constantinople have been destroyed.*" According to the official website of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, "*For three days, his [Gregory's] body rested thus hanging, receiving the mockings of the angry crowd. A group of Jews bought the corpse and circulated it round the city, before throwing it in the Ceratius gulf. Fortunately, captain Nicholas Sklavos, found his relic in the sea, and*



The sealed gate at the Phanar, also known as "Kin Kapisi" (the Grudge Gate). The gate was sealed in memory of Patriarch Gregory V who was hanged front of it in 1821. The next Patriarch declared: "Until a Turkish sultan or statesman or Seyhulislam (religious leader) is hanged from of it, this gate shall remain sealed."

transferred it secretly to Odessa, where it was buried in the Greek Church of the Holy Trinity.” In 1871, Gregory’s relics were translated to Athens.

On October 5<sup>th</sup>, the Christian Register printed a July 20<sup>th</sup> letter from Paris, offering some background on Patriarch Gregory:

*Gregory, the pious and venerable Patriarch of Constantinople, who lately fell a victim to the infatuation and revenge of the populace, in the 74<sup>th</sup> year of his age, was a native of Peloponnesus. He was first consecrated to the Archbishopial See of Smyrna, where he left honourable testimonials of his piety and Christian virtues. Translated to the Patriarchal throne of Constantinople, he occupied it at three distinct periods, for under the Musselman [Muslims] despotism was introduced and perpetuated, the anti-canonical custom of frequently changing the head of the Greek clergy.*

*During his first Patriarchate he had the good fortune to save the Greek Christians from the fury of the Divan, who had it in contemplation to make the people responsible for the French expedition into Egypt. He succeeded in preserving his countrymen from the hatred of the Turks, but he was not the better treated for his interposition; the Turkish government banished him to Mount Athos. Recalled to his See some years after, he was again exposed to great danger in consequence of the war with Russia; and on the appearance of an English fleet off Constantinople, the Patriarch was exiled anew to Mount Athos, and once more ascended his throne, on which he ended his career.*

*This Prelate invariably manifested the most rigid observance of his sacred duties; and in private life he was plain, affable, virtuous, and of an exemplary life. To him the merit is ascribed of establishing a patriarchate press. He has left a numerous collection of pastoral letters and sermons, which evince his piety and distinguished talents. He translated and printed in modern Greek, with annotations, the Epistles of the Apostles. He lived like a father, among his diocesans, and the sort of death he died adds greatly to their sorrow and veneration for his memory. This Prelate had not taken the least share in the insurrection of the Greeks; he had even pronounced an anathema against the authors of the rebellion; an anathema dictated indeed, by the Musselman’s sabres, but granted to prevent the effusion of blood, and the massacre of the Greek Christians.*

The dates of these reports give a sense of the state of global communications in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Patriarch Gregory was killed in April, but news didn’t reach the US until July. The May 17<sup>th</sup> report from Vienna wasn’t published in America until August 4<sup>th</sup>; the July 20<sup>th</sup> Paris letter made its

first appearance on October 5<sup>th</sup>. Another bit of news, dated September 12<sup>th</sup> and sent from St. Petersburg in Russia, was published in the Washington Gazette on December 4:

*The Court Gazette of today contains a long recital of the solemn interment of the Patriarch of Constantinople. It concludes with these words: — “It is in this manner that by order of Alexander I, Emperor of all the Russias, the last duties of Christian faith and charity, have been rendered to a holy Patriarch of the orthodox oriental Greek Church, Gregory, who suffered martyrdom.” This declaration formally denies the assertion of the [Turkish] Porte, in its answer to the Russian ultimatum, that the Patriarch was guilty of treason.*

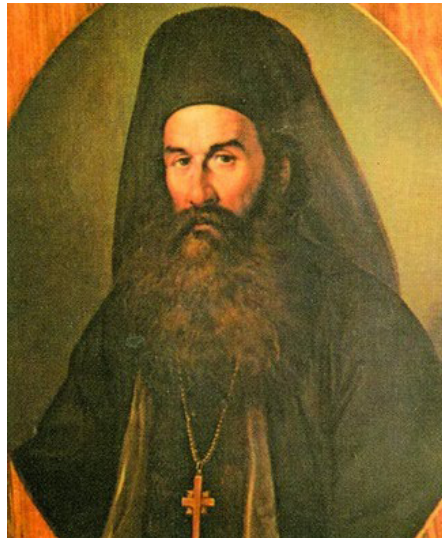
The American media — particularly the various Protestant journals—often held the Orthodox in rather low regard, viewing them as superstitious, backward idolators. I was somewhat surprised, then, to see Patriarch Gregory treated with such respect and admiration. I have not found a single

American account of the Patriarch which was critical of him, or decried his role as a hierarch, or anything.

It is noteworthy that, when some tried to convince him to flee Constantinople to save himself, the good shepherd responded: “They are trying to get me to flee. A sword will be drawn at the loins of Constantinople and the rest of the cities of Christian eparchies. You wish however that, vested, I take refuge in a ship or be locked in a house and never be a beneficial Ambassador, that I would then hear how the executioners hacked apart the abandoned people. Never! For this I am Patriarch, that I may save my

Nation, but never however will they perceive anything other than the faith portrayed on my face. The Greeks, the men of battle, will fight with greater zeal, until they soon will be granted victory; of this I am certain. Look with patience if what I am saying comes true. Today (Palm Sunday) we will eat fish, but after a few days and likely this week the fish will eat us...Yes, why shouldn’t I become food for animals, I will never accept fleeing to Odessa, or Kerkyra or Ancyra, passing among people pointing their fingers saying: “Here comes the killer Patriarch.” If my Nation is saved and triumphant, then I will accept incense of praise and honors, for I paid my debt...I go wherever my nous, the great people of the Nation and Heavenly Father call me, the martyr of human deeds.”

Patriarch Gregory was hanged just a few days after this statement over the gate of the Phanar, the Patriarchal church. The gate was welded shut after Gregory’s death, and it remains sealed to this day, a memorial to the martyred Patriarch.



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## ON THE GREAT FAST

*By St. Theodore the Studite.*

**B**rethren and fathers, fasting is good if it possesses its own special characteristics, which are to be peaceable, meek, well-established, obedient, humble, sympathetic and all the other forms of virtue. But the devil hurries to suggest the opposite to fasters and to make them insolent, angry, bad-tempered, puffed up, so as to produce hurt more than gain.

But let us not be ignorant of his plans, but continue our path peaceably, gently, meekly and steadfastly bearing with one another in love, knowing that this is what is acceptable to God; for though you bend your neck double like a hoop and smother yourself with sackcloth and ashes, if these qualities are lacking to you, you would not be well-pleasing to him. Because while fasting batters and wastes the body, it clears the soul and makes it flourish. For as much as our outer nature is perishing, by so much the inner is being renewed day by day. And our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding weight of glory.

Thus, looking at the reward, let us bear the toils of virtue with long-suffering, giving thanks to the God and Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love.

Do we not commune each day of his immaculate body and blood? What could be sweeter and more filled with enjoyment

than this, since those who partake with a pure conscience will obtain eternal life? Do we not converse each day with the godly David and the other Holy Fathers through taking in the readings? What could bring greater consolation to the soul? Have we not broken off contact with the world and with our relatives according to the flesh?

Again is anything more blessed or higher than this? For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to his glorious body, according to the working by which he is able even to subdue all things to Himself. And so, my brothers, let us rejoice and be glad as we repudiate every pleasure.

All flesh is grass, and all human glory like the flower of the grass. The grass withered and the flower faded, but the work of virtue endures for ever.

Is anyone among you suffering? As the brother of God says, let him pray. Is anyone sad? Let him sing psalms. Is anyone tempted by evil passion (since the tempter is always at work)? Let him endure patiently as he listens to the one who says: *Let us recall that blessed is the one who endures temptation; for when he has been proved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love him.* And, if you know these things, **blest are you if you do them**, said the Lord, to whom be glory and might, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever and to the ages of ages.

Amen.



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

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

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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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## THE LAST JUDGMENT

By St. Augustine, from "The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers," by Phillip Schaff.

Intending to speak of the day of His final judgment, and to affirm it against the ungodly and incredulous, we must first of all lay, as it were, in the foundation of this elaborate concept the divine declarations. Those persons who do not believe such declarations do their

best to oppose to them as false and illusive sophisms of their own, either contending that what is cited from Scripture has another meaning, or altogether denying that it is an utterance of God's. For I suppose no man who understands what is written, and believes it to be communicated by the supreme and true God through holy men, refuses to yield and consent to these declarations, whether he orally confesses his consent, or is from some evil influence ashamed or afraid to do so; or even, with an opinionativeness closely resembling madness, makes strenuous efforts to defend what he knows and believes to be false against what he knows and believes to be true.

That, therefore, which the whole Church of the true God holds and professes as its creed, that Christ shall come from heaven to judge quick and dead, this we call the last day, or last time, of the divine judgment. For we do not know how many days this judgment

may occupy; but no one who reads the Scriptures, however negligently, need be told that in them "day" is customarily used for "time." And when we speak of the day of God's judgment, we add the word *last* or *final* for this reason, because even now God judges, and has judged from the beginning of human history, banishing from paradise, and excluding from the tree of life, those first men who perpetrated so great a sin.

He was certainly exercising judgment also when He did not spare the angels who sinned, whose prince, overcome by envy, seduced men after being himself seduced. Neither is it without God's profound and just judgment that the life of demons and men, the one in the air, the other on earth, is filled with misery, calamities, and mistakes. And even though no one had sinned, it could only have been by the good and right

judgment of God that the whole rational creation could have been maintained in eternal blessedness by a persevering adherence to its Lord.

He also judges not only in the mass, condemning the race of devils and the race of men to be miserable on account of the original sin of these races, but He also judges the voluntary and personal acts of individuals. For even the devils pray that they *may not be tormented* (Mt. 8:29), which proves that without injustice they might either be spared or tormented according to their deserts.



*The Last Judgment*  
Fresco at the Holy Monastery of Megisti  
Lavra, Holy Mountain

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Men are punished by God for their sins often visibly, always secretly, either in this life or after death, although no man acts rightly save by the assistance of divine aid; and no man or devil acts unrighteously save by the permission of the divine and most just judgment. For, as the apostle says, *There is no unrighteousness with God* (Rom 9:14) and as he elsewhere says, *His judgments are inscrutable, and His ways past finding out.* (Rom 11:33).

In this lecture, then, I shall speak, as God permits, not of those first judgments, nor of these intervening judgments of God, but of the last judgment, when Christ is to come from heaven to judge the quick and the dead. For that day is properly called the Day of Judgment, because in it there shall be no room left for the ignorant questioning why this wicked person is happy and that righteous man unhappy. In that day true and full happiness shall be the lot of none but the good, while deserved and supreme misery shall be the portion of the wicked and of them only.

#### **The Passages in Which the Savior Declares that There Shall Be a Divine Judgment in the End of the World**

The Savior Himself, while reproofing the cities in which He had done great works, but which had not believed, and while setting them in unfavorable comparison with foreign cities, says, *But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment than for you.* (Mt 11:22). And a little after He says, *Verily, I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee.* (Mt 11:24). Here He most plainly predicts that a day of judgment is to come. And in another place He says, *The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching*

*of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the words of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here.* (Mt 12:41–42). Two things we learn from this passage, that a judgment is to take place, and that it is to take place at the resurrection of the dead. For when He spoke of the Ninevites and the queen of the south, He certainly spoke of dead persons, and yet He said that they should rise up in the Day of Judgment. He did not say “They shall condemn,” as if they themselves were to be the judges, but because, in comparison with them, the others shall be justly condemned.

Again, in another passage, in which He was speaking of the present intermingling and future separation of the good and bad—the separation which shall be made in the day of judgment—He adduced a comparison drawn from the sown wheat and the tares sown among them, and gave this explanation of it to His disciples: *He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man.* (Mt 13:37). Here, indeed, He did not name the judgment or the day of judgment, but indicated it much more clearly by describing the circumstances, and foretold that it should take place in the end of the world.

In like manner He says to His disciples, *Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* (Mt 19:28). Here we learn that Jesus shall judge with His disciples. And therefore He said elsewhere to the Jews, *If I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges.* (Mt 12:17).

We ought not suppose that only twelve men shall judge along with Him, though He says that they shall sit upon twelve thrones; for by the number twelve is signified the completeness of the multitude of those who shall judge. For the two parts of the number seven (which commonly symbolizes totality), that is to say four and three, multiplied into one another, give twelve. For four times three, or three times four, are twelve.

There are other meanings, too, in this number twelve. Were not this the right interpretation of the twelve thrones, then since we read that Matthias was ordained an apostle in the room of Judas the traitor, the Apostle Paul, though he *labored more than them all* (1 Cor. 15:10), should have no throne of judgment; but he unmistakably considers himself to be included in the number of the judges when he says, *Know ye not that we shall judge angels?* (1 Cor 6:3).

The same rule is to be observed in applying the number twelve to those who are to be judged. For though it was said, “judging the twelve tribes of Israel,” the tribe of Levi, which is the thirteenth, shall not on this account be exempt from judgment, neither shall judgment be passed only on Israel and not on the other nations. And by the words “in the regeneration,” He certainly meant the resurrection of the dead to be understood; for our flesh shall be regenerated by incorruption, as our soul is regenerated by faith.

Many passages I omit, because, though they seem to refer to the last judgment, yet on a closer examination they are found to be ambiguous, or to allude rather to some other event—whether to that coming of the Saviour which continually occurs in His Church, that is, in His members, in which comes little by little, and piece by piece, since the whole Church is His body, or to the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem. For when He speaks even of this, He often uses language which is applicable to the end of the world and that last and great day of judgment, so that these two events cannot be distinguished unless all the corresponding passages bearing on the subject in the three evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, are compared with one another; this is because some things are put more obscurely by one evangelist and more plainly by another. Thus, it becomes apparent what things are meant to be referred to one event and what to the other. It is this which I have been at pains to do in a letter which I wrote to Hesychius of blessed memory, bishop of Salon, and entitled, “Of the End of the World.”

I shall now cite from the Gospel according to Matthew the passage which speaks of the separation of the good from the wicked by the most efficacious and final judgment of Christ: *When the Son of man, he says, shall come in His glory, ... then shall He say also unto them on His left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.* (Mt 25:34–41). Then He in like manner recounts to the

wicked the things they had not done, but which He had said those on the right hand had done. And when they ask when they had seen Him in need of these things, He replies that, *inasmuch as they had not done it to the least of His brethren, they had not done it unto Him*, and concludes His address in the words, *And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.*

Moreover, the evangelist John most distinctly states that He had predicted that the judgment should be at the resurrection of the dead. For after saying, *The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father: he that honoreth not the Son, honoreth not the Father which hath sent Him*; He immediately adds, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death to life.* (Jn 5:22–24). Here He said that believers on Him should not come into judgment. How, then, shall they be separated from the wicked by judgment, and be set at His right hand, unless judgment be in this passage used for condemnation? For into judgment, in this sense, they shall not come who hear His word, and believe on Him that sent Him.

Amen.



Jesus Christ is the faithful witness or the faithful martyr for two more reasons. The first one is because He gave witness to the Truth, as for example when Pilate asked Him, *Who are you?* And He answered, *For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.* (Jn 18:37). Poor Pilate asks, *what is truth?* (18:38) and Christ does not answer. Some have ventured to say that Pilate should have asked, “Who is the truth?” and that he would have probably received a response. At any rate, the truth is a great subject. This is why we are struggling, to come to the truth. Poor Pilate had the entire Truth in front of him. The Truth is not some abstract idea or thought. **The Truth is a Person.** I am the Truth, Christ announced. He did not say, “I came to tell you a few nice things about the truth to help you along.” He said; *I am the Way and the Truth and the Life!* (Jn 14:6)

Elder Athanasios Mtilinaios (+2006)

From the 100 homilies on the book of the Revelation,  
translated by Constantine Zalalas

## GOD'S CALL TO SALVATION

By Rev. Fr. Antony Diachenko (+1970).

*Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe the gospel.*

(Mk 1:15).

† † †

What a blessed time it was when, from the very lips of the Saviour Himself, the word sounded forth: *Repent*. Fortunate were those who heard this teaching. This sermon was not that of an ordinary teacher, nor even of a prophet—but of the sweetest Jesus, a sermon of incarnate Love.

How could one not listen to such a sermon! How was it possible for one's heart not to be moved, not to shed tears of repentance? My dear brethren, what if this blessed time were with us now? What if the Saviour appeared amidst us now and said: *Repent*. I think every one of us would fall down to His most pure feet, and, washing them with tears of contrition and covering them with fervent kisses of burning love, would only repeat with heartfelt sighs: *O Lord, I repent; accept my repentance. Lord, I repent; remember not my sins...* Would this not be so, my dearly beloved ones? Oh, if this could only be! But do not forget that the Lord is the same yesterday, today and forever, remember that now, just as then, He ceaselessly calls out to us: *Repent!*

Do our hearts readily respond to this voice of Divine love? *Repent!* Our inattentiveness sometimes reaches the point that we do not hear it, although this voice of the Lord, calling us to Himself, speaks out to us everywhere and at all times. Here we are not talking about the holy temples where the voice of God is clearly heard; neither are we talking about the Holy Gospel in which we are so plainly given to know the will of God. We need only to look carefully at ourselves and our surroundings, or to attentively observe the nature which surrounds us; both here and there we can hear the voice of the Lord calling us to Himself.

The Lord calls us to Himself through our own selves. *Know ye not*, says the Apostle, *that ye are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?* (1 Cor 3:16). And if this is so, what further need have we to show that the Lord calls us to Himself through our very nature? *For in Him we live, and move, and have our being* (Acts 17:18), possessing as *His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness* (2 Pet 1:3). What then can we say about all our good thoughts and kind feelings? Are these not signs of the Spirit of God? And the unearthly which gladdens our

heart after a good deed or the pangs of conscience which torment us for our sins; those sighs which sometimes tear from our breast, or tears of contrition which at times fill our eyes—what is all this if not the powerful voice of Him Who says of Himself: *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with Me.* (Rev 3:20).

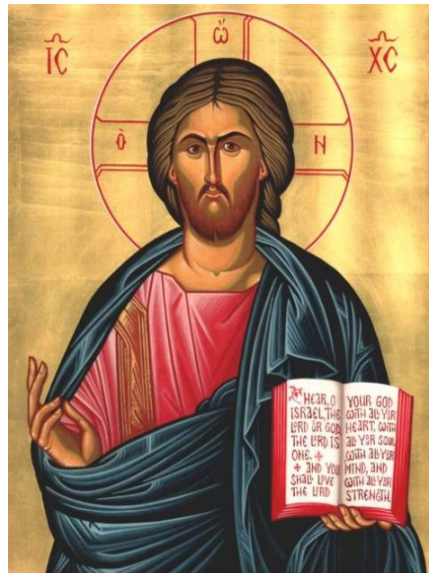
St. Barbarus was a frightful thief; three hundred souls perished at the hands of this cut-throat, including two priests! Who could have thought that such a man, hardened by all these killings, could ever come to repentance? Sin is powerful, but the grace of God within us is yet more powerful. In the midst of all the murders and noisy carousing with his comrades, Barbarus did not hear the voice of God within himself, but when he remained alone in the cave, when he entered the chamber of his heart, then within himself, so loud and powerful did the convicting voice of God sound

in the reproaches or his conscience, that Barbarus was at once converted. Likewise the righteous David and Moses the Black were changed from angels of darkness to angels of light—by hearing the voice of God.

My dear brethren, this voice of God sounds within us too, but to our great misfortune, it frequently produces no action; just as in church, the words of God are often spoken, but sometimes they do not penetrate our hearts, and even pass by our ears. The Lord once called to our fallen ancestor: *Adam, where art thou?* Adam heard the voice of God, but instead of answering with contrition of heart and acknowledging

his guilt, he thought to hide from the Omnipresent One amongst the trees of paradise. Don't we do the same? Sometimes we hear in our hearts, *Adam, where art thou?*—sinner, where are you? Another step, and you will fall into the abyss; take heed, stop. But instead of taking heed and stopping, we run from the warning voice of our conscience and think to muffle its soul saving voice with the noise of worldly distractions and pleasures. And the voice of God in us remains fruitless.

The Lord calls us to Himself through various circumstances of our lives. Our life is a school in which the Lord acts upon us as a wise educator upon his students. In order that the students might succeed in their lessons, both of science and morality, the instructor at times praises them and at times punishes them, or brings them into contact with someone who could have a beneficial influence upon them. A similar thing happens to us. The Lord pours upon us His mercy; He gives us wealth, clothes us with strength, crowns us with



honor and glory—for what other reason than that we might turn more often to Him with a thanksgiving prayer, that We might share our abundance with His lesser brethren, that we might use our strength to defend the innocent and our power to wipe away the tears of those less fortunate. Is all this not His calling out to us: Follow me! *Good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things. I will make thee ruler over many things; enter, thou into the joy of thy Lord.* (Mt 25:23).

The righteous Melania of Rome knew neither the amount nor the value of her riches; but she did know for what reason the Lord showered her with such wealth, and what her right hand received from Him, her left hand distributed to His brethren. In this way St. Melania's wealth was a trumpet by which the Lord called her into His heavenly kingdom.

Concerning poverty and want there is little need to say anything. As the saying goes, "if there were no thunder, the people wouldn't cross themselves." *But though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day* (2 Cor 4:16) says the Apostle. And who has not experienced this? When are we more humble, more devout, more moderate in our desires than in times of sorrow and need? When the Prodigal Son, as the Gospel relates, had his father's inheritance, he only drank, ate, and made merry in a far country, taking no thought of his father or his homeland; but when he had dissipated his riches, when he became hungry and could scarcely obtain husks fed to swine—let alone beg a piece of bread—only then did he feel the whole import of his situation; then he remembered his father and threw himself into his embrace. Oh, if only we were more mindful of all the various circumstances of our lives, how often we would hear the Lord saying to us: *Repent.*

And have you paid sufficient attention to those persons with whom the Lord has brought you into contact? Children: You have parents who have given you life and upbringing. Parents: You have children preparing for you rest and consolation in your old age. Husband: You have a wife who shares your joys and your sorrows. Friends: You have close ones who give you good advice, who are concerned about your happiness and comfort you in sorrows...

Tell me; are not these obvious messengers who loudly proclaim that the Lord Himself, by the power of love, is entwined in the bosom of your family, that He sent you such people for which you must eternally thank and glorify Him? Are these not our earthly guardian angels, through whom the Lord Himself guards and sustains us on the slippery path of life?...

St. Niphont [*Ed., Russian Orthodox saint, +1156, commemorated on April 21<sup>st</sup>*], in the flower of youth, at first amazed everyone by his rapid successes in learning and virtues, but later, he gradually became so accustomed to a debauched life that he was unrecognizable; idle talk, drunkenness, stealing,

fighting, profligacy—these became his favorite occupations. He was reproached, threatened, but he was hardened like a rock, But the Lord is merciful! One day Niphont's old friend Nikodim met him and looking into his face, so altered by his debauched life, said to him in astonishment: "My friend! I hardly recognize you; your face—it's frightful!" He didn't say much, but his words had such profound effect on the youth, that he changed his life, and pleased God by such a righteous life that he was vouchsafed by God numerous revelations. In a similar manner the Lord called to Himself the holy martyr Justin and the righteous martyr Eudocia. And so He calls to Himself each of us, sending us kind people and guides.

The Lord also calls us to Himself through nature which surrounds us. During His earthly life, He Himself often pointed out things in nature as though it were a book which contained many useful lessons for us. We need only to look at it in the right spirit of piety and before us is opened up a whole school of righteousness. For this reason one Holy Father said, "I have no need of books. I have one large book in which everything needful is written—this book is nature." This is why, when the holy martyrs Sts. Christina and Barbara looked attentively upon the magnificence of the heavens, they at once abandoned their faith in the false gods and confessed the One True God.

Let us, dear brothers and sisters, open our ears and hearken to the voice of God calling us ever closer to Himself. And let us not overlook those seemingly insignificant means by which God calls, remembering the example of Elijah who heard the voice of God not in the wind, neither in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in a still small voice.



Yes, my dearly beloved children, truly we lack this most holy virtue, humility. Egotism, this evil wickedness, has caused all the sufferings of man. Indeed, humility is holiness!

Why do we clash over a trifle? Because we do not have humility. He who has humility wards off troubles. Without true humility, troubles remain intact and increase, such that all hope of correction is lost. A humble person does not remember any past wrongs which his neighbor did to him, but with all his heart forgives and forgets everything for the love of God. Beg our humble Jesus in your prayers to give you a spirit of humble-mindedness and meekness.

**Elder Ephraim of Filotheou**

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

## THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

By Fr. Michael Pomazansky (+1988).

*Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever. Likewise, His Body, the Church, proclaims the same faith, adheres to the same dogmas and performs the same Mysteries as those instituted by the Apostles and preserved by God's grace through the members of the Church to the present day.*

*With so much talk today among the heterodox concerning the "unity of the Church" and the "coming together of the Body," it is important that Orthodox understand the teaching of the Church on this matter. Below is an excerpt from the forthcoming book, *Dogmatic Theology*, by Fr. Michael Pomazansky which gives a concise explanation of the Orthodox definition of the "oneness" of the Church and contrasts this with popular misconceptions of those outside the Church.*

† † †

*The unity of the Church follows of necessity from the unity of God; for the Church is not a multitude of persons in their separate individuality, but a unity of the grace of God, living in a multitude of rational creatures, submitting themselves willingly to grace...*

*Alexei Stepanovich Khomiakov*

*[Russian intellectual and religious writer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century]*

† † †

The ninth Article of the Symbol of Faith indicates the four basic signs of the Church: *We believe ... in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.* These attributes are called essential, that is, those without which the Church would not be the Church.

In the Greek text the word "in One" is expressed as a numeral (εἰς μίαν, eis mian). Thus the Symbol of Faith confesses that the Church is one: (a) it is one as viewed from within itself, not divided; (b) it is one as viewed from without, that is, not having any other beside itself. Its unity consists not in the joining together of what is different in nature, but in inward agreement and unanimity. *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.* (Eph 4:4-6).

Depicting the Church in parables, the Saviour speaks of one flock, of one sheepfold, of one grapevine, of one foundation stone of the Church. He gave a single teaching, a single baptism, and a single communion. The unity of the faithful in Christ comprised the subject of His High-Priestly Prayer before His sufferings on the Cross: the Lord prayed *that they all may be one.* (Jn 17:21).

The Church is one not only inwardly, but also outwardly. Outwardly its unity is manifested in the harmonious confession of faith, in the oneness of Divine services and Mysteries, in the oneness of the grace-giving hierarchy, which comes

in succession from the Apostles, in the oneness of canonical order.

The Church on earth has a visible side and an invisible side. The invisible side is: that its Head is Christ; that it is animated by the Holy Spirit; that in it is performed the inward mystical life in sanctity of the more perfect of its members. However, the Church, by the nature of its members, is visible, since it is composed of men in the body; it has a visible hierarchy; it performs prayers and sacred actions visibly; it confesses openly by means of words, the faith of Christ.

More than any other aspect of the Church, the close bond between the Church of Christ on earth and the Church of Christ in heaven distinguishes the Orthodox Church from all other Christian confessions. For how can one speak of a single body if its members are not in harmony one with another? And this harmonious existence is not only with those present bodily in the Church today, but also with those who have gone before and who now belong to the Church triumphant.

The Apostle instructs those who have come to believe in Christ and have been joined to the Church as follows: *Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant.* (Heb 12:22-24). We are not separated from our dead brothers in the faith by the impassable abyss of death: *they are close to us in God, for all live unto Him.* (Lk 20:38). The Church hymns this relationship in the kontakion of the feast of the Ascension of the Lord: *"Having accomplished for us Thy mission and united things on earth with things in heaven, Thou didst ascend into glory, O Christ our God, being nowhere Separated from those who love Thee, but remaining ever present with us and calling: I am with you and no one is against you.*

The holy Apostles, departing from this world, put off the earthly body, but have not put off the Church body. They not only were, but they also remain the foundation of the Church. The Church is *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.* (Eph 2:20). And, being in Paradise, they continue to be in communion with believers on earth.

In this bond of the Church with the saints, and likewise in the Headship of the Church by the Lord Himself, may be seen one of the mystical sides of the Church. *By Thy Cross, O Christ, there is a single flock of angels and men; and in the one assembly heaven and earth rejoice, crying out, O Lord, glory be to Thee.* (Wednesday Matins, Tone 1).

The Orthodox teaching of the Church, which in itself is quite clear and rests upon Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, is to be contrasted with another concept which is widespread in the contemporary Protestant world and has penetrated even

into Orthodox circles. According to this different concept, all the various existing Christian organizations, the so-called “confessions” and “sects,” even though they are separated from each other, still comprise a single “invisible Church,” inasmuch as each of them confesses Christ as the Son of God and accepts His Gospel. The dissemination of such a view is aided by the fact that side by side with the Orthodox Church there exists outside of her a number of Christians that exceed by several times the number of members of the Orthodox Church. Often we can observe in this Christian world outside the Church a religious fervor and faith, a worthy moral life, a conviction—all the way to fanaticism—of one’s correctness, an organization and a broad charitable activity. What is the relation of all of them to the Church of Christ?

Of course, there is no reason to view these confessions and sects as on the same level with non-Christian religions. One cannot deny that the reading of the word of God has a beneficial influence upon everyone who seeks in it instruction and strengthening of faith, and that devout reflections on God the Creator, the Provider and Saviour, have an elevating power there also. We cannot say that their prayers are totally fruitless if they come from a pure heart, for *in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.* (Acts 10:35).

The Omnipresent Good Provider God is over them, and they are not deprived of God’s mercies. They help to restrain moral looseness, vices, and crimes; and they oppose the spread of atheism. However, all this does not give us grounds to consider them as belonging to the Church. Already the fact that one part of this broad Christian world outside the Church, namely the whole of Protestantism, denies the bond with the heavenly Church, that is, the veneration in prayer of the Mother of God and the saints, and likewise prayer for the dead, indicates that they themselves have destroyed the bond with the one Body of Christ which unites in itself the heavenly and the earthly. Further, it is a fact that these non-Orthodox confessions have “broken” in one form or another, directly or indirectly, with the Orthodox Church, with the Church in its historical form; they themselves have cut the bond, they have “departed” from her. Neither we nor they have the right to close our eyes to this fact.

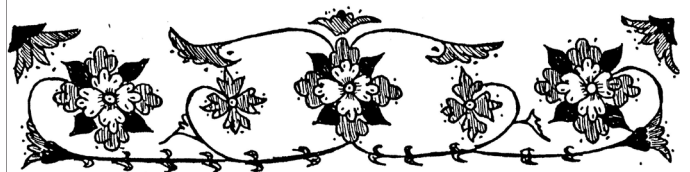
The teachings of the non-Orthodox confessions contain heresies which were decisively rejected and condemned by the Church at her Ecumenical Councils. In these numerous branches of Christianity there is no unity, either outward or inward—either with the Orthodox Church of Christ and/or between themselves. The supra-confessional unification (the “ecumenical movement”) which is now to be observed does not enter into the depths of the life of these confessions, but has an outward character. The term “invisible” can refer only to the Heavenly Church. The Church on earth, even though it has its invisible side, like a ship a part of which is

hidden in the water and is invisible to the eyes, still remains visible, because it consists of people and has visible forms of organization and sacred activity.

All of such “uniting” and “equalizing” views indicate a forgetfulness of the principle that there can be many teachings and opinions, but there is only one truth. And authentic Christian unity—unity in the Church—can be based only upon oneness of mind, and not upon differences of mind. *The Church is the pillar and ground of the Truth.* (I Tim. 3:15).

Note also that in speaking of the Church, we must be careful not to pass judgment either on those within her fold, nor on those still outside, for God alone knows the secrets of the hearts of men. In his book, “The Church Is One,” Alexei Khomiakov writes:

“Inasmuch as the earthly and visible Church is not the fullness and completeness of the whole Church which the Lord has appointed to appear at the final judgment of all creation, she acts and knows only within her own limits; and, according to the words of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians (1 Cor 5:12) does not judge the rest of mankind; and He only looks upon these as excluded, that is to say, not belonging to her, who exclude themselves. The rest of mankind, whether alien from the Church, or united to her by ties which God has not willed to reveal to her, she leaves to the judgment of the Great Day. The Church on earth judges for herself only, according to the grace of the Spirit, and the freedom granted her through Christ, inviting also the rest of mankind to the unity and adoption of God in Christ; but upon those who do not hear her appeal she pronounces no sentence, knowing the command of her Saviour and Head, *not to judge another man’s servant.* (Rom 14:4).”



By means of the priesthood God accomplishes great and redeeming works among mankind: He purifies and sanctifies people, animals, and elements; He delivers people from the villainous works of the devil; He renews and strengthens; He converts bread and wine into the purest Body and Blood of the God-Man Himself; He marries people and makes marriage honorable and the nuptial bed pure; He absolves sins, heals illness, converts earth into heaven, unites heaven with earth, the human being with Himself; He joins angels and men in one gathering. What do they not lack, the people who have no priesthood? They are deprived of salvation. It is not in vain that the Lord, the Accomplisher of our salvation, is called the Chief Priest.

St John of Kronstadt (+1908)

## THE ESSENCE OF HUMILITY

By Bishop Alexander (Mileant), translated by Fr. Sergiy Kisselev.

The Holy Scripture teaches that humility is the essential virtue, without which it is impossible to bear any good fruit at all. Our Lord Jesus Christ began His Sermon on the Mount with a call to humility, saying: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* (Mt 5:3). As the common poor realize they are in need of everything, so does the one poor in spirit see himself as imperfect and in need of divine assistance. Being conscious of this, in turn, attracts God's mercy, which makes him abundantly rich.

Unfortunately, most "worldly" people underestimate and even despise the virtue of humility. They tend to think that while preaching humility, Christianity is degrading the human person and obliterating one's natural feeling of dignity. Humility, they say, deprives one of an active attitude in life, extinguishes all initiative and nurtures a servile mindset. Such an erroneous notion of humility is only rooted in a lack of spiritual knowledge.

The essence of humility is best illustrated in the Gospel. Let's take the example of the healing of the Roman centurion's servant. In one of His visits to Capernaum, Jesus Christ was approached by a Roman centurion (an officer in modern terms), who had the following request: *Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented,* to which the Saviour, Who never declined anyone's wish, promised that He would visit his home and heal the servant. Every believing person would have rejoiced at such a promise. But the centurion's reaction was far from average: *Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.* The centurion's profound faith and humility moved the Lord to such an extent that not only did He immediately heal his servant, but also made him an example for others, saying: *I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.* (Mt 8:6-13).

Having heard of the numerous healings that the Saviour had performed, the centurion acquired an intense faith in His almightiness. Without denigrating his dignity in any way, he realized, at the same time, that he was **unworthy to demand** any kind of special attention toward his person, all the more so being a pagan and a foreigner. He also remembered that if he, being a common man, is unquestionably obeyed by his minors, so much the more everything will obey the will of the One sent by God. The acknowledgment of the **divine almightiness**, on the one hand, and of one's **imperfection**, on the other, are the basis of the attitude which is called humility.

When man, led by a deep faith, encounters the Creator's infinite power, he cannot help perceiving his smallness and weakness, seeing himself as a tiny insect on the shore of a boundless ocean. This is why in the presence of God humility

is but the most natural feeling. Vanity and pride can only exist in the one who, being removed far from God, is comparing himself to other minute creatures like himself.

Sound faith, according to the word of the Saviour, is capable of *moving mountains* (Mt 17:20)—not due to some kind of supernatural power that comes along with such faith, as certain sectarians will teach, but because it is capable of **attracting the divine power**—and the latter can do the impossible. For this reason all known examples of a firm and wonder-working faith are, at the same time, examples of a profound humility: the woman suffering from hemorrhage (Mk 5:25-28), the mother from Canaan (Mt 15:22-28), and many others. The stronger one's faith is, the more humble he is; and vice versa, a proud person cannot possess a profound faith, being all absorbed in one's self. Being spiritually weak, he is therefore unquiet and easily scared, although he might do his best in order to conceal it.

Spiritual and lay literature alike have known many examples of great and gifted personalities. Many gifted people realized that they were only too far from the measure of perfection or knowledge that they were capable of achieving. Knowing this did not, to the least extent, make them feeble or low-spirited. On the contrary, it gave them more incentive to pursue excellence. To think that humility kills one's initiative, giving him an inert and servile disposition, is to miss the essence of Christianity. The latter's decisive trait is that it calls the man to perfection by way of ascension from the present state, which is damaged by sin, to a likeness of God, as is said: *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.* (Mt 5:48). The self-sufficient proud man is in fact the most wretched one, because he is so blind he cannot even perceive his misery (Rev 3:17).

Finally, the Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Who had descended from the skies, the word of Whom was the immediate law for the whole of nature and for the immaterial spirits as well, Who brought the dead back to life, is, at the same time, the greatest example of humility. Who could ever be higher than Him, the Creator of everything visible and invisible alike? And yet He was always the example of obedience towards His earthly "parents," He was obedient towards the lay authorities, He paid taxes, and He meekly forgave His enemies. Striving towards humility, we are doing so in the steps of our Saviour, Who left us His commandment: *Take My yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* (Mt 11:29).

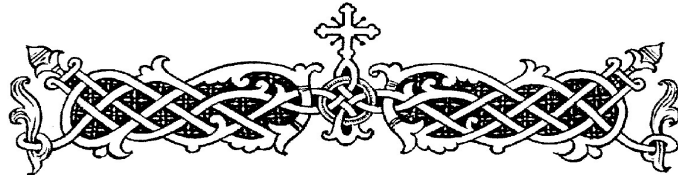
The Elder Siluan wrote: "When the soul sees the Lord in the Holy Spirit, how much He is meek and humble, then she becomes humble herself. It is a special state that no one is able to describe, since it is only known by experience in the Holy Spirit."

According to the holy Abba Dorotheos, there exist two types of humility: "The initial humility consists of consid-



ering one's neighbor more clever and better than oneself... The other kind consists in that one should attribute all his accomplishments and benefits to God and not to himself—this is the perfect humility of the saints. It is found naturally within the soul due to the fulfilment of God's commandments. The branches of a tree that have a lot of fruit hanging on them bow downwards. A branch devoid of fruit is stretching right up. There are also trees that bear no fruit while their branches grow straight up, but as soon as someone, by tying a stone to the branch, bows it down, then it will start bearing fruit. So does the soul, when it humbles itself, become fruitful, and the more it bears the fruit of good deeds, the more does it humble itself. The saints give us the same example: the more they got close to God, the more they saw themselves as sinful and unworthy."

Thus, humility is the most precious virtue without which it is impossible to achieve anything righteous. The holy John of the Ladder says: "If pride has turned some of the angels into demons, than there is no doubt that **humility can make angels out of demons**. Therefore, have courage, ye the fallen, placing your hope in God!"



On the day of Pentecost our Lord solemnly sent down to the disciples in a tempestuous wind the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of fire which alighted on each of them and entered within them and filled them with the fiery strength of divine grace which breathes bedewingly and acts gladdeningly in souls which partake of its power and operations (cf. Acts 2:1-4). And this same fire-infusing grace of the Holy Spirit which was given to us all, the faithful of Christ, in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, is sealed by the Sacrament of Chrismation on the chief parts of our body as appointed by the Holy Church, the eternal keeper of this grace. It is said: *The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit*. On what do we put this seal if not on vessels containing some very precious treasure?

St. Seraphim of Sarov



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## AN ELDER'S COUNSELS TO ALL ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS LIVING IN THE WORLD

Translated from "Vera i Zhizn," no. 16, 1977, St. Elias Publications, Forestville, CA; original in "Sviatinya pod Spudom," by S.A. Nilus.

My beloved child:

1. In moments of despair, know that the Lord is not abandoning you; rather, you are abandoning the Lord. In the name of God, here is how I would order you to live when you are alone: even if you are weighed down by grief, even if you don't want to—always, from your heart, mentally call upon the Lord Jesus Christ, Who dwells in your soul.

2. Followers of Christ must have in mind not their own will but God's will, which forbade the Apostles and us likewise from investigating the future, which God placed under His own control.

3. If you live with others, serve them as you would God Himself, and do not demand love in return for love, praises for humility, gratitude for service.

4. Don't do anything that might stumble or offend those close ones living with you; if they should offend you, accept this not as an offense but as a tool, prepared for you by the Lord God, which, if you so desire, you can use to uproot all filth from your heart.

5. Before you say anything, think carefully: will your word or action offend God or your neighbor?

6. Do not judge another man's servant, whether he is standing or falling; he has God Who has power to keep him from falling and to raise him up from a fall.

7. Bear in mind that the minute which laziness has stolen from you may be the last minute of your life; after it comes death and the judgment. Abandon all idleness.

8. Do not hurt anyone and do not repay abuse with abuse, hurt with hurt; and in the book of life your name will be written together with the righteous.

9. I ask you, my friends, do not disdain any means by which you may please God. These are numerous. For example, being kindly affectionate towards others, consoling the sorrowful, interceding for someone who has been unjustly treated, giving alms to the needy, turning one's gaze away from what is unclean, withstanding unclean thoughts; forcing oneself to pray, patience, merciful kindness, fairness, and the like. In the performance of these virtues you will draw to yourself God's all-powerful aid, and with this you will overcome all difficulties which before seemed insurmountable.

10. Resist by all means losing your temper, and, with God's help it will surely weaken. If it happens that you become irritated or angry, then be all the more careful not to say anything; either step away or close your lips that no fierce

flame should escape and singe your soul and cause rebellion in the soul of the other person; only when the flame dies out and your heart is at peace, then you can say something by way of correction.

11. Strive by all means to avoid getting angry. No calamity visits us of itself; it is allowed by God's Providence for those soul-saving purposes for which the holy Apostle Paul was beset by calamities suffered a *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.* (2 Cor 11:26).

12. Knowing this, pay no attention to who it is who offends you and why. Just remember that no one could have caused you such offense if the Lord had not willed to allow it. It is better to thank the Lord that through the afflictions visited upon you, He clearly shows that you are no stranger to Him and that He is leading you into the Kingdom of Heaven. Holy Scripture says: *If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?* (Heb 12:7).

13. Always avoid sternness, and before the Lord you will be like innocent children in your relations with others.

14. Rest in God's love, learn of it, breathe it: God is love and whosoever abides in love, he is in God, and God is in him. With God's love even a life of affliction is sweet.

15. Salvation lies not in an abundance of talk, but in absolute vigilance towards oneself.

16. Avoid quarrels; by agitating the heart they deprive us of peaceful disposition of soul. Oppose all quarrelsome thoughts with the Jesus Prayer. Don't believe in prejudices.

17. Suspicion is by no means a Christian characteristic; do not make a habit of it. Through the Holy Scripture God Himself requires of us wisdom, vigilance and purity: *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and innocent as doves.* (Mt 10:16).

18. Always hold to the middle path: extremes are never praiseworthy.

19. Always be devoted to the will of God: it is altogether soul-saving.

20. Be loving and cheerful towards others. Love them, serve them; they are valuable; the Saviour's blood was shed for them; they are members of Christ. Do not offend them, even in ways that are scarcely noticeable.

21. Gain salvation by conducting yourself in a way pleasing to the Lord God, pleasing Him by all kinds of love. Make this your sole concern—to grow rich in love. He who has love has God within him.

22. Notice, you are perfectly satisfied with everything when you have patience, humility of wisdom, submissiveness and love for all.

23. Do not reproach that which is in the past, otherwise the Lord God will call you to account for that which He already forgave you.

24. When despondent, force your heart and your lips to pray: Lord, save me—I am perishing!

25. When making a request of someone, ask with the patience of the Canaanite woman.

26. It is a sin to believe another's faults; avoid such sinful certainty.

27. If in some way you offended your servant, do what you can to help him forget the offense.

28. Do everything scrupulously, without haste, so that your undertaking might meet with success.

29. Conquer evil with good; bad cannot be corrected with bad.

30. Without cutting off one's will one cannot lay a foundation for salvation, let alone attain it. My children, entreat the Lord to grant you self-denial; it is essential for salvation.

31. If you're thinking of visiting someone close to you, make a firm resolve to preserve the same love and disposition toward him as you have when you go to see him, even if during your visit he somehow offends you.

32. Whenever something unpleasant happens in your relations with those closest to you, turn first of all to yourself: in a strict examination we nearly always find that we ourselves gave cause for the unpleasantness.

33. When your temper flares up, keep silent and say the Jesus Prayer.

34. Do not justify yourself, do not argue, take into account a person's character and age. Comfort one and all however you can; do not judge anyone; do not repay evil with evil; love everyone, forgive everyone, be a servant to all.

35. Consider yourself as the least and most selfish of all.

36. Love the Lord God and pray to Him as to the Father; humble yourself before all Christians; and the Lord your God will love you, and your pastor will rejoice over you.

37. Endure impatience, confusion, rudeness, hotheadedness—all without contradiction.

38. When you conceive an involuntary feeling of animosity towards someone, try to conquer this sinful feeling; force yourself to pray: *Save, O Lord, Thy servant (name) and by his holy prayers grant peace to my heart.* Make yourself be considerate to this person, and the Lord seeing your good intention, will not only uproot from your heart your sinful animosity, but He will fill it with love.

39. If you receive no comfort from prayer, know that it is preparing for you divine consolation and sweetness in due time: *I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.* (Pss 39:1).

40. Throughout your life, in all that you do, guide yourself by the following Christian reasoning: "Is what I have thought of doing contrary to God's will? Is it harmful to my soul? Will

it offend my neighbor?" If, after a strict examination, your conscience does not prick you, then follow through with your intention. But if it does prick you, refrain from acting on it.

41. Do not trouble yourself with another's honor, but use your tongue only for praising God and for another's benefit and edification. When you are tempted to say something bad, recall those sins you committed from your youth and reproach yourself.

42. Do not complain about life; it is unbearable only for the wicked. For those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who trust in Him and love Him, it is always bearable.

43. Life is given to us only that we might glorify God, do good to our neighbor and attain the eternal kingdom by following the narrow path indicated in the Gospel—not in order to have fun: *Blessed are those that mourn*, not those who laugh.

44. The source of humility is the Lord Jesus Christ Who humbled Himself; it is the crown and beauty of all virtues. What water is to parched earth, so humility is to the human soul.

45. Humility is a virtue in which God Himself delights: *To whom will I have respect*, says the Lord, *is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.* (Isa 66:2).

46. What constitutes humility? It seems to me that it consists in a man's thinking that he is a greater sinner than anyone else, he does not demean or hurt anyone, does not judge, looks only at himself; he seeks neither wealth, nor glory, nor praise, nor honor, considering himself unworthy of these; he bravely endures humiliations, abuse, reproaches, acknowledging in his heart that he deserves this; he treats everyone equally, is ready to serve everyone with love, does not see his own good deeds and doesn't talk about them unnecessarily. I am entreating such humility for you from the Lord God, my children, because it will not only deliver you from sin, but it will lead to the love of Him Who humbled Himself unto death, even the death on the cross.

47. Love covers a multitude of sins. If you are sad, it serves to comfort; unhappy, to ease your grief; it is a help to the poor, father and mother to the orphan, a comfort to the sick, kindness to the servant, to the lost it serves as a guide to salvation, and for all Christians it is a zealous servant. If you have such love towards the lesser brothers and members of our Lord Jesus Christ, not only will your sins be smoothed away, but you will see the Lord face to face and rejoice for evermore.

48. Guard your lips, train your heart in the Jesus Prayer, be temperate in all things, and you will receive a priceless gift, the gift of the love of God towards you.

49. Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's. While attending to externals, to what concerns your life in society, offer yourself up to God continually in your heart, and thus live in this Babylon—this world—ceaselessly thinking upon your heavenly Jerusalem and upon your predestination.

50. Exchange your material well-being for slavery to the Lord Jesus Christ. Resist indulgence, avoid luxury, don't exalt yourself in front of your servants: they are, in fact, your equals, because our Lord calls them also to His Holy Supper, with the same words as He calls you: *Come, eat, this is My Body.....Drink from it all of you, this is My Blood, which is shed for you and for many..*

51. The valleys below are nearly always fertile and fruitful, while the high mountains are for the most part dry and unsuitable for agriculture. Similarly, an ear of wheat which stands with its head up is always empty, whereas the one bent down has many grains. Have a humble heart, and you will be enriched with all that is needed for salvation.

52. Rain falls onto a fruitful valley directly from the clouds and from the mountains: so, too, humility. By rain here I mean God's grace, which is given to the humble directly from God and also through people who in this life have been raised up by the Lord, like the mountains. If your inner life is humbly given over to God's will and closed to His enemies, then, the Teacher, the Holy Spirit, will come to you and abide in you.

53. Forget about the broad way: the Lord, according to His merciful kindness, is leading you through the narrow gates into the Heavenly Kingdom, while the other way leads to eternal destruction.

54. For you, and for myself in this life, I desire only the cleansing of sins, and I ask the Lord God that He do with us whatever is pleasing to Him in order to cleanse our sins and wash away our iniquities, even if this means dishonor. You and I must live according to God's commandments, and not by human logic.

55. For the benefit of your soul, love solitude and, submitting entirely to the injunction of the Heavenly Father, train your heart to ceaselessly perform the Jesus Prayer. Having the Lord God abiding within you, you will become more patient, more loving and more humble.

56. Take care that laziness does not undermine your strength for spiritual labors: laziness is the first enemy for those living far from the Father; but neither should you despair of salvation, nor be overly grieved if sometimes you grow weak in your spiritual struggles.

57. Works, of themselves, will not save us; rather, it is God's mercy, if only we do good deeds in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. May He not deprive you, my friends, of His mercy all the days of your life. Whether you are weak, ugly—it matters not; run to the merciful Lord Jesus Christ and firmly trust in Him: this hope will never, ever let you down.

58. Do not scorn my words, nor consider them hard to fulfill: for the Lord and with the Lord all that is difficult is not difficult, and all that is grievous is not grievous, for His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

The grace of our Lord be with you!

## CONFRONTING HOMOSEXUALITY WITHIN THE FAMILY: A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

*An Anonymous contribution to "Orthodox Heritage."*

I am the father of a large family. I converted to Orthodoxy in college. I was born and raised in a Roman Catholic family and I was the youngest of six children.

When my oldest brother attended the eighth grade in a Roman Catholic private school, he was sexually abused by one of his teachers, who was a Roman Catholic priest. My parents did not know about the abuse at the time and the school was eventually closed due to other cases of sexual abuse. As result of this experience, my brother identified himself as a homosexual. In another situation (now so common, it's a cliché), when my sister was in high school, her female PE instructor introduced her to homosexuality. As a result, my sister began identifying herself as a homosexual.

Even though, as minors, they both suffered inappropriate behavior from adults to whom they had been entrusted, they deny that these experiences were causative regarding their homosexuality. My siblings reject any suggestion that outside influences led them to homosexuality. Having been brought up in the same household, however, I can attest that these incidences were THE formative experiences that lead them to embrace homosexual identities.

My siblings are in their 50s now and homosexuality remains part of their identity. These incidents, occurring in their youth—perpetrated and betrayed by people under whom they had been entrusted—affected the course of their entire lives. I can't maintain the conceit that my children would be somehow immune to such a tragedy simply because they are baptized Orthodox. On the contrary, I am convinced that, while my children are under our care, my wife and I have the responsibility to actively and vigilantly ensure that such incidences don't influence our children.

Increasingly overt homosexuality in our society directly challenges our Orthodox life. That challenge is direct and unavoidable when a family member is openly homosexual. My siblings bring their partners to all family events. The homosexual siblings and their partners are treated like married couples by my family. The rest of my family declare homosexual unions acceptable, normal, and held up as morally equal to heterosexual marriage. They believe that a person can be a "Christian homosexual." And tragically, children easily get caught up in the error.

Before my wife and I had children, I witnessed my sister explaining to one of our nieces—who was six years old at the time—that my sister's relationship with her female "partner" was like a husband and wife. That incident precipitated our decision to permanently remove our children from that environment. In the end, because the rest of my immediate family

so completely embraced homosexuality as normal and acceptable, I was forced by the circumstances to end all participation in family gatherings on my side of the family and refused to allow my homosexual siblings to visit our home. To date, I am committed to that policy and will remain so until they come to true repentance, acknowledge that homosexuality is a sin, and reject that lifestyle.

I love my brother and sister and their absence from my life pains me. But my primary responsibility as an Orthodox Christian parent is to protect my children from anything and anyone who would lead them away from Christ, even if that person is a member of my earthly family. I believe this is what Christ meant when he said *Anyone who loves mother or father, sister or brother more than Me is not worthy of Me.*

I reject the common accusation that this fails to demonstrate Christian love. The culture at large currently reflects the view that homosexuality is normative. Since my side of the family completely embraces and reflects this view, my absence from my siblings' lives is the ONLY way I can witness to them that homosexuality is wrong. Participating in their delusion in any way would convey tacit acceptance and assist the enemy in the destruction of their souls as well as risk the salvation of my children.

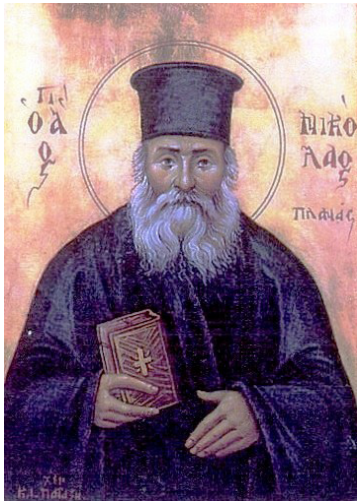
In spite of my family background, it has been possible, by a great gift of God's mercy, to raise my own children away from many of the overt and increasingly prevalent perversities of the contemporary culture. They have been afforded a relatively innocent and happy childhood. We give glory to God for the life He has given us.

An excellent resource for understanding the truth about homosexuality is a DVD video documentary produced by the American Family Association entitled "It's Not Gay." It can be purchased online from the American Family Association website. This video interviews many people who have lived the homosexual lifestyle and then later rejected it and abandoned their homosexual identity. These people give testimonies regarding what influenced them to begin practicing homosexuality and how it affected their lives and the lives of their families. It is an excellent film. I would strongly recommend it for anyone directly exposed to homosexuality and for all parents who are putting their children on school campuses, whether that be the junior high, high school, or college campus. This film would also be beneficial for church youth group leaders. There is some explicit content that is not appropriate for younger children, so parents should preview the film in order to determine if it is appropriate for their teens to view.

Another good resource for teens (and adults) on the subject of homosexuality and all sexual sins is the collection of audio recordings produced by St. Nicodemos Publications Society. The three series that deal with sexuality and sexual sins are titled: "The Ten Commandments," "Tobit," and "Questions and Answers."

## Ὁ Ἅγιος τῶν Ἡμερῶν μας - Πλανᾶς ὁ Νικόλαος

Συντεθημένο ἀπὸ τὸν Μητροπολίτη Πατρῶν κυρὸ Νικόδημο.



Ἢ μπορούσαμε νὰ ποῦμε ὅτι ἡ ἐποχή μας εἶναι μία ἐποχή διχασμοῦ τῆς καρδιάς, σύγχυσης, χάους, φόβου (ὄχι τοῦ ὑπαρξιακοῦ), ἀπληστίας, παραζάλης καὶ ἀνησυχίας. Δὲν ὑπάρχει καμιὰ δίψα ἀλήθειας. Καὶ οὔτε ἀμείλικτα ἐρωτήματα ζωῆς ἀναζητοῦν κάποια ἀπόκριση ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Ἐνῶ ἡ λαχτάρα γιὰ μάθηση καὶ

χορτασιμὸ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ νοῦ σχεδὸν ἔχει νεκρωθεῖ. Συνάμα ἡ «ἀπολυταρχία τοῦ λογικοῦ» τείνει νὰ ἐπικρατήσῃ σ' ἓνα σιδερένιο αἰῶνα.

«Στὴν ἐποχή μας», γράφει ὁ Ἰω. Θεοδωρακόπουλος, «ἔγιναν ὅλα μηχανικὰ καὶ ἀπρόσωπα, δηλαδὴ ἀνόνομα, ἐξωτερικὰ· ἔχασαν δηλαδὴ τὴν ἐσωτερικότητά τους. Καὶ ἡ ἀωνομία αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ κύρια πηγὴ τῆς σύγχρονης διαφθορᾶς». Ὑπάρχει λοιπὸν στὸν κόσμον ἡ ἀγωνία τοῦ ἀδιέξοδου, ἔτσι ὅπως τὴ δίδαξαν ὁ Νίτσε, ὁ Σάρτρ, ὁ Καζαντζάκης καὶ ἄλλοι πολλοί, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἔβγαλαν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἀπὸ τὴ σιγουριά τῆς ἐγκοσμιότητος καὶ τοῦ φόβου τοῦ Θεοῦ;

Ὡστόσο ὁ «Ἐκκλησιαστικὸς» λέει: «Τὸν Θεὸ φοβοῦ καὶ τὰς ἐντολὰς αὐτοῦ φύλασσε, ὅτι τοῦτο πᾶς ἄνθρωπος» (ἔχει καθῆκον κάθε ἄνθρωπος). Ποῦ θὰ πεῖ ὅτι ὁποῖος συνειδητὰ ζεῖ μέσα στὸ ἔδαφος καὶ στὸ πνεῦμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ συνάμα βιώνει σωστὰ τὴν ὀρθόδοξη πνευματικότητα, καμιὰ ὑπέρμετρη τραγικότητα, θλίψη, ἀδιέξοδο καὶ ἀπειλὴ δὲν πρέπει νὰ φωλιάζῃ στὴν καρδιά του. Κανένα δίλημμα δὲν πρέπει νὰ κάμψῃ τὸ φρόνημα καὶ τὴν ἐμπιστοσύνη τοῦ χριστιανοῦ στὸ Θεό. «Μὴ φοβοῦ, ἀλλὰπίστευε» μᾶς παραγγέλλει ὁ Κύριος.

Βέβαια, τοῦτοι οἱ καιροί, ἔνεκα τῆς μεγάλης πνευματικῆς τους καθίτησης ἀπαιτοῦν μία ξεχωριστὴ κατάθεση προσωπικῆς καὶ συλλογικῆς προσπάθειας, ἀφοῦ ἀκόμα καὶ ἡ ἀγιότητα ἀποτελεῖ ἓνα «λησιμονημένο ὄραμα». Καὶ εἶναι ἀρκετοὶ ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ νομίζουν ὅτι μποροῦν νὰ ἔχουν ποιότητα ζωῆς δίχως τρολὲ (τὴν κεραία ποὺ ἀπὸ ἠλεκτροφόρο σύρμα δίνει κίνηση στὸ ὄχημα). Ἀλλὰ εἶναι φανερὸ πιά, ὅτι τίποτα τὸ δημιουργικὸ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κινήθῃ δίχως πίστη καὶ μάλιστα στὸν ἀληθινὸ Θεό. «Δίχως Θεὸ ὅλα ἐπιτρέπονται» λέει ὁ Ντοστογιέφσκυ, καὶ βλέπουμε

ποῦ πάει ὁ κόσμος σήμερα!

Ἐπίσης εἶναι γνωστὸ ὅτι τὸν ἀγῶνα γιὰ τὴν κίνηση καὶ διατήρηση τοῦ τρολὲ μὲ τὸν ἠλεκτροφόρο οὐρανὸ, δὲν μπορεῖ ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ τὸν κάνει πάντα μόνος του! Εἶναι ἀνίσχυρος ὑποκειμενικὰ καὶ συγκυριακὰ. Γι' αὐτὸ χρειάζεται βοήθεια. Θέλει διαλεκτικὴ ἐνίσχυση ἀπὸ φωτισμένες μορφές, ταπεινοὺς σηματοδοτές, ταγοὺς καὶ ἀγίους. Οἱ ὁποῖοι μὲ τὴ βαθιὰ πίστη καὶ τὴν ἔμπρακτη, χριστιανικὴ διδαχὴ τους, δίνουν ἐγγυημένες λύσεις στὰ πνευματικὰ καὶ ὑλικὰ προβλήματα τῆς καθημερινῆς ζωῆς.

Ἄλλωστε «ἡ πίστη μας χωρὶς αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀγίους παύει νὰ ὑφίσταται». Καὶ «ἂν λησιμονήσουμε αὐτὴ τὴν ἀγιότητα δὲν ἀπομένει ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία παρὰ ὁ ταυτισμὸς τῆς μὲ τὸν κόσμον», γράφει ὁ Μητροπ. Περγάμου Ἰω. Ζηζιούλας.

Μιὰ τέτοια μορφὴ, ἐπίκαιρος ἀναφορᾶς γιὰ τοὺς καιροὺς μας, εἶναι καὶ ὁ ἀπλοϊκός, ταπεινὸς καὶ φτωχὸς (ἔως πένης) παπα-Νικόλαος Πλανᾶς. Ὁ ὁποῖος βίωσε τὸ σκάνδαλο καὶ τὴ μωρία τῆς πίστεως ὅπως τὴ χαρακτηρίζει ἡ Γραφή ὄχι γιὰ τὶς κηρυχτικὲς, συγγραφικὲς, πατερικὲς ἢ θύραθεν γνώσεις του, ἀλλὰ γιὰ τὴν ἀδιατίμητη ταπεινότητά του, τὴν ἀγάπη του πρὸς τὸν πλησίον, καὶ κυρίως γιὰ τὴ λιτότητα τοῦ βίου του. Ἦταν ἓνας ἀληθινὸς «φίλος τῆς ὑπακοῆς» στὸ θέλημα καὶ μόνον τοῦ Θεοῦ, ὑπόδειγμα χριστιανικοῦ βίου καὶ ποιμένα ὁ ὁποῖος, στ' ἀλήθεια, «τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ τίθησιν ὑπὲρ τῶν προβάτων».

Ὁ καλὸς αὐτὸς λευίτης ἔζησε καὶ ἐργάστηκε στὴν Ἀθήνα περισσότερα ἀπὸ ἑξήντα χρόνια καὶ κοιμήθηκε στὶς 2 Μαρτίου τοῦ ἔτους 1932. Θεωροῦσε ὅμως πάντοτε τὸν ἑαυτὸ του Νάξιο καὶ περηφανευόταν γι' αὐτό. Ὁ Νικόλαος Πλανᾶς γεννήθηκε στὴ Νάξο τὸ 1851 ἀπὸ γνωστὴ καὶ πολὺκλαδὴ οἰκογένεια τῆς Χώρας. Καὶ μεγάλωσε πλάι στὸ σπίτι τοῦ ὀνομαστοῦ τέκνου τῆς Ναξίας Ἁγίου Νικοδήμου τοῦ Ἁγιορείτη, μέσα σ' ἓνα κλίμα μυστικῆς ἔξαρσης ποὺ καλλιεργοῦσαν τότε ἔντονα οἱ Κολλυβάδες, οἱ πατέρες τοῦ Ἄθω καὶ οἱ Γέροντες τοῦ Ἡσυχασμοῦ. Ἄλλωστε καὶ ὁ παπποὺς τοῦ Νικόλα Πλανᾶ ἀπὸ τὴν μητέρα του ἦταν ὀφφικιοῦχος τῆς τοπικῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ὁ οἰκονόμος Γεώργιος Μελισσουργός.

Μετὰ τὸ θάνατο τοῦ πατέρα του στὰ 1868, ὁ Νικόλαος Πλανᾶς μαζί μὲ τὴ μητέρα του Αὐγουστίνα καὶ τὴ μικρὴ ἀδελφή του Σουσάνα «μετανάστεψε» στὴν Ἀθήνα. Ἀφοῦ στὸ μεταξὺ, φέροντας μέσα του τὰ πλοῦσια βιώματα τῆς γενέθλιας γῆς καὶ τῆς οἰκογενειακῆς παράδοσης, εἶχε ἀποφασίσει τὴ σταδιοδρομία του!

Ὅταν ὁ Νικόλαος Πλανᾶς ἔφυγε ἀπὸ τὸν λειμῶνα τῆς ναξιακῆς γαλήνης καὶ ἦρθε στὴν Ἀθήνα, βρέθηκε ξαφνικὰ μέσα στὴ βαβούρα καὶ τὸ ἐγκόσμιο σκόρπισμα μιᾶς νέας Βαβυλώνας. Σ' ἓνα κλίμα πρωτευουσιάνικης ἀσύνδετης, ταραγμένης καὶ ἀσυνάρτητης ζωῆς. Ἡ

όποια δίχως συγκεκριμένη ταυτότητα, συνεχιζόταν πάνω στα χνάρια της βαναρικής και όθωνικής άρνησης και άμετροέπειας (μεγαλοστομίας).

Οί κάτοικοι τής Αθήνας, ως ένας άθλιος συρφετός, προσπαθούσαν, μιμούμενοι τὰ εύρωπαϊκά κακέκτυπα ζωής, συμπεριφορᾶς και φιλοσοφίας, νὰ συγκροτήσουν μία άτομική και συλλογική συνείδηση. Σ' αὐτούς τούς ανθρώπους τής πρωτεύουσας ἀναφέρεται ὁ Κονδυλάκης με τούς «Άθλιους τών Αθήνων», ὁ Σουρής, ὁ Συνοδινός και πολλοί άλλοι συγγραφεῖς.

Άκόμα και ὁ Αλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης πού ἔγραψε πικραμένος: «Φεῦ. Τίς μοι δώσει ὕδωρ και δάκρυα; Άπό τόν τόπον τής δοκίμασίας και τόν τόπον τής μικρῆς ἀναψυχῆς, ἤλθα εἰς τόν τόπον τής καταδίκης, ὅπου ἀπό πολλοῦ σύρω τόν σταυρόν μου, μὴ ἔχων πλέον δυνάμεις νὰ τόν βαστάξω εἰς τὴν πόλιν τής δουλοπαροικίας και τών πλουτοκρατῶν. Ἐφθασα εἰς Αθήνας...»

Άλλά και ὁ Κωστής Μπαστιάς δὲν φεῖδεται παρησίας γιὰ νὰ περιγράψει τὴν κατάσταση τής πλάνης και τής ἀσυναρτησίας πού ἐπικρατοῦσε στὴν ἀλλοπρόσαλλη Αθήνα. «Ὅ,τι ἱερὸ φυλάξαμε», γράφει, «τετρακόσια χρόνια σκλαβιάς ποδοπατιέται, ὅ,τι μᾶς κράτησε ὄρθιους, σὰν ἀσάλευτο ἀντιστήλι, γκρεμίζεται. Σὲ τέτοιο γιουρούσι τοῦ σατανᾶ, κάθε ὑποταγή εἶναι ἄρνηση τής πίστεως και παράδοση στὸ διάβολο».

Σ' αὐτὸ τόν κόσμο ἦρθε ὁ Νικόλας Πλανᾶς νὰ ζήσει και νὰ καταθέσει τὸ ὑστέρημα τής καρδιάς του. Νὰ στηριξοῖ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη ἀξιοπρέπεια μέσα ἀπὸ ταπείνωση και ἀγάπη και νὰ ἀνατρέψει πολλές κατεστημένες συνήθειες μέσα στὸ κέντρο τής ἀθηναϊκῆς ἀδιαφορίας και τοῦ κυνικοῦ ἀθεϊσμοῦ. Νὰ ξαναδώσει τὴν ἱερότητα και τὸν χαμένο ἐνθουσιασμό στὸν κόσμο τής θρησκευτικῆς, χριστιανικῆς λατρείας. Καὶ παρὰ τούς διωγμούς και τίς λοιδορίες νὰ ἐγκαινιάσει μαζί με τὸ φίλο του Παπαδιαμάντη και τούς ἄλλους «Συμποτικούς» συντρόφους του, ἕνα νέο πνεῦμα ἐκκλησιαστικῆς καθαρότητας στὰ τέλη τοῦ 19<sup>ου</sup> και στὶς ἀρχὲς τοῦ 20<sup>ου</sup> αἰώνα.

Γ' αὐτὸ και ὁ Αλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης σὲ ἄρθρο του μοναδικό, με τίτλο: «Ἱερεῖς τών πόλεων και ἱερεῖς τών χωρίων» πού δημοσιεύθηκε στὸ λεύκωμα «Ἡ Ἑλλάς κατὰ τούς Ὀλυμπιακοὺς Ἀγῶνας τοῦ 1896», μεταξὺ τών ἄλλων ἔγραψε: «Γνωρίζω ἕνα ἱερέα εἰς τὰς Αθήνας. Εἶναι ὁ ταπεινότερος τών ἱερέων και ὁ ἀπλοϊκότερος τών ἀνθρώπων. Εἶναι ἀξιαγάπητος. Εἶναι ἀπλοϊκός και ἐνάρετος. Εἶναι ἄξιος τοῦ πρώτου τών μακαρισμῶν τοῦ Σωτήρος».

Ἐπρόκειτο γιὰ τὸν Νικόλα Πλανᾶ ὁ ὁποῖος, ἀφοῦ πρώτα στεφανώθηκε, στὶς 14 τοῦ Ἀπριλίου τοῦ 1879 και τὸν Ἰούλιο χειροτονήθηκε διάκονος στὴ Μεταμόρφωση τοῦ Σωτήρος Πλάκας, ἔμεινε γιὰ λίγα χρόνια νὰ ὑπηρετεῖ με ξεχωριστὸ ἦθος στὸν ἴδιο Ναό. Καὶ στὴ συνέχεια, στὶς 2 Μαρτίου τοῦ 1884, χειροτονήθηκε σὲ

Πρεσβύτερο στὸ ἐκκλησάκι τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἐλισαίου ὡς «Νικόλαος Πλανᾶς Ἱερεὺς ἐκ Νάξου» και τοποθετήθηκε στὸν Ἅγιο Ἰωάννη Βουλιαγμένης. Ἐνεκα ὅμως τοῦ ὅτι σὲ ὅλη τὴν περιοχὴ εἶχε μόνο τρεῖς οἰκογένειες ποιμένων ὡς ἐνορίτες, λειτουργοῦσε τακτικότερα στὸν Ἅγιο Ἐλισαῖο, στὸ Μοναστηράκι, με ψάλτες τὸν Αλέξανδρο Παπαδιαμάντη και τὸν Αλέξανδρο Μωραϊτίδη.

Εἶχε τὴν «ἰερὴ συνήθεια» νὰ κάνει σχεδὸν καθημερινὲς λειτουργίες και ἀγρυπνίες σὲ ὅλα τὰ ἐκκλησάκια τής Αθήνας και ἔξω ἀπ' αὐτή. Ἰδιαιτέρα στὸ ἐκκλησάκι τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἐλισαίου ὅπου τὸ τυπικὸ ἦταν ἀγιορεῖτικο, πλούσιο σὲ κατάνυξη, συγκεντρώνονταν πάρα πολλές ἀπὸ τίς ἐκκλησιαστικὲς μορφές τής ἐποχῆς, οἱ ὁποῖες ἀργότερα ἔπαιξαν μεγάλο ρόλο στὸν ἐκκλησιαστικὸ βίο τής Χώρας, ὅπως ἦταν: ὁ Νεκτᾶριος Κεφαλᾶς, ὁ Φιλόθεος Ζερβάκος, ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου, πολλοὶ Ἐπίσκοποι και ἀγιορεῖτες Γέροντες. Οἱ ὁποῖοι στὸ πρόσωπο τοῦ παπα-Νικόλα Πλανᾶ, τοῦ ὀλιγογράμματος και ταπεινοῦ ἱερέα, ἔβρισκαν και βίωναν τὴν «πρόγευση τών ἐσχάτων». Τὴν ἀγιότητα ὡς ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἐμπειρία. Ποῦ σημαίνει ὅτι μέσα στὸ μικρὸ ἐκκλησάκι ὑπῆρχε εἰκονισμὸς τής Βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ και μετοχὴ στὴ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ και στὴ νοητὴ θέωση τών «μυσταγωγικῶς παρισταμένων».

Γιὰ τὸν παπα-Νικόλα Πλανᾶ δὲν ὑπῆρξε ποτὲ θέμα ὕλικῶν ὠφελιμάτων. Ἐνιωθε πάντοτε πλούσιος και μόνο ὅτι ὑπηρετοῦσε τὸ Θυσιαστήριο ὡς ἱερέας Χριστοῦ και ἀγίαζε τὸν κόσμο. Ζοῦσε σ' ἕνα ταπεινὸ δωματιάκι στὸ σπίτι τής νύμφης του ἀπὸ τὸ γιό του Ἰωάννη, κάπου στὸ Κουκάκι (Γαργαρέττα). Φοροῦσε μόνιμα τὸ ἴδιο τριμμένο ρασάκι ἕως τὴν τελευτὴ τοῦ βίου του. Ἡ ὁποία ἔγινε, δίχως νὰ ἀρρωστήσει, τὴν Τσικνοπέμπτη τοῦ 1932, ἐνῶ εἶχε ξαπλώσει γιὰ νὰ κοιμηθεῖ.

Ἀργότερα γιὰ τὴ μοναδικότητα και ἀγιότητα τοῦ Παπακαλόγερου Νικόλα Πλανᾶ, διαμορφώθηκε ἡ συνείδηση στὸ λαὸ ὅτι θαυματουργοῦσε. Καὶ ὅτι αὐτὸ συνέβη ἐπειδὴ ὁ Ὅσιος Νικόλας Πλανᾶς δὲν εἶχε τίποτ' ἄλλο στὸ νοῦ του ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ και τὴ διακονία τών συνανθρώπων του μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία.

Κατὰ τὴν κηδεῖα του, πού ἔγινε στὸν Ἅγιο Γιάννη Βουλιαγμένης, ὅπου ὁ ἀγαθὸς Πρεσβύτερος ὑπηρετήσε ἐπὶ πενήντα ἔτη, ἀκούστηκαν πολλοὶ ἐπαινετικοὶ λόγοι και γράφτηκαν στὸν Τύπο κείμενα πού μιλοῦσαν γιὰ τὴν ἀφιλοκερδεία, τὴν ἀπλότητά του και τὴν ἀπόλυτη καλοσύνη του. Τὸν ἐπικήδειο ἐκφώνησε ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος κυρὸς Χρυσόστομος Παπαδόπουλος. Καὶ τὸ μεγάλο πλῆθος τοῦ λαοῦ ἀπαίτησε νὰ γίνεῖ ἡ περιφορὰ τοῦ σκηνώματός του σὲ ὅλη τὴν Πλάκα τής Αθήνας ὅπου ἔζησε και διακόνησε.

Στὶς μέρες μας, ὅσο ποτὲ ἄλλοτε, ἡ μνήμη τοῦ Ὁσίου Νικολάου Πλανᾶ, εἶναι ἐπίκαιρη και παραδειγματικὴ

για τὸν Κλήρο καὶ τὸ Λαό. Ἡ αὐτάρκειά του ἦταν πνευματική. Καὶ αὐτὸ τοῦ ἔδινε τὴ δυνατότητα νὰ αισθάνεται πλούσιος ἐνῶ ἦταν φτωχός. Νὰ ἔχει μόνιμα τὸν τρολὲ ἐνωμένο μὲ τὸν Οὐρανὸ καὶ δίχως κανένα φόβο νὰ ἀντιμετωπίζει ὅλες τὶς ἐξωτερικὲς συγκυρίες, οἱ ὁποῖες καὶ στὰ χρόνια του ἦταν πολὺ σκληρὲς καὶ πιεστικὲς, ὅπως καὶ στὶς μέρες μας! Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας, μετὰ τὴν ἀγιοκατάταξή του, δίκαια ψάλλει:

«Πλανᾶς ὁ Νικόλαος,  
ὁ ταπεινὸς πρεσβύτερος  
ᾧφθη ἐκλεκτὸς Χριστοῦ ἐργάτης,  
μικρὸς τὸ δέμας,  
πεφωτισμένος τὸν νοῦν,  
πίστει σοφῶν ὑπερετρῶν,  
ὄρθρω καὶ νυχθημερῶν τῷ φωτὶ ἀνυπαζόμενος.»

Καὶ ἐπίσης ψάλλει τό:

«Ὡ τοῦ παραδόξου θαύματος.  
Τὰ μωρὰ τοῦ κόσμου ὁ Θεὸς ἐπέλεξε,  
τὴν δ' ἔπαρσιν τῶν σοφῶν τούτοις κατήσχυνεν.  
Εὐφραίνου ἡ ταπεινὴ Νάξος,  
γενέθλη Πλανᾶ χρηματίσασα  
Νικόλαον τὸν ἀπλοῦν  
ἐν ἱερεῦσι Χριστοῦ ἡ ἐκθρέψασα.»



## Ἀνήκω σὲ Μία Χώρα Μικρή!

*Ἡ ὁμιλία τοῦ Γιώργου Σεφέρη στὴν τελετὴ παραλαβῆς τοῦ Βραβείου Νόμπελ Λογοτεχνίας, 11 Δεκεμβρίου, 1963.*

**Ἀ**νήκω σὲ μία χώρα μικρή. Ἐνα πέτρινο ἀκρωτήριο στὴ Μεσόγειο, ποὺ δὲν ἔχει ἄλλο ἀγαθὸ παρὰ τὸν ἀγῶνα τοῦ λαοῦ, τὴ θάλασσα, καὶ τὸ φῶς τοῦ ἡλίου. Εἶναι μικρὸς ὁ τόπος μας, ἀλλὰ ἡ παράδοσή του εἶναι τεράστια καὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα ποὺ τὴ χαρακτηρίζει εἶναι ὅτι μᾶς παραδόθηκε χωρὶς διακοπή.

Ἡ ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα δὲν ἔπαψε ποτὲ τῆς νὰ μιλιέται. Δέχτηκε τὶς ἀλλοιώσεις ποὺ δέχεται καθετὶ ζωντανό, ἀλλὰ δὲν παρουσιάζει κανένα χάσμα.

Ἄλλο χαρακτηριστικὸ αὐτῆς τῆς παράδοσης εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη τῆς γιὰ τὴν ἀνθρωπιά, κανόνας τῆς εἶναι ἡ δικαιοσύνη. Στὴν ἀρχαία τραγωδία, τὴν ὀργανωμένη μὲ τόση ἀκριβεία, ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ ξεπερνᾷ τὸ μέτρο, πρέπει νὰ τιμωρηθεῖ ἀπὸ τὶς Ἐρινύες. Ὅσο γιὰ μένα συγκινούμαι παρατηρώντας πῶς ἡ συνείδηση τῆς δικαιοσύνης εἶχε τόσο πολὺ διαποτίσει τὴν ἑλληνικὴ ψυχὴ, ὥστε νὰ γίνεῖ κανόνας τοῦ φυσικοῦ κόσμου.

Καὶ ἓνας ἀπὸ τοὺς διδασκάλους μου, τῶν ἀρχῶν τοῦ περασμένου αἰῶνα, γράφει: «...θὰ χαθοῦμε γιὰτὶ ἀδικήσαμε...». Αὐτὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἦταν ἀγράμματος. Εἶχε μάθει νὰ γράφει συναπτὰ τριάντα πέντε χρόνια

τῆς ἡλικίας του. Ἀλλὰ στὴν Ἑλλάδα τῶν ἡμερῶν μας, ἡ προφορικὴ παράδοση πηγαίνει μακριὰ στὰ περασμένα ὅσο καὶ ἡ γραπτὴ. Τὸ ἴδιο καὶ ἡ ποίηση.

Εἶναι γιὰ μένα σημαντικὸ τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι ἡ Σουηδία θέλησε νὰ τιμήσει καὶ τούτῃ τὴν ποίηση καὶ ὅλη τὴν ποίηση γενικά, ἀκόμη καὶ ὅταν ἀναβρῦζει ἀνάμεσα σ' ἓνα λαὸ περιορισμένο. Γιατί πιστεύω πῶς τοῦτος ὁ σύγχρονος κόσμος ὅπου ζοῦμε, ὁ τυρρανισμένος ἀπὸ τὸ φόβο καὶ τὴν ἀνησυχία, τὴ χρειάζεται τὴν ποίηση. Ἡ ποίηση ἔχει τὶς ρίζες τῆς στὴν ἀνθρώπινη ἀνάσα—καὶ τί θὰ γινόμασταν ἂν ἡ πνοή μας λιγότευε; Εἶναι μία πράξη ἐμπιστοσύνης—κι ἓνας Θεὸς τὸ ξέρεῖ ἂν τὰ δεινά μας δὲν τὰ χρωστάμε στὴ στέρηση ἐμπιστοσύνης.

Παρατήρησαν, τὸν περασμένο χρόνο γύρω ἀπὸ τοῦτο τὸ τραπέζι, τὴν πολὺ μεγάλη διαφορὰ ἀνάμεσα στὶς ἀνακαλύψεις τῆς σύγχρονης ἐπιστήμης καὶ στὴ λογοτεχνία, παρατήρησαν πῶς ἀνάμεσα σ' ἓνα ἀρχαῖο ἑλληνικὸ δράμα καὶ ἓνα σημερινό, ἡ διαφορὰ εἶναι λίγη. Ναί, ἡ συμπεριφορὰ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου δὲ μοιάζει νὰ ἔχει ἀλλάξει βασικά. Καὶ πρέπει νὰ προσθέσω πῶς νιώθει πάντα τὴν ἀνάγκη ν' ἀκούσει τούτῃ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη φωνὴ ποὺ ὀνομάζουμε ποίηση. Αὐτὴ ἡ φωνὴ ποὺ κινδυνεύει νὰ σβήσει κάθε στιγμὴ ἀπὸ στέρηση ἀγάπης καὶ ὀλοένα ξαναγεννιέται. Κινηγημένη, ξέρεῖ ποὺ νὰ βρεῖ καταφύγιο, ἀπαρνημένη, ἔχει τὸ ἔνστικτο νὰ πάει νὰ ριζώσει στοὺς πιὸ ἀπροσδόκητους τόπους. Γι' αὐτὴ δὲν ὑπάρχουν μεγάλα καὶ μικρὰ μέρη τοῦ κόσμου. Τὸ βασιλεῖο τῆς εἶναι στὶς καρδιὲς ὄλων τῶν ἀνθρώπων τῆς γῆς. Ἐχει τὴ χάρη ν' ἀποφεύγει πάντα τὴ συνήθεια νὰ κρίνει μία χώρα ἀπὸ τὸ μέγεθός της, τὴν γλῶσσα της, τὸν πλοῦτο, ἢ τὴν βιομηχανία της.

Χρωστῶ τὴν εὐγνωμοσύνη μου στὴ Σουηδικὴ Ἀκαδημία ποὺ ἔνιωσε αὐτὰ τὰ πρᾶγματα, ποὺ ἔνιωσε πῶς οἱ γλῶσσες, οἱ λεγόμενες περιορισμένης χρήσης, δὲν πρέπει νὰ καταντοῦν φράχτες ὅπου πνίγεται ὁ παλμὸς τῆς ἀνθρώπινης καρδιάς, ποὺ ἔγινε ἓνας Ἄρειος Πάγος ἰκανὸς νὰ κρίνει μὲ ἀλήθεια ἐπίσημη τὴν ἄδικη μοῖρα τῆς ζωῆς, γιὰ νὰ θυμηθῶ τὸν Σέλλεϋ, τὸν ἐμπνευστή, καθὼς μᾶς λένε, τοῦ Ἀλφρέδου Νομπέλ, αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ποὺ μπόρεσε νὰ ἐξαγοράσει τὴν ἀναπόφευκτη βία μὲ τὴ μεγαλοσύνη τῆς καρδιάς του.

Σ' αὐτὸ τὸν κόσμο, ποὺ ὀλοένα στενεύει, ὁ καθένας μας χρειάζεται ὄλους τοὺς ἄλλους. Πρέπει ν' ἀναζητήσουμε τὸν ἄνθρωπο, ὅπου καὶ νὰ βρίσκεται. Ὅταν στὸ δρόμο τῆς Θήβας, ὁ Οἰδίπους συνάντησε τὴ Σφίγγα, κι αὐτὴ τοῦ ἔθεσε τὸ αἰνιγμὰ της, ἡ ἀπόκρισή του ἦταν: Ὁ ἄνθρωπος.

Τούτῃ ἡ ἀπλὴ λέξη χάλασε τὸ τέρας. Ἐχομε πολλὰ τέρατα νὰ καταστρέψουμε. Ἄς συλλογιστοῦμε τὴν ἀπόκριση τοῦ Οἰδίποδα.

## Ἀπαιτῶ!

Ἀπὸ ἓνα Ἑλληνορθόδοξο φυλλάδιο.

**Τ**ὸ θαῦμα ποῦ θὰ ἐξιστορηθεῖ τώρα, δυστυχῶς, ὅπως ἔδειξαν τὰ πράγματα, δὲν ἔγινε κατ' εὐδοκίαν Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ κατ' ἀπαίτηση κάποιας μητέρας, ποῦ θεώρησε ἢ δυστυχῆς τὴν δική της γνώμη καὶ ἐπιθυμία πιδ σωστὴ ἀπὸ τὴν Θεία ἀπόφαση ποῦ εἶχε ληφθεῖ γιὰ τὸ καλὸ τοῦ παιδιοῦ της. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ μπαίνοντας στὴν Ἐκκλησία τῆς Παναγίας μαζί με ἄλλους συμποσκηνητές, διότι εἶχε ἔρθει με πούλμαν ἀπὸ ἓνα μεγάλο χωριὸ τοῦ Νομοῦ Ἀχαΐας, φώναζε:

- Ἀπαιτῶ, Παναγία μου, τὸ παιδί μου νὰ γίνη καλά!

Ὅταν τῆς ὑπεδείχθη ὅτι δὲν πρέπει νὰ λέει στὴν Παναγία «ἀπαιτῶ», ἐκεῖνη εἶπε: «Τὸ ἀπαιτῶ, γιὰ τὸ παιδί μου εἶναι 28 χρονῶν καὶ ἔχει μικρὸ παιδάκι καὶ οἱ γιατροὶ εἶπαν ὅτι σὲ 15 ἡμέρες θὰ πεθάνει, γιὰ τὸ ὄλικο καρκίνιο».

Ὅσοι τὴν ἄκουσαν νὰ προσεύχεται κατ' αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπο, προσπάθησαν νὰ τὴν συμβουλεύσουν καὶ τῆς εἶπαν πὼς στὴν προσευχὴ πρέπει νὰ παρακαλοῦμε καὶ ὄχι νὰ ἀπαιτοῦμε, γιὰ τὸ Θεός, ὁ πραγματικὸς Πατέρας τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἀγαπᾷ τὸ πλάσμα Του ἀπείρως περισσότερο ἀκόμη καὶ ἀπὸ μιὰ μάννα. Ἐπὶ πλέον τῆς εἶπαν νὰ ἀφήσει τὸ παιδί της στὰ χέρια τῆς Παναγίας νὰ τὸ σώσει, γιὰ τὸ Ἐκεῖνη δίνει τὴν βοήθειά Της κατὰ τὸ συμφέρον τοῦ κάθε ἀνθρώπου. Αὐτὴ ὅμως δυστυχῶς πιδ ἐξαγριωμένη φώναζε:

- Ἀπαιτῶ, ἀπαιτῶ, Παναγία μου, τὸ παιδί μου νὰ γίνη καλά!!!...

Δὲν ἤθελε νὰ καταλάβει πὼς κανεὶς δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἀπαιτεῖ, γιὰ τὴν Παναγία, σὰν στοργικὴ Μάννα, ξέρετε καλύτερα ἀπ' ὅλους μας τί εἶναι καλύτερο πρῶτα γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία τῆς ψυχῆς μας. Ὁ Κύριός μας Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς μᾶς ἔδωσε τὸ ὑπόδειγμα τῆς σωστῆς προσευχῆς: «*Πάτερ μου, εἰ δυνατόν ἐστὶ, παρελθέτω ἀπ' ἐμοῦ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦτο· πλὴν οὐχ ὡς ἐγὼ θέλω, ἀλλ' ὡς σὺ*». (Ματθ. 26:39). Τὴν τελευταία ἀπόφαση τὴν ἀφήνουμε στὴν ἀλάνθαστη καὶ σωτήρια κρίση τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Μετὰ ἀπὸ ἓνα περὶπου χρόνον, κάποιοι ἀπὸ τοὺς ποσκηνητῆς ποῦ εἶχαν ἔρθει με τὴν ἐν λόγῳ μητέρα, ξαναἠλθε νὰ ποσκηνησῆ τὴν Χάρη Της καὶ ἔλεγε μεγαλοφῶνως μπροστὰ στὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Παναγίας:

- Παναγία μου, τὸ θέλημα Σου νὰ γίνετα, μὰ τὸ κακὸ ποῦ εἶδα στὸ χωριό μου!

Ὅταν ρωτήθηκε τί ἔγινε στὸ χωριό του, ἀπάντησε καὶ διευκρίνησε πότε εἶχε ἔρθει καὶ γιὰ ποῖο περιστατικὸ μιλοῦσε. Ἀναφερόταν στὴν περίπτωσή τῆς κυρίας ποῦ φώναζε τὸ «ἀπαιτῶ». Τότε ἡ Ἠγουμένη τὸν ἐρώτησε:

- Τί ἔγινε ὁ γυιὸς τῆς κυρίας;

- Ἐγινε καλά, ἀλλὰ δὲν ὑπάρχει οὔτε αὐτὸς οὔτε οἱ γονεῖς του.

Στὴν ἀπορία «γιατί;» ἀπάντησε ὁ ποσκηνητῆς με θλίψη:

- Ὅταν ὁ γυιὸς της ἔγινε καλά, πῆγε σὲ ἓνα νυκτερινὸ κέντρο καὶ συνεδέθη με τὴν ἐκεῖ τραγουδίστρια. Ἐφυγε ἀπὸ τὸ σπίτι του καὶ ἔμεινε με τὴν τραγουδίστρια. Οἱ γονεῖς του ποῦ στενοχωροῦντο γιὰ τὴν παράνομη αὐτὴ συμπεριφορὰ του, ὅταν τὸν συναντοῦσαν τὸν συμβούλευαν νὰ ἀλλάξῃ τακτικὴ. «Δὲν κάνει, παιδί μου, τοῦ ἔλεγαν, ἔχεις γυναῖκα καὶ μικρὸ παιδί. Γύρισε σπίτι σου». Ἐπειδὴ ἐνοχλεῖτο ὁ γυιὸς ἀπὸ τὶς συμβουλῆς τῶν γονέων του, μιὰ μέρα ποῦ θύμωσε ἐναντίον τους πολὺ, πῆρε τὸ κυνηγετικὸ του ὄπλο (γιατί ἦταν καὶ κυνηγός), σκότωσε τὴν μάννα του καὶ τὸν πατέρα του καὶ ἐν συνεχείᾳ αὐτοκτόνησε!

Ὅσοι ἄκουσαν τὸ περιστατικὸ φρίκισαν. Μητροκτόνος, πατροκτόνος καὶ αὐτόχειρας!

Δὲν ἦταν ἀπείρως καλύτερα νὰ φύγει με ἓναν φυσιολογικὸ θάνατο, καὶ μάλιστα ἐξίλεωτικὸ, ὅπως γίνεται ὅταν ὑπομένει ὁ ἀσθενὴς τὴν ἀρρώστια του; Ἡ Παναγία δὲν ἤξερε καλύτερα;

Ἡ σαρκικὴ του μάννα ἀπαιτοῦσε τὴν ὑγεία τοῦ σώματος καὶ ἀγνοοῦσε τὸν κίνδυνο τοῦ χαμοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς τοῦ παιδιοῦ της, ποῦ τώρα εἶναι αἰώνιος. Ἐνῶ ἡ στοργικὴ Παναγία, γνωρίζοντας τὸν κίνδυνο, προσπάθησε νὰ τὸν ἐξίλεώσει με τὴν ἀρρώστια, γιὰ νὰ σωθεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ του. Ἡ παράλογη ἀπαίτηση τῆς μάννας τὸν κατεδίκασε αἰώνιος.

Εἶθε με ἀπόλυτη ἐμπιστοσύνη νὰ ἀναθέτουμε κάθε πρόβλημά μας, χωρὶς ὑποδείξεις λύσεως στὴν Παναγία καὶ Ἐκεῖνη, νὰ πιστεύουμε ἀπόλυτα ὅ,τι ἐπιτρέψει θὰ εἶναι καὶ ἡ καλύτερη λύση τῶν προβλημάτων μας κατὰ τὸ «γεννηθῆτω τὸ θέλημά Σου».



**Ἡ** πείρα ἀποκτιεταὶ ἀπὸ τὰ πυρὰ τῶν δαιμόνων, ποῦ δέχεται ὁ στρατιώτης τοῦ Χριστοῦ στὴν πνευματικὴ μάχη.

**Γ**ιὰ νὰ ἐξαγνισθεῖ ὁ νοῦς καὶ ἡ καρδιά, πρέπει ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ μὴ δέχεται πονηροὺς λογισμοὺς, ἀλλὰ οὔτε καὶ ὁ ἴδιος νὰ σκέφτεται πονηρά. Νὰ ἐνεργεῖ δὲ ἀπλὰ καὶ ταπεινὰ καὶ νὰ ἀγωνίζεται φιλότιμα.

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

**Ὅ**σο σωστὸς ἄνθρωπος δὲν εἶναι αὐτὸς ποῦ λέει σωστὰς κουβέντες, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνος ποῦ ζεῖ καὶ σωστά, Εὐαγγελικά.

**Γέρων Παΐσιος ὁ Ἀθωνίτης (+1994)**



## Ὁ Πολιτισμὸς τῆς Εὐχέρειας

*Χρήστου Μαλεβίτση, ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο τὸ «Τὰ Μῆλα τῶν Ἑσπερίδων», ἑκδ. Imago. Δημοσιεύθηκε στὸ ἀφιέρωμα «Οἰκονομία σὲ Κρίση - Τὸ Ἔχειν καὶ τὸ Εἶναι» τοῦ περιοδικοῦ «Πειραϊκὴ Ἐκκλησία», τ. 217, Ἰούλιος 2010.*

**Ο**ἱ Δυτικὲς κοινωνίες εἰσέρχονται πλησίστιες στὸν πολιτισμὸ τῆς εὐχέρειας. Ἐνῶ ὅλοι οἱ μέχρι τώρα πολιτισμοὶ ἦσαν πολιτισμοὶ τῆς δυσχέρειας. Ἡ διαφορὰ εἶναι κρίσιμη. Διότι ἡ δυσχέρεια συνθέτει τοὺς πολιτισμούς, ἡ δὲ εὐχέρεια τοὺς ἀποσυνθέτει.

Βέβαια, ὁ πολιτισμὸς ἔγινε ἀπὸ τὸν ἄνθρωπο γιὰ νὰ μετατρέψει τὴ δυσχέρεια σὲ εὐχέρεια. Οἱ παλιοὶ πολιτισμοὶ τὸ καταφέρανε τοῦτο σὲ περιορισμένο βαθμὸ καὶ γιὰ περιορισμένο ἀριθμὸ ἀνθρώπων. Μόνον ὁ δικὸς μας πολιτισμὸς στὴ δεύτερη φάση του, σὲ αὐτὴν τῆς καταναλωτικῆς κοινωνίας, ἐπέτυχε νὰ μεταστοιχειώσει τὴ δυσχέρεια σὲ εὐχέρεια σὲ μεγάλο βαθμὸ καὶ γιὰ μεγάλο ἀριθμὸ ἀνθρώπων. Μὲ τὸν καιρὸ δὲ αὐξάνει καὶ ὁ βαθμὸς τῆς εὐχέρειας καὶ ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ποὺ τὴν ἀπολαμβάνουν. Αὐτὸ ὄνειρευόταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀπὸ καταβολῆς τοῦ? τώρα τὸ ἐπέτυχε? δὲν νιώθει εὐτυχῆς;

Ἐδῶ ἀκριβῶς βρίσκεται ἡ μεγάλη ἀποκάλυψη: ὅτι στὸν πολιτισμὸ τῆς εὐχέρειας ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲν αἰσθάνεται εὐτυχῆς. Ἀλλὰ καὶ κάτι παραπάνω: δὲν αἰσθάνεται ἀσφαλῆς. Καὶ τὴν πλέον ταπεινὴ συνείδηση τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ τῆς εὐχέρειας τὴν ἔχει σταυρώσει ἡ κατῆφεια καὶ τὴν ἔχει χαράξει ἡ ὑποψία, ἡ καὶ ἡ βεβαιότητα τῆς ριζικῆς ἀνασφάλειας.

Πράγματι, αὐτὸ τὸ τελευταῖο εἶναι πολὺ ἀπογοητευτικό· ἀτενίζομε πλέον καὶ στὶς ἀμέτοχες συνειδήσεις τὸν κατοπτρισμὸ τῆς ματαιότητος τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ μας. Ἦταν νοητὴ ἡ συζήτηση γιὰ τὴν κρίση τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ μεταξὺ ἱστορικῶν ἢ φιλοσόφων ἢ κοινωνιολόγων. Τώρα ὅμως ἡ συζήτηση αὐτὴ διεξάγεται ἀνάμεσα σὲ ἀνθρώπους ἀπλοϊκοὺς ἢ νέους, μὲ τὶς ἐλάχιστες ἀκόμη ἐμπειρίες ζωῆς. Καὶ ἡ συνείδηση ἀμχανεῖ πρὸ τοῦ μεγάλου κακοῦ, βλέποντας πὺς τὸ ψῦχος τῆς ἱστορικῆς αὐτοσυνειδησίας κατῆλθε ὡς τοὺς ἀνθισμένους λειμώνες καὶ τοὺς καταψύχει προῶτως. Καὶ ἀποδεικνύεται πλέον μὲ ἐνάργεια μεσημεριοῦ πὺς πράγματι ὁ πολιτισμὸς μας τελεῖ σὲ κρίση—διότι ἡ κρίση τοῦ κλονίζει καὶ τὶς ἀγεώργητες, καὶ τὶς ἄγουρες συνειδήσεις. Δὲν πρόκειται πλέον περὶ θεωρητικῆς ἐκδοχῆς, ἀλλὰ περὶ καθεστῶτος ἐδραίου.

Πηγὴ τῶν πολιτισμῶν εἶναι ἡ δυσχέρεια τοῦ βίου. Βιοτικὴ δυσχέρεια, βεβαίως, ἀντιμετωπίζουν καὶ τὰ ζῶα. Μόνον ποὺ αὐτὰ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ ἀπαντήσουν στὴν πρόκληση τῆς δυσχέρειας καὶ παραμένουν ἐσαεὶ δέσμιά της. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀπελευθερώνεται ἀπὸ τὴν δυσχέρεια ἀπαντώντας δημιουργικὰ στὴ πρόκλησή

της. Ἡ ἀπελευθέρωση εἶναι σχετικὴ· μὲ τὸν Δυτικὸ ὅμως πολιτισμὸ μας πᾶει νὰ γίνῃ ἀπόλυτη. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ μετασηματίζεται στὸν πρῶτο πολιτισμὸ τῆς εὐχέρειας στὴν ἱστορία.

Ἡ πενία, δηλαδὴ ἡ δυσχέρεια, δὲν κατεργάζεται μόνο τέχνες, κατὰ τὸ λόγιο. Κατεργάζεται καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα, τὸν ἐσωτερικὸ πλουτισμὸ, τὰ αἰσθήματα, τὶς συγκινήσεις, τὶς ἀγάπες, τὶς θρησκείες, τὶς φιλοσοφίες, τὶς ἰδεολογίες. Ὅχι μόνον ὁ ὑλικὸς πολιτισμὸς, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ πνευματικὸς πολιτισμὸς εἶναι προϊόντα τῆς δυσχέρειας. Καὶ τοῦτο τὸ τελευταῖο μᾶς ἐνδιαφέρει ἀκόμη περισσότερο. Δὲν θὰ ὑπῆρχε πνευματικὸ ἔργο χωρὶς τὴν δυσχέρεια τῆς ὑπάρξεως.

Ἦλη ἡ Ὀδύσεια εἶναι ἡ βιοτικὴ δυσχέρεια ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου. Καὶ ὅλη ἡ Ἰλιάδα εἶναι ἡ ἀγωνιστικὴ δυσχέρεια ἐνὸς λαοῦ. Ἡ ριζικὴ δυσχέρεια τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ὑπαρξῆς, ποὺ εἶναι ὁ θάνατος, συνιστᾷ τὸ σημεῖο ἀφετηρίας τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ. Καὶ ἡ διὰ βίου προσκόλλησι τοῦ ἀνθρώπου στὴ θρησκεία τοῦ συστοιχεῖται πρὸς τὸν διὰ βίου χειμασμὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου στὸν κόσμον τοῦτο. Ἡ ζωὴ τελεῖ πάντοτε ὑπὸ ἀπειλῆ καὶ καταφεύγει στὸ ἔργο τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ γιὰ νὰ ἀσφαλισθεῖ ὑλικῶς καὶ πνευματικῶς. Ὡστόσο, τοῦτο δὲν σημαίνει πὺς οἱ πνευματικὲς καταφυγὲς τῆς ζωῆς εἶναι προσχήματα ἄμυνας χωρὶς αὐτόνομη ἐσωτερικὴ ἀξία—δηλαδὴ δὲν πρόκειται γιὰ ἐξορκισμοὺς. Ὅχι. Ναὶ μὲν ἡ δυσχέρεια τοῦ ζῆν ἀναγκάζει τὸν ἄνθρωπο στὸ νὰ ψάξει γιὰ πνευματικὰ ἐρείσματα, δὲν πρόκειται ὅμως γιὰ ἐπινοήματα, παρὰ γιὰ γνήσιες ἀποκαλύψεις πραγματικότητων, ἀγνώστων μέχρι τότε. Ἡ διάνοιξη τῆς συνείδησης, ὠθημένη ἀπὸ τὴν δυσχέρεια, εἶναι πραγματικὴ καὶ κοσμοϊστορικῆς σημασίας. Ἄλλωστε, ἐπειδὴ ἀκριβῶς αὐτὲς οἱ πραγματικότητες ὑπάρχουν, τὶς ἀντιτάσσει ὁ ἄνθρωπος στὴν δυσχέρεια, γιὰ τὴν ὑπέρβασή της. Ἄν δὲν ὑπῆρχαν, δὲ θὰ τὶς εὑρίσκε· θὰ τοῦ ἦταν ἴσως ἀκατόρθωτο καὶ νὰ τὶς ἐπινοήσει. Καὶ μάλιστα θὰ ἦταν πιὸ δύσκολο, ἂν ὄχι ἀδύνατο, νὰ τὶς ἐπινοήσει παρὰ νὰ τὶς ἀνακαλύψει.

Ὅσο ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀπαλλάσσεται ἀπὸ τὴν δυσχέρεια τοῦ ζῆν τόσο ἀπαλλάσσεται καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνάγκη νὰ καταφύγει στὸν προφήτη, στὸν ἅγιο, στὸν ποιητὴ, στὸν φιλόσοφο. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ στὸν πολιτισμὸ τῆς εὐχέρειας τὰ ἐπάγγελα αὐτὰ ὀλοένα καὶ περισσότερο παραμένουν ἀζήτητα. Διότι οἱ ἐπαγγελίες τους γιὰ σωτηρία (θρησκευτικὴ, αἰσθητικὴ, γνωστικὴ) δὲν ἐνθουσιάζουν κανέναν. Ἡ εὐχέρεια ἀποσαθρώνει τὴν πνευματικὴ σκευὴ τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

Βέβαια, ἡ ὑπαρξὴ εἶναι καταστατικῶς δυσχερῆς στὸν κόσμον τοῦτο, ἀφοῦ ἡ κατ' ἐξοχὴν δυσχέρεια, ὁ θάνατος, δὲν ἀναιρεῖται ἀπὸ κανέναν πολιτισμὸ. Ὅμως ἡ ἀναίρεση τῆς βιοτικῆς μέριμνας (τροφὴ, ἐνδυσση, στέγη, φάρμακα) ἀπαλύνει τὶς ὑψηλότερου βαθμοῦ δυσχερείες

μέχρις ἀμβλύνσεως τῶν, δεδομένου ὅτι οἱ «πλατιῆς μάξες» ποὺ συνιστοῦν τὸ μόνον ὑποκείμενο τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ τῆς εὐχέρειας, νιώθουν νὰ εὐδαιμονοῦν μέσα στὴ θαλπωρὴ τῆς ὑλικῆς τους εὐμάρειας. Δὲν εἶναι ἀσήμαντο πράγμα ἡ ἱκανοποίηση τῶν ἄμεσων καὶ ἐπιτακτικῶν βιοτικῶν ἀναγκῶν. Γι' αὐτὸ ἀκριβῶς καὶ ἡ λύση ποὺ δόθηκε κατακυριάρχησε καὶ παραμέρισε ὅλες τὶς ἄλλες λύσεις τῶν ἄλλων δυσχερειῶν.

Ὅλα ὁμῶς τοῦτα ἰσχύουν βραχυπροθέσμως. Δὲν μποροῦν νὰ ἰσχύουν μακροπροθέσμως. Μακροπροθέσμως ὁδηγοῦν εὐθέως πρὸς τὴν κατάρρευση τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ. Ἐπειδὴ ἡ εὐχέρεια ἀπορρυθμίζει τοὺς μηχανισμοὺς συντηρήσεως καὶ ἐπεκτάσεως τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ. Ἴσως στὸ τέλος ἀναλάβει τὸν μόχθο αὐτὸ μιὰ ἀποφασισμένη μειοψηφία. Ὅποτε θὰ περάσουμε σὲ ἄλλες ἱστορικὲς μορφές χαρούμενης, πλέον, δουλείας τῶν πολλῶν τῆς εὐχέρειας στοὺς λίγους τῆς δυσχέρειας.

Ὡστόσο, ὁ πολιτισμὸς μας ἤδη κρούεται στὰ ὅρια τῆς ὑλικῆς του εὐχέρειας, ποὺ εἶναι τὰ ὅρια ἀντοχῆς τοῦ φυσικοῦ μας περιβάλλοντος. Στὸ μεταξὺ ὁμῶς ἡ εὐχέρεια, ποὺ ἡ Δύση ἔχει ἀπολαύσει σὲ πρωτοφανῆ βαθμὸ καὶ γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ στὴν ἱστορία, ἔχει πράξει τὸ κακό. Ὑπονόμευσε ὅλη τὴν πνευματικότητα καὶ ὅλη τὴν ἐσωτερικότητα ποὺ εἶχαν δημιουργήσει οἱ πολιτισμοὶ τῆς δυσχέρειας.

Σ' αὐτὸν τὸν κόσμο τὰ πάντα ἔχουν τὸ ἀντίρροπὸ τους. Ἡ ὑλικὴ δυστυχία ἀντιζυγίζεται μὲ πνευματικὴ εὐτυχία. Ἡ ὑλικὴ εὐτυχία ἀντιροπεῖται μὲ πνευματικὴ δυστυχία. Ἡ δυσχέρεια τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ἐδημιούργησε τὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη, τὸν Λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἡ εὐχέρεια τῆς Δύσεως προετοιμάζει τὸν Λόγο τοῦ Δαιμονικοῦ. Ἦδη τὸν ἀκοῦμε εὐκρινῶς... ὅλοι μας...



**Ἡ** γενεολογία τῆς πολιτικῆς εἶναι συνεχῆς καὶ γνησίᾳ κατὰ τοὺς προγόνους. **Ἡ ἀργία ἐγέννησε τὴν πενίαν. Ἡ πενία ἔτεκε τὴν πείναν. Ἡ πείνα παρήγαγε τὴν αὐθαιρεσίαν. Ἡ αὐθαιρεσία ἐγέννησε τὴν ληστείαν. Ἡ ληστεία ἐγέννησε τὴν πολιτικὴν. Ἴδου ἡ αὐθεντικὴ καταγωγὴ τοῦ τέρατος τούτου.**

Τότε καὶ τώρα πάντοτε ἡ αὐτὴ. Τότε διὰ τῆς βίας, τώρα διὰ τοῦ δόλου καὶ διὰ τῆς ...βίας. Πάντοτε ἀμετάβλητοι οἱ σχοινοβάται οὗτοι οἱ Ἀθίγγανοι, οἱ γελωτοποιοὶ οὗτοι πίθηκοι (καλῶ δ' οὕτω τοὺς λεγομένους πολιτικούς). Μαῦροι χαλκεῖς κατασκευάζοντες δεσμὰ διὰ τοὺς λαοὺς ἐν τῇ βαθυζόφω σκοτίᾳ τοῦ αἰωνίου ἐργαστηρίου των...

**Κυρ-Ἀλέξανδρος Παπαδιαμάντης**  
Ἀπὸ τὸ «*Ἐμποροὶ τῶν Ἐθνῶν*»

## Ἀμαρτία: Ἡ Ἐσχάτη Μέθη!

Τοῦ κ. Μιχαήλ Ε. Μιχαηλίδη, θεολόγου.

**Ἔ**τσι τὴν εἶπε καὶ τὴ χαρακτήρισε ὁ ἱερός Χρυσόστομος, τὴν ἀμαρτία: «Ἐσχάτη μέθη». Καὶ τέτοια εἶναι κάθε παράβαση τοῦ θεοῦ Νόμου.

Ἡ ἀμαρτία μοιάζει μὲ μέθη. Ὅσο πιὸ πολὺ κρασί πίνει κανεὶς, τόσο καὶ ὁ ὀργανισμὸς του τὸ ἀποζητάει. Κι ὅσο τὸ ἀποζητάει, τόσο καὶ περισσότερο μεθάει. Ἡ μέθη δὲν ἔχει ποτὲ κορεσμό. Ὁ νοῦς θολώνει, ἡ θέληση χαλαρώνει καὶ χάνει τὴ δύναμή της, κι ὁ ἄνθρωπος τότε δένεται στὰ σκλαβόσχοινα τοῦ πάθους του.

«Ἐσχάτη μέθη καὶ κακὸν ἔσχατον» εἶναι ἡ ἀμαρτία. Ποιδὲς ἦρθε στὸν κόσμον καὶ φόρεσε σάρκα καὶ δὲν εἶδε τὴν ἀμαρτία νὰ τοῦ γλείφει τὰ πόδια; Ποιδὲς ἀνάπνευσε τὸν ἀέρα καὶ δὲ μύρισε τὴ δυσωδία τῆς κακίας; Ποιδὲς πάτησε τὸ πόδι του σὲ τοῦτο τὸν πλανήτη καὶ δὲ σκουντούφλησε στὰ χαλίγια καὶ δὲν τὸν τρύπησαν τ' ἀγκάθια τῆς παρανομίας; «*Τὶς γὰρ καθαρὸς ἔσται ἀπὸ ρύπου, ἀλλ' οὐδεὶς, ἐὰν καὶ μία ἡμέρα ὁ βίος αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς*». (Ἰώβ 4:5). Τὸ κακὸ λοιπόν, εἶναι κληρονομικό. «*Ἴδου γὰρ ἐν ἀνομίαις συνελήφθην, καὶ ἐν ἀμαρτίαις ἐκίσσησέ με ἡ μήτηρ μου*». (Ψαλμ. 50:7).

Ἡ ὑπαρξη τοῦ ἠθικοῦ νόμου εἶναι ὁ ρυθμιστὴς τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ζωῆς. Ὅπως οἱ ὠροδείκτες καὶ λεπτοδείκτες σοῦ δείχνουν τὴν ὥρα καὶ τὸ χρόνο τῶν ἐνεργειῶν σου, ἔτσι καὶ ὁ ἠθικὸς νόμος—τοῦ Θεοῦ ὁ νόμος—σὲ καθοδηγεῖ στὴν ὀρθὴ πορεία τῶν πράξεων τῆς ζωῆς σου.

Ὁ ἅγιος Νικόλαος Βελμίροβιτς λέγει ὅτι: «Ὅλα γίνονται κατὰ τὸ συνειδητὸ καὶ λογικὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὸ τί ἐπιτρέπει πάντοτε σὲ συνάρτηση μὲ τὴν ἠθικὴ ἢ ἀνήθικη συμπεριφορὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ὁ ἠθικὸς νόμος τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι ὁ μοναδικὸς νόμος μὲ τὸν ὁποῖο ὁ Κύριος Δημιουργὸς καὶ Παντοκράτορας καθοδηγεῖ τὸ σύμπαν, τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς φύσης καὶ τὶς μοῖρες τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τῶν λαῶν». Βέβαια, συμπληρώνει ὁ ἴδιος: «ὑπάρχουν καὶ οἱ φυσικοὶ καὶ οἱ ἠθικοὶ νόμοι, ἀλλὰ δὲ ἀλληλοαποκλείονται καὶ δὲ συμπίπτουν, ἀλλὰ κινοῦνται παράλληλα».

Ἐνας, βέβαια, εἶναι ὁ ἠθικὸς νόμος, ἀλλ' ἡ φωνὴ του μεταδίδεται ἀπὸ δύο ἡγεῖα: τὸ ἓνα ἡγεῖο μεταδίδει τὴ φωνὴ τοῦ ἔμφυτου νόμου, καὶ τὸ ἄλλο ἡγεῖο μεταδίδει τὸν τέλειο καὶ ἀποκαλυμμένο νόμο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Οἱ ἀμαρτίες μοιάζουν μὲ τὰ φάλτσα μιᾶς χορωδίας ἢ μιᾶς ὀρχήστρας. Καὶ ὅπως ὁ μαέστρος εἶναι εὐαίσθητος καὶ στὰ πιὸ μικρὰ φάλτσα—δηλαδή, στὰ μουσικὰ λάθη καὶ τὶς παραφωνίες—κατὰ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο καὶ ὁ Θεὸς γνωρίζει καὶ ἀναγνωρίζει τὰ ἐλαφρότερα τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων.

Ἡ ἁμαρτία μοιάζει μὲ ἐπιδημικὴ ἀσθένεια, πού δὲν ἀναχαιτίζεται, παρὰ μὲ μετάνοια. Ἡ ἁμαρτία εἶναι καὶ δόλωμα καὶ δηλητήριον. Ἔχει γεύση ἐλκυστικὴ καὶ ἀποτέλεσμα θανάσιμον. Ἔχει γοητεία, πού ἐξαπατᾷ. Εἶναι τραγούδι, πού σβήνει σύντομα. «Ὁ τυφλὸς δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ δεῖ τὴ διαφορὰ ἀνάμεσα σ' ἓνα ἀριστούργημα τοῦ Γκρέκο καὶ ἐνὸς ἀπλοῦ τοπίου. Ὁ κουφὸς δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ διακρίνει τὸν ἦχο ἐνὸς συριγμοῦ καὶ ἐνὸς ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ ὄργάνου ἢ ἐνὸς Μπάχ. Καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ ἔχει ἀκριβῆ ἰδέα τὶ κακὸ πρᾶγμα εἶναι ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ, τοῦ ὁποῖου ὅλα τὰ δημιουργήματα εἶναι τέλεια» (Ryle).

Ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος μεθᾶι στὴν ἁμαρτία, πῶς εἶναι δυνατὸ ν' ἀντικρύσει τὸ Θεό; Μήπως ὁ ἄνθρωπος, στὸ μεθύσι του ἐπάνω, μπορεῖ ν' αὐτοσυγκεντρωθεῖ ἢ νὰ κοιτάξει στὰ μάτια τὸν ἄλλο; Κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον τρόπο, λέγει ὁ Θεόφιλος Ἀντιοχείας, «ἐπὶν ἡ ἰδὸς ἐν τῷ ἐσόπτρῳ, οὐ δύναται ὁρᾶσθαι τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν τῷ ἐσόπτρῳ, οὕτως καὶ ὅταν ἡ ἁμαρτία ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, οὐ δύναται ὁ τοιοῦτος ἄνθρωπος θεωρεῖν τὸν Θεόν». Ἐὰν συμβεῖ, δηλαδή, νὰ χαλάσει ἡ διαφάνεια τοῦ καθρέφτη, δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸ νὰ ἰδεῖ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸ πρόσωπό του, ἔτσι καὶ ἡ ἀχρεΐωση πού προκαλεῖ ἡ ἁμαρτία, δὲν ἀφήνει τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ ἰδεῖ καὶ νὰ νιώσει τὴν παρουσία τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Φοβερὴ σκουριά, ἡ ἁμαρτία. Ἀμαυρώνει τὴν καθαρότητα τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ μειώνει τὴν ἀντίσταση τῆς ἐλευθερίας. Σκοτίζεται ὁ νοῦς καὶ τὸ ἔρεβος μένει νὰ κυβερνᾷ τὸν ἐσωτερικὸ ἄνθρωπο. Ἡ ἁμαρτία, ὡς παράβαση καὶ παραβίαση τοῦ νόμου τοῦ Θεοῦ, δημιουργεῖ τύψεις καὶ πολλές ἀνεπιθύμητες καταστάσεις, πού ἀφαιροῦν τὴν εἰρήνη καὶ ψυχραίνουν τὴ φλόγα τῆς πίστεως. Αὐτὸ ἐκφράζει καὶ ὁ ἀπόστολος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅταν λέγει: «*Θλίψις καὶ στενοχωρία ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ψυχὴν ἀνθρώπου τοῦ κατεργαζομένου τὸ κακόν... δόξα δὲ καὶ εἰρήνη παντὶ τῷ ἐργαζομένῳ τὸ ἀγαθόν*» (Ρωμ. Β' 9:10).

Εἶναι ἐκφραστικὴ καὶ διδακτικὴ ἡ σκέψη τοῦ Billy Graham: «Ἡ ἁμαρτία ὑπόσχηται πορφύρα καὶ δίδει σάβανο, ὑπόσχηται ἐλευθερία καὶ φέρει δουλεία, ὑπόσχηται νέκταρ καὶ προσφέρει χολή!» Δὲ νομίζω ν' ἀμφισβητεῖ κανεὶς, ὅτι ὅλη ἡ βία, ὁ πόνος, ἡ θλίψη, ἡ αἰσχύνη καὶ ὅλες οἱ τραγωδίαι τῆς ζωῆς, συνοψίζονται σὲ τούτη τὴ μικρὴ λέξη, πού λέγεται «ἁμαρτία».

Ὁ μέγας τῆς οἰκουμένης διδάσκαλος καὶ κήρυκας, ὁ ἱερός Χρυσόστομος, πάντοτε στὰ κηρύγματά του τόνιζε πῶς, «οὐδὲν δεινὸν τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων δεινῶν, ἀλλ' ἡ ἁμαρτία μόνον». Ἄλλοτε πάλι ἔλεγε ὅτι, «μία συμφορὰ χριστιανῶ μόνη, τὸ προσκροῦσαι Θεῶ».

Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ μεγαλύτερη συμφορὰ στὸν ἄνθρωπο, τὸ νὰ βρῆται σὲ μετωπικὴ σύγκρουση μὲ τὸ Θεό.

Πράγματι, «οὐδὲν δυσωδέστερον», «οὐδὲν ἐπαχθέστερον», οὐδὲν πλέον «ἀκάθαρτον»... Ἀλλά, θὰ πεῖ κανεὶς: Ὅλοι μας εἴμαστε ἁμαρτωλοὶ καὶ ἁμαρτάνουμε κάθε ὥρα καὶ κάθε στιγμή. Λοιπόν; Νὰ παραμείνουμε στὴ λάσπη καὶ στὴ δυσωδία τῆς ἁμαρτίας; Ὅχι, βέβαια.

Ἐπάρχει ἐλπίδα. Ἐπάρχει σωτηρία. Ἐπάρχει μετάνοια. Ἐπάρχει Θεὸς τοῦ ἐλέους καὶ τῶν οἰκτιρῶν. Ὁ παράδεισος εἶναι γιὰ ὅλους τοὺς ἁμαρτωλοὺς, πού μετανοοῦν.



## Ὅταν Ἀρχίσει τὸ Κακὸ ἀπὸ τὴν Συρία...

Ἀπὸ πνευματικὸ τέκνο τοῦ μακαριστοῦ παπα-Γιάννη Καλαϊδῆ.

**Ἐ**πέστρεψα πρὶν λίγο ἀπὸ τὸν πνευματικὸ μου, πνευματικὸ τέκνο τοῦ μακαριστοῦ Ἀντωνίου Μητροπολίτου Σισανίου καὶ Σιατίστης, τὸν ὁποῖο τιμοῦν οἱ περισσότεροι ὡς σύγχρονο Ἅγιο. Ὁ πατὴρ εἶναι προσηλωμένος στὴν σωτηρία τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ μόνο, ἀποφεύγοντας τὶς ἀναφορὲς γιὰ τὸ τί μέλλει γενέσθαι, ἀλλὰ συζητώντας γιὰ τὸν μακαριστὸ Ἐπίσκοπο, ἀπεκάλυψε μερικὰ πράγματα, τῶν ὁποίων ὑπῆρξε μάρτυρας ὁ ἴδιος καὶ δείχνουν ὅτι ὁ μακαριστὸς πέραν ὅλων τῶν χαρισμάτων πού εἶχε, ἔγινε δέκτης μεγάλων ἀποκαλύψεων ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό.

«Μᾶς ἔλεγε, συνέχεια καὶ πολλές φορὲς μὲ στενοχώρια, τὸν καιρὸ τῆς εὐδαιμονίας «μεγάλῃ πείνᾳ θὰ πέσει στὴν Ἑλλάδα, παιδί μου, μεγάλη πείνα...» κι ἐμεῖς δυσκολευόμασταν νὰ τὸν πιστέψουμε...

Τὸν καιρὸ δὲ πού ἦταν στὸ νοσοκομεῖο στὰ τελευταῖα του, μετὰ τὴν τελευταῖα ἐγχείρηση πού ἔκανε, μόλις τὸν φέρανε στὸ δωμάτιο κοιτοῦσε ἀπέναντι τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου Χριστοῦ καὶ ἔκλαιγε σὰν μικρὸ παιδί λέγοντας μὲ τὴν γνωστὴ ταπεινότητά του «πῶς μὲ ἀξίωσες Χριστέ μου, ἐμένα καὶ μοῦ ἀπεκάλυψες αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα!», προφανῶς κάτι σοβαρὸ εἶχε δεῖ πιὸ μπροστά... Ὅταν τὸν ρωτήσαμε «τί εἶδες Δέσποτα;» μὲ δυσκολία μᾶς ἀπάντησε, γιατί εἶχε πρόβλημα μὲ τὴν φωνή του, «ὅταν ἀρχίσει τὸ κακὸ ἀπὸ τὴν Συρία νὰ ἀρχίσετε νὰ προσεύχεστε!» καὶ τὸ ἐπανελάβε πολλές φορὲς «ἐκεῖ, ἀπὸ τὴν Συρία ὅταν ξεκινήσει...» ἐννοώντας ὅτι μετὰ θὰ πιάσει ἡ μπόρα καὶ ἐμᾶς... Τὸν ξαναρωτήσαμε «τί ἄλλο εἶδες Δέσποτα;» καὶ μᾶς εἶπε «θὰ σᾶς πῶ μετὰ...» ἀλλὰ μετὰ ἐκοιμήθη...»

Αὐτὸ ἦταν προφανῶς τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Κυρίου...

## Δυὸ Περιστατικά Ἐκτρώσεων

Απὸ τὸ περιοδικὸ «Πολύτεκνη Οἰκογένεια» τῆς Πανελληνίας Ἐνώσεως Φίλων τῶν Πολυτέκνων, Ἀθηνῶν.



### Βλέπω Τέσσερα Μικρὰ νὰ μὲ Κυνηγοῦν!

**Μ**ία κυρία γύρω στὰ ἐξήντα εἶχε κόρη παντρεμένη ἐφτὰ χρόνια, ποὺ δὲν ἔκανε παιδιά, καὶ τελικὰ χώρισε γ' αὐτὸ τὸ λόγο. Κλαίγοντας ἡ μάνα τῆς ἀποκάλυψε:

Δικές μου ἀμαρτίες πληρώνει τὸ κορίτσι μου. Παντρεύτηκα τὸ 1940, μὲ τὸν Πόλεμο. Ὁ ἄντρας μου πολέμησε καὶ γύρισε τραυματισμένος, μὰ εὐτυχῶς σώθηκε. Ὑστερα ἦρθε ἡ Κατοχὴ μὲ τὴ φοβερὴ πείνα. Ἐμείνα τέσσερις φορὲς ἔγκυος. Ὅμως ὅλες τὰ ἔρριξα, δυὸ θηλυκὰ καὶ δυὸ ἀρσενικά. Λιγοψύχησα. Πῶς θὰ τὰ μεγάλωνα μέσα στὴν Κατοχὴ καὶ τὴν πείνα;

Τούτη τὴν κόρη τὴ γλύτωσα ἀπὸ τὸ μαχαίρι τοῦ δήμιου γιατροῦ ἀπὸ Θαῦμα. Τὴν παραμονή, ποὺ θὰ γινόταν τὸ ἔγκλημα, εἶδα στὸν ὕπνο μου μίαν γυναίκα μαυροφόρα, γλυκεία στὴν ὄψη. Τὴν παρομοίασα μὲ μίαν Εἰκόνα τῆς Παναγίας τῆς Ὁδηγήτριας, ποὺ εἶχα ἀπὸ τὴ μακαρίτισσα τὴ μητέρα μου. Μοῦ εἶπε αὐστηρά:

-Σκληρὴ γυναίκα, ὀλιγόπιστη. Τὸ κορίτσι εἶναι δικό μου καὶ μὴν τολμήσεις νὰ τὸ χαλάσεις! Ἀνατρίχιασα, φοβήθηκα καὶ ἔτσι γλύτωσα τὴ Μαρία μου.

Οἱ τύψεις ὅμως δὲν μ' ἀφήνουν νὰ ἡσυχάσω. Κάθε τόσο μὲ ταράζει τὸ ἴδιο ὄνειρο. Βλέπω τέσσερα μικρὰ νὰ μὲ κυνηγοῦν, σὰν νὰ θέλουν νὰ μὲ πιάσουν, μὰ δὲν μποροῦν, εἶναι τυφλά! Ξυπνάω συγκλονισμένη. Παρακαλῶ τὴν Παναγία νὰ μοῦ πάρει τὸν ὕπνο, νὰ μὴ βλέπω αὐτὸ τὸ συνταρακτικὸ ὄνειρο...

### Ἔνα Τυφλὸ Ἀγοράκι Ἔτρεχε νὰ μ' Ἀγκαλιάσει!

**Μ**ιὰ ἄλλη κυρία, γύρω στὰ τριάντα τῆς χρόνια, ἀποκάλυψε ἐπίσης:

Ἔχω δυὸ κοριτσάκια, ἕξι κι ὀχτὼ χρονῶν. Ἐμείνα ξανὰ ἔγκυος. Πιάσαμε μεγάλη γκρίνια μὲ τὸν ἄντρα μου.

-Νὰ ρίξεις τὸ παιδί. Δὲν τὰ βγάζω πέρα μὲ τρία παιδιά. Βλέπεις ὅτι βασανίζομαι νὰ θρέψω τόσα στόματα. Ἔχουμε καὶ τοὺς γέρους. Δὲν ἀντέχω ἄλλο...

Στὴν ἀρχὴ ἀντιστάθηκα. Ἄκουγα μὲ φρίκη νὰ μὲ σπρώχνουν σὲ τέτοιο ἔγκλημα. Δυστυχῶς, μὲ πίεζαν καὶ τὰ πεθερικά. Ὁ ἄντρας μου ἔγινε πολὺ σκληρός, μὲ ἀπειλοῦσε μὲ διαζύγιο. Ἀπελπίστηκα καὶ ὑποχώρησα ἀγανακτισμένη. Τὸ κακὸ ἔγινε. Τὸ παιδί ἦταν ἀγόρι. Ὅλοι στενοχωρήθηκαν. Τιμωρία ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό, σκέφτηκα, μὰ ἦταν πλέον ἀργά.

Πῆγα σὲ Πνευματικὸ καὶ ἐξομολογήθηκα. Μοῦ ἔβαλε Κανόνα.

-Πέντε χρόνια ἀκοινώνητη καὶ μὲ ἐπιείκεια, γιατί τὸ ἔκανες χωρὶς τὴ θέλησή σου.

Μὲ ὑπομονὴ δέχθηκα τὸν Κανόνα. Ὅμως πονοῦσε ἡ ψυχὴ μου, ὅταν τὶς Μεγάλες Γιορτὲς ὄλοι στὸ σπίτι πήγαιναν καὶ κοινοῦσαν, ἀκόμα καὶ ὁ αἴτιος τοῦ κακοῦ, ἔστω ἀπὸ συνήθεια. Μὲ πλήγωναν καὶ τὰ κοριτσάκια μου, ὅταν μὲ ἀφέλεια μὲ ρωτοῦσαν:

-Μαμά, ἐσὺ δὲν θὰ κοινωνήσεις;

Ἔπρεπε κάθε φορὰ νὰ σκεφτῶ ψεύτικες δικαιολογίες. Ἡ μικρὴ μου κορούλα μου ἔλεγε συχνά:

-Μανούλα, ἦθελα κι ἐγὼ νὰ ἔχω ἓνα ἀδελφούλη. Θὰ τὸν ἀγαποῦσα πολὺ.

Μιὰ φορὰ μου εἶπε:

-Μαμά, εἶδα στὸν ὕπνο μου ἓνα ἀγοράκι. Μοῦ εἶπε πῶς εἶναι ὁ ἀδελφούλης μου ποὺ ἀγαπῶ. Μὰ πῶς δὲν ἔχει μάτια νὰ μὲ δεῖ;

Μὲ πῆραν τὰ κλάματα, γιατί τὸ ἴδιο ὄνειρο ἔβλεπα κι ἐγώ. Ἔνα τυφλὸ ἀγόρι ἔτρεχε νὰ μ' ἀγκαλιάσει, μὰ δὲν μποροῦσε, ἦταν τυφλό. Σκέφτηκα, ἄχ παιδάκι μου! Ἐγώ σου ἔβγαλα τὰ ματάκια σου, γιατί δὲν εἶχα δύναμη νὰ φωνάξω: ΟΧΙ στὸ ἔγκλημα τῆς Ἐκτρώσεως, ποὺ ἔκαμε δυστυχισμένο κι ἐσένα, μὰ πιὸ πολὺ ἐμένα.



### Ἐρχονται Δύσκολοι Καιροὶ Ἐπειδὴ Λιγότεψε ἡ Πίστη

**Ἐ**ρχονται δύσκολοι καιροὶ ἐπειδὴ λιγότεψε ἡ Πίστη. Ἐξ' αἰτίας τῆς φτώχειας, οἱ ἄνθρωποι θὰ πουλήσουν τὴν ψυχὴ τους γιὰ τροφὴ καὶ ροῦχα. Ὁ κόσμος θὰ γίνῃ κακός, θὰ ἐξαφανιστεῖ ἡ ἀγάπη καὶ τὸ ἔλεος μεταξὺ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἱερεῖς καὶ λαικοὶ θὰ γίνουν ἓνα καὶ δὲν θὰ ὑπάρχει κάποιος νὰ καθοδηγήσει τοὺς πιστοὺς. Οἱ πιστοὶ δὲν θὰ μποροῦν νὰ βροῦν τὸν ποιμένα, οὔτε καὶ τὸν σωστὸ δρόμο. Θὰ κυβερνάει τὸ χρῆμα καὶ ἡ ἐπιθυμία νὰ κάνουν περιορισίες.

Κανεὶς δὲν θὰ φροντίζει γιὰ τὶς ψυχὰς τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ὅλα θὰ περιοριστοῦν σὲ μίαν ἀπλὴ συναλλαγὴ. Ὅλοι θὰ ἀδιαφοροῦν γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία τους, γιὰ τὴν πίστη, δὲν θὰ ἔχουν φόβο Θεοῦ, τὸ κατῆκον, ἡ ὑποχρέωση, ἡ εὐθύνη θὰ εἶναι ἄγνωστες ἔννοιες. Ὅλα θὰ περιστρέφονται γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ χρῆμα. Ὁ ἓνας θὰ πουλάει τὸν ἄλλον, ἡ κακία στὸν κόσμο θὰ εἶναι ἀνυπόφορη. Θὰ ζήσουμε τοὺς ἔσχατους καιροὺς. Δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ φανταστοῦμε πόσο δύσκολα θὰ εἶναι. Δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ φανταστοῦμε τί περιμένει ἐμᾶς καὶ τὰ παιδιά μας. Τὰ παιδιά μας σὲ αὐτοὺς τοὺς δύσκολους καιροὺς θὰ εἶναι ἀνέτοιμα νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσουν τὶς καταστάσεις, ἐπειδὴ οἱ γονεῖς σήμερα δὲν διδάσκουν στὰ παιδιά τὸν φόβο τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ντροπὴ πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους.

### Γέροντας Ἰλαρίωνας Ἀργκάτου(+2006)

Ἔνας μεγάλος σύγχρονος Ρουμάνος Γέροντας

## THE ANGELIC PATH

### AN OUTLINE OF ORTHODOX MONASTICISM

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*If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hadst, and give to the poor, and come, follow Me [Mt 19:21].*

† † †

From the beginning these words of Christ have been a clear call to all Christian monks that they have felt impelled to obey to the letter.

Although Christ lived and worked among men, participated in the functions of His day, counted women among His friends, and although He instituted no monastic order, monasticism may well be considered the sum and substance of His teaching. Once He had entered upon His mission, He had no family life—in fact, He denied blood relationships (Mt 12:48-50). He spent many hours in the wilderness in solitary communion with His Father. He said: *If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.* (Lk 14:26)

The advice of Jesus to the young man who sought a greater perfection, beyond that of following the ten commandments, was to *sell all he had and to follow Him* (Mt 19:21). Another man He challenged to follow Him without delay, without even taking time to attend to his father's funeral (Lk 9:60). These are hard sayings for people in the world, but admirably suited to monks and nuns.

Let us here explain what we mean by "the world." St. Isaac the Syrian defines it as: "...the extension of a common name to distinct passions ... passions are a part of the current of the world. Where they have ceased, the world's current has ceased." In other words, people in the world are held by the pull of their emotions into a vortex of preoccupations; they disperse and scatter abroad, as it were, their soul's integrity, diversifying its primal simplicity."

The ideal of a life entirely given over to God can be found on many pages of the New Testament. St. Paul held virginity in high esteem and advocated it for those who could bear it (1 Cor 7:1, -7, -37, -40). We find many examples in Holy Scripture of men and women giving their lives unreservedly to God and to the service of the Church. In the first

instance there were the Apostles and the Seventy and the women who followed and ministered unto Jesus; then there were the deacons and men like St. Luke and St. Barnabas, and women such as Dorcas and Phoebe, who worked with St. Paul. Nevertheless, it was only toward the beginning of the fourth century that Christian monasticism appeared as a definite institution.

### The Development of Monasticism

Christian monasticism originated in the East, in the Egyptian desert. Following the official recognition of Christianity in 313 AD by the Roman Emperor St. Constantine, there arose the danger—which has not lessened with the passage of time—that men might confuse the earthly kingdom with the Heavenly Kingdom. Then, as now, it was the monks who kept alive the concept that the Kingdom of God is not of this world. Men, and women too, fearing that the lure of comfort and security would divert them from their search for unity with God, left all behind and made their way into the desert, at first singly, then in loosely formed groups. By the mid-fourth century there could already be distinguished the three forms of monastic life still found in the Orthodox Church today.

### The Eremitic Life

The life of a hermit, who lives alone in a cell difficult of access, is entirely devoted to prayer and severe asceticism. The hermit's

prototype is St. Paul of Thebes, whose life was written by St. Jerome. St. Paul settled in the desert several years before St. Anthony (251-356), who is generally regarded as the father of monasticism. The story of the encounter of these two holy men, after long years of solitude, is one of the most touching in the history of the Desert Fathers. It is clear from St. Athanasius' *Life of St. Anthony* that monasticism was already well known when St. Anthony, having previously entrusted the care of his orphaned sister to a group of virgins near Alexandria, entered the desert.

### The Cenobitic Life

The cenobitic or community life, was first established by St. Pachomius of Tabennisi (c. 315-320), where men lived together under a common rule in a regularly constituted monastery. There were also communities of women following this same rule. It is this rule which was used to a great extent by St. Benedict in forming his monastic rule upon which all other Western monastic rules are based.



St. Basil the Great (329-379) was a strong advocate of the community life. Because of his two books, the Shorter and the Longer Rules, his influence in Orthodox monasticism is profound, although he did not found an order as such. Separate monastic “orders” or “congregations,” as found in the Roman monastic tradition, are unknown in the Orthodox Church. Quite simply, all those who live in the monastic life are accepted as members of the great Brotherhood of Ascetics, and the same rule is used and the same habit is worn by both men and women, forming an integral and inseparable part of the Church’s Body. Very close to St. Basil stood his sister, St. Macrina, who founded a community for women in Cappadocia before her more illustrious brother founded his on the banks of the Iris.

### The Semi-Eremitic Life

The semi-eremitic (also known as skete) life, or middle way, is based upon a loosely knit group of small settlements, each practicing asceticism independently, though under the direction of an abbot, the first of whom was Ammon of Nitria. Their focal point is, as it is for all forms of monastic life, the Holy Eucharist, for which they regularly assemble.

The pinnacle of Orthodox monasticism, where all three forms of monastic life coexist to this day, is Mount Athos, the “Holy Mountain,” with its over 1,000 years of uninterrupted spiritual activity. It alone gave the Church 26 patriarchs and 144 bishops. All Orthodox countries are represented there, the monks living in their own monasteries or grouped in one or another of the great Lavras, or as hermits.

“There is a great richness of forms of the spiritual life to be found within the bounds of Orthodoxy, but monasticism remains the most classical. One could say broadly that Eastern monasticism was exclusively contemplative, if the distinction between the two ways, active and contemplative, had in the East the same meaning as in the West. In fact, for an Eastern monk, the two ways are inseparable. The one cannot be exercised without the other. Interior prayer receives the name of spiritual activity. If the monks occupy themselves with physical labors, it is above all with an ascetic end in view.” [From *Sermons and Addresses of the Metropolitan Philaret, Moscow, 1844, Part II, p. 87*].

As we have said, monasticism originated in Egypt, but by degrees its leadership shifted to Palestine where it flowered

under St. Euthymius the Great (d. 472) and especially under his disciple St. Sabbas (d. 532) who greatly influenced the monastic rule; at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, it shifted to Constantinople where St. Theodore was abbot of the great and influential monastery of Studium, founded in 463. To this age belongs the monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai, founded by Emperor Justinian in 560, which is still functioning, harboring a great treasure of manuscripts and holy icons which escaped the ravages of the iconoclastic wars.

With time, there developed in all Orthodox countries a rich and distinctive monastic tradition. Each could boast of important spiritual centers which spread their light over all the Orthodox world. Foremost among them were the Kiev Caves Lavra and Optina Monastery in Russia, Mount Athos and Patmos in Greece, Tismana and Neamtu in Romania, and Ochrid in Serbia. There were countless monasteries,

convents and hermitages in these countries in pre-communist times.

Monasticism has always been regarded as a voluntary form of martyrdom. It developed and blossomed forth in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, after the bloody persecution of Christians had dwindled. During the communist rule, monastic life, like all church life, was stifled. In these places there came to be thousands of unknown martyrs, crowding prisons and concentration



camps. It is calculated that in Russia alone more people died for their faith in the first 30 years since the Revolution than died in the first 300 years of Christianity. There seems to have been a balance between the cessation of persecution and the growth of monasticism. If this is so, then we should be seeing in the Free World a resurgence of monastic vocations, especially of the more ascetic form.

Although the emphasis in Orthodox monasticism has always been on spiritual activity aimed above all at union with God in complete renunciation of this present world, it would be incorrect to imply, as some do, that Eastern monks care nothing for the needs of others and have had little or no influence upon the course of events. In the East as in the West, it was the monks, sometimes hidden in caves, who kept the torch of civilization burning during the dark ages of barbaric incursions. And later, it was in the cloister that Christian and national culture was kept alive during the many centuries of Tartar and Moslem-Turkish invasions and occupations, a trial which their Western brethren were spared. Many bishops (all

Orthodox bishops are monks) played leading roles in their countries' state councils, as for example St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359), who was also a great mystic. There was also St. Sergius of Radonezh (1314-1392), one of Russia's greatest saints, and many others up to the present day, such as Patriarch Miron Christea who was regent (1927-1930) for the young king of Romania. They advised, admonished, encouraged or opposed their princes when necessary.

Although Orthodox monks never played such spectacular roles as did the Abbots of Cluny at one time, nevertheless, throughout history their influence was considerable. In the Byzantine Empire they were powerful in quelling heresies and fighting immoralities. None were more active in this battle than St. John Chrysostom (d. 407). Later, in the Russian Empire, St. Tikhon of Zadonsk (d. 1783) was similarly renowned.

Although they functioned primarily as communities of prayer, Orthodox monasteries also engaged in charitable activities: feeding the hungry, housing the homeless and caring for the sick. Many of them grew very large, comprising several hundred or even thousand monks or nuns. Some had vast estates which they farmed. While this occasionally tended towards excessive wealth and had to be curtailed, it enabled these prosperous monasteries to rescue whole regions from famine.



### Where do Orthodox Monks and Nuns Come From?

Orthodox monks and nuns come from all walks and manner of life. In former times the greater number were of peasant stock, but at the same time many a great name lay hidden under the humble black habit and the new Christian name received at tonsure. Certainly there were to be found many unlettered and uncultured monks, because the cloister was and is open to all, regardless of social rank or education. But if one reads the daily offices and grasps their scriptural and theological wealth, and if one hears the readings from the Holy Fathers—all of which are the monk's daily fare, one begins to think twice about the intellectual superiority of their critics. It must not be forgotten that it was the monks who translated these services and writings into their native tongues, a continuing labor in which nuns also take part.

There are also spiritual writings that are unique to each nation—the beauty of which is unsurpassed in secular compositions—but which are little known outside the cloister. In

monasteries were painted world famous icons and from them came exquisite embroideries and priceless illuminated manuscripts. All were written, painted and worked anonymously for the greater glory of God, reflecting humility, which is the keynote of all Christian monasticism.

### The Monastic Daily Life

The devotional pattern of the monastic day is based upon the words of the Psalmist: *Seven times a day do I praise Thee because of Thy righteous judgments.* (Pss 119:64). Consequently, there are seven praises (lauds) in each 24-hour cycle. These are arranged as follows: 1) Midnight Office; 2) Matins together with 3) First Hour; 4) Third and Sixth Hours; 5) Ninth Hour; 6) Vespers and 7) Compline. They are called praises or lauds because they mirror the Saviour's redemptive work for mankind, as well as various events in His divine life and in the life of the Holy Apostles and the Church. Let us examine each:

1) The **Midnight Office** is said at or after midnight and is a reminder of the Resurrection which took place "early in the morning," and also of the Second Coming, *the hour of which no man knows* (Mark 13:33, 35). It likewise recalls the parable of the bridegroom who came at midnight and the five foolish virgins whose lamps had gone out: *Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.* (Mt 25:13).

2) This is followed by **Matins** which ends at dawn, reflecting the dawn of our salvation,

3) The **First Hour** is then read, praising the beginning of the new day in which we join our hymns to those of the angels, together bringing them before God.

4) The **Third and Sixth Hours** are read before the Divine Liturgy, In the Third Hour the death of our Lord was plotted; also at this hour the Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles. The Sixth Hour commemorates the Passion and Crucifixion of our Lord. If there is no Liturgy, the Typica is read which gives a sketch of the Liturgy.

5 & 6) In the evening the **Ninth Hour** is read. Its prayers recall the hour in which the Lord laid down His life for the redemption of the world. Without pause there begins the service of **Vespers** which tells of the creation, of God's love for the world, of man's fall into sin, his expulsion from paradise and of the Redeemer's coming upon earth,

7) Before retiring, **Compline** is sung, bringing thanks for the coming of night with its rest and the remembrance of

death for which we must always be prepared. This is followed by evening prayers.

Within the framework of this daily cycle flows the monk's life so that it may be filled with holiness, with grace from above, and hope of eternal blessedness, whatever his task—be it manual or intellectual work or the practice of hesychasm towards which all monastic life is directed.

### The Stages of Monastic Life

The person, man or woman, who enters monastic life, tries to leave his or her old self behind, with all the old joys and sorrows, virtues and sins, and starts a new life, seeking to find a new relationship to all things and people in Christ, to Whom he vows his life. The taking of the monastic vow and habit are but a repetition and amplification of the baptismal vows.

At first there were no stages along the monastic path; there were no postulants or novices but simply monks. Today, however, monastics generally progress from one stage to another: the postulant looks forward to becoming a novice, the novice to receiving the habit and going on to full profession—which may take years or which he may never reach. There is no prescribed time period for each stage, but at least three years must elapse before full profession. The intermittent stages may even be dispensed within certain cases; in communist times, for example, where the normal flow of monastic life is impossible. There is also no obligation to advance from one stage to the next; should a novice not feel ready or not wish to progress for reasons of humility, he/she is free to remain in the monastery as he is. Monks who become priests are called hieromonks; this does not affect their monastic status.

1) **Novice.** One begins as a postulant who may be permitted, after three months or so, to wear a portion of the habit (tunic and belt), which is regarded as a tacit expression of his/her determination to abide in the monastic life of asceticism, subject to the approval of the abbot (abbess). In becoming a novice, the aspirant receives in addition to the tunic (podriasnik) and belt, the monastic head covering, called “skoufos” for men and “apostolnik” for women.

2) **Rassophore.** When the superior thinks fit, the novice may ask to receive the rassa or habit, an over-garment with wide sleeves and reaching to the ankles, and also the monastic head covering with veil (in Russian—klobuk; in Greek—kamelos).

This portion of the habit is given with the appropriate rite in church by a hieromonk. The new monk or nun takes no vows at this time, but should a rassophore leave the monastery and wish to marry, he or she must receive written permission of the bishop, without which he could incur excommunication.

3) **Stavrophor,** from the Greek “stavros” (cross) and “phoro” (to wear), so called because the monk/nun wears a wooden cross on the chest tied under the habit to a paramnydas or paraman. The paraman is a small square piece of fabric embroidered with representations of the Cross, spear, reed, sponge, the pillar of scourging, Adam's skull and the cock which crowed at the time of Peter's denial. At the same time he/she receives the mandyas or mantia, a flowing cloak without hood, which reaches to the ground in long narrow pleats, and which is worn only in church. This profession takes place

according to an impressive and solemn rite; the vows are made before a hieromonk. The profession is made publicly in church and the vows of Stability, Obedience, Poverty and Chastity are given by the candidate before he/she receives the tonsure, the paraman and mantia which are new added to the habit. The officiating priest bestows a new name upon the monk in recognition of the beginning of his new life. The monk does not choose this name himself but accepts it as his first act of obedience.



The Orthodox attitude towards monasticism is best summed up in the collect of the Prodigal Son with which the ceremony of profession opens:

*Make haste to open Thy fatherly arms*

*Unto me who have wasted my life like the prodigal.*

*Despise not a heart now grown poor*

*O Saviour Who hast before Thine eyes*

*The boundless riches of Thy mercies.*

*For unto Thee, O Lord, in compunction do I cry:*

*O Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee...*

(Here the monk is a penitent)

And the verse which is sung during the clothing part of the ceremony:

*My soul shall rejoice in the Lord*

*for He hath put on me the garment of salvation;*

*And with the tunic of gladness hath He clothed me.*

*He hath put upon me a crown as upon a bride groom,*

*And as a bride hath he adorned me...*

(Here the monk is the betrothed of God)



4) **Megaloschema**, from the Greek “megas” (great) and “schema” (habit), or in Russian, “skhmnik.” The difference between the Stavrophor and the Megaloschemos lies in the degree of asceticism which, for the latter, is very strict and not something of which everyone is capable. In addition to the habit of the Stavrophor, the Megaloschemos wears the analovos which is rather like the Western scapular in shape, although there is no symbolic or historical connection between them. The analovos is embroidered with the cross which the monk is to take up daily in following Christ. The same representation figures on the koukoulion, a thimble-shaped kamelos. These are given according to a rite, similar to that of stavrophor, in which the original vows are repeated with yet greater solemnity. These two rites are also referred to respectively as the receiving of the Little and the Great Habits.

The distinctive color of the monastic raiment is black which symbolizes that the second Baptism is more laborious than the first whose symbolic color is white; for the second is a baptism of repentance, which will end only with the end of this present deceitful life.

#### The Monastic Rule

The Rule or “Typicon” governing Orthodox monastic life is based upon that of St. Basil the Great, which he synthesized from the tradition of the early Desert Fathers. This Rule was later adapted by various great fathers of monasticism throughout the centuries: St. Sabbas the Sanctified in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, St. John Climacus in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, St. Theodore the Studite at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and others. It likewise provided the foundation for the great Athonite tradition which evolved in the 10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the revival of monasticism in Russia and Moldavia in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century under the inspiration of St. Paisius Velichkovsky. Today St. Basil’s Rule remains an important part of the spiritual tradition of the Orthodox Church.

The monastic Rule is too complex to be expounded here in any detail. Basically, its purpose is to safeguard the monk in his daily life, helping him, through obedience, to keep unceasing vigil within his soul and thereby guiding him into a union of heart and spirit through which is acquired, as far as this is possible in this world, union with God.

Effort without discipline leads nowhere. It is only by patient and deliberate striving that the soul can hope to perfect itself and come closer to God. Therefore, the keeping of the monastic Rule is very important, whether it concerns the eremitic or the cenobitic life, and the monastic benefits from

it to the degree that he or she is obedient to its precepts. Of necessity, the Rule is more complex for the cenobitic life where it must regulate the services read in common as well as order a community life with all the different characters and diverse backgrounds of the individuals gathered under the same roof.

A monastery or convent is a community of monks or nuns living under a common rule and governed by an abbot (abbess) or superior chosen from among the professed monks. He rules like a loving father over his children, often assisted by a council of monks to whom he delegates certain responsibilities.

Monks work for their livelihood and the common upkeep of the monastery—in the fields and gardens, painting and carving icons, making church vestments, translating or writing and printing books on the spiritual life. Apart from its life of prayer, which remains at all times its essential focus, a monastery may harbor—as circumstances dictate—the sick, the aged, the orphaned and homeless, or perform any work of Christian charity. It is customary for a monastery to have a guest house in which the pilgrim can stay three nights free of charge. Although Orthodox monks are not cloistered, as monastics are in some Western orders, monks and visitors only mix at certain times and in designated places. The great schema monks lead a more strictly secluded life.



#### The Elder or “Starets”

We shall briefly describe here the position of elder (“starets” in Russian) which, although rarely encountered today, is frequently mentioned in Orthodox literature. Properly understood, eldership is not a position or rank but a gift granted by God to those of exceptional spiritual caliber and therefore not limited necessarily to monks. Eldership cannot be taken upon oneself; an elder is one recognized by others as possessing outstanding spiritual discernment and wisdom, someone to whom both monastics and lay people come for guidance. The elder, or eldress, must not be confused with the hermit, although frequently an elder will have spent time in the eremitic life before blossoming forth with the gift of eldership.

#### The Monastic’s Service to the World

Monks are often accused of egotism because they concentrate upon the salvation of their own souls. This is putting the accent in the wrong place: the monk seeks the ways of perfection, directing all his strength towards following Christ.

The monk's ideal is entirely to forget himself, to "lose his life," and to truly worship God and *love Him with all his heart and all his soul and all his mind, and his neighbor as himself.* (Mt 22:37).

But where does this "angelic life," as monasticism is called (by virtue of its aspiration to imitate the angels who are always praising and magnifying God), touch the outside world, the earth, the earthly?

In many ways. A monastery is primarily a center of prayer, and prayer is something the world has always needed, never more so than today when people are so busy and find it difficult to give proper time to prayer. The monk prays not only for himself but for everybody, living and dead. Just as a soldier is a specialist in war, the monk is a specialist in prayer. Therefore, as V. Lossky writes: "the spiritual work of a monk living in a community or a hermit withdrawn from the world, retains all its worth for the entire universe even though it remains hidden from the sight of all."

The monastery gate is always open wide to all of man's needs, ready with comfort and sustenance—both spiritual and physical—for anyone who may knock at its door, saint or sinner. The monk sees in every man the image of Him Who said: *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.* (Mt 25:40).

The man of the world may look upon the man of the cloister with misgiving, somehow feeling him to be a living reproach to worldliness, an unnatural man, almost inhuman. This is far from true. The monk is simply a man who has laid all aside, completely and for good, to follow Christ wherever He may lead.



Question yourself as to whether this faith is within you, or perhaps you are led by worldly wisdom. And if you leave all things in the hands of God, behold! You have acquired faith and undoubtedly, without any question, you will find God to be your helper. And so, even should you be tried a myriad of times and should satan tempt you to abandon faith, prefer death a thousand times more and don't obey worldly wisdom. In this way the door of the mysteries will be opened to you and you will be amazed how the chains of worldly wisdom previously bound you. Now you will fly with divine wings above the earth and breathe the new air of freedom, which, of course, others are deprived of. If, however, you see that within you, you are governed by worldly wisdom, and in the smallest danger you lose hope and despair, know that you have not yet acquired faith, and consequently also hope, in God.

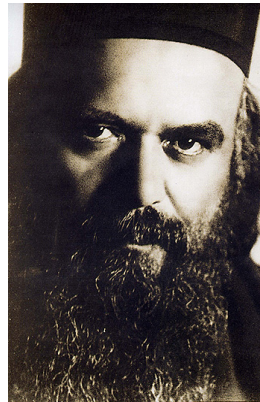
**St. Joseph the Hesychast**  
From "Precious Vessels of the Holy Spirit"

## THE NEW IDEAL IN EDUCATION

*A timeless article by St. Nikolai Velimirovich. This is part of an address given on July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1916, by Fr. Nikolai Velimirovich, Ph.D.; the saint was canonized in 2003.*

Nature takes sufficient care of our individualistic sense,  
leaving to Education the care of our panhumanistic sense.

† † †



Ladies and Gentlemen,  
If we do not want war we must look to the children. There is the only hope and the only wise starting point. It is not without a deep prophetic significance that Christ asked children to come unto Him. In all the world-calamities, in all wars, strifes, religious inquisitions and persecutions, in all the hours of human misery and helplessness, He has been asking, through centuries, the children to come unto Him.

I am sure, if anybody has ears for His voice today, amidst the thunderings of guns and passions and revenges, one would hear the same call: *Let the children come unto Me!*—Not kings and politicians, not journalists and generals, not the grown-up people, but children. And so today also, when we ask for a way out of the present world-misery, when we in a profound darkness today ask for light, and in sorrow for tomorrow ask for advice and comfort, we must look to the children and Christ.

### Why not Kings?

Why does Christ not ask the kings to come to Him—the kings, and politicians, and journalists, and generals? Because they are too much engaged in the wrong state of things and because they are greatly responsible themselves for such a wrongful state; consequently, it is difficult for them to change their ways, their hearts and their minds. It would be very hard for Napoleon and Pitt to kneel together down before Christ and to embrace each other. It would be almost impossible for Bismarck and Gambetta (*Ed., on opposing sides during the Franco-Prussian war of 1870*) to walk together. Not less it would be impossible for the Pope and Monsieur Loisy or George Tyrrel (*Ed., controversial Catholic priests*) to pray in the same bench.

Every generation is laden with sins and prejudices. That is the reason why Christ goes only a little way with every generation, and then He becomes tired and asks for a new generation—He calls for children. Christ is always new and fresh as children are. Every generation is spoiled and corrupted by living and struggling.

But for a new generation the world is quite a wonder. God is shown only to those for whom the world is a new thing, a wonder. No one, who does not admire this world as a wonder,

can find God. For the old Ernst Haeckel (*Ed., controversial German philosopher, atheist*), no God exists, just because for him no wonder exists. He pretends to know everything. Christ means for him nothing. Every foolish child, believing in God and in this wonderful world, has more wisdom than this materialistic professor from Germany. Christ is getting tired of an old generation. Sadly He calls for a new one—for children. In our distress today, I think, we should multiply His voice, calling for Him, for a new generation and for a new education.

### The Education Which Makes for War

This type of education has a very attractive name: the individualistic education. The true name of it is selfishness, or egotism. No religion of Asia ever boasted of having been the birthplace of such an education. It is born in the heart of Europe, in Germany. It was brought up by Schopenhauer and Goethe. It was subsequently supported by the German biologists, by the musicians, sculptors, philosophers, poets, soldiers, socialists and priests, by the wisest and by many madmen beyond the Rhine. Unfortunately France, Russia and even Great Britain have not been quite exempt from this pernicious theory of individualistic education.

The sophistic theories of Athens of old have been renewed in Central Europe—the individuum is the ultimate aim of education. A human individuum is of limitless worth, said the German interpreters of the New Testament. Materialistic science, contradicting itself, agreed on that point with modern theology. Art, in all its branches, presented itself as the sole expression of one individuum, i.e., of the artist. The modern socialism, contradicting its own name, supported individualism very strongly in every department of human activity. Consequently modern Pedagogy, based upon the general tendencies, put up the same individualistic ideal as the aim to be achieved by the schools, church, state, and by many other social institutions.

### The Results of the Old Ideal

War is the result of the aforementioned old ideal of education. I call it old because it is over forever, I hope, with this latest war. (*Ed., how unfortunate that the saint was not correct in his hopes of WWI being the "last" war.*) The old European ideal of education was so called individualistic. This ideal was supported equally by the churches and by science and art. Extreme individualism, developed in Germany more than in any other country, resulted in pride, pride resulted in materialism, materialism in pessimism

Put upon a dangerous and false base every evil result followed quite naturally. If my poor personality is of limitless value, without any effort and merit of my own, why should I not be proud? If the aim of the world's history is to produce some few genial personalities, as Carlyle taught, why should I not think that I am such a personality for my own generation, and why should I not be proud of that? Once filled with

pride I will soon be filled also with contempt for other men. Selfishness and denial of God will follow my pride; this is called out by a scientific word: materialism.

Being a materialist, as long as I possess a certain amount of intellectual and physical strength, I will be proud of myself. But as soon as my body or spirit are affected by any illness (it may be only a headache or toothache), I will plunge into a dark pessimism, always the shadow and the end of materialism. Modern Germany was, as you know, the hearth of individualism, and consequently also of pride, materialism, atheism and pessimism. The worship of strong personalities (Kaiser William and Hindenburg) holds the whole of Germany in unity during this war, which is not the case either in France or in Great Britain or Russia, where the common cause inspires the unity.

### The Education Which Makes for Peace

When will wars really stop in the world's history? As soon as a new ideal of education is realized. What is this new ideal of education which makes for peace? I will give it in one word: Panhumanism. This word includes all I wish to say.

Individualism means a brick, Panhumanism means a building. Even the greatest individuality (may it be Caesar, or Raphael, or Luther) is no more than a brick in the panhuman building of history. The lives of individuals are only the points, whereas the life of mankind is a form, a deep, high and large form.

If a great and original individuality were the aim of history, I think history should stop with the first man upon earth, for our first ancestor must have been the most striking individual that ever existed. Men coming after Adam have been like their parents and each other. Kaiser William is not nearly as interesting and striking a creature as the first man was. When Kaiser William opens his mouth to speak, he speaks words that are known. When he moves or sits, when he eats or prays—all that is a nuance only of what other people do, all is either from heritage or imitation, and quite an insignificant amount is individual. Whereas every sound that the first man uttered was quite new for the Universe; every movement striking and dramatic; every look of his eyes was discovering new worlds; every joy or sorrow violently felt; every struggle a great accumulation of experiences. And so forth.

Well, if one striking individuum is the aim of history, history should have closed with the death of Adam. But history still continues. Why? Just because it was not Adam that was its aim, but mankind; not one, or two, or ten heroes, but millions of human creatures; not some few great men, but all men, all together, all without any exception.

From this point of view we get the true ideal of education. The purpose of education is not to make grand personalities, but to make bricks for the building, i.e., to make suitable members of a collective body and suitable workers of a collective work.

## SAME-SEX MARRIAGE: HOW DID WE GET HERE? AND WHERE ARE WE GOING?

By Archpriest Lev Semenov, May 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

*President Barack Obama recently affirmed his personal support for the legalization of same-sex marriage. For a perspective from Russia on this momentous development, we offer the following commentary by Archpriest Lev Semenov, Dean of the Faculty of Further Education at St. Tikhon's Orthodox University and cleric of the Church of St. Nicholas in Kuznetskaya Sloboda, both in Moscow.*



† † †  
 The political heavyweight of the Western world has taken a step towards the abyss. If we are to believe the news report broadcast on the radio, and later confirmed in the press, President Barack Obama has made his first public statement in support of the legalization of same-sex marriages.

One can only sympathize with the citizens of this country who hold the Christian faith, just imagining

how they must have felt when they heard this statement from their head of state. There are quite a few Orthodox in the United States (my internship at New York University in 1999, when I met clergy and laity of four Orthodox jurisdictions, convinced me of this) and I think they were not pleased by the President's statement.

In connection with this shocking news, two questions naturally arise: How could this have happened? And what comes next? It seems obvious that the willingness of the leader of a major world power to recognize same-sex marriage as normal, destroying all grounds of traditional morality and familial structure, has its distant origins rooted in the process of secularization that began to gain strength at the threshold of the modern era.

The pinnacle of its manifestation is now the West's general fascination with such notorious idols as "political correctness" and "tolerance," all the while misconstruing them; as a result of which, in defiance of common sense, everything is being turned upside down: human rights are being turned against humans, causing irreparable harm to their freedoms, including their freedom of conscience. One does not need to look far to find examples. "Old Lady Europe" has long been in training to break the records of political correctness. But the New World has since begun to catch up with it.

This tendency towards secular extrapolation began to show itself most clearly with regard to the historical past, an example of which are the attempts at silencing the very place

of Christianity in the history of European culture. Thus, despite Christianity's enormous role in its formation and development over many centuries, contemporary European community legislators, as is well known, have removed the very mention of the Christian roots of European culture from the constitution of the European Union.

Instead of ensuring human rights as regards freedom of conscience, people are in fact deprived of the right to demonstrate their religious identity in even the most restrained manner. In Italy the courts examined the question of the permissibility of having crucifixes on the walls of educational institutions. In Great Britain, the new edition of the Oxford Junior Dictionary, designed to expand the vocabulary of school children, has eliminated the words "abbey," "altar," "bishop," "chapel," "christen," "monk," "monastery," "novice," "saint," and a host of other Biblicisms. A stewardess for a British airline was fired because a Christian cross was visible in the neckline of her uniform. In the United States serious intentions have been expressed, on the grounds of having a politically correct attitude towards non-Christians, officially to change the terms Christmas and Easter to "winter" and "spring" holidays.

This epidemic of fundamentally shattering the millennia-old traditional family, which began in Europe some time ago and has now spread to the United States, threatens the moral health of society, the stability of the monogamous family, and the interests of children growing up in families.

It would be interesting to hear from gays and lesbians preparing to form marital unions (if one can call it that), who often express the intention of acquiring children for such "families" by adopting orphans, what kind of upbringing the unfortunate children of such "families" will receive if same-sex marriage is legalized. Are the democratic societies of Western countries prepared for the prospect, in the very near future, of the mass reproduction, through the upbringing received in such "families," of entire generations with a similar sexual orientation?

It would be naïve to suppose that those taking the bit between their teeth in this mad rush towards destroying the traditions of Western society will stop here. Elementary logic dictates that, following the rejection of the commandment *thou shalt not commit adultery*, the violation of other commandments will ensue; then, surpassing all the horrors of Kafkaesque absurdity, the rejection of the commandment *thou shalt not kill* will arrive. It is not difficult to imagine how "civilized" (read: secularized) humanity, having desired to free itself from the burden of Christian moral values as being too burdensome for their perverse aspirations, would one morning wake up to hear that an American president has expressed his support for the "inalienable" right of every person... to commit murder.

May God grant that this nightmarish dystopia never come into being! But only fidelity to those traditional religious foundations upon which all world culture has been built can serve to bar the way to its realization.

## LOVE OF GOD

From "Life of Monk Herman of Valaam" by Yanovsky, 1868.

Once the Elder (St. Herman of Alaska) was invited on board a frigate that had come from St. Petersburg. The captain of the frigate was a man quite learned, highly educated; he had been sent to America by Imperial command to inspect all the colonies. With the captain were some 25 officers, likewise educated men.

In this company there sat a desert-dwelling monk of small stature, in an old garment, who by his wise conversation brought all his listeners to such a state that they did not know how to answer him. The captain himself related: "We were speechless fools before him!"

Father Herman gave them all one common question: "What do you, gentlemen, love above all, and what would each of you wish for his happiness?" Diverse answers followed. One desired wealth, one glory, one a beautiful wife, one a fine ship which he should command, and so on in this fashion.

"Is it not true," said Father Herman at this, "that all your various desires can be reduced to one—that each of you desires that which, in his understanding, he considers best and most worthy of love?" "Yes, it is so," they all replied. "Well, then, tell me," he continued, "can there be anything better, higher above everything, more surpassing everything and in general more worthy of love, than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who created us, perfectly adorned us, gave life to all, supports all, nourishes and loves all, who Himself is love and more excellent than all men? Should not a person then love God high above all and desire and seek Him more than all else?" All began to say: "Well, yes! That is understood! That speaks for itself!"

"And do you love God?" the Elder then asked. All replied: "Of course, we love God. How can one not love God?" "And I, sinful one, for more than forty years have been striving to love God, and cannot say that I perfectly love Him," answered Father Herman; then he began to show how a person should love God.

"If we love someone," he said, "we always think of him, strive to please him, day and night our heart is occupied with this subject. Is it thus that you, gentlemen, love God? Do you often turn to Him, do you always think of Him, do you always pray to Him, and fulfill His holy commandments?" It had to be acknowledged that they did not! "For our good, for our happiness," concluded the Elder, "at least let us make a promise to ourselves, that from this day, from this hour, from this very moment we shall strive to love God above all, and fulfill His holy will!" Behold what an intelligent, superb conversation Father Herman conducted in society; without doubt this conversation must have imprinted itself on the hearts of his listeners for their whole life!

## FLEEING SIN'S DESTRUCTIVE WAYS

By St. Theodore the Studite.

A physical harbour is not like a harbour of the mind. When someone comes to anchor in the former, they ease off and have no worries about the storms and dangers of the sea. In the latter on the contrary, the passions become more ferocious with the relaxation of the flesh, and the spirits of wickedness join in the assault like storms: the spirit of fornication, the spirit of gluttony, the spirit of avarice, the spirit of despondency, the spirit of dejection, the spirit of pride. The fear is that we may be sunk in harbour. David once looked unguardedly on Uriah's wife, and readers know what he suffered. *Jacob ate and was filled*, says Scripture, *and the beloved kicked*. [Deut 32,15].

Take care, you who are listening to this. *Flee the destructive places and ways of sin*. Govern your sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, your food, drink and sleep, that you may keep from being overwhelmed by the tempest of the passions.

This is worth remembering: someone who sails across the physical sea is subject to storms and tempests without their wanting it, while someone who crosses the water of the mind is lord of tempest and of calm. For if they manfully shake off unseemly thoughts, they are filled with calm, having the Holy Spirit as the companion of their voyage. Someone touched without meaning to and they were enflamed to lust and gave birth to iniquity.

But one whose senses are unbridled and who lets in desires like streams, stirs up a most dreadful storm for themselves. Unless the person does not swiftly smooth out their tempestuous thoughts, will end by repeating those miserable words, *I entered the depths of the sea, and a tempest drowned me*. [Pss 68:2]. Therefore let reason be in control, and let the better not be dragged down by the worse, but let the spirit be master and act for the better. Or don't you know what sin produces? Didn't it introduce death into the world? Didn't it destroy the earth? Hasn't it filled the inhabited world with graveyards and tombs from the beginning of time until now? For humanity was incorrupt before the fall and none of the things I have mentioned would have started if the first-formed had steadfastly observed the commandment that had been given. Sin is the cause of the everlasting punishments, the fuel of the unquenchable fire of Gehenna, the food of the undying worm; sin that has made humanity, that was in honour, be compared to the unreasoning beasts.

And so, because sin is like all this, destructive and deadly, we must flee from it, brethren, with all our might, and choose virtue, which makes humans angels, raises them from death, resists the demons, overcomes the rulers of this age, and finally betroths them to the kingdom of heaven. May we all reach it too by the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father and the Holy Spirit belong glory, might and honour, now and for ever, and the ages of ages. Amen.

## TWO HOLY FATHERS ON THE CALENDAR ISSUE

ELDER EPHRAIM OF KATOUNAKIA AND ELDER JOSEPH THE HESYCHAST

From "Elder Ephraim of Katounakia", by Holy Hesychasterion "St. Ephraim" Katounakia, Holy Mountain, p.56.

When the New Calendar entered into the life of the Church after 1924, the entire Holy Mountain, for reasons of tradition, maintained the use of the Old Calendar, without severing communion with and maintaining dependency upon the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, and consequently, with the other Orthodox Churches.

Because of this calendar change, some Athonite Monks—the self-titled "zealots"—broke their spiritual communion with the Patriarchate and the rest of the Holy Mountain. They would participate neither in Liturgies, nor in festal celebrations, nor even communicate with the rest of the fathers.

Katounakia was one of the centers of the zealots and papa-Ephraim was one of them. Moved by spiritual zeal, both he and Elder Joseph the Hesychast initially joined the extremist party of the so-called "Matthewites." When an issue arises concerning the faith, naturally fanaticism will rise up.

The grandiose Matthew, who so occupied Athonite monasticism, proceeded from another Matthew, a Cretan monk. Matthew had obvious rebellious tendencies, and thus they readily induced him to take hold of some authority on account of the calendar disorder. Increasing the degree of fanaticism surrounding the calendar change, and depicting the Church as lapsed, Matthew created that which pleased him. He became "super-orthodox" and worked up his followers with sermons and demonstrations. This still occurs today with some of his followers—a fresh wound to the bosom of the Church.

As always, every source of scandal creates fanaticism and unrest—mostly from ignorance—until the true state of affairs is revealed. It was natural for the fathers in the desert areas to be found among the fanatics, since anxiety and ignorance were prevalent, and because they had an acute fear that perhaps they would betray their faith.

Then, in opposition to the Matthewite harshness, the Florinite moderation appeared. The Florinites avoided the severity of the Matthewites, maintaining a milder stance, even though they were still "zealots." The two fathers then turned towards this faction. They chose the "lesser of two evils" as the better, even though they were still not at peace with this.

The living Church, unjustly cast aside, was protesting with their consciences, causing them unrest. The solution for the elders was prayer.

Elder Joseph the Hesychast turned with insistence to his sure refuge of prayer, seeking an answer from on high. *And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me* (Pss 49:15), was something that the blessed Elder knew well from his ascetic life. Falling to his face with tears, pain of heart, and deep humility, he pleaded:

"We have sinned and trespassed against You, O Lord, and we have betrayed Your Most Holy will. Justly You have turned Your face from us, for we have confused and mocked the light of Your Truth. We have closed our eyes to the bedrock of the Truth, Your unswerving and unshakable Church, Your All-Holy Body, which You established amongst us through Your own presence, and which we have handed over to the conjectures of human thoughts and speculation. Remember, All-Good One, Your compassion and mercy towards us, for they are from the ages unto ages."

With pain and persistence, he continued knocking on the doors of God's compassion and mercy, and the All-Good One did not turn away from his humble supplication. As our blessed Elder Joseph related to us:

"During this intense petition, I was overcome by sleep. I discovered myself suddenly alone on one piece of the mountain of Athos that was separated from the rest. It stood in the oceans trembling from moment to moment, in danger of sinking into the sea. I was

frightened and thought to myself, "Since this has broken off from the whole and is trembling, in a little while it'll sink and I'll be lost. Then, with one mighty leap, I found myself on the stable part of the mountain. Sure enough, the small section of rock that I had been standing on was swallowed up by the sea, and I glorified God Who had saved me from destruction! Immediately, I tied in the dream with the issue that had been occupying me and about which I had been petitioning the Lord not to allow me to be deceived in my judgment."

Similarly, while he was praying, papa-Ephraim of Katounakia heard a voice that told him, "In the person of the Florinites, you have renounced the entire Church."

The fathers found peace with this revelation that the Church had not ceased in its living presence. Afterwards, Elder Joseph also heard a divine voice inform him that, "the Church is found in the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople." When, at the suggestion of Elder Joseph, they left the zealots and returned to communion with the rest of the Athonite Fathers, they truly came to know the power of Grace in the Mysteries they celebrated.

Papa-Ephraim always used to see Divine Grace consecrating the venerable gifts into the body and blood of Christ during the Divine Liturgy. For the entire time he was with



the zealots, he saw something like a veil in front of him, hindering him from seeing this Divine Grace distinctly. This veil was withdrawn when he returned to the living Church.

In speaking about this, Elder Ephraim said: “First I, then Old Joseph, received revelations spiritually regarding the calendar scandal; that is, that the living Church is in Constantinople and not in the faction of the so-called zealots. We returned then to the living Church, where the rest of the Holy Mountain also is.”

After being reconciled with the Church once again under the Ecumenical Patriarchate, in 1952 they went to the neighboring brotherhood of Danielaioi to celebrate Pascha. The fathers welcomed them with much love: “Welcome, welcome. Elder Joseph, please take the stasidion [chair in church reserved for the elders]. Father Ephraim, please come and celebrate the Liturgy for us.”

“The Danielaioi chanted the hymn ‘Theotoke Parthene’ (O Virgin Theotokos) on the solea and I, standing in the sanctuary, could almost see the Mother of God; so great and so tangible was the grace I was feeling,’ the Elder confessed with nostalgia.

But Father Nikephoros (a companion of the elders), accustomed to their zealot neighbors, started grumbling and getting very upset. The Elder found himself in a difficult position. While praying, he felt that the will of God opposed him. He was frightened then. He consulted Elder Gabriel, the Abbot at the Monastery of Dionysiou, as well as Father Gerasimos, the Hymnographer. They told him: “My brother, obey your spiritual father.” In prayer it was even harder. He felt that God had imposed a penance on him. The dilemma was whether to maintain obedience or follow the Church. He was forced to choose the first option, which made us realize that obedience is fundamental to the Church; for the divine founder of the Church “humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a Cross” (Phil. 2:8).

Then, he went through a crisis of conscience of another kind. He, who had been informed that he was subject to the Patriarchate, and that the word “Church” means love, which he found in the warm behavior of Danielaioi; he whose heart leapt for joy when he said the word “Church” like a child’s heart leaps when it needs its mother’s hug; he who considered Elder Joseph and his brotherhood his own beloved family; how could he now abandon them? Fortunately, these doubts lasted only a few days. He then thought: “In spirit I will always be with the Church, but with my body I will be with the Zealots for a while, as long as my elder is alive.”

Thus he made peace with himself. He waited patiently until 1975, i.e. for 23 years. He never gave anyone the right to criticize him. When he finally established his own brotherhood, he left the Zealots forever with great humility.

## ON THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN

By Elder Porphyrios (+1991).

*A large part of the responsibility  
for a person’s spiritual state lies with the family.*

† † †



A child’s upbringing commences at the moment of its conception. The embryo hears and feels in its mother’s womb. Yes, it hears and it sees with its mother’s eyes. It is aware of her movements and her emotions, even though its mind has not developed. If the mother’s face darkens, it darkens too. If the mother is irritated, then it becomes irritated also. Whatever the mother experiences—sorrow, pain, fear, anxiety, etc.—is also experienced by the embryo.

If the mother doesn’t want the child, if she doesn’t love it, then the embryo senses this and traumas are created in its little soul that accompany it all its life. The opposite occurs through the mother’s holy emotions. When she is filled with joy, peace and love for the embryo, she transmits these things to it mystically, just as happens to children that have been born.

For this reason a mother must pray a lot during her pregnancy and love the child growing within her, caressing her abdomen, reading psalms, singing hymns and living a holy life. This is also for her own benefit. She makes sacrifices for the sake of the embryo so that the child will become more holy and will acquire from the very outset holy foundations. Do you see how delicate a matter it is for a woman to go through a pregnancy? Such a responsibility and such an honor!

I will tell you something about other animate and non-rational beings and you will understand what I mean. In America the following experiment was carried out: in two identical rooms which were kept at exactly the same temperature flowers were planted in identical soil and watered in exactly the same way. There was, however, one difference: in the one room gentle, soothing music was played. And the result? The flowers in that room displayed an enormous difference in relation to the flowers in the other room. They had a quite different vitality, their colors were more attractive and they grew incomparably better.



**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.**

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We sincerely apologize for the delay in the development and dissemination of the subject issue. We were confronted with various computer hardware issues that resulted in the loss of some of our work.

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

## A HIDDEN TREASURE

Source: From Ch. 33 of *Palladius' Paradise of the Fathers*.

When someone says or does something mean to us, or hurts our feelings in some way, how do we react? Do we get angry and think up some way to pay the person back, to “get even”? Or do we use this as a chance to grow closer to God by obeying the Gospel commandment to *turn the other cheek*, to forgive one another, even those whom we might consider to be our enemies? If we practice Christ’s teaching and bravely endure the hurts we feel as a result of another’s actions or words, without developing hard feelings towards that person, we shall gradually acquire a great treasure in our hearts, as the following example illustrates.

St. Theophan the Recluse (in *Unseen Warfare*), tells us to *force ourselves to rejoice when you are insulted, blamed or scorned. For this ill treatment and dishonor conceals a great treasure, and if we willingly accept it you will soon become rich in spirit.*

Long ago, when monasticism was still quite young, there lived in the Egyptian desert a community of nuns. Now among them dwelt a certain sister who purposely made herself an object of ridicule and scorn as a means of training her soul and speeding her climb up the ladder of perfection. For, as St. John of the Ladder (Step 8) wrote: *Perfection (if it is possible) is to regard dishonor as praise.*

On her head this nun wore an old ragged piece of cloth, while the other nuns had nicely made monastic veils. They looked down upon her and treated her like the lowest servant, not even allowing her to eat with them. They would yell at her and order her about as she waited on tables, and she became, as it were, the broom of the nunnery. But she never complained or got angry or answered back at their harsh words. Keeping her mind firmly set

on her goal, she rejoiced when the other nuns made fun of her or insulted her, taking it as an opportunity to exercise herself in the Christian virtues of humility, patient endurance of wrongs, forgiveness and love for those who hurt you.

At the same time there lived not far away a monk called Piteroum. He was wounded by the prideful thought that he was better than many because of his strict way of life. To cure him of his pride, the Lord sent Piteroum an angel who said to him: “Go to the nunnery in Tabenna. There you will find a woman wearing on her head a rough piece of cloth. She is far ahead of you on the ladder of perfection, for although she is busy serving the needs of others, her mind is constantly with God on high. You may spend hours in the solitude of your cell but your mind is off wandering in other countries.”

At once Piteroum went to Tabenna and asked to see the nuns. They knew him to be a holy man and all came to receive his blessing, all but the ill-treated sister, the servant of all. “Is there no other nun here?” He asked. “Master,” came the reply, “we have one more, but she is quite worthless; she is in the refectory.”

Piteroum asked to see this nun, and when he saw the cloth on her head, he knew her to be the one described by the angel. He bowed down before her: “Bless me, Mother.” And she fell down at his feet: “Bless me, Master.” The other nuns were astonished, but Piteroum revealed to them the treasure of virtues hidden in her soul. Hearing this from the blessed man, the nuns fell down at their sister’s feet, begging forgiveness for the shameful way they had mistreated her. And even after Piteroum had left they continued to repent before her and showered her with honor and praise. But the woman feared that all this attention would injure her soul by opening it to pride, and within a few days she departed from the community. Where she went and where she died no one knew.



# 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]

[HTTP://WWW.ORTHODOXHHERITAGE.ORG](http://www.OrthodoxHeritage.org)

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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## BUILDING A LIFE WITH GOD

*By Hieromonk Seraphim of Mt. Athos (+1981).*

A man can live with God (or without God—as some people do). It is possible to live with God by reason of His good pleasure for man to do so, and also by reason of a man's own positive inclination. Here, the circumstances of the man's life appear either favorable or unfavorable; in other words, it becomes evident that the essential elements of such an existence are not dictated by outward circumstances but by the person's own predilection, his desire, his intent.

In order to live with God, to make this a reality, one must leave space for Him in one's daily activities, must give Him room!

The personal desire to live with God must be joined in the heart by the remembrance of God. A person is free to choose, according to his desire or lack of it, whether or not to incorporate the remembrance of God into his life. From this point, this choosing, the two paths increasingly diverge. One man desires it, another doesn't give it a thought; he doesn't seek it. It may be that outwardly they live side by side, i.e., in similar circumstances, similar surroundings; but one lives with God, the other without God. Thus, the first element of a life with God is desire.

Next in order of importance is the extent to which a person is caught up in his external affairs; to what extent he is enslaved by worldly affairs and how important and urgent he considers them. For example, are there circumstances whereby his work superiors make many demands of him, beyond "normal" work periods such as "finish this as soon as possible," and "have it done by..." or does he have certain personal needs or

cares for those close to him requiring his added attention. Whatever the case, the result for the individual Christian is that he gets caught up in outward activities and this greatly hinders remembrance of God. And without remembrance of God, how is it possible to live with God? One must therefore set a goal for oneself: to battle for liberation [from this enslavement] in order to maintain within oneself the remembrance of God—no matter what! This is a task which is both lawful for man, right before God, and possible within the conditions of man's earthly life. Try it and see yourself. The obstacles to this goal are mostly superfluous and may be overcome.

It is true: the beginning is difficult. But this is only because we are not accustomed to it and not because the remembrance of God actually disturbs whatever it is we are doing; not at all. He who so desires and looks into this matter will find the possibility of attaining it within himself. This will both amaze him and convince him that remembrance of God is of great help in all his endeavors, including the normal pursuit of worldly affairs. In reality, it also makes him more peaceful and significantly more successful in his undertakings. Life becomes more enjoyable; he is happier. And to support this we turn to the Psalmist: *For our heart shall rejoice in Him, because we have trusted in His holy name (Pss 33:21); and my soul shall be joyful in the LORD: it shall rejoice in His salvation. (Pss 35:9).*

Once the soul's enslavement by outward affairs weakens, it becomes possible to "make room" for God in the midst of all these worldly matters and thereby to live with Him. Man's life is occupied by human affairs, but if among them a place can be found for God, there, too, is life with God.

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One, however, may wonder as to how, practically speaking, this is accomplished. Remembrance of God is simply the beginning. Next there are the feelings of the heart. These are the very life of a man. Think about it: throughout a man’s life, in all that he does, his feelings (such a diversity!) move in him; they live, change, accompany his every action, and share in every part of his outward life. Pleasure, displeasure, irritation, joy, distress, jealousy, striving towards or repulsion from something—these inner feelings accompany all the outward activities, his whole life. They exist. They are not imagined!

Among these feelings are those which are akin to the remembrance of God, conducive to it: fear of God, faith, piety, gratitude towards God (how patient He is with us great sinners... He even showers gifts upon us...), hope, love for Him, trust in Him, a readiness to fully entrust oneself to His care. He is good, mercifully kind, very much like a tenderhearted mother: *Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.* (Isa 49:15). These exact feelings must be found in our hearts, singled out from among all other feelings and nurtured accordingly. With their help, the desired aim can be achieved—to live with God!

Together with remembrance of God, one must join all of these feelings and good inclinations to his actions, i.e., to his outward activities which, like some kind of rising air bubbles or vessels, get filled (and they do indeed fill up) with these gifts that arise from the heart. Thus, in remembering God while we work, let us concentrate on all these feelings which are akin to the remembrance of God and, in turn, all these emotional conditions will be with us as we go about

fulfilling our earthly tasks. The result shall be the beginning of our life with God. For this is just what it is!

The Lord desires to be with man: *My delights were with the sons of men* (Prov 8: 31), *and they shall be My people and I will be their God* (Jer. 31:33), *and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.* (Isa 62:5). Our desire and hope to live with God lies within these verses and it is truly left up for man to cooperate with this will of God. In his fallen state (and the Lord knows this—He “takes it into account,” humanly speaking) man can cooperate through remembrance of God, through his feelings towards Him—even though these are weak and confused. What is most important here is man’s desire, and effort, both of which rely upon man’s faith! The Lord will fulfill and strengthen whatever else is necessary. Therefore, begin with this faith and the corresponding confidence!

“Enslavement” comes from the influence of the external world upon man. It must be resisted. What is necessary from the world for man’s survival must be addressed as such; however, these external influences must never be allowed to control the heart. One can truly do whatever is necessary for the body’s survival and the heart can be either at liberty or in bondage. Man’s heart must be kept at liberty, because a free heart can remember God and give attention to Him, even as one attends to his worldly tasks. This predisposition and corresponding behavior opens up the possibility for man to live with God; and a beginning of a life with God is realized.

The balance can also realize a shift: spiritual vigilance and a desire to be with God can transitionally become strong enough to outweigh the soul’s enslavement to mundane, outward activities. The activities themselves are not eliminated; they remain, but their power over the soul weakens

altogether. A shift occurs in the inner life which attends to the outward actions. Previously, the latter fully occupied the person's attention, while the inner life passed unnoticed; the person gave it no heed (how it was sustained was quite unknown to man, perhaps "by itself," like abandoned children left to grow up by themselves). But when the power of the external world over the man is weakened, there is a gradual shifting of positions: external things become unimportant to the soul; they lose their former significance, while the inner life draws all the attention to itself and acquires preeminence. This allows for the very real possibility to live with God, when the thoughts and feelings of the heart are constantly with Him!

When a man elevates his awareness to this level and realizes this type of a life he becomes indifferent towards the daily race often observed in conducting one's worldly tasks and affairs; man is no longer preoccupied or overly concerned with them—all this is merely a hindrance to his spiritual existence. It obstructs the effort to "live with God" while attending towards the daily "business" matters. Previously the "doing" was everything, and the inner life was, by contrast, some kind of fog which was ignored; all attention was focused upon the "doing." But now these things, these activities, are but a covering, a covering beneath which is carried on the principal activity which is, in essence, a true life with God! This is a source of joy, happiness, light! And when this is achieved, man can exclaim and realize the shining *upon the world as the light of knowledge* (from the Nativity Troparion).

It appears, then, that without a sustained level of outward activity it becomes more difficult to "live with God"; there's nothing to secure the attention, and feelings towards Him (after all, they are weak in the beginner, just as his attention is scattered) and thus easily dissipate. Without outward activity a person is left like a plant pulled from the ground—its roots have neither firm support, nor do they absorb the strengthening elements of the ground. So, too, without any outward activity, a person's inner life weakens and he loses the possibility of life with God.

The Lord established human life. Take heed! God gave men earthly cares so that they wouldn't fall into something worse! "Vanities" are earthly activities undertaken without God, but they are preferable to the actions of irrational and destructive passions and sins to which fallen man is so prone. And if these "vanities," i.e., these earthly, human affairs are undertaken with the thought of God, with the aim of salvation, they become a pathway leading to heaven.



True happiness is not the honors and pleasures of the body. As many as fight to acquire virtue—to put into practice the commandments of God—these are the truly happy.

Blessed Elder Philotheos of Paros (+1980)

## CLEAVE UNTO CHRIST

By St. Cyril of Alexandria.

*No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. [Lk 9:62]*

† † †

For just as the husbandman, who has begun to break up his land by the plough, if he grow weary and leaves his labor 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. Likewise, **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.



Labor to acquire thanksgiving toward God for everything, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, and then you will find peace.

Sts. Barsanuphius & John

## THE PRISONER'S ANGEL

*Elena Andreyevna Voronova is a rare example of a righteous woman who neither married, nor was a nun, nor a fool-for-Christ. Her life might well have remained hidden were it not for the spiritually sensitive soul of one of Russia's most talented authors, Sergei Nilus. The following, taken from Nilus' book, "On the Banks of God's River," is a brief illustration of what strength of spirit can be contained in a "fragile" vessel.*

*The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit.*

[1 Cor 7:34]

† † †

From childhood Elena Andreyevna Voronova suffered from weak lungs. Upon finishing her higher education, she went south to Crimea so that she can benefit from the warm climate of that region. Despite her fragile health, Elena had an energetic temperament. Her heart was filled with love and the desire to serve her fellow man. Under the rays of the warm Crimean sun, her health improved and she set about founding a model school which elicited the admiration and approval of the country's ober-prokurator, K. P. Pobedonostsev, whose friendship with Elena lasted the rest of his life. [*Ed.*, "ober-prokurator," also Chief Procurator, was the title of the lay supervisor of the Apostolic Governing Synod, who effectively was the lay head of the Russian Orthodox Church and a member of the Tsar's cabinet.]

Returning to the northern capital, Elena soon became involved in a benevolent society which ministered to prisoners. Here it was that she blossomed forth with all of her Christian soul's meek and warm qualities. There were numerous criminals, already sentenced to death, who were granted reprieve by the Tsar due to the intercessions of this compassionate woman; she often pleaded on behalf of all prisoners whose repentance she felt was firm and genuine. Elena would bring her "case" before Metropolitan Anthony (Votkovsky) who in turn served as mediator between her and "her" prisoners, and the Tsar.

One of Elena's most beloved duties in her work among the prisoners was to read aloud to them either from the Holy Scripture or from some other soul-profiting book. Even among hardened criminals she would discover hearts which were not deaf to the call of the Christian faith and the teachings of the Orthodox Church. Unfortunately, there are very

few recorded accounts concerning those prisoners who were converted to a new life under the influence of Elena Andreyevna Voronova. But among those which do exist, one case deserves special notice.

It was Elena Andreyevna's custom to visit the prison hospital, bringing with her some books and small crosses to be given to those prisoners who did not have them and who wouldn't refuse them. She was well-known there by both the guards and the prisoners, with whom she had established a friendly and trusting rapport. This was not easily done with prisoners but, as she herself testified, God helped her in this by the prayers of the Optina elders to whom she went for spiritual guidance.

One day, when she came to the prison hospital, she noticed a prisoner whom she hadn't seen before. He was lying on his hospital bed; his face had a very dark although intelligent expression. On his feet were shackles—evidently he was a particularly dangerous criminal. When Elena sat down to read, he gave her a look of hatred and then turned his face towards the wall. His whole demeanor, his sick body, and especially his

fetters, made a very strong impression on Elena's compassionate heart. Later, she related that she could not remember what it was she had discussed that day, or what she had read, only that God helped and everything went well.

After the discussion, she noticed that the new prisoner had, in the course of her reading, turned his face once again towards her; it seemed that his expression was less harsh. She began to hand out the crosses to

those prisoners who requested them—every prisoner asked for one. Approaching the new prisoner, she timidly offered him a cross. The thought crossed her mind: what if he should turn away or utter some blasphemy? But with her heart she prayed for him; he neither turned away nor said a word as she put a cross around his neck.

Some time passed and Elena again visited the prison hospital. She noticed that the fettered prisoner was no longer there. When she inquired about him she was told that he was placed in solitary confinement; his case had been tried and for political crimes and the murder of five persons he had been sentenced to death. The other prisoners said that in leaving he had asked them to tell her that he was still wearing the cross she had given him; he had also requested that she come to see him if at all possible before the execution.



Elena was very moved by this news and decided with God's help to somehow arrange a meeting with him. Permission was granted and here she found out that his name was Hilarion and that only after a long search he had at last been caught in his sister's apartment. Just before the police arrested him, he had fired a shot which went straight into his pregnant sister's abdomen, killing her unborn child; this was his fifth murder. Clearly he was a vicious criminal and fully deserving of the death penalty. Nonetheless, Elena's heart went out to him, hoping to see, even in such a darkened soul, at least a glimmer of God's image.

As she entered the cell, the door was locked and bolted behind her. Left alone face to face with such a criminal, her heart momentarily gave way and she all but regretted having come. Hilarion was lying on the bed and when she entered he began to get up and pull his legs with the clanking fetters over the side of the bed. It was a painful sight.

—Thank-you for coming! I was afraid you wouldn't. Did they tell you I hadn't taken off your cross?

—Yes, they told me.

—Then I'm grateful to them too. You probably already know that I'm sentenced to death; my days are numbered. Tell me, you were explaining things so well there in the hospital, could you explain for me the meaning of a dream which I had here? I saw that I was in a dark place—such as a swamp or somewhere much worse—and I was covered all over with the most disgusting filth. Only my legs were left white. What does this mean? I don't understand it but somehow I feel this dream is significant; it left such a strong impression. Can you explain it to me?

At this moment Elena felt that the explanation of this dream was a key to something very important for Hilarion's soul; the turning of this hardened sinful soul from darkness to light might well depend on its correct interpretation—not according to human reasoning, but inspired from above. In her heart Elena Andreyevna fervently begged God for wisdom.

—I think, Hilarion that this dream was given you from above, to show you that no matter how sinful you are before God and man, you too can hope in God's mercy—on the condition, however, that you continue towards Him along the path of repentance which you have already begun; after all, you did not remove the cross you were given; on your legs, even during your illness, were iron fetters which caused you great pain, and so your legs, cleansed by this suffering, were shown to you to be white. Is it not from above that you have been assigned the death penalty and all its accompanying torments as a final cleansing, just as the cross for the repentant thief, so that together with him you might be in paradise? Only say as he did—first: I am justly condemned, for *I have received the due reward of my deeds*, and then: *Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!* (Lk 23:41-42).

When she finished speaking, Elena Andreyevna glanced at Hilarion. His head was bowed and two tear drops were quietly running down his cheeks. He was silent for moment and then he said:

—You are right; I must suffer to atone [*Ed., make amends*] for all the evil I have done. Thank you; you have done something very great for me; you have opened up for me a new world. What is left to me of this life I must lay upon the cross of my final sufferings, before my death. Remember me, O Lord, in Thy Kingdom.

The reader can well imagine what went on in Elena Andreyevna's soul on hearing these words and sensing Hilarion's genuine repentance. She knew she could ask Metropolitan Anthony that his sentence be lightened, and yet., knowing something greater than the prolongation of an earthly life was at hand she kept silent. Hilarion continued:

—I shall not ask you, as would be usual in my case, to have me pardoned. Just call for me the prison priest; I must cleanse my soul by repentance and receive, if only I am worthy, the Holy Mysteries—God grant that this be so! Of you, Lord, I have this last request...

After a tearful embrace they parted for the last time.

Never in very good health, Elena Andreyevna became ill and was forced to give up her prison visits. She developed angina pectoris [*Ed., a syndrome characterized by an extreme pain below the sternum*], and this, combined with her ailing lungs, caused her much suffering. For several months before her death she lay in bed. Then on Monday of Passion Week, 1916, she became radiant and said to her friend:

—Sonia, I shall die on Good Friday. The Lord Himself came and told me!

And so she died, having seen God, on the day of the great suffering of the Lord, and offering her own sufferings for the countless prisoners whose repentance—and freedom—was bought by the compassionate tears and heartfelt prayers of her God-loving soul.

*Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.* (Mt 5:8)



With fear and reverence you should stand in church, for our Christ is invisibly present with the holy angels. He fills the attentive and reverent with grace and blessings, whereas He censures the inattentive as unworthy. Try to receive Communion as often as possible—you have my permission to do so freely—for Holy Communion is an excellent aid for those who struggle against sin.

**Elder Ephraim of Filotheou**  
From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

## PRAYER AND THE TRANSFIGURATION OF OUR LORD

By the Blessed Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow.



The saintly Metropolitan Philaret was one of the most outstanding hierarchs of the Russian Church, he was born Basil Drozdov, the son of a priest: Although small in stature he stood out among his fellow students at the St. Sergius Holy Trinity Seminary by reason of his lively intelligence and genuine piety. His early talent for preaching brought him to the attention of Metropolitan Platon of Moscow,

who said of him, "I give sermons like a man, but he speaks like an angel."

In 1808 he received the monastic tonsure with the name Philaret, after Saint Philaret the Almsgiver. After being ordained to the diaconate, he taught Greek, Hebrew, and rhetoric at the St. Petersburg Theological Academy, where he prevailed upon the authorities to have courses taught in Russian rather than in Latin. This concern to make the understanding of Orthodoxy as accessible as possible motivated many of his subsequent undertakings in the course of his fifty years in the episcopal rank. He was responsible for having the Holy Scripture translated into Russian, and he himself wrote a Catechism, which has remained a standard text of the Russian Church ever since its initial publication in 1823.

As Metropolitan of Moscow, Philaret succeeded in having restored some measure of independence from the State, which the Church had lost in the "reforms" of Peter I. He labored to improve the caliber of seminaries and theological schools, and he gave crucial support to the spiritual revival generated by St. Paisius Velichkovsky and his monastic followers, at a time when many hierarchs and clergy looked askance at the institution of eldership, or "starchestvo" and the practice of unceasing prayer which this revival prompted. Metropolitan Philaret's own spiritual father was a close disciple of Saint Seraphim of Sarov, and although Philaret kept concealed his inner life, its excellence is manifest in the various miracles wrought by his prayers: a girl dumb for thirteen years began to speak, a merchant was spared the necessity of having his arm amputated, an eight-year-old paralyzed girl began to walk.

Metropolitan Philaret reposed on November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1867, being forewarned of the date two months earlier by his father in a dream. In his theological writings, Metropolitan Philaret often focused on the life of grace that is opened to believers in Christ. It is clear that he himself experienced this grace while still in this temporal world and certain that he now enjoys it in the fullest measure in the company of the saints.

And he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening. And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were

Moses and Elias. [Lk 9:28-30]

† † †

How sublime a spectacle on Mount Tabor! A spectacle indeed worthy of being contemplated with rapture as the apostles contemplated it, and of being solemnly celebrated as we now celebrate it. It is not without meaning, that they who witnessed the great revelations on Sinai and Horeb, not without purpose, that Moses and Elias appear on Mount Tabor also. They shall see more here than they saw there, on Sinai and Horeb, the might and glory of God were revealed unto men, through the powers of visible nature; on Tabor, not only does divinity reveal itself to man, but humanity itself appears arrayed in divine glory, Moses quaked on Mount Sinai (Heb 12:21); Elias complained on Horeb (I Kings 19:14); whereas on Tabor, through the fear of the apostles there shines forth joy: *It is good for us to be here.* (Lk 9:33)

Christians! Your heart is no doubt ready to say of the witnesses of the glory of Mount Tabor: *indeed it was good for them to be there.* What then, if we tell you that the way to the contemplation of the glory of Mount Tabor is not swallowed up in an abyss, is not walled up from us, nor overgrown with thorns, not forgotten, nor lost, but may still be indicated by those who know it, to those who seek it? (It is not difficult to understand that we speak here of the spiritual way, for a carnal way cannot possibly lead us to spiritual visions and divine revelations.)

Why does the evangelist, when about to describe to us the glorious Transfiguration of the Lord, first of all direct his own and our attention to prayer? He went up into a mountain to pray. Why, if not to point out to us in prayer the way to the light of Tabor, the key to spiritual mysteries, the might of divine revelation? If the divinely inspired Evangelist found it so necessary to associate the idea of prayer with the description of the glory of Tabor, then it certainly will not be amiss on our part also, Christians, to associate however short a meditation on the power and efficacy of prayer, with remembrance of the glorious Transfiguration of our Lord.

There are some Christians whose understanding and performing of the act of prayer is in an outward ritual sense, rather than in an inward spiritual one; these souls, while in no way doubting in the general belief that prayer is powerful and efficacious, are mistaken in their conduct. They do entirely err in the application of this truth to themselves and to their prayer.

Praying repeatedly, and seeing no result from their prayer, either in themselves or around them, they, instead of doubt-

ing the sincerity and merit of their own prayers, are prone to imbibe the idea inspired by a spirit of sloth and self-deceit, that powerful and availing prayer must needs be some peculiar gift of grace, reserved for some of God's elect, and for certain extraordinary cases only. To such we say without hesitation that there is no man whose prayer may not become powerful if he only desire it steadfastly and with a pure heart, with faith and hope in God, and that there is no case in which his prayer will not be granted, if only its object be not contrary to the Wisdom and Mercy of God, or to the true welfare of the suppliant. This is saying much. We trust, nevertheless, that we are not deceiving the true lovers of prayer.

Figure to yourselves a man who, by the power of prayer shuts or opens the heavens, stops or brings down rain; commands that a handful of flour and a little oil should suffice to feed several persons for several months, or perhaps even for more than a year and it is fulfilled; breathes on a dead man, and restores him to life; brings down fire from heaven to consume a sacrifice and an altar immersed in water. What can appear more extraordinary than this power of prayer? But it appears so only to a man who knows not what spiritual power is, whilst to one who does, it appears only as the act of a man like unto ourselves.

This is not my own opinion merely, but the teaching of an Apostle, St. James, exhorting us to pray one for another, and wishing to incite us thereto, says that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much; and, he confirms this general precept and convincing motive by the example of that extraordinary man whom we have just pictured, and whom he represents as a man like unto ourselves: *Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.* (Jas 6:17-18). Why is it said here that this wonderworking Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are? It is just that we, deeming him an extraordinary man, should not be discouraged from imitating him, and from attaining power in prayer.

If it appears to you that imitating the prayers of the prophet is far above your mediocrity and a height unattainable by you, then imagine yourselves as much below the prophet;

imagine yourselves to be even less than all other Christians, and even then, I affirm that your prayer will be powerful and effectual. Furthermore it may convert you from heathenism to Christianity, and it may lead you to the true knowledge and worship of God. Even though all this is unknown to you, and if there be no man near who can direct you, pray and open the heavens and bring down thence an angel unto you who will teach you.

You may ask whether I am dreaming and have been carried away by my desire to invite you to fervent and effectual prayer. No, my brethren and fellow worshippers. I am speaking of things that have actually happened before, and therefore may happen again, and which are contained as testimony within our holy books. The Roman centurion, Cornelius, whom we know from the Acts of the Apostles, was a Gentile. It is not known whether he knew the One God, but certain it is that he did not know Jesus Christ Whom God hath sent; but he did as much good as he was able. He feared and prayed always to God, though to him unknown; a devout man, and one that feared "God" with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always. And what did the unceasing prayer of



the Gentile achieve? It did indeed call down heaven upon him, and brought to his aid high and even divine powers. In the midst of his prayers, an angel appears to him, saying, *Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God,* (Acts 10:31); and then instructs him to send for the Apostle Peter. And when the Apostle was preaching unto him Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost, even before baptism, was poured from on high upon Cornelius...

But it is time at last to inquire why it is that so many prayers remain without effect, if every prayer may always be so powerful and effectual? For it is for the sake of this question principally that we have said all that which we have as yet spoken. Let us particularly note one instance in which a prayer really answered in an unanticipated and sublime way. Thus, Paul besought the Lord thrice to be delivered from a thorn in the flesh but God answered him: *My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness.* (II Cor 12:9). The temptation is not removed; but a victory still more wonderful is granted over the continuing temptation.

If we accept such cases, all unsuccessful prayers are accounted for by this short saying of the Apostle: *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.* (Jas 4:3). Our prayers are fruitless for one of three reasons: either because they are not fervent and persevering supplications, which proceed from the depth of our souls, and into which our whole soul is poured forth; instead they are only weak desires which we utter without fervor, thinking; or because our supplications are unclean and evil, inasmuch as we ask that which is hurtful and of no benefit to our souls; or because we ask things not for the glory of God, but for the gratification of our carnal and selfish desires.

Pray, Christian, fervently and with the whole might of thy soul, pray diligently and perseveringly, pray rightly and purely; and if thou art not thyself equal to it, then pray for prayer itself, and by prayer thou wilt first obtain true and effectual prayer, and then this prayer shall overcome all things with thee and obtain all things for thee; it will guide thee unto Mount Tabor or create a Tabor within thee; it will call thy soul into heaven. Amen.



## CONFRONTING ECCLESIASTICAL ISSUES WITHIN OUR FAITH IN AN ORTHODOX MANNER

*By Elder Paisios the Athonite—the Blessed Geronta helps us to find the right manner in which to deal with the various ecclesiastical issues confronting our Church. He exposes the nuances of ego present in both the extreme modernist and extreme traditionalist. May God protect us and His Church from both!*

**W**e must avoid extremes; extreme solutions will never solve a problem. In the old days, the grocer would add little-by-little on the scale, to find the exact amount and get the right balance. He would avoid adding or removing something abruptly. Extreme views, no matter on what side, are always a source of trouble for Mother Church; but also for those who hold them, because - in the end - both will suffer. It's like having a possessed person, full of spiritual insolence (contempt for everything), pulling on one end; and a narrow-minded fool, zealous in his ignorance, pulling on the other.

This is a confrontation, in other words, between a foolish zealot and a man steeped in spiritual arrogance. And the two bicker and strike at each other, because what is missing from both is divine Grace. And the worst that could happen, God forbid, is that there will be no end to their bickering; one

end will keep on striking at the other, with no end in sight. But those who will take these extremes in order to bend them and bring them together—in harmony—will be crowned by Jesus Christ with two unfading crowns.

We must be careful not to create problems in the Church, or magnify the small indiscretions that take place here and there, because this will only make things worse and give pleasure to the devil. The person who gets overly upset and angry at the sight of a minor mistake, and rushes head on supposedly to put things in order, resembles the foolish sacristan who sees a candle dripping and rushes head on to put it out—knocking over people and candle stands in his way and causing even a greater disorder during worship.

Unfortunately, we have so many people keen on disturbing the Mother Church these days! The educated among them have only an intellectual grasp of the dogmas; they don't approach them in the spirit of our Holy Fathers. And the uneducated are not far behind; they have grasped the dogmas with their teeth only, and that's why they cannot discuss ecclesiastical matters without grinding their teeth at each other. As a result, they cause greater harm to the Church than the enemies of our Orthodox Faith. A torrential river is not good, because it will sweep away logs, rocks, even people; but a shallow river is not good either, because it will become a breeding ground for mosquitoes.

Then there are those who spend their time criticizing each other, instead of working for the common good. Instead of keeping an eye on themselves and their behavior, they watch for mistakes in others. They are on the look out for what others say or write, and they are ready to strike at them without mercy. These people cause great harm, because—on the one hand—they do injustice to their brothers and sisters; while—on the other—they undermine them before the faithful. And these actions also end up scandalizing and sowing unbelief in weak souls.

Those who may justify their malice by claiming their right to correct others instead of concentrating on their own faults, or those who go public with Church problems—even matters too sensitive to discuss—on the principle of tell it to the Church, should do two things: First, they should examine their own little church, their families or their Brotherhood; and only if these pass the test, if they prove good, they should go ahead and embarrass Mother Church. Good children, I believe, will never bring charges against their mother.

Each person complements the character of the other, and we are all obliged to tolerate not only the spiritual temperament of others, but also their human weaknesses. Now, unfortunately, there are those who have irrational expectations of other people. They expect everyone to be like them, to have their spiritual temperament; and if the other person does not meet their standard, if they are a bit more lenient or austere, they are eager to find them non spiritual.



## ON FREQUENT COMMUNION

*By the Athonite Hieromonk Arsenius, Holy Monastery of Stavronikita (+1846).*

He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. [Jn 6:56]

† † †



What can be loftier and more desirable than these most comforting words of our Savior in which He expresses all His love, all the boundless abyss of His compassion which is given to man in the Mystery of Communion! With what can we compare the state of a man who is united with the Lord Himself! This is the Mystery of Mysteries, so exalted that it can only be grasped in part by man's limited mind. It is sufficient for us to know that in the Mystery of Communion we are granted, through His grace, the greatest of God's gifts, and therefore we must by all means try to live in such a way that we may more often approach this most Holy Mystery, which the ancient Christians were furnished and partaking of on a daily basis.

Holy Communion, strengthening our spiritual and bodily powers, also serves as an invincible weapon for us in defeating the invisible enemy of our salvation—the devil. This enemy is extremely dangerous for us. How many snares he sets out for our ruin and destruction, in which he tries with all his power to entrap us; wherever we go, at almost every step, this evil spirit tries to wound us, ever trying to deceive and tempt us. We want to do good, but he lures us into evil; we want to pray, but he brings upon us foul thoughts, laziness, heaviness and so forth, taking advantage of our weaknesses and our inclination towards sin. How much care, attention to self, and self-discipline is required of us, lest this cruel spirit of malice prevail over us!

This enemy of mankind is so much the more dangerous in that he is invisible to us and is exceedingly cunning and evil. Against such a dangerous foe we must use a mighty weapon; but what can be more powerful than the most holy Mystery of Communion? In itself it is an almighty power, for in partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ we receive the Master of heaven and earth, Whose might is infinite. On the other hand, it contains within itself all the power of our great redemption which was accomplished for us by our Savior, the fruit of which was victorious triumph over the dark kingdom of the devil.

He that rarely approaches this saving Mystery is estranging himself from salvation. Even common sense can grasp the truth of this. He who receives Holy Communion often, also cleanses his conscience often in the Mystery of Confession,

and in reliving his grief and contrition over the sins he has committed, he sets the saving fear of God as seal on his soul, keeping him from sin. To attain this, he must arm himself more often with good thoughts and good works which keep him from sin and draw him nearer to God. Then, according to the frequency of Communion, good dispositions and virtues acquire great power and become essential to the soul.

Each of us knows from experience that frequent repetition of anything forms a habit in us. He that repeats a sin often makes himself a slave to sin; he that strives for virtue becomes a struggler of piety. Thus, the person who partakes of Communion often necessarily acquires the disposition to serve the Lord with fervor, for he truly believes in the power of this Divine Mystery; he praises God with gladness and hope, for he truly trusts that the Lord is his helper and defender; he submits to Him with humility and love, because he truly loves the Lord Who has loved him and bestowed upon him every heavenly gift.

Present-day Christians, for the most part, rarely approach the saving Mysteries of Confession and Holy Communion but Christians of the first centuries were vouchsafed this gift daily. From this it is evident how piety has decreased in our days, and that it will do so further in the future. One can sometimes hear people say that they avoid approaching the Holy Mysteries because they consider themselves unworthy. But who is worthy of it? No one on earth is worthy of it, but whoever confesses his sins with heartfelt contrition and approaches the Chalice of Christ with consciousness of his unworthiness the Lord will not reject, in accordance with His words, *him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.* (Jn 6:37).

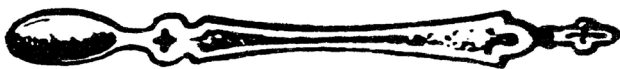
Others are so caught up in the vanity of the world that they find no time to prepare for Communion, or only prepare haphazardly for this most holy Christian duty. What carelessness concerning such a lofty gift of God, what negligence concerning the salvation of one's soul! Throughout the whole year they cannot set aside even a few days for the salvation of their soul, when before their eyes there are almost daily examples of sudden death. And we will not remain silent about the person who indeed approaches the Chalice of Christ unworthily. Of such people the word of God says: *He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.* (I Cor 11:29).

Approaching this awesome mystery, we say, *neither like Judas will I give Thee a kiss.* Who is it that gives the Lord the kiss of Judas? Without a doubt, it is those who, not having cleansed their consciences by heartfelt repentance, not having grieved over their sins, approach the Chalice of Christ without the fear of God, or those who, having been joined to the Lord, having been sanctified by His most holy gift and freely cleansed of their innumerable transgressions,

the spawn of the spirit of malice, return again to their foul deeds, again become enslaved to Satan. Woe, eternal woe, to such people!

Let us conclude our discourse on the communion of the Holy Mysteries of Christ by pointing out some of the innumerable blessings which it bestows upon those who receive Communion worthily. According to the teaching of the Church (pre-Communion prayers), this most Holy Mystery of the Body and Blood gives to those partaking of it worthily strengthening of joints and bones, healing of divers infirmities, health, strength, preservation, salvation and sanctification of soul and body, estrangement and cleansing of a defiled soul, preservation from every soul-corrupting deed and word, protection from every action of the devil, a rampart and aid in dispersing the enemy (i.e., evil spirits); the driving away of every fantasy, evil act and work of the devil acting mentally in our members; the burning up and utter destruction of wicked thoughts and undertakings, and of nocturnal fantasies of the dark and evil spirits; correction of life and confirmation in holiness of life, keeping of the commandments, increase in virtue and perfection, enlightenment of the senses, peace of the powers of the soul, unashamed faith, fullness of wisdom, enlightenment of the eyes of the heart, boldness and love towards God, the gift of the Holy Spirit, an increase of divine grace; the abiding in our soul of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; strengthening of life, an earnest of the future life and kingdom, provision for eternal life, a good defense before the dread judgment seat of Christ, and communion of heavenly blessings.

With a conscience cleansed by the Mystery of Confession and with a sincere desire to correct our life, let us more and more often come to partake of the Heavenly Meal given us in the Mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ. And, by worthy reception of this lofty gift, we may in turn receive those innumerable gifts which are bestowed upon us through this great Mystery. Those of us who worthily taste this most Holy Bread here on earth have the eyes of our soul towards Him and we pray that, one day, we may be deemed worthy in partaking Christ more completely in heaven as well. And through His grace, we shall remain eternally in communion with and in the face to face vision of Jesus Christ, our Creator, Master and Redeemer, of which may we all be deemed worthy through His good pleasure and beneficence.

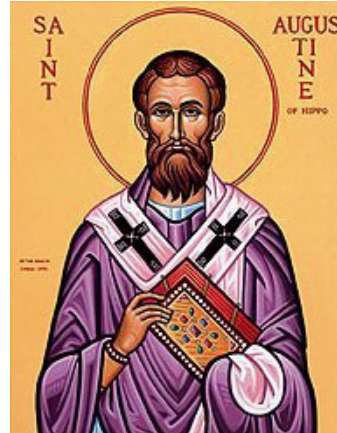


Be especially careful of the demon of apathetic listlessness (*Ed.*, ἀκηδία in Greek). Don't underestimate it. When it subjugates the soul, it drugs and paralyzes it. It is a large demon and enters man together with a great number of other demons.

Blessed Elder Porphyrios (+1991)

## REFORM YOUR LIFE!

By St. Augustine of Hippo (+430), an excerpt from "On Correcting One Another," *Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers, Vol. III:100*; Preservation Press, Swedesboro, NJ, 1996.



Come, Brethren, be reformed in your life! You dread lest an enemy should bring you before a court; and you have no fear that God will judge you? Where is your faith? Fear while you have time to fear. The Day of Judgment is indeed far off; but the last day of every individual man cannot be far away, for life is short. And since even this brief span is

uncertain, you know not when your last day will be.

Because of tomorrow correct your life today. Let the reproof in secret profit you now. I speak openly, but I am rebuking you in secret. I knock at the ears of all; but I address myself to the conscience of some in particular. Were I to say, "You, adulterer, mend your ways," I would in the first place say what I did not know, or maybe only suspect from something chance heard. But I do not say, "You, adulterer, mend your ways;" what I do say is this: "Let each one of you in this congregation who is an adulterer mend his ways." The rebuke is public; the amendment is in secret. He who fears God will, I know, amend his life.

I have come to know, and with me so will any man who has reflected even a little, that there is no man who fears God who will not amend his life at His word, unless it is the man who thinks he has a longer time to live. It is this that brings spiritual death to so many, as they keep saying, "tomorrow, tomorrow;" and all of a sudden the door is closed. He remains without, with his raven's croak, because his voice was not the grieving voice of the dove. Tomorrow, tomorrow... the voice of the raven. Mourn like the dove, and beat your breast; but as you beat your breast, let what you beat amend itself, lest you seem not so much to be beating your conscience as ramming it hard with blows; making a bad conscience more unyielding instead of more obedient. Mourn, but not in fruitless grieving.

It may be that you say to yourself: "God has promised me forgiveness, whenever I reform; so I am safe. I read in the Holy Scripture: *If the wicked do penance for his sins which he hath committed, and shall do justice, I will not remember all his iniquities.* (Ezek. 18:21, 22). I am safe; tomorrow, when I amend my life, God will pardon me and all of my sins." And what am I to say? Am I to cry out against God? Am I to say to God: Do not give him pardon? Am I to say that

this is not written in the Scripture, that God has not made this promise? If I were to say that, I would say what is false. You are right; what you say is true.

That God has promised you pardon when you amend your life, I cannot deny. I agree and I grant you and I know that God has promised you forgiveness. But who has promised you tomorrow? Where have you read that you will receive forgiveness (when you do penance), and also the book that tells you as to how much longer you have to live. It is not there, there is no such book, you say. Therefore you do not know how much longer you have to live. Then reform your life, and be always prepared.

Do not live in fear of the last day, as though it were a thief coming to wreck your house while you sleep; but keep watch, and amend your life this day. Why put it off for tomorrow? If your life is to be long, let it be happy as well as long. No one puts off a good long dinner; and by putting off your repentance and amendment, you choose in turn the bad meal, a long evil life! If it is to be long, it will be all the better for being good. If it is to be short, it is as well that its fruits should last. Men so neglect their own life that, in it, they will have nothing bad except the life itself. You buy a house; you look for a good one. You marry a spouse, you choose a good one. You desire children, and you hope they will be good. You buy shoes, and you will not have bad ones. But you love a bad life! What has life done to you that you will only have it bad? That among all the good things that are yours, your life alone is bad?

And so, brethren, should I wish to correct one among you in private, it may be in my prayer and desire that you will listen to me. In public I correct many among you. All of you seem to approve my words; would then some of you do as I say? I do not care for the man who approves of me with his voice, and scorns me in his heart. For when you approve of what I say, and yet do not amend your life, you are a witness against yourself. If your life is bad, and what I say pleases you, then be displeased with yourself; because if your life is bad, and you are displeased with it, once you amend it you will be pleased with yourself.

In all that I am saying to you now, I am placing a mirror before you. These are not my words. I speak to you only at the command of the Lord; for fear of whom I dare not be silent. Who would not rather be silent, and not have to render an account because of you? But we have already assumed a burden which we cannot, and ought not, throw off our shoulders. When the Epistle to the Hebrews was being read, my brethren, you heard these words: *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you* (Heb 13:17).

When do we do this with joy? When we see men draw fruit from God's words. When does the laborer work with joy in

his field? When he looks at the tree, and sees the fruit; when he looks at his crop, and looks forward to an abundant yield on the threshing floor; when he has not labored in vain, nor bent his back in vain, nor worn his hands in fruitless toil, nor borne in vain both heat and cold.

It is for this he says, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you. Did he say, Not profitable for them? No; he said, unprofitable for you. For when those placed over you are saddened by your wickedness it is profitable to them; their sadness is profitable to them; but it is not profitable for you. It is our desire that nothing shall profit us that does not profit you. Let us then, brethren, labor together in doing good in God's field, that together we may enjoy His reward.

Turning then to the Lord our God, the Father Almighty, let us, as best we can, give thanks with all our hearts, beseeching Him that in His goodness He will in mercy hear our prayers. And, by His grace, drive evil from our thoughts and actions, increase our faith, guide our thoughts, actions, guide our minds, grant us His holy inspirations, and bring us to joy without end, through His Son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.



The Master of all visible and invisible creation was not ashamed to humble Himself and to take upon Himself our human nature, subject as it was to the passions of shame and desire and condemned by divine judgment; and He became like us in all things except that He was without sin, that is, without ignoble passions. All the penalties imposed by divine judgment upon man for the sin of the first transgression—death, toil, hunger, thirst and the like—He took upon Himself, becoming what we are, so we might become what He is...

Being rich, He became poor for our sake, so that through His poverty we might become rich. In His great love for man He became like us, so that through every virtue we might become like Him.

St. Mark the Ascetic



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## ON DESPONDENCY

Bishop Arsenius Zhadanovsky (+1937).

Despondency springs from various sources, primarily from our physical illnesses. In this case, despondency is suppressed by spiritual inspiration, spiritual interests. *The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak*, it says in Scripture. The holy Apostle Paul was beset by a physical infirmity: *there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure*. (II Cor. 12:7). Saint John Chrysostom takes *thorn in the flesh* to mean a severe headache. However, the same Apostle Paul testifies: *I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong* (II Cor. 12:10), because he was wholly caught up in serving the Lord. Our bodily infirmities and the resultant despondency can be overcome only by the strengthening grace of God.

Despondency can also stem from a reduction of the powers of the soul, from loss of faith, from moral falls, from our sinfulness. The counsel in such cases is “to take a hair of the dog that bit you,” i.e., replace unbelief with firm belief in the Lord, change your bad ways to good ways, work to become morally renewed, spiritually energized and born again; repent and partake of the Holy Mysteries of Christ, and you will destroy despondency. To this second type of despondency can also be referred cases when it arises from grief, illness and misfortunes. Here, too, one can discern insufficient faith in the Lord and His Providence, and an excessive attachment to earthly things.

There is yet another type of despondency, one that afflicts people who are troubled by carnal sin. Here despondency is rooted, on the one hand, in a sickly condition, in physical weakness, and on the other hand, in spiritual faintheartedness, in spiritual emptiness. The remedy for this type of despondency lies partly in the physical strengthening of the organism. However, this type of despondency is very persistent and can turn into a chronic disposition. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that the underlying causes have disordered our entire psyche: they dull the memory and enfeeble the will. For this reason, we must draw upon ourselves as much of God's all-healing power as possible, for it alone is capable of restoring spiritual and physical strength.

Further, despondency can also be a kind of testing that comes to us as we walk towards the Lord. In spiritual life, this type of despondency is quite common. Here, explain the holy ascetics, the grace of God conceals itself for a time in order to train a person to strengthen his spiritual forces, and, at the same time, to compel him to seek the Lord more zealously and to love Him more ardently, for only in Him is there peace and true happiness. This type of despondency is

overcome by means of internal warfare. One must struggle against despondency, chase it away, not succumb to it; one must pray, compelling oneself if necessary, because despondency stifles all desire for prayer; one must entreat the Lord to banish from us despondency *by Thy holy angels drive away from me demonic despondency* (fourth Prayer Before Sleep of Saint Makarios the Great).

This latter type of despondency affects people who are not firmly grounded in spiritual life. However, it also strikes those renowned for their spiritual experience, when they are seized by a spirit of conceit and spiritual pride—from which may God protect us. In such cases, despondency is not so much a form of testing as it is a form of punishment by God, and often this despondency results in grave consequences: in a complete falling away from the Lord, in despair, and even suicide. However, in all types of despondency our physician is the Lord, and understandably so, for the Lord is our comfort, our joy, our gladness and our consolation.

One must not delay in warring against despondency, for the next step after despondency is despair—which leads to perdition. The melancholy and despondency that visit us from time to time are precursors of that melancholy that will prevail in the last times; as it says in the word of God, there will be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world. Now just imagine the spiritual state of the people of the last times!...



If you are not what you should be, you should not despair. It is bad enough that you have sinned; why in addition do you wrong God by regarding Him in your ignorance as powerless? Is He, who for your sake created the great universe that you behold, incapable of saving your soul? And if you say that this fact, as well as His incarnation, only makes your condemnation worse, then repent; and He will receive your repentance...

St. Peter of Damaskos



**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.**

## Ἡ Μητέρα τῆς Ζωῆς

Πρωτ. π. Γεωργίου Παπαβαρνάβα.

Κάθε χρόνο στις 15 Αὐγούστου ἐορτάζουμε τὴν Κοίμησι καὶ Μετάστασι τῆς Θεοτόκου, ποὺ ὀνομάζεται καὶ Πάσχα τοῦ καλοκαιριοῦ. Ἄν ἡ μνήμη ἐνὸς Ἁγίου ἀποτελῆ ἀφορμὴ χαρᾶς καὶ πανηγύρεως γιὰ ὅλη τὴν Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Κοινότητα, ἡ Κοίμησι τῆς Θεοτόκου εἶναι χαρὰ καὶ πανηγύρι ὑπέρλαμπρο γιὰ ὅλη τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη οἰκουμένη.

Ἡ Παναγία εἶναι ἡ Μητέρα τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ ἐπομένως εἶναι Μητέρα τῆς ζωῆς καὶ αἰτία τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης σωτηρίας. «Μετέστης πρὸς τὴν ζωὴν μήτηρ ὑπάρχουσα τῆς ζωῆς». Ἐπρεπε ὅμως καὶ αὐτὴ, ὅπως ὅλοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι, νὰ πληρώσῃ τὸ «κοινὸν χρέος», νὰ γνωρίσῃ τὸν θάνατο, ποὺ δὲν εἶναι δημιούργημα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ ἀποτέλεσμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας. Βέβαια, μετὰ τὴν Ἀνάστασι τοῦ Χριστοῦ καταργήθηκε ὁ θάνατος καὶ οἱ ψυχῆς τῶν δικαίων προγεύονται τὸν Παράδεισο. Τὰ σώματά τους θὰ ἀναστηθοῦν πνευματικὰ καὶ ἄφθαρτα, κατὰ τὴν Δευτέρα παρουσία τοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ θὰ ἐνωθοῦν τὸ καθένα μετὰ τὴν δική του ψυχὴ. Ὅμως, κατὰ θεία παραχώρησι καὶ φιλανθρωπία, ὑφίσταται ὁ πρόσκαιρος χωρισμὸς τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα, γιὰ νὰ μὴ γίνῃ «τὸ κακὸν ἀθάνατον». Διαλύεται στὸν τάφο τὸ ἀνθρώπινο σῶμα μέχρι τὴν κοινὴ ἐξανάστασι.

Ἀλλὰ τὸ θεοδόχο σῶμα τῆς Παναγίας, αὐτὸ τὸ σῶμα ποὺ ἐβάστασε γιὰ ἐννέα μῆνες καὶ ἐγαλούχησε ὡς βρέφος τὸν Θεὸν Λόγον, δὲν ἦταν δυνατὸν νὰ τὸ κρατήσῃ ὁ τάφος. Τρεῖς ἡμέρες μετὰ τὴν κοίμησίν της «μετέστησεν αὐτὴν πρὸς τὰς ἐκεῖθεν μονάς, Χριστὸς ὁ ἐξ αὐτῆς ἄνευ σπορᾶς γεννηθεὶς». Τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἀναστήθηκε, ἐνώθη μετὰ τὴν καθαρὴ ψυχὴ της καὶ, πνευματικὸ καὶ ἄφθαρτο, ἀναλήφθηκε στοὺς οὐρανοὺς, γιὰ νὰ εἶναι πάντοτε στοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων κοντὰ στὸν Υἱὸ καὶ Θεὸ της. «Διὸ θνήσκουσα, σὺν τῷ Υἱῷ ἐγείρη διαιωνίζουσα» (Κοσμᾶς ὁ Ποιητής, ἀΨδὴ Κανόνος στὴν Κοίμησι τῆς Θεοτόκου).

Στὸ τελευταῖο μυστήριό της ζωῆς της, τὴν ἐνδοξὴ Κοίμησίν της, ἔπρεπε νὰ εἶναι παρόντες ὅλοι οἱ «αὐτοπται τοῦ Λόγου καὶ ὑπηρεταί», δηλαδὴ οἱ Ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ Ἅγιοι Ἱεράρχες, ὅπως ὁ Διονύσιος ὁ Ἀρεοπαγίτης καὶ ὁ διδάσκαλος τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἱεροθέου, πρῶτος Ἐπίσκοπος Ἀθηνῶν. Γι' αὐτὸ μετὰ τρόπο θαυμαστὸ μαζεύτηκαν ὅλοι ἀπὸ τὰ πέρατα τῆς οἰκουμένης, γιὰ νὰ προπέμψουν τὸ Θεοδόχο καὶ ἀκραιφνέστατο σῶμα της. «Θεῖα δυνάμει περαιωθέντες τὴν Σιών κατελάμβανον καὶ πρὸς οὐρανὸν ἐπειγομένην, προέπειπον τὴν ἀνωτέραν τῶν Χερουβίμ».

Τὴν Μετάστασι τῆς Θεοτόκου, δηλαδὴ τὴν Ἀνάστασι καὶ Ἀνάληψι τοῦ σώματός της, βεβαιώνουν πολλοὶ Θεοφόροι Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, ὅπως οἱ Ἅγιοι Ἀνδρέας ὁ Κρήτης, Ἰωάννης ὁ Δαμασκηνός, Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς, Μάρκος ὁ Ἐφέσου, Θεόδωρος ὁ Στουδίτης καὶ ἄλλοι. Ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν ὑμνολογία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας τὸ γεγονὸς αὐτὸ τονίζεται καὶ ψάλλεται πανηγυρικὰ: «Τὴν ἐν πρεσβείαις ἀκοίμητον Θεοτόκον, καὶ προστασίαις ἀμετάθετον ἐλπίδα, τάφος καὶ νέκρωσις οὐκ ἐκράτησεν ὡς γὰρ ζωῆς Μητέρα πρὸς τὴν ζωὴν μετέστησεν, ὁ μήτραν οἰκήσας ἀειπάρθενον». (Κοντάκιο Ἑορτῆς).

Ἡ ἔξοδος τῆς Παναγίας ὑπῆρξε ἐνδοξὴ, ὅπως καὶ ὅλη ἡ ἐπίγεια ζωὴ της. Φυσικὰ γνώρισε καὶ αὐτὴ τὸν πόνο, ἀφοῦ αὐτὸς εἶναι συνυφασμένος μετὰ τὴν ζωὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου μετὰ τὴν πτώσι. Δὲν ὑπάρχει περίπτωσι νὰ μὴν πονέσῃ κανεὶς στὴν ζωὴ του, γι' αὐτὸ σημασία ἔχει τὸ πῶς ἀντιμετωπίζει τὴν ἀναποδιὴ καὶ τὴν θλίψι ποὺ προκαλοῦν τὸν πόνο. Ὁ τρόπος μετὰ τὸν ὁποῖο ἀντιμετωπίζονται ἔχει σχέση μετὰ τὴν νοοτροπία τοῦ καθενὸς καὶ τὴν ὅλη προσωπικότητά του. Οἱ ἀρρώστιες καὶ ὁ θάνατος ἀποτελοῦν ὀριακὰ σημεῖα τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης ζωῆς καὶ σὲ αὐτὰς τὴν περιπτώσι εἶναι δύσκολο νὰ ὑποκριθῇ κανεὶς. Ἐτσι φανερώνεται ἡ πνευματικὴ του κατάστασι, τὸ ποῖος πραγματικὰ εἶναι. Ἡ κοίμησι τῶν Ἁγίων, ὅπως ἄλλωστε καὶ ὅλη ἡ ζωὴ τους, εἶναι κάτι τὸ ἐκπληκτικὸ. Βλέπεις ἕνα πρόσωπο ἡρεμο, γαλήνιο, εἰρηνικὸ, χωρὶς ἄγχος καὶ τρόμο, νὰ περιμένῃ τὴν ἔξοδο ἀπὸ τὴν ζωὴ αὐτὴ μετὰ τέτοια λαχτάρια, ὅπως κάποιος ποὺ λείπει ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγαπημένη τοῦ πατρίδα πολλὰ χρόνια καὶ τώρα, ἐπὶ τέλους, ἐπιστρέφει στὸν τόπο ποὺ λατρεύει.

Τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τοῦ Θεοῦ δὲν τοὺς στενοχωροῦν οἱ θλίψεις, ἀντίθετα μάλιστα, τοὺς πλαταίνουν τὸν νοῦ καὶ τὴν καρδιά καὶ τοὺς ἀνοίγουν νέους ὀρίζοντες κατὰ τὸ Γραφικὸ, «ἐν θλίψει ἐπλάτυνας με» καὶ «ἐν παντὶ θλιβόμενοι ἀλλ' οὐ στενοχωρούμενοι». Μία ἁγιασμένη ὑπαρξὴ ἔλεγε: «Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ θὰ μετὰ νὰ στενοχωρηθῶ δὲν ἔχει γεννηθεῖ ἀκόμα».

Ἐπομένως, τὸ πρόβλημα στὴ ζωὴ δὲν εἶναι οἱ θλίψεις, ποὺ πάντα θὰ ὑπάρχουν, ἀλλὰ ὁ τρόπος μετὰ τὸν ὁποῖον ἀντιμετωπίζονται. Καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ τρόπος πρέπει νὰ εἶναι τέτοιος ποὺ νὰ βοηθᾷ στὸ νὰ ἀποφεύγεται ἡ σύγχυσι καὶ ἡ ἀπόγνωσι καὶ νὰ διατηρεῖται ἡ εἰρήνη τῆς ψυχῆς. Ὡς τέτοιος προτείνεται ἀπὸ τὴν μακρόχρονη πεῖρα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἡ ἀπόλυτη ἐμπιστοσύνη στὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ, καθὼς καὶ ἡ καταφυγὴ καὶ προσευχὴ στὴν Μητέρα τῆς Ζωῆς καὶ Μητέρα ὄλων μας.



## Ἡ Ψῆφος τῶν... Ἀγγέλων

Τοῦ Πρεσβυτέρου Ἀθανασίου Μηνᾶ.

Ἐὐρέθην πρὸ ἀρκετοῦ καιροῦ στὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος μὲ ἀποστολὴ νὰ μεταφέρω τὶς ἀνησυχίες πολλῶν πατέρων, ἱερέων, διακόνων, μοναχῶν καὶ λαϊκῶν θεολόγων σὲ ὅ,τι ἀφορᾷ τὸν θανάσιμο κίνδυνο γιὰ τὴν ἐν Χριστῷ ἐλευθερία τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων Ἑλλήνων, ἐξαιτίας τῆς «Κάρτας τοῦ Πολίτη» καὶ τὴν ὑποχρεωτικὴ χρῆση αὐτῆς στὴ ζωὴ τῶν πολιτῶν ποὺ μὲ ἀπειλές οἱ κρατοῦντες προσπαθοῦν νὰ ἐπιβάλλουν δικτατορικὰ στὸ λαό μας.

Ἄφου ἄκουσα τὴν ἀπάντησή τους μὲ προσοχή, ἀντήλλαξα διάφορες σκέψεις ὠφέλιμες μὲ πολλοὺς ἀγιορεῖτες πατέρες, ἡγουμένους καὶ μῆ. Κατενόησα δέ, ὅτι πολλοὶ ἐξ αὐτῶν ἀνησυχοῦσαν σφόδρα καὶ ἀνησυχοῦν ἕως τῆς σήμερον. Ἀπόδειξις ἢ γνωστὴ ἐγκύκλιος ποὺ ἐξέδωσε ἢ διπλὴ σύναξις τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους πρὸς τὸ Ὁρθόδοξο πλήρωμα.

Μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγες ἡμέρες, ἐνῶ ἡ ζέση ἦταν ἀνυπόφορη (ἀρχές Αὐγούστου 2010), ἀποφάσισα νὰ ἐπιστρέψω στὴ βάση μου, ἔχοντας ἀποκομίσει ἁγία ἐν πολλοῖς συμπεράσματα, τὰ ὁποῖα ἀνεκοίνωσα σὲ ἄλλους πατέρες.

Περιμένοντας νὰ ἔλθει ἡ ὦρα ποὺ τὸ λεωφορεῖο τῆς γραμμῆς θὰ μᾶς μετέφερε ἀπὸ τὶς Καρυές στὴ Δάφνη, μὲ πλησίασε ἕνας σεβάσιμος γέροντας, ἄγνωστος σὲ μένα, στάθηκε καὶ μὲ ρώτησε: «Πάτερ, εἶστε πνευματικός;»

Ντράπηκα νὰ τοῦ ἀπαντήσω καταφατικά. Τότε ἐκεῖνος μὲ ξαναρωτᾷει, κοιτώντας με διαπεραστικὰ στὰ μάτια, δίνοντάς μου νὰ καταλάβω ὅτι αὐτὴ τὴν ὦρα δὲν χρειάζονται ἀρρωστημένες ταπεινολογίες. Τοῦ ἀπήντησα, τότε, ὅτι μὲ τὴν χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ ἢ Ἐκκλησία μου εἶχε δώσει τὴν εἰδικὴ εὐλογία καὶ ἄδεια νὰ εἶμαι ἐξομολόγος.

Εὐθὺς ἀμέσως μου εἶπε ἐπὶ λέξι: «Πάτερ, πρὶν λίγες ἡμέρες εἶδα ἕνα φοβερὸ ὄραμα, τὸ ὁποῖο δὲν μπορῶ νὰ κρατήσω ἐπάνω μου. Νοιώθω τὴν ἀνάγκη νὰ τὸ ἀποκαλύψω σὲ πνευματικὸ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, μὲ τὴν παράκληση ἐκεῖνος νὰ τὸ χειριστεῖ ὅπως τὸν φωτίσει ὁ Θεός».

«Μιλήστε, πάτερ», τοῦ ἀπήντησα.

«Εἶδα, μου εἶπε, μεγάλη κινητικότητα στὶς οὐράνιες δυνάμεις Ἁγίων καὶ Ἀγγέλων, καὶ ἐνοιωσα ὅτι κάποιος μεγάλος κίνδυνος ἔρχεται στὸ ἐγγὺς μέλλον νὰ ἀπειλήσει τὴν πατρίδα μας καὶ ὅλους ἐμᾶς καὶ ὅτι αὐτὴ

ἡ κινητικότητα στὶς οὐράνιες δυνάμεις μου φάνηκε ὡς μιὰ προετοιμασία γιὰ ἄμεση βοήθεια στὴν πατρίδα μας καὶ τὸν λαό μας ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἁγίους μας».

Πρὶν προλάβω νὰ συνέλθω ἀπὸ τὴν ἐκπληξη, μὲ χαιρέτησε, καὶ μὲ τὸ ἀγιορεῖτικο «εὐλογεῖτε» ἀθόρυβα ἀπομακρύνθηκε. Ἐκτοτε δὲν τὸν ξαναεἶδα, οὔτε προσπάθησα νὰ μάθω ποῖος ἦταν.

Ἦλθε ἡ ὦρα τῆς ἀναχωρήσεως. Ἄνοιξαν οἱ πόρτες τοῦ λεωφορείου. Ἀνέβηκα καὶ κάθισα μὲ προορισμὸ τὴν Δάφνη, Οὐρανούπολη, Θεσσαλονίκη, Ἀθήνα. Τὸ γεγονὸς αὐτὸ ἐρχόταν περιοδικὰ, στὸ νοῦ μου ἐν τούτοις δὲν τοῦ ἔδωσα ἀπόλυτη προτεραιότητα στὴν ποιμαντικὴ μου διακονία. (Φοβήθηκα κατ' ἀρχὴν, ἐπειδὴ σύμφωνα μὲ τοὺς πατέρες ὑπάρχει καὶ ἡ πλάνη).

Ὅμως μετὰ τὶς ἐκλογές ποὺ ἐγιναν στὴ χώρα μας καὶ κατανοώντας τὸ ἀδιέξοδο στὸ ὁποῖο ὀδηγοῦμεθα καὶ τὸν ἄμεσο κίνδυνο ποὺ διατρέχουμε νὰ βρεθοῦμε ὅλοι στὸν ἀλληλοσπαραγμὸ ἢ στὸ χάος, θυμήθηκα ἐντονα τὰ λόγια τοῦ γέροντα τότε στὶς Καρυές καὶ σκέφθηκα νὰ δημοσιεύσω τὰ λεγόμενά του σὲ μένα, ὥστε, εἰ δυνατόν, νὰ γίνουν γνωστὰ στὸ πανελλήνιο. Προσευχόμενος ταυτόχρονα, μὲ θερμὴ παράκληση στὸν Κύριο καὶ Βασιλέα Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ νὰ βοηθήσει τὴν πατρίδα μας καὶ τὸν λαό μας καὶ νὰ στρέψει σὲ ἀληθινὴ μετάνοια τὶς καρδιές ὅλων μας ὥστε νὰ ἀντιληφθοῦμε, ἄρχοντες καὶ ἀρχόμενοι, τὴν ἐπερχόμενη δαιμονικὴ μπόρα ποὺ φανερὰ πλέον πλησιάζει.

### ΣΥΜΠΕΡΑΣΜΑ

Ὅταν τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ, οἱ Γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι, οἱ Σαδδουκαῖοι καὶ οἱ Ἑρωδιανοί, σατανοκίνητοι ὄντες, ἀποφάσισαν νὰ ἐξοντώσουν τὸν Υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὸν Θεάνθρωπο Μεσσία Ἰησοῦ, ἐπειδὴ ἡ διαβολικὴ τους ὑπερηφάνεια δὲν τοὺς ἄφηνε περιθώρια νὰ κατανοήσουν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Σωτῆρος Χριστοῦ, τότε ἀκριβῶς ὁ Κύριος, ἀπεκάλυψε στὶς γυναῖκες ἐκεῖνες ποὺ ἐκλαιγαν, ὅταν ματωμένος περνοῦσε σηκώνοντας τὸν Τίμιον Σταυρὸ Του ἀπὸ μπροστά τους, τὰ ἐπερχόμενα δεινὰ ποὺ θὰ βίωναν οἱ ἴδιες, τὰ παιδιὰ τους καὶ ἡ πόλις τῆς Ἱερουσαλὴμ πολὺ σύντομα. Ὅπως ἐπίσης, καὶ σὲ ἄλλη στιγμὴ ἐνώπιον τῶν Ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων προεφήτευσε τὴν καταστροφὴ τοῦ Ναοῦ καὶ τὴν ἰσοπέδωση τῆς πόλης. Αὐτὰ συνέβησαν ἀκριβῶς ἐπὶ Τίτου τὸ 67 μ.Χ. ὅπως ἡ ἱστορία ἔχει καταγράψει.



Ὅμως, τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ πάλι, σὲ ἀντίθεση μὲ τὴν στάση του πρὸς τοὺς Ἑβραίους, παρήγγειλε νὰ βρισκονται σὲ ἐγρήγορη ἐκείνοι πού τὸν πίστεψαν, τὸν δέχτηκαν καὶ τὸν ἀγάπησαν, δηλαδή τοὺς Ὁρθοδόξους, ἔτοιμοι, ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ δεόμενοι, ὥστε ὅταν θὰ ἔβλεπαν τὰ στρατεύματα νὰ κυκλώνουν τὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ, νὰ ἀπομακρυνθοῦν ἐγκαίρως καὶ νὰ κρυφτοῦν στὶς σπηλιές καὶ στοὺς γύρω λόφους, δίνοντάς τους τὴν ὑπόσχεση ὅτι Ἐκεῖνος θὰ μερμνοῦσε καὶ θὰ τοὺς ἔσωζε ἀπὸ τὴν φοβερὴ αὐτὴ δοκιμασία.

Καὶ πράγματι ἔτσι ἔγινε. Αὐτὸ πού συνέβη εἶναι ὄντως ἐκπληκτικὸ. Οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι, κληρὸς καὶ λαός, πού πίστευσαν τὸν λόγο τοῦ Μεσσίου, ἀτενίζοντας τὰ στρατεύματα τοῦ Τίτου, ἔφυγαν ἔξω τῆς πόλεως Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ σώθηκαν. Οἱ ἐχθροὶ Του δέ, πού τὸν ἀρνήθηκαν, βλέποντας τὰ στρατεύματα νὰ κυκλώνουν τὴν πόλιν, παρέμειναν μέσα σὲ αὐτὴν καὶ στὸ Ναό, ἐλπίζοντας ὅτι θὰ σωθοῦν. Καὶ ὅπως ἀναφερθήκαμε πρὸ πάνω, τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα πού ἦταν τραγικὸ καὶ φοβερό, τὸ ἔχει ἤδη καταγράψει ἡ Ἱστορία. Πράγματι, δὲν ἔμεινε λίθος ἐπὶ λίθου καὶ ὄλοι ὅσοι δὲν τὸν πίστεψαν πέρασαν ἀπὸ στόματι μαχαίρας. Ὁ δὲ Ναός καταστράφηκε καὶ παραμένει ἔτσι ἕως τῆς σήμερον.

Τηρουμένων λοιπὸν τῶν ἀναλογιῶν, ἀγαπητοὶ μου Ὁρθόδοξοι ἀδελφοί, κληρε καὶ λαὸ τοῦ Τριαδικοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τοῦ Σωτῆρος Χριστοῦ, ἀναρωτιέμαι μήπως τώρα εἶναι ἐπὶ θύραις ἢ ὥρα τῆς προφητείας τοῦ πατρὸς Παΐσιου γιὰ τὴν μπόρα τὴν δαμονική.

Ὅσοι ἔχουν νοῦν Χριστοῦ καὶ εἶναι ἀκόλουθοι τῶν Ἁγίων, ἀντιλαμβάνονται ἀκριβῶς ὅτι αὐτὰ πού συμβαίνουν σήμερα δὲν εἶναι ἀπλῶς θέατρον τοῦ παραλόγου, ὅπως μᾶς τσαμπουνίζουν ὄλοι στὰ μέσα μαζικῆς ἐνημέρωσης ἀλλὰ τουναντίον, ἄνθρωποι πού ἀρνήθηκαν καὶ ἀρνοῦνται στὴν πράξη τὸν Χριστὸν καὶ τὴν διδασκαλίαν Του, κατήντησαν κατοικητήρια πολλῶν δαιμόνων, οἱ ὁποῖοι ὄχι μόνο κανοναρχοῦν τὴν δική τους ζωὴ ἕως τῆς τελικῆς ἐξοντώσεώς τους, ἐπειδὴ οἱ δαίμονες δὲν ἔχουν ἀγάπη, ἀλλὰ ἀλλοίμονον, παρασύρουν καὶ ὄσους τοὺς ἐμπιστεύονται ἢ θὰ τοὺς ἐμπιστευθοῦν τὴν ζωὴ τους τὶς ἐπόμενες ἡμέρες!

Καὶ γεννάται αἰφνης τὸ ἐρώτημα: «Τὶ μέλλει γενέσθαι; Τὶ ὀφείλουμε νὰ πράξουμε;» Εἶναι πολὺ ἀπλὸ καὶ εὐκόλο ἀδελφοί μου.

Ἄς μετανοήσουμε εἰλικρινὰ ὄλοι οἱ Ἕλληνες κ' ἄς κλάψουμε. Καὶ ἐφ' ὅσον ἐπιστρέψουμε στὸν ἀληθινὸ Ποιμένα καὶ Ἐπίσκοπο τῶν ψυχῶν μας, τὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστό, τὸν Βασιλέα τῶν βασιλευόντων καὶ Κύριο τῶν κυριευόντων, ἄς Τοῦ ζητήσουμε μὲ καρδιακὴ προσευχὴ ταπεινὰ νὰ βοηθήσει τὸ ποιμνίό Του, τὴν Ἐκκλησία Του, τὴν πατρίδα μας, τὸν κόσμον ὅλο, πού

κεῖται στὴν ἀπόλυτη ἀποστασία καὶ διαφθορά, ὥστε, εἰ δυνατόν, καὶ οἱ Εὐρωπαῖοι καὶ ὁλόκληρος ὁ κόσμος, νὰ βαπτισθοῦν Ὁρθοδόξως καὶ νὰ ἀπομακρυνθοῦν ἀπὸ τὴν πλάνη πού τοὺς δέρνει καὶ τοὺς καθιστᾷ σκληρόκαρδους καὶ ἀπάνθρωπους.

Μὲ ἐκπληξὴ ἀκούσαμε, αὐτὲς τὶς ἡμέρες, τὶ ζήτησε ἡ Εὐρωπαϊκὴ Ἐνωση ἀπὸ τὴν Σλοβακία γιὰ νὰ γίνει μέλος της. νὰ ἀρνηθοῦν, τοὺς εἶπαν, οἱ Σλοβάκοι τὸ ἔθμικὸ τους δίκαιο καὶ νὰ νομοθετοῦν στὸ ἐξῆς σύμφωνα μὲ τὸ Εὐρωπαϊκὸ Δίκαιο, μὲ πρῶτο τὸν νόμον γιὰ τὴν νομιμοποίηση τῆς ὁμοφυλοφιλίας, ὅπως ἐπίσης καὶ τὴν σιωπηλὴ ἀνοχή τους στὰ ἐγκλήματα τῆς παιδεραστίας, καθὼς καὶ σὲ κάθε σηπώδη καὶ βορβορῶδη ἀνηθικότητα πού μαζὶ μὲ τὴν ἐκμετάλλευση τοῦ ἐνὸς πρὸς τὸν ἄλλον πρυτανεύουν στὴν Εὐρωπαϊκὴ κουλτούρα. Ἐσχάτως, σύμφωνα μὲ τὰ ΜΜΕ, σὲ ὅ,τι ἀφορᾷ τὸν κυνεδισμό, ἀπέκτησαν συνήγορο, τὸν Πρόεδρο τῶν ΗΠΑ, Ὀμπάμα. Τὶ νὰ πεῖ κανεῖς!!! Ἴσως ὁ πόνος καὶ τὰ δάκρυα θὰ δώσουν τὴ λύση παγκοσμίως.

Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, Γιὲ τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ Ζῶντος, ἐλέησον καὶ σώσον ἡμᾶς καὶ τὴν πατρίδα μας ἀπὸ τὰ ἐπερχόμενα δεινὰ πού καθαρὰ φαίνονται στὸν ὀρίζοντα τῆς ἀνθρωπότητας καὶ τάχιστα ΚΑΤΑΦΘΑΝΟΥΝ...

Ἀμήν.



Ἐχοντας τὸ φόβο τοῦ Θεοῦ ζωντανὸ στὴ σκέψη μας, νὰ θυμόμαστε πάντοτε τὸ θάνατο. Νὰ μισήσουμε τὸν κόσμον καὶ ὅλα τὰ τοῦ κόσμου, νὰ μισήσουμε κάθε σαρκικὴ ἀνάπαυση, νὰ ἀαρνηθοῦμε στὴ ζωὴ αὐτὴ, γιὰ νὰ ζήσουμε μὲ τὸν Θεό. Νὰ θυμᾶστε τί ὑποσχεθήκατε στὸν Θεό. Γιατὶ αὐτὸ θὰ μᾶς τὸ ζητήσει τὴν ἡμέρα τῆς κρίσεως. Ἄς δοκιμασθοῦμε λοιπὸν μὲ τὴν πείνα, τὴ δίψα καὶ τὴ γύμνια. Ἄς ἀγρυπνήσουμε, ἄς πενήθισουμε, ἄς στενάξουμε μὲ τὴν καρδιά μας. Ἄς ἐρευνήσουμε ἂν γίναμε ἄξιοι τοῦ Θεοῦ. Νὰ ἀγαπήσουμε τὴ θλίψη, γιὰ νὰ βροῦμε τὸν Θεό. Νὰ καταφρονήσουμε τὴ σάρκα, γιὰ νὰ σωθεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ μας.

Ἀββᾶς Ἀντώνιος

Ἀπὸ τὸ «Μέγα Γεροντιοκὸν»

## Ἡ Φοβερὴ Προφητεία Ἐπιγραφή σπὸν Τάφο τοῦ Μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου

Ἀπὸ διαφορῆς πηγῆς.

Τὸ ἱερὸν λείψανον τοῦ Μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου ἀνεκωμίσθη ἐκ Νικομηδείας ὑπὸ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ διαδόχου αὐτοῦ Κωνσταντίνου κατὰ τὸ ἔτος 350 μ.χ. καὶ κατετέθη εἰς τὸν ναὸν τῶν Ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων ἐκ Κωνσταντινουπόλεως (τὸ νῦν Τουρκικὸν τέμενος Σουλτὰν Σελῆμ ἢ Φατίχ).

Ἐπὶ τῆς Χρυσῆς Λάρνακος, ἣτις καὶ σήμερον ἀκόμη ὑπάρχει καὶ ἀσφαλῶς θὰ εὑρίσκειται εἰς τὸ ἐν Ἁγία Σοφία ἀρχαιολογικὸν Τουρκικὸν Μουσεῖον, εἶναι ἐγκαραγμένη μετὰ ἐλλειπογράμματους στίχους ἡ ἀναφερομένη προφητεία τὴν ὁποία ἐξήγησεν ὁ Γεώργιος Σχολάριος, ὁ πρῶτος μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Οἰκουμενικὸς Πατριάρχης (μετονομασθεὶς Γεννάδιος).

Τὸ κείμενο τῆς ἐγκαραγμένη ἐπιγραφῆς-προφητείας, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς βρέθηκε πάνω στὴν πλάκα τοῦ μνήματος, ἦταν αὐτὸ:

**Τ. πτ. τ. ιδτ. Η βελ. τ. ιμλ. Ο Κλμν. μαμθ. μ. δ. ν. τροσ. γν. τ. πλολγ. τ. επτλφ. κρτσ. εσθ. βελε. εθν. ππλ. κτξ. κ. τ. νο. ερμσ. μχο. τ. εξν. πτ. ιστρογν. πθσ. τ. ινδκτ. πλυσ. κτδ. τ. εντ. τ. ιδκτ. ε. τβρ. τ. μορ. μλ. δ. ν. στρτσ. τ. δκτ. τ. ιδκτ. τ. δμτ. τροσ. πλ. εσπτιψ. ετ. χν. τ. δμτ. πλμ. εγρ. μγ. μοκτ. στρβν. κ. τ. πλθ. κ. τ. φλ. σνδ. τ. επρ. δ. θλσ. κ. ξρ. τ. πλμ. σνω. κ. τ. ισμλ. τροσ. τ. απγν. ατ. βολσ. ελτ. μκρ. ολγ. τ. δ. ξθ. γν. αμ. μτ. τ. πκτρ. ολ. ιμλ. τισ. τ. επλφ. επρο. μετ. τ. προμ. ττ. πλμ. εγρ. εφλ. ηγρων. μχ. τ. ππτ. ωρ. κ. φν. βο. ττ. στ. στ. μτ. φβ. σπστ. πλ. σδω. ε. τ. δξ. τ. μορ. αδ. ερτ. γν. θμοστ. κ. ρμλο. ττ. εξτ. δσπυ. φλ. γ. εμ. υπχ. κ. ατ. προλβτ. θλμ. εμ. πλρτ.**

Ἡ ἀποκωδικοποίηση τοῦ κειμένου ἀπὸ τὸν Οἰκουμενικὸν Πατριάρχην Γεννάδιο:

**Τῇ μὲν πρώτῃ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Ἰσμαῆλ ὁ καλούμενος Μωάμεθ μέλλει διὰ τὴν τροπώσῃ γένος τῶν Παλαιολόγων τὴν ἐπτάλοφον κρατήσει ἔσθθεν βασιλεύσει ἔθνη πάμπολλα κατάρξει καὶ τὰς νήσους ἐρημώσῃ μέχρι τοῦ Εὐξείνου Πόντου ἰστρογείτονας πορθήσει τῇ ὀγδόῃ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου Πελοπόννησον κατάρξει τῇ ἐνάτῃ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου εἰς τὰ βόρεια τὰ μέρη μέλλει διὰ τὴν στρατεύσει τῇ δεκάτῃ τῆς Ἰνδίκτου τοὺς Δαλμάτας τροπώσει πάλιν ἐπιστρέψει ἔτι χρόνον τοῖς Δαλμάταις πόλεμον ἐγείρει μέγαν μερικὸν τε συντριβῆναι καὶ τὰ πλήθη καὶ τὰ φύλλα**

**συνοδοὶ τῶν ἐσπεριῶν διὰ θαλάσσης καὶ ξηρᾶς τὸν πόλεμον συνάψουν καὶ τὸν Ἰσμαῆλ τροπώσουν. Τὸ δὲ ἀπογόνων αὐτοῦ βασιλεύσει ἔλαττον. Τὸ δὲ ξανθὸν γένος ἅμα μετὰ τῶν πρακτόρων ὄλων Ἰσμαῆλ κατατροπώσουν τὴν ἐπτάλοφο ἐπάρουν μετὰ πάντων προνομίων τότε πόλεμον ἐγείρουν ἔμφυλον ἠγριωμένον μέχρι τῆς πεμπταίας ὥρας καὶ φωνὴ βοήσει στήτε στήτε μετὰ φόβου σπεύσατε πολλὰ σπουδαίως εἰς τὰ δεξιὰ τὰ μέρη ἄνδρα εὗρητε γενναῖον θαυμαστὸν καὶ ρωμαλέον τοῦτον ἔξετε δεσπότην φίλος γὰρ ἐμοῦ ὑπάρχει καὶ αὐτὸν παραλαβόντες θέλημα ἐμὸν πληροῦται.**

### Λεπτομερῆς Ἀνάλυσις

Εἶναι βέβαιον καὶ οὐδεμία ὑπάρχει ἀμφιβολία ὅτι ὁ χρησμοὶς ἢ μᾶλλον ἡ καταπληκτικὴ αὕτη προφητεία ἐγράφη ὑπὸ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας καὶ ἐν γνώσει καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ Αὐτοκράτορος Διαδόχου τοῦ Μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου.

Ἡ ἀνάλυσις τῆς προφητείας ἔχει ὡς ἐξῆς (μετὰ ἔντονα τὸ πρωτότυπο κείμενο, ἀκολουθεῖ ἐρμηνεῖα τοῦ κ. Γεώργιου Η. Μπούρα, ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον «Πνευματικὴ Διαθήκη», 1972).

**Τῇ μὲν πρώτῃ τοῦ Ἰνδίκτου ὁ καλούμενος Μωάμεθ μέλει διὰ τὴν τροπώσῃ γένος τῶν Παλαιολόγων.**

Ἡ λέξις ΙΝΔΙΚΤΟΣ ἔχει εὐρύτεραν σημασίαν δηλοῦσα ἐποχὴν μακρὰν καθ' ἣν ἐγένοντο αἱ διάφοροι Τουρκικαὶ κατακτήσεις. Οἱ Τοῦρκοι ὀνομάζονται ΙΣΜΑΗΛΙΤΑΙ ὡς ἀσπασθέντες τὴν Μουσουλμανικὴν θρησκείαν. Ἡ ἐπόμενη φράσις «ὁ ΚΑΛΟΥΜΕΝΟΣ ΜΩΑΜΕΘ μέλει διὰ τὴν τροπώσῃ γένος

τῶν Παλαιολόγων», ἐννοεῖ τὸν κατακτητὴν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως καὶ τὸν Κωνσταντῖνον Παλαιολόγον, ὅστις ἔπεσε κατὰ τὴν ἄλωσιν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως τὸ ἔτος 1453. Παρατηρήσατε τὸ 353 μ.χ. ἡ προφητεία ὁμιλεῖ διὰ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Παλαιολόγου καὶ τοῦ κατακτητοῦ Μωάμεθ! Δηλαδή πρὸ 1.100 ἐτῶν ποῖος ὅθεν ἀμφιβάλλει ὅτι ἡ προφητεία αὕτη δὲν εἶναι Θεόπνευστος;

**Τὴν ἐπτάλοφον κρατήσει, ἔσθθεν δὲ Βασιλεύσει καὶ τὰς νήσους ἐρημώσῃ μέχρι τοῦ Εὐξείνου Πόντου.**

**Ἰστρογείτονας πορθήσει, τῇ ὀγδόῃ τοῦ Ἰνδίκτου Πελοπόννησον καταρξει.**

Ἡ λέξις ΙΣΤΡΟΓΕΙΤΟΝΕΣ εἶναι οἱ περὶ τὸν ποταμὸν Ἰστρὸν ἢ Δούναβιν γειτονιάζοντες νῦν Ρουμάνοι.



*Τῇ ἐννάτῃ τοῦ Ἰνδίκτου εἰς τὰ βόρεια τὰ μέρη μέλλει διὰ τὴν στρατεύσῃ.*

*Τῇ δεκάτῃ τοῦ Ἰνδίκτου τοὺς Δαλμάτας ἐκτροπώσῃ πάλιν δ' οὗτος ἐπιστρέφει.*

*Ἐτι χρόνον τοῖς Δαλμάταις πόλεμον ἐγείρει μέγαν μερικὸν τὲ συντριβεῖναι.*

Δία τῆς φράσεως ETI XPONON TOIS DALMATAIΣ POLEMON EGHEIPEI MEGAN MERIKON TE SYNTRIBHNAI ὑπονοεῖται ἡ μέχρι Βιέννης προέλασις κατόπιν τῶν Τούρκων πρὸ τῆς ὁποίας ἀνεκόπησαν, ἡττηθέντες ὑπὸ τῶν Οὐγγῶν καὶ τῶν συμμάχων αὐτῶν κατὰ τὸ ἔτος 1683.

*Καὶ τὰ πλήθη καὶ τὰ φύλλα συνωδοὶ τῶν ἐσπερίων διὰ θαλάσσης καὶ ξηρᾶς τότε Πόλεμον συνάφουν καὶ τὸν Ἰσμαὴλ τροπώσουν.*

Ἡ φράσις ὑπονοεῖ τὴν ἡτταν τῶν Τούρκων ὑπὸ τῶν Δυτικῶν Δυνάμεων κατὰ τὸν 1ον Παγκόσμιον πόλεμον 1924-1918.

*Τὸ δὲ ἀπόγονον αὐτοῦ βασιλεύσει ἔλαττον.*

Ἡ φράσις ἐννοεῖ τὸν διάδοχον τοῦ Σουλτανικοῦ καθεστώτος, τὸ ψευτο-δημοκρατικὸν πολίτευμα τῶν καιρῶν μας, τὸ ὁποῖο θὰ κρατήσει πολὺ ὀλίγον.

*Τὸ δὲ ξανθὸν γένος ἅμα μετὰ τῶν πρακτόρων ὄλων Ἰσμαὴλ κατατροπώσουν τὴν ἐπτάλοφο ἐπάρουν μετὰ πάντων προνομίων.*

Ἡ φράσις ἐννοεῖ τὴν κατάληψιν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως μετὰ τῶν στενῶν ἐν τῷ ἅμα ὑπὸ τοῦ ΞΑΝΘΟΥ ΓΕΝΟΥΣ ΤΟΥ ΡΩΣΣΙΚΟΥ καὶ τῶν δορυφόρων αὐτοῦ Βουλγάρους κ.λπ.

Ὅτι τὸ Ξανθὸν γένος εἶναι τὸ Ρωσικὸν οὐδεμία ἀμφιβολία ὑπάρχει διότι τοῦτο ἀναφέρει σαφῶς ὁ Ἅγιος Ἀνδρέας ὁ κατὰ Χριστὸν Σαλὸς ἀκμάσας κατὰ τὸ ἔτος 340 μ.χ. καὶ ὁ ὁποῖος λέγει: «Ἐγὼ δὲ φημι ὅτι τὸ Ξανθὸν γένος εἰσελεύσεται εἰς τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολιν καὶ τὰ κῶλα τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καταστρέψουσιν, ἄρχεται δὲ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐκ τοῦ δεκάτου ἐβδόμου γράμματος τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ ἀλφαβήτου ἀνακεφαλαιούμενον». Τὸ 17<sup>ον</sup> γράμμα τοῦ ἀλφαβήτου εἶναι τὸ (Ρ)ωσικόν. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ Ἅγιος Ταράσιος, Οἰκουμενικὸς Πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἀναφέρει: «Ἴσχυς δὲ πρῶτον ἔσται Βορείων ἐπὶ τῆς Ἑπταλόφου Γέτας δὲ οὗτοι Μασσογέται Ρώσσοι». Ἀκόμη δὲ καὶ ὁ Προφήτης Ἰεζεκιήλ, 600 ἔτη πρὸ Χριστοῦ, ἀναφέρει ὅτι τὸ γένος τοῦτο θὰ κατέλθῃ ἐκ τοῦ Βορρᾶ καὶ θὰ κατασυντριβῇ εἰς τὰ ὄρια τῆς Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ Κωνσταντινουπόλεως: «ΓΩΓ ΚΑΙ ΜΑΓΩΓ ΗΓΕΜΩΝ ΤΟΥ ΡΩΣ».

Παρατηρήσατε τὴν πορφητεία τῆς Λάρνακος τοῦ Μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου: οὐδεμίαν μνεῖαν κάμνει διὰ τὸν 2<sup>ον</sup> Παγκόσμιον Πόλεμον, ἀλλὰ μετὰ τὸν 1<sup>ον</sup> ἀναφέρει μόνον τὸ Δημοκρατικὸν καθεστῶς τῆς Τουρκίας ποῦ θὰ βασιλεύσῃ ὀλίγον καὶ ἀναφέρει

κατόπιν τὴν κατάληψιν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ὑπὸ τοῦ Ξανθοῦ γένους τῆς Ρωσσίας. Ἡ Τουρκία οὐδόλως ἀνεμίχθη εἰς τὸν 2<sup>ον</sup> Παγκόσμιον Πόλεμον καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ὀρθῶς δὲν ἀναφέρει περὶ αὐτῆς.

*Τότε πόλεμον ἐγείρουν ἔμφυλον ἡγριωμένον μέχρι τῆς πεμπταίας ὥρας.*

*Καὶ φωνὴ βοήσῃ στήτε στήτε μετὰ φόβον σπεύσατε πολλὰ σπονδαίως εἰς τὰ δεξιὰ τὰ μέρη ἄνδρα εὐρητε γενναῖον θαυμαστὸν καὶ ρωμαλέον τοῦτον ἔξετε δεσπότην φίλος γὰρ ἐμοῦ ὑπάρχει.*

*Καὶ αὐτὸν παραλαβόντες θέλημα ἐμὸν πληροῦται.*

Ἡ φράσις «καὶ φωνὴ βοήσῃ τρίτον ΣΤΗΤΕ ΣΤΗΤΕ ΜΕΤΑ ΦΟΒΟΥ» ἐννοεῖ τὸ θαῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν φωνὴν τοῦ Ἀρχαγγέλου ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν δι' οὗ θὰ σταματήσει ὁ Πόλεμος καὶ τὸ ὁποῖον θαῦμα θὰ γίνῃ ἄνωθεν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως καὶ θὰ στραφῇ τὸ τόξον ἐκ τοῦ σημείου τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ πρὸς τὰ δεξιὰ, τὰ μέρη τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἐξ' ἧς θὰ ἀποκαλυφθῇ ὁ ἐκλεκτός του Θεοῦ Βασιλεὺς Ἰωάννης.

Διὰ τὸ θαῦμα τοῦτο γράφει ἐκτεταμένως ὁ Λέων ὁ Σοφὸς Αὐτοκράτωρ τοῦ Βυζαντίου τὰ ἐξῆς: «Ὁραθήσεται γὰρ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ νεφῶδες στερέωμα λαμπρότερον τοῦ ἡλίου, ἄνωθεν δὲ κρεμασθήσεται Σταυρός. Εὐωνύμου δὲ τοῦ Σταυροῦ τοῦ πορφυροῦ ἐκτεταμένον τόξον, οἷον ἔθετε τοῖς Πατράσιν ἡμῶν εἰς Διαθήκην αἰώνιον, ἀγνοούντων δὲ πάντων ἀνακληθήσεται τὸ τόξον διὰ τοῦ νοτίου μέρους, ὁ ἔσται ἐκτελούμενον ἐν τῷ κλίματι τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, καὶ πληρωθήσεται τὸ πέρας ἕως τῆς σκηνῆς, ἀναδειχθήσεται δὲ τὴ θέσει τῆς καλλίας τοῦ Ἀληθινοῦ Βασιλέως. Τότε οἱ Λαοὶ ἰδόντες δοξάσουσι τὸν Θεὸν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ δρομαίως σπεύσουσιν εἰς τὸ ἄκρον τοῦ τόξου καὶ λαβόντες τὸν Πολύτιμον καὶ γηραιὸν Ἄνακτα μετὰ λαμπάδων καὶ Βαίῶν φέρουσιν αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ Ἁγίᾳ Σοφίᾳ. Καὶ κῆρυξ βροντώδῃ τῇ φωνῇ καὶ μὴ φαινόμενος ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ πρὸς τὸν Λαὸν εἶπη: ΑΡΕΣΤΟΣ ΥΜΙΝ ΕΣΤΙΝ ΟΥΤΟΣ!»!



**Λ**οιπόν, ζωὴ χωρὶς Χριστὸν δὲν εἶναι ζωὴ. Πάει, τελείωσε. Ἄν δὲ βλέπεις τὸ Χριστὸν σὲ ὅλα σου τὰ ἔργα καὶ τίς σκέψεις, εἶσαι χωρὶς Χριστό. Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι νέα ζωὴ. Πῶς τὸ λέω; Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι τὸ Πᾶν. Εἶναι ἡ χαρὰ, εἶναι ἡ ζωὴ, εἶναι τὸ φῶς, τὸ φῶς τὸ ἀληθινό, ποῦ κάνει τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ χαίρεται, νὰ πετάει, νὰ βλέπει ὅλα, νὰ βλέπει ὅλους, νὰ πονάει γιὰ ὅλους, νὰ θέλει ὅλους μαζί του, ὅλους κοντὰ στὸ Χριστό.

**Γέροντας Πορφύριος Κουσοκαλυβίτης (+1991)**

## Μὴ Γίνεσθε Σκλάβοι Ἀνθρώπων

K. Ζουράρις, ἀπὸ τὸ περιοδικὸν «Ἄρδην» τ. 11.

**La science est trop lente,  
que la priere qalope  
et que lumiere gronde.**

**Ἡ ἐπιστήμη εἶναι πολὺ ἀργή,  
ὅτι ἡ προσευχὴ καλπάζει  
καὶ τὸ φῶς βρυχᾶται.**

[Ἀρθοῦρος Ρεμπὼ, «*Une Saison en Enfer*»—  
«Μία Ἐποχὴ στὴν Κόλαση»]

† † †

Ἐπάρχει στὸν πλανήτη ἓνας τόπος ὅπου θάλλει ὡς καθεστῶς, μόνιμο διότι εἶναι καὶ νόμιμο, ἡ οἰκουμενικότης. Τόπος τέτοιος δὲν εἶναι βεβαίως ὁ ΟΗΕ, διότι ἐκεῖ σαρώνει τὸ Συμβούλιο Ἀσφαλείας του. Καὶ μέχρι νὰ καταργηθῆ τὸ Συμβούλιο Ἀσφαλείας, οἰκουμενικότης δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ὑπάρξει. Ἄλλωστε, καὶ μετὰ ἀπὸ τὴν ἐνδεχομένη τοῦ ἐξαφάνιση, θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ καταργηθοῦν καὶ οἱ ψηφοφορίες ἀπὸ τὸν ΟΗΕ. Μὲ νόμιμο τὸ νόμιμον, ἄλλωστε, 51%-49%, καθεστῶς οἰκουμενικότης δὲν ὑφίσταται. Κατατυραννεῖ, ἀπλῶς, ἡ δικτατορία τῆς «ψηφοφορίας». Κι ἂν ὑπάρχει ἀντίρρηση ἐπ’ αὐτοῦ, ἄς ρωτήσουμε τὸ νικημένο 49%, πῶς νοιώθει...

Οὔτε τὸ Ἴντερνέτ, βεβαίως, παράγει οἰκουμενικότητα, διότι ἄλλο κυκλοφορία κι ἄλλο εὐφορία. Ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ Οἰκουμενικὸ Πατριαρχεῖο δὲν παράγει καθεστῶς οἰκουμενικό, διότι χρειάζεται νὰ ἔχει ἐνορίες. Χωρὶς ἐνορία, πατριαρχεῖο Οἰκουμενικὸ δὲν νοεῖται, ἄρα, χωρὶς κάποια τουλάχιστον ὄρια, τὸ Πατριαρχεῖο παύει ὑφιστάμενο.

Ἡ οἰκουμενικότης ὅμως εἶναι ἓνα καθεστῶς, ποὺ καταργεῖ τὸ ὄριον, εἶναι πέραν τῶν ὁρίων ποὺ θέτουν ἀμοιβαίως ἢ ἑτεροβαρῶς οἱ ἄνθρωποι, ὅπως π.χ. τὸ τραγωδίας σημαντικόν, «ἀρχομεν τῶν ἐκεῖ, ἵνα μὴ ὑπακούωμεν ἄλλον»...

Ἡ οἰκουμενικότης, ὡς καθεστῶς γιὰ ὅλους τους καθεστῶτες, πρέπει νὰ εἶναι μία ὑπερορία, ἀλλοιῶς ξαναπέφτει στὸ σύνορο. Τὸ μόνον, λοιπόν, στὸν κόσμον μὴ συνοριακὸ καθεστῶς, εἶναι ὁ τρόπος τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους. Κι ὅμως ἔχει σύνορα καὶ μάλιστα περιορισμένα, ἀφοῦ αὐτὰ ὀρίζονται ἀπὸ ἓναν τόπο μικρὸ κι ἓνα κατὰ φύσιν ἄτοπον, δηλαδή τὴν ἀπουσία τοῦ θηλυκοῦ. Ὁ ὅποιος ὅμως τοῦ βίου πλάνης καὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπείων γυρολόγος, αὐτός,

μόλις πάρει ἀντίδωρο τὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος, γνωρίζει πιὰ τί πάει νὰ πει γιὰ τὰ σωθικὰ τοῦ τὸ «ἐπ’ ἐλευθερία ἐκλήθητε, ἀδελφοί».

Πουθενά, σὲ κανένα καθεστῶς, δὲν νοιώθεις τόσο ἐλεύθερος, τόσο ἀπελευθερωμένος ἀπὸ τὴν «πρὸς ἀλλήλους τῶν καθ’ ἡμέραν ἐπιτηδευμάτων ὑποψίαν», ποὺ εἶναι τὸ τραγικό, ἔς ἀεί, σύνορο τοῦ θουκυδιδείου καθεστῶτος γιὰ μία σφύρα συναύπαρξη μεταξὺ τῶν ἐμφοβῶν συμπαικτῶν τοῦ ἀντιπάλου δέους. Ἐκεῖ, στὸ περιβόλι τῆς Παναγίας, καταργεῖται ἡ περὶ καθεστῶτος ὀρθοφροσύνη, ποὺ ἐπιτάσσει ὅτι «τὰ πάντα ὑπὸ δέους ξυνίσταται», ὥστε αὐτὰ τὰ πάντα, νὰ μποροῦν νὰ συνίστανται ὡς καθεστῶς τῆς ἑτερότητας τῶν συμπαικτῶν, δηλαδή ὡς καθεστῶς ἐλευθερίας. Διότι, ἐκεῖ, ὑπὸ τὴν σκέπη τῆς Ἐλεούσας, βλέπουμε στὸ πετσί μας καὶ τὴν σάρκα τῶν ἄλλων νὰ λειτουργεῖται σὲ καθ’ ὀλοκληρίαν καθημερινότητα, τὸ ἄλλως ἀνέφικτον παντοῦ, τὸ ἀψηλάφητο ἀλλοῦ,

νὰ πετυχαίνει τὸ ἐπίτευγμα, τὸ πανηγυρτζίδικο αὐτό, «Θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀμερίμνους εἶναι». Νὰ λειτουργεῖται καὶ νὰ λειτουργεῖ ἡ ἀμερμνησία, δηλαδή νὰ ἐφαρμόζεται ἐμπράκτως ἡ οἰκουμενικὴ τῶν πάντων ἐλευθερία, ποὺ καταργεῖ τὸ δέος μου ἐνώπιον τοῦ φοβισμένου ἐνώπιόν μου ἄλλου: ἐλευθερία οἰκουμενικὰ ἀμερμνη, ποὺ καταργεῖ τὰ σύνορα. Ὁ φόβος παράγει πάντοτε τὰ

σύνορα, ἐνῶ ἡ οἰκουμένη ἔξω βάλλει τὸν φόβον!

Ἐπάρχει ἓνα συνεχὲς «δωρεᾶν» στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος, ποὺ δὲν μπορεῖς νὰ τὸ καταλάβεις, ἂν δὲν νοιώσεις, ὅτι αὐτὸ τὸ «δωρεᾶν δότε» ἐκρέει ἀπὸ μία ἀέναη ἔκρηξη ἐλευθερίας, ποὺ ἐκρήγνυται ἐκεῖ, μέσα ἀπὸ μία συνεχὴ ἐνδορρηξία τῆς ἀνθρωπαρεσκείας καὶ τοῦ ἐγῶ. Τὸ «ἐγῶ» αὐτοκενουται, ὄχι ἀπλῶς μέσα σ’ ἓνα κοινοβιακὸ «ἐμεῖς», ἀλλὰ σ’ ἓνα «ἐσὺ» τοῦ πλησίον κι ἔτσι τὸ καθεστῶς, ἐκεῖ, γίνεται Διακονία. Καὶ γνωρίζουμε—χωρὶς ἐμεῖς νὰ τὸ πετυχαίνουμε—ὅτι ἡ Διακονία τοῦ πλησίον εἶναι μία Οἰκουμενικότης ἐν κινήσει, ποὺ νικᾷ τὸ ἀκίνητο σύνορο τοῦ φόβου.

Πουθενὰ ἀλλοῦ, ἔξω καὶ παντοῦ, δὲν βλέπεις νὰ χιτίζεται σκαλι-σκαλί, ἐκεῖνο τὸ δυσθεώρητο ἀνθρωπίνους ὀφθαλμοῖς τὸ «ὑπὲρ τῆς εἰρήνης τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου», ὅσο στὸ Περιβόλι τῆς Παναγίας. Μία ἀνειρήνευτη προσευχὴ ὑπὲρ τοῦ σύμπαντος τς εἰρήνης, μία εἰρηνευμένη καταλλαγή ὑπὲρ τοῦ ἐμπολέμου σύμπαντος κόσμου, τέτοια οἰκουμένη εἰρήνης ὀργώνει, σπεῖρει, ἀρδεύει καὶ συνάγει αὐτὸς



ὁ θεοδοτὸς στῦλος τῆς ὑπομονῆς. Μία εἰρήνη ποῦ ἀναπαύει δικαίους καὶ ἀδίκους, διότι καταργεῖ τὸ δίκιο καὶ τὸ ἄδικο τοῦ καθενός, διὰ τῆς κενωτικῆς—ὑπὲρ τοῦ οἰουδήποτε διπλανοῦ—ἀγάπης.

Καὶ ὅταν καθεστηκυῖα τάξις γίνεται ἡ ἀγάπη, ἐκεῖ, τὰ σύνορα πάσχουν τὴν «καλὴν ἀλλοίωσιν» καὶ μεταμορφώνονται σὲ οἰκουμένη. Ἡ ἀγάπη δὲν γνωρίζει σύνορα. Ἀγάπη κατ' ἐπιλογὴν, δηλαδή ἀγάπη μὲ σύνορα-ὄρια, σημαίνει ὅτι ζῆ ἀκόμη ὁ «ζοφώδης ἔρως τῆς ἁμαρτίας», δηλαδή ἡ ἐπιβολὴ τῆς ἡδονῆς τοῦ ἑνὸς ἐπὶ τῆς ἡδονῆς τοῦ ἑτέρου. Στὸ θεοφρούρητο περιβόλι, ὡς εἰρήνη ἱερουργεῖ ἡ ἀγάπη. Ἡ ἀγάπη ὅμως σημαίνει οἰκουμενικὴ ἀγκαλιὰ καὶ ἡ ἀγκαλιὰ δὲν κάνει διακρίσεις: ἀγκαλιάζει. Πλαστοργεῖ οἰκουμένη. «*Εἰ θέλοι, δύνασαι ὅλος πῦρ εἶναι*», μᾶς παροτρύνει, ἀγαπητικὰ καὶ περιγελαστικά το Γερωντικόν, ὅμοια μὲ τοὺς γελαστοὺς Γέροντες τοῦ Ὁρους, ποῦ σὲ πρᾶνουν, κοροϊδεύοντας τρυφερὰ τὴν γεώδη σου τρυφή. Ἄν θέλεις...

Ἄν θέλεις, μπορεῖς νὰ γίνεις φωτιὰ καὶ νὰ πυρπολήσεις τὰ ἀναλώσιμά σου, τὰ νευρωσικά σου τὰ φθαρτά, αὐτὰ ποῦ σὲ πνίγουν μέσα στὴ συσσώρευση τῶν φθαρτῶν, μέσα σου. Ἄν θές, ἂν ἀντέχεις τὴν ἀριστοκρατικὴ σου ἔκρηξη, σπάστα ὅλα! Ὅλα τα ἀναλώσιμά σου, πέταξέ τα ὅλα καί, εἰ θέλοι, πέταξε! Ποτὲ καὶ πουθενὰ ἄλλοῦ δὲν ἀκούγεται ὡς βροντὴ ἐλευθερίας καὶ πράξις ὑποποιοῦ κενώσεως ὁ ἐπινίκιος ὕμνος, ναί, «*τὰ Σὰ ἐκ τῶν σῶν σοὶ προσφέρομεν κατὰ πάντα καὶ διὰ πάντα*». «Ναί» στὴν ἀπελευθέρωση τοῦ σαρκίου μας ἀπὸ τὸ σαρκίον μας, ἄρα, «ναί», στὴν οἰκουμένη τῆς ἐρωτικῆς Μετοχῆς.

Στὴν Ἁγία ἀνηφόρα τοῦ Ὁρους, ὅλα τα «ὑλικά ἀγαθὰ», ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅλα τα ἄυλα «ἀγαθὰ», ὅπως ἡ πρωτιά, τὸ ἀρχηγῆλικι, ἡ ἀνθρωπαρέσκεια, ὅλα τους παίρνουν τὴν κατηφόρα καὶ καταντοῦν ἐκεῖ στὴ θάλασσα τὸ Ὁρος, στὰ ψάρια ποῦ τρέφουν τοὺς Μοναχοὺς καὶ ἐμᾶς τοὺς μοναχοὺς. Τὸ περιβόλι τῆς Κουροτρόφου ἀνήκει σὲ ὅλους, Οἰκουμενικὴ ἰδιοκτησία τῆς Παγγενῆς καὶ τῆς Λαοθάλασσας, μᾶς τρέφει ὅλους, ὅλους μας ντύνει καὶ μᾶς στολίζει. ἴσους καὶ ἀριστοκράτες, Ὁμοίους, κατὰ Διάκρισιν πάντοτε τῆς ζωοποιοῦ μας νεκρώσεως: ὅσο πιὸ πολὺ το μαδᾶς καὶ τὸ φοφᾶς μέσα σου τὸ «δικό μου καὶ δικό σου», τόσο πλουσιώτερος γίνεσαι κι ἀνακαλύπτεις καὶ μέσα σου καὶ πρὸς τὰ ἔξω σου, ἓνα ἄλλου εἶδους ἀρχηγῆλικι, παραμυθιασμένο ἀπὸ τὴν ὑποποιοῦν σου κένωσιν καὶ σαλταρισμένο πρὸς τὴν θέωσιν.

«*Τὰ σὰ ἐκ τῶν σῶν*», πρὸς τὸν κάθε πλησίον διπλανό μας! Ὅλα δικά του ἂς εἶναι! Καὶ γι' αὐτὸν τὸν πλησίον, ὅλα δικά μου πρέπει νὰ εἶναι! «*Ἀλλήλων ἰσόδουλοι, ἀλλήλων κύριοι... ἐν τῇ ἀμάχῳ ἐλευθερία*» μας... Ἐνα πανηγυρτζίδικο μηδὲν-μηδὲν ἢ καλύτερα,

μία διαρκῆς ἰσοπαλία ἀνάμεσά σε δύο ἐγωπάθειες, γιὰ ἓνα γιορταστικὸ ἓνα-ἓνα! Διαρκῆς «μετάδοσις», «ἀντίδοσις» ὅλων πρὸς ὅλα καὶ ὅλους, «*σοὶ προσφέρομεν κατὰ πάντα καὶ διὰ πάντα*», μόνον τόσο-πολύ, μόνον συνεχῶς ἐκεῖ, στὸ Ἅγιον Ὁρος.

Ἐκεῖ, μόνον τόσο ἐκεῖ, καὶ μόνον τόσο πολὺ, ζῆ καὶ βασιλεύει τὸ οἰκουμενικὸ κοινωνικὸ-πολιτικὸ Καθεστῶς του «δὲν ὑπάρχουν δικά σου καὶ δικά μου»! Τὸ ἀγιορεῖτικο κοινωνίας «σύστημα» δὲν εἶναι οὔτε «κεφαλαιοποιητικὸ» οὔτε «ἀναδιανεμητικὸ». Εἶναι κοινωνικῆς ἀσωτείας ὀλοποιητικόν. Ὅλοι τους ποιητὲς τοῦ Προσφόρου, οἱ καλόγηροι ποιοῦν συνεχῶς τὸ Ὁλον. Καὶ τὸ προσφέρουν Πρόσφορον πρὸς ὅλους, κατὰ πάντα καὶ διὰ πάντα, μέσα ἀπὸ τὴν καθημερινή τους ἀπογύμνωσιν καὶ τῆς Παγγενῆς τοὺς τὸ οἰκουμενικὸ πανηγύρι, γιορτὴ καθημερινή καὶ διὰ-σκεδάση (διὰ-σκεδάννυμι)—σκόρπισμα, ἀσωτεία «*ὑπὲρ τῆς εἰρήνης τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου... τὰ Σὰ ἐκ τῶν σῶν*»...

Μόνον στὸ περιβόλι τῆς Βρεφοκρατούσας καταλαβαίνεις πόσο νηπιώδης νεύρωση εἶναι νὰ γίνεσαι μίξερὸς ἰδιοκτήτης, κτήρῳ τοῦ ἰδίου, ἐνῶ, ἂν πετάξεις τίς κτήσεις καὶ κατακτήσεις σου τίς «ἴδιες», μπορεῖς νὰ γίνεις Κτήτῳ-πρωτομάστορας τοῦ αἰδίου ποῦ, δυνάμει, κατοικοεδρεῖ ἐντός σου καὶ γιὰ τὰ ἔξω σου.

«*Τὸ δὲ ἐμὸν καὶ τὸ σὸν τοῦτο, ρήματά ἐστι ψιλὰ μόνον*», ψιλὰ γράμματα γιὰ παίκτης μὲ ἀποψιλωμένη λογικὴ. Μόνον ὅσο ἀποψιλῶνεις τὸ «ἐμὸν» καὶ τὸ «σόν», μόνον μὲ τὴν ἀποψίλωσιν τοῦ ἐδάφους καὶ τοῦ ὑπεδάφους σου ἀπὸ τοῦτα τὰ «ψιλὰ ρήματα», ποῦ σοῦ χαϊδεύουν τὸ μαλακό σου ὑπογάστριον, μόνον ἔτσι γίνεσαι ἀρχηγὸς τῆς Οἰκουμένης καὶ παίζεις στὸν μεγάλο τελικό. Ἄλλοιῳ, παραμένεις πάντοτε ἐπαρχιακὸς προύχοντας καὶ μικρομεσαῖος νταβατζῆς. Κι ὅσο πιὸ πολὺ μένεις κολλημένος στὰ εἶδη διατιμῆσεως, τόσο πιὸ πολὺ γίνεσαι δοῦλος τῶν ἀνθρώπων, γιατί πρέπει νὰ τοὺς κολακέψεις, νὰ τοὺς ὑποτάξεις, νὰ τοὺς ἐξαγοράσεις καί, τότε, χάνεις τὴν Οἰκουμένη ποῦ ἔχεις μέσα σου καὶ ἔξω σου.

Στὸ Ἅγιο Ὁρος παράγεται μία παραγωγικότητα κι ἓνα ὑπερπροϊόν, ποῦ ἐπιβάλλει ἓνα ὀλοκληρωτικὸ καθεστῶς, ὅπου «ἡ τιμὴ, τιμὴ δὲν ἔχει». Ὅπου ἡ τιμὴ εἶναι τὸ μόνο, καθολικὸ, ἐνικώτατο καὶ οἰκουμενικὸ «ἀγαθὸ», ἀδιατίμητο. Στὸ Ἅγιο Ὁρος, παντοῦ κι ἐδῶ, «*...τιμῆς ἠγοράσθητε· μὴ γίνεσθε δοῦλοι ἀνθρώπων*».



Ἄθρα καὶ κεκρυμένως καὶ οὐδενῶς ὀρῶντος Ἀπροσεύχεσθα»

Ἅγιος Κύριλλος Ἀλεξανδρείας (+444)

## Ὁ «Γέροντας» Ἀρχάγγελος

Ἀπὸ τὸ «Ἀγιορείτικο Βῆμα».

Ὁ ὅσιος Μακάριος, Ρωμαῖος στὴν καταγωγή, ἦταν γιὸς συγκλητικοῦ. Ὅταν ἐνηλικιώθηκε, οἱ γονεῖς τοῦ τὸν ἀνάγκασαν νὰ νυμφευθεῖ. Ἐκεῖνος ὁμως, τὴ νύχτα τοῦ γάμου, ἐγκατέλειψε τὴ νύφη κι ἐξαφανίστηκε.

Βαδίζοντας γιὰ τὴν ἔρημο, συνάντησε κάποιον γέροντα.

- Ποῦ πηγαίνεις, πάτερ; τὸν ρώτησε.
- Ὅπου πηγαίνεις κι ἐσύ, ἀπάντησε ἐκεῖνος.

Ὁ ὅσιος ἀκολούθησε τὸ γέροντα, κι ἔτσι βιάδιζαν κι οἱ δυὸ γιὰ πολλὰς μέρες στὴν ἔρημο. Λίγο πρὶν φτάσουν στὸν προορισμό τους, ὁ γέροντας ἔγινε ἄφαντος. Ὁ Μακάριος ἄρχισε νὰ λυπάται κι νὰ κλαίει. Τότε ἐμφανίζεται πάλι ὁ γέροντας κι τοῦ λέει:

- Ἐγὼ εἶμαι ὁ ἀρχάγγελος Ραφαήλ. Νὰ δοξάζεις τὸ Θεό, γιατί ξεπέρασες τοὺς σκοτεινοὺς τόπους κι ἔφτασες στοὺς φωτεινοὺς.

Ἀμέσως ὁ ἀρχάγγελος ἐξαφανίστηκε, ἐνῶ ὁ ὅσιος συνέχισε χαρούμενος τὴν πορεία του. Σὲ πέντε μέρες ἔφτασε σ' ἓνα σπήλαιο. Ἐκεῖ ἐγκαταβίωσε κι ἀσκήτησε.

Μὲ τὸ κύλισμα τῶν χρόνων τὰ μαλλιά τοῦ ἔγιναν λευκὰ σὰν τὸ χιόνι κι τὸ δέσμα τοῦ σκληρὸ σὰν τῆς χελώνας. Τὰ φρύδια τοῦ κατέβαιναν χαμηλὰ κι σκέπαζαν τὰ μάτια, ἐνῶ ἡ γενειάδα τοῦ ἔφτανε μέχρι τὰ γόνατα.

Κάποτε ὁ ὅσιος πειράχθηκε σκληρὰ ἀπὸ τὸ δαίμονα τῆς πορνείας, κι ἐνίωσε γιὰ μίαν στιγμὴ τὴν καρδιά του νὰ κλίνει πρὸς τὴν ἁμαρτία. Ἀμέσως ὁμως συνήλθε κι, μετανοημένος πικρά, κίνησε νὰ φύγει ἀπὸ τὸ σπήλαιο.

Τότε φανερόνεται μπροστά του ὁ προστάτης τοῦ Ἀρχάγγελος Ραφαήλ κι τοῦ λέει:

- Ποῦ πηγαίνεις, Μακάριε;
- Φεύγω ἀπὸ τὸν τόπο, ὅπου ἁμάρτησα.
- Δὲν μπόρεσες ν' ἀντέξεις ἓνα πειρασμό; Γύρισε πίσω στὸ κελί σου.
- Ποιὸς εἶσαι, κύριέ μου;
- Ἐγὼ εἶμαι ὁ ἀρχάγγελος Ραφαήλ, πὸν σὲ ὁδήγησα σ' αὐτὸν τὸ δρόμο.

Καὶ λέγοντας αὐτά, ἔγινε ἄφαντος.

Ὁ ὅσιος γύρισε στὴ σπηλιά του, γονάτισε καταγῆς κι πέρασε ἔτσι νηστικὸς σαράντα μέρες. Μόλις σηκώθηκε, εἶδε τὴ σπηλιά γεμάτη φῶς. Εἶδε ἀκόμη κάποιον νέο, πορφυροντυμένο κι στεφανωμένο μὲ χρυσοὺς στεφάνι. Τὸν ἄκουσε μάλιστα νὰ ψάλλει μίαν πρωτάκουστη ᾠδὴ μὲ πλούσια φωνή, σὰν νὰ ἔψαλλαν πολλοὶ μαζί.

Μόλις σταμάτησε ἡ ψαλμωδία, ἀπλώθηκε τριγύρω μίαν μεθυστικὴ εὐωδία. Κι ἀμέσως ἐκεῖνος πέταξε στὸν οὐρανὸ κι χάθηκε ἀπὸ τὰ μάτια του.

## Σεπτεμβριανὰ...

*Εἶναι ἐντολὴ τῶν προγόνων μας, κι ὑποχρέωση γιὰ κάθε Ἑλληνορθόδοξο, νὰ μὴ λησμονῆ τὴν ἱστορία του!...*



Ὁ Σεπτέμβριος τοῦ 1955 ἀποτελεῖ μίαν «μαύρη ἡμερομηνία» γιὰ τὸν Ἑλληνισμό. Πιὸ συγκεκριμένα, στὶς 6 Σεπτεμβρίου τοῦ 1955, πραγματοποιήθηκαν τὰ λεγόμενα «Σεπτεμβριανὰ», δηλαδή μίαν ὀργανωμένη, μαζικὴ κι βίαιη ἐπίθεση ἀπὸ ἓναν ἐξαγριωμένο Τουρκικὸ ὄχλο ἐναντίον τῶν Ἑλλήνων τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης (καθὼς κι ἄλλων μὴ μουσουλμανικῶν μειονοτήτων), λεηλατώντας κι πυρπολώντας ἑλληνικὰ καταστήματα, σπίτια, σχολεῖα, βιβλιόπωλες ἐκκλησίες (ἀκόμα κι νεκροταφεῖα) κι δημιουργώντας τρομοκρατία κι ἀνασφάλεια γιὰ τὶς ὑφιστάμενες μειονότητες.

Ἀφορμὴ γιὰ αὐτὲς τὶς ἐπιθέσεις ἐναντίον τῶν Ἑλλήνων τῆς Κωνσταντινούπολης (πογκρόμ), ἀποτελέσασε τὸ γεγονός τῆς βομβιστικῆς ἐπίθεσης στὸ πατρικὸ σπίτι τοῦ Κεμάλ Ἀτατούρκ στὴν Θεσσαλονίκη, πὸν ἀποδείχτηκε στὴν συνέχεια ὅτι ἦταν σκηνοθετημένη προβοκάτσια ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια τὴν τότε τουρκικὴ κυβέρνησι, ἡ ὁποία ὀργάνωσε αὐτό...

Τὰ «Σεπτεμβριανὰ» ἀποτελοῦν ἓνα μέρος ἐνὸς μακροῦ καταλόγου διώξεων κατὰ ἄλλοθρήσκων μειονοτήτων πὸν ξεκίνησαν περὶ τὰ τέλη τῆς Ὀθωμανικῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας, πλὴν ὁμως ἐντάθηκαν ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴ τῶν Νεοτούρκων κι ὕστερα.

Τὰ ἀποτελέσματα τῆς βίας τῶν Τούρκων, τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ τὸν ὁποῖον ὁ Ἀμερικανὸς συγγραφέας, κι πρῶην πρέσβυς τῶν ΗΠΑ, George Horton ἀποκάλεε ὡς τὴν «ΤΥΦΛΑ ΤΗΣ ΑΣΙΑΣ» ἦταν ὡς ἑξῆς:

- † Θάνατο 16 Ἑλλήνων κι τὸν τραυματισμὸ 32.
- † Βιασμὸ 12 Ἑλληνίδων.
- † Βιασμὸ ἀδιευκρίνιστου ἀριθμοῦ ἀνδρῶν (ἐξαναγκάστηκαν νὰ ὑποστοῦν περιτομή).

† Καταστροφὴ:

- 4.348 ἐμπορικῶν καταστημάτων,
- 110 ξενοδοχείων,
- 27 φαρμακείων,
- 23 σχολείων,
- 21 ἐργοστασίων,
- 73 ἐκκλησιῶν,
- περὶ 1.000 ἑλληνικῆς ἰδιοκτησίας κατοικιῶν.



## THE FEAST OF THE DORMITION

*Condensed from "The Dormition of Our Most Holy Lady, the Mother of God and Ever Virgin Mary," Holy Trinity Monastery, 1976; translated from the Menology of St. Dimitry of Rostov.*

*The grave and death could not hold the Mother of God, who is sleepless in her intercessions and an unchanging hope in her mediations. For as the Mother of Life she was transferred to life by Him Who dwelt in her ever-virgin womb.*

(Kontakion for the Feast)

† † †

The last of the twelve great feasts in the Church year, the Dormition of the Mother of God, culminates the cycle of feasts and indicates God's ultimate plan for mankind—that having completed this earthly life, the faithful shall be resurrected in body and soul and united with Christ for eternity.

The Most Holy Theotokos, whose entire life had been spent in accordance with God's will, is the most perfect example of humanity, greatest among the saints and *more honorable than the cherubim*. Only through such a pure vessel could the Incarnation of God the Word occur, for Jesus Christ, born of the Holy Virgin, was perfect man and perfect God. For this reason she is honored above all of God's creation and at the close of her earthly life, she was bodily taken to heaven without having to await the fearful Day of Judgment. Thus did God glorify his obedient handmaid having instructed all generations to call her blessed.

While nothing is mentioned in the Scriptures concerning the Dormition of the Mother of God, the account has been preserved in the Sacred Tradition of the Church and has come down to us in Church services and early icons depicting this event.

The Most Holy Mother of God had reached an advanced age and she wished to leave the body and go to God as soon as possible. Her one great desire was to see the sweet face of her Son, Jesus Christ, sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Suddenly there appeared before her the Archangel Gabriel. He told her that in three days she would depart from this life and be with Christ. As a sign that death would have no power over her, he gave the Holy Virgin a branch from paradise. The Archangel said it was to be carried before the bed of the Mother of God when her body was carried to burial.

At these words the Blessed Mother of God filled with joy and began to prepare for her death. First she told the beloved disciple John, who had adopted her, about it. Then she told the rest of her household and ordered her rooms to be sprinkled with perfume and as many lamps as possible to be lighted in them. St. John sent word to St. James, the first Bishop of Jerusalem, and he informed all the Christians in the surrounding area. Several of the faithful arrived promptly and could not restrain their tears. The whole house was filled with weeping, but the Mother of God dried their tears, consoled them, and asked them to rejoice.

*O ye Apostles, from afar being now gathered together here in the town of Gethsemane, give burial to my body; and Thou my Son and my God receive Thou my spirit.* (Exapostelarion sung during the Dormition Fast).

Our most Pure Lady arranged for her two garments to be given to two poor widows who had faithfully served her.



She asked that her body be buried on the Mount of Olives, where her parents, Saints Joachim and Anna, and her "spouse," St. Joseph, were buried.

Suddenly a noise like a clap of thunder was heard and a cloud encircled the house. By the command of God, angels had seized the Apostles, who were scattered to the ends of the earth preaching the Gospel, and brought them on

clouds to Jerusalem. St. John went out to greet them and told them of the speedy departure of the Mother of God. This filled their hearts with great sorrow.

On August 15<sup>th</sup>, the blessed hour that all were awaiting arrived. It was the third hour of the day (about 9 a.m.). The holy Apostles were praising God; the Immaculate Virgin lay on a beautifully adorned bed. Suddenly there shone in the room a wonderful light. The roof opened and the glory of the Lord descended from heaven with hosts of angels and archangels and with the Holy Fathers and prophets of old who had prophesied about the Holy Virgin. At the sight of this, the Mother of God cried aloud with great joy: *My soul doth magnify the Lord...!* And, raising herself, she worshipped her Son. Looking at her with love, He said: *Come My Near One, come My Dove, come My precious treasure and enter the abodes of eternal life.*

*My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready* (Pss 107:2), the Holy Virgin replied, surrendering her pure soul into the hands of the Lord. She felt no pain whatever, but fell

as it were into a sweet sleep. At once there was wonderful angelic singing: *Rejoice, Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women.* (Lk 1:28).

For a long time the Apostles stood transfixed with amazement. When they came to themselves they worshipped the Lord and they surrounded the bed of His Mother, whose face shone like the sun. There began the solemn procession for her burial. Reaching the Garden of Gethsemane, they put down the bed with the most precious body and all the Christians came forth to give a last kiss, weeping at the loss of such a treasure. Even after the great stone had been rolled across the entrance to the tomb, the Apostles remained by the tomb for three full days, singing psalms day and night.

By God's special arrangement, however, the Apostle Thomas was not present at these events. He arrived only on the third day and was very sorry that he had not been allowed to say farewell to the Immaculate Mother. Taking pity on him, the Apostles decided to open the tomb so that he might at least see the dead body of the Mother of God. But when they rolled away the stone they were amazed! The body of the Mother of God was not in the tomb! All that remained were the burial clothes and a wonderful fragrance. They prayed that the Lord would reveal to them where the body had been taken. Later, they saw standing in the air the Immaculate Mother of God, surrounded by a multitude of angels, and she said to them: *Rejoice, for I am with you all the days.*

From that time forth the Apostles taught the whole Church of Christ that the Mother of God was raised by her Son and taken to heaven on the third day after her burial.

**Most Holy Theotokos, save us!**



**O**Lady, generously share thy mercy and thy graces with all thy people—thine inheritance. Rescue us from the terrors that encompass us. See how many dangers of all kinds afflict us, from our own people and from strangers, from within and without. Through thy power, turn everything for the best. Bring mutual calm between fellow-citizens at home, and drive away those who attack like wild beasts from outside. Bestow thine aid and healing on us to counteract our passions, and give our souls and bodies abundant grace—sufficient for every need. And if we are unable to contain it, increase our capacity and give us more, that—saved and strengthened by thy grace—we may glorify the pre-eternal Word, Who took flesh from thee for our sake, together with His Father without beginning and the life-giving Spirit, now and forever and unto unending ages. Amen.

**St. Gregory Palamas**

## THE GRANDMOTHER'S CLOCK

*Author unknown, from "The Divine Spark."*

—Grandma, why is it that you always count each time your clock strikes, and then you look as though you're thinking about something? The seven-year-old girl put this question to her dear grandmother as she climbed onto her lap.

—I've developed a habit of counting the chimes, and then I reflect on the fact that, with each passing hour, the life still ahead of me is that much shorter and death is that much closer. The clock begins to strike and I think to myself, "Another hour of my life has flown into eternity; I have an hour less to live in this world." The striking of the clock, like the tolling of a funeral bell, reminds me that eventually the last hour of my life will strike, and then the funeral bell will let people know that my time on earth has come to an end.

—But why, Grandma, do you think about this? It can't be very pleasant. Surely you don't want to die...

—No, my child, I don't want to die, but death does not ask us when he will be welcome. However, I've reached the age when the thought of death is there, whether I want it or not. And what kind of Christian would I be if I was afraid to think about death? Our Lord teaches us to think about death and to be prepared for it any day. And so, when the clock begins to strike, I think to myself: "Yet another hour of my life here on earth has gone by. What good or bad have I done in the past hour? Am I becoming a better person or not? Am I prepared to stand before God at His judgment?" If I did or said something bad in the hour just gone by, then I sigh to the Lord over my sin and afterwards try to refrain from committing the same offense. The memory of death helps me to keep from getting cross and saying angry words to the servants or you or anyone else. Instead, I am able to respond with kindness, even love.

—From now on, Grandma, I'm going to do the same. Every time the clock begins to strike, I'm going to think about death, just as you do.

—It is good, my child, for each and every Christian to do that, but at your age it's beyond your ability. Don't promise something you cannot carry through. When you grow up, then you can undertake to do as I do. Until then, do this. When the clock strikes, ask yourself: "My life has grown by another hour. What have I done in this hour, what have I learned, what have I discovered?" If there's something you neglected or forgot to do, hurry and do it. If you offended someone or you have taken offense, be quick to make it up with that person, and in the next hour try not to do anything bad or to repeat the mistakes you made in the hour gone by. In this way, with each passing hour, you will become wiser and kinder; you will grow in body and soul.

—That sounds good, Grandma. I'm going to do just that.

—And may the Lord bless you, my dear child.

## A WORTHY EXAMPLE

By E. V. Sarat, translated from "Voskresnoye Chteniye," 1900, Book 10, published by the "Russian Youth Committee," Baldwin Place, NY.

On November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1899, in the village of Nadezhdin in the Serdovsk district, there took place the burial of an elder who was distinguished for his Christian life and, in particular, for his zeal towards the house of God. He did not come from an illustrious family, nor was he a wealthy man; he was the church caretaker, a retired soldier of peasant stock. His name was Ivan Alekseyevich Alyonov.

His biography is simple and brief. Orphaned in childhood, he was raised by some distant relatives, from whom he received neither a mother's tender caresses nor a father's strict supervision. Nevertheless, there nestled in his heart a spark of God, and he did not go astray. Not because he had committed some offense but simply because he was a loner, he was sent to be a soldier, and he faithfully served twenty-five years. The strict military school of life developed him into a man for whom the fulfillment of one's duties was paramount. Returning from the army already with venerable gray hairs, Ivan Alekseyevich could find no lodgings in the village of his youth, but God did not abandon him; He called him to serve in His house. The parish priest offered him the position of church caretaker, and "Leksevich," as he came to be called, served diligently in that capacity for the next thirty-five years.

In the course of those years, Leksevich accomplished a great deal of good. By his own labors, without any outside help, and at his personal expense, he planted saplings near the church; around the perimeter of the cemetery he planted acacias; he lined the entrance to the church with pine and birch trees, and he planted more trees around the cemetery church. In time these all grew into fine, big specimens. Leksevich could not contain his evident delight. "Look, Batiushka! Look at the poplars, the pines, the birch trees. Can you believe their trunks? To think that I planted them when they were only this big," he exclaimed, holding up his little finger. Leksevich often expressed his pleasure in this manner, while his cheeks glistened with tears of joy, the pure joy of a child.

In spite of his age, Leksevich spent whole days digging in "his" yard, daily watering his "children." He accustomed the

peasants—the parishioners—to stop by the church yard on their way back from the river when they went to haul water, and they would wait for Leksevich to take two pails from each bucket, as a "tax" for his trees.

Leksevich also liked to attend to the cleaning of the church, where, just as in the yard, he kept everything in exemplary order. He derived great pleasure from his work. Someone would say to him, "Leksevich, it's time to rest your old bones. You should stop climbing up the belfry; it's too difficult for you." But the old man looked so dejected at the mere suggestion that he should curtail his duties, that the person regretted having said anything. "As he says, he'll die if he has nothing to do." There is a touching scene that I'll never forget. The parishioners had a new bell cast, three and a half tons. Before



being raised into the belfry, it hung from some trestles, so that any passerby could ring it, testing its tone. One evening I saw Leksevich approach the bell when it was dark and he thought no one was watching. He crept up to the "stranger" and grabbed its tongue. But, alas! The tongue did not respond. The next day I said to him, "Leksevich, you should try ringing the new bell." "No, Batiushka, evidently my days of ringing are over. I'll have to decline." And some tears rolled down his cheeks.

One would have to be an artist to faithfully depict even an approximation of Leksevich's love for the house of God and for the saints. Without exaggeration one can say that he lived exclusively, body and soul, for the house of God. No matter what time you came, he would invariably be looking after the trees, or cleaning the church vessels, or on his knees, polishing. In his childlike simplicity and innocence, he became totally engrafted, as it were, onto the church. More than once I overheard him talking by himself in the church. He would be standing before the icon of Saint Nicholas, for example, and converse with the holy hierarch as if he were present in the flesh. He would wipe the dust from the icons, the candle stands, the vigil lamps; then he would stand back to survey his work. "Now, that's better! Saint Nicholas, you were so dusty. Forgive me for not having noticed this before." And these were not casual or mechanical remarks. No, he spoke from a prayerful disposition. Afterwards he would make a prostration and then step away.

Having such an attachment to the church, Leksevich could not be indifferent to what he saw to be imperfections or deficiencies. "Batiushka," he would say, "that's a poor quality vigil lamp in front of the Iveron icon," or, "It would be

good to have an icon of the Mother of God, ‘Joy of All Who Sorrow,’ hanging here.” And before you knew it, Leksevich had arranged for all this, at his expense! In the last ten years of his life, the good man donated not less than 500 rubles to the church. This came exclusively from his salary of three rubles a month and a pension in the same amount. Sometimes one would inadvertently mention in his presence some need of the church, and Leksevich, deeming it his responsibility alone, would straightway say, “Hold on, Batiushka, I’ll get together the money...” and he would apply all his energy towards accomplishing whatever was needed. Sometimes he would not say anything, but later you would notice that whatever had been mentioned had been taken care of—and Leksevich would be beaming. Although Leksevich’s resources were meager, he found opportunity to give alms to those who were truly indigent, helping them to procure their daily bread. He also liked to send donations to the poor monasteries on Mount Athos.

Leksevich led a decidedly ascetical way of life. He slept on practically bare boards, using a pillow of straw for his head. His food was lenten—he subsisted principally on potatoes, bread and water. Rarely did he eat hot food, and he prepared everything himself. He prayed often and at length. He was literate and liked to read the life of the Mother of God, especially about her Dormition. He donated to the church an icon of the Dormition, and every year he had a molieben with an akathist served before it. Being himself a man of strict and holy life, Ivan Alekseyevich could not tolerate any impropriety in the church during the services. In such cases, he would reprove and correct, in a manner that did not offend. There was something about his face that bore a resemblance to Saint Nicholas: stern yet kind, introspective yet also penetrating. He would go about the church, quietly and unobtrusively, and if he noticed that someone (usually among the women) was standing improperly, he would pause and make a reprimand, without, however, creating the least disturbance.

Everyone feared Leksevich, and everyone loved him. As for Leksevich, he treated all people equally; he exemplified the same level of respect to all persons (excepting clergy, whether of his own or another parish): simple peasants, wealthy men and poor, aristocrats and important “personas”—he addressed them alike with the familiar “you.” But this “you” was exclusively his, and no one took offense; the use of the more formal “thou” would have been altogether out of character for him. More than once I remarked to him privately, “Leksevich, you call everyone ‘you,’ and therefore why not call me ‘you’ likewise?” “By no means. No, no... A priest is a noble servant of God,” said the old man solemnly. To argue with him was useless.

Although Ivan Alekseyevich was uneducated, his view of life and of the afterlife was perfectly correct and in har-

mony with the teaching of the Holy Church. Having a pure heart, he had no fear of death; on the contrary, he liked to talk about death and calmly awaited it, confessing and communing frequently. Several years before his repose, he prepared for himself a “little house” (a coffin). He often looked at it and showed it to others, reminding them of death. He made a number of these “little houses.” He would wait and wait, and then say, “No, it seems that my death is still a way off.” And he would give the coffin for some needy person’s burial. At last the Lord granted Leksevich to lie down peacefully in his “little house,” without any serious or tormenting illness. Although at ninety years old, he had exceeded the bounds of age, he was fully conscious to the end and he died so peacefully, like a candle that gradually melts away.

The last five years of his life, Leksevich was unable to work, but the grateful parishioners supported him with a pension of three rubles a month, and he continued to life in a private corner of the caretaker’s cottage. In spite of its being a weekday, a great crowd of people gathered for the burial of this revered elder. The local chanters chanted at the funeral, and pupils from the local parochial school likewise desired to pay their final tribute: they also chanted at the Liturgy and participated in the funeral. May your memory be eternal, kind, good Leksevich. Thank you for giving us a good example of how to serve God and how to prepare for ourselves a treasure in the heavens.



The Source of every true joy, of all true tranquility and peace of conscience, of cleansing, of spiritual and bodily healing, the source of spiritual power and boldness, flows in the temple, whilst theaters and various worldly distractions and consolations can never replace that which a true Christian receives in the temple, where God Himself comforts the souls of believers and those whose hearts are turned to Him, as a mother comforts her child. It is from the temple, too, that our departed ones receive consolation and solace, with the cleansing from their sins and forgiveness. How ardently we should love the temple, how we should adorn it! And so do all those who recognize its value; and the Church prays for them, saying, *Let us pray for them that, with faith, piety and fear of God enter in; and further, Let us pray for them that bring forth fruit and do good works in this holy and all-venerable temple; or, Bless those that love the beauty of Thine house. Glorify them in return by Thy Divine might.*

St. John of Kronstadt



## MIXED-UP GEORGE

By Elder Porphyrios (+1991).

*A large part of the responsibility for a person's spiritual state lies with the family. A child's upbringing commences at the moment of its conception. (Elder Porphyrios)*

† † †

One day, a mother came here distraught about her son, George. He was very mixed-up. He stayed out late at night and the company he kept was far from good. Every day things were getting worse. The mother was overcome by anxiety and distress.

I said to her:

—Don't say a word. Just pray.

We agreed that, between ten and ten fifteen every evening, we would both pray. I told her to say not a word and to leave her son to stay out till whatever time he wanted, without asking him, "What sort of time is this to come home? Where were you?", or any such thing. Instead she would say to him as lovingly as possible, "Come and eat, George, there's food in the fridge."

Beyond this she was to say nothing. She would behave towards him with love and not stop praying.

The mother began to apply this tactic, and after about twenty days had passed the boy asked her:

—Mother, why don't you speak to me?

—What do you mean, George, that I don't speak to you?

—You've got something against me, Mother, and you're not speaking to me.

—What strange idea is this that you've got into your head, George? Of course I speak to you. Am I not speaking to you now? What do you want me to say to you?

George made no reply. The mother then came to the monastery and asked me:

—Elder, what was the meaning of this that the boy said to me?

—Our tactic has worked!

—What tactic?

—The tactic I told you, of not speaking and simply praying secretly and that the boy would come to his senses.

—Do you think that is really it?

—That is it, I told her. He wants you to ask him "Where were you? What were you doing?" so that he can shout and react and come home even later the next night.

—Is that so?' she said. What strange mysteries are hidden!

—Do you understand now? He was tormenting you because he wanted you to react to his behavior so that he could stage

his little act. Now that you're not shouting at him he is upset. Instead of you being upset when he does what he wants, now he is upset because you don't appear distressed and you display indifference.

One day George announced that he was giving up his job and going to Canada. He had told his boss to find a replacement because he was leaving. In the meantime I said to his parents:

—We'll pray, I told the grieving mother.

—But he's ready to leave...

—I'll grab him by the scruff of the neck, said his father.

—No, I told him, don't do anything.

—But the boy's leaving, Elder!

—Let him leave. You just devote yourselves to prayer and I'll be with you, I said.

Two or three days later early one Sunday morning George announced to his parents:

—I'm going off today with my friends.

—Fine, they replied, do as you want.

He left, and along with his friends, two girls and two boys, he hired a car and set off for Chalkida (*Ed.*, Chalkida is located to the north of Athens, on Euboea island). They drove around aimlessly here and there. Then they went past the church of Saint John the Russian and from there to Mantoudi, Aghia Anna and beyond to Vasilika, They had a swim in the Aegean Sea, they ate, drank and had a fine time. At the end of it all they set off on the road home. It was already dark. George was

driving. As they were passing through Aghia Anna the car hit the corner of a house and was badly damaged. What could they do now? They managed to bring the car back to Athens at a crawling pace.

George arrived back home in the early hours of the morning. His parents said nothing to him and he went off to sleep. When he woke up he came and said to his father:

—Do you know what happened?... Now we'll have to repair the car and it will cost a lot of money.

His father said:

—Well, George, you'll have to find a solution to this yourself. You know I've got debts to pay and your sisters to look after...

—What can I do, father?

—Do whatever you like. You're grown-up and you've got a brain of your own. Go off to Canada and make some money...

—I can't do that. We have to repair the car now!...

—I've no idea what you should do, said his father. Sort it out yourself.



So, seeing that further dialogue with his father was pointless, he said no more and left. He went to his boss and said:  
—I had an accident with a car. I don't want to leave now, so don't hire anyone else.

His boss said:

—That's all right by me, lad.

—Yes, but I would like you to give me some money in advance.

—That's fine, but you were wanting to leave. If you want money, your father will have to sign for it.

—I'll sign for it myself. My father doesn't want to get involved. He told me so. I'll work and I'll repay it.

Now isn't that a miracle? When the boy's mother came again to see me I said to her:

—The method we employed worked and God heard our prayer. The accident was from God and now the boy will stay at home and will come to his senses.

That's what happened through our prayer. It was a miracle. The parents fasted, prayed and kept silent and they were successful. Sometime later, the boy himself came and found me—without any of his family having said anything to him about me. George became a very fine man and now works in the air force and is married with a lovely family...



**B**e careful not to waste your time aimlessly—leaving no time for your spiritual life; because you will reach a point of being so agitated inside that you will no longer be able to do your spiritual [rule]. Instead, you will try to get involved in some work, or start a conversation, or even look to create a problem to keep you busy. When we neglect the Jesus Prayer and our [daily] spiritual duties, the enemy gets hold of our spiritual “heights” and he begins his assault from up there—using both our flesh and our mind as his weapon. Thus, he renders useless our physical and spiritual strengths; and, by cutting off our communication with God, he leads our soul to be taken prisoner by the passions.

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)



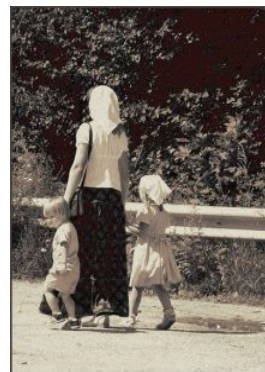
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## ON HOMESCHOOLING

By Archpriest Chad Williams, Rector, St. Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Church, Richmond, ME.

*People are generally called intelligent through a wrong use of this word. The intelligent are not those who have studied the sayings and writings of the wise men of old, but those whose soul is intelligent, who can judge what is good and what is evil; they avoid what is evil and harms the soul and intelligently care for and practice what is good and profits the soul, greatly thanking God. It is these alone who should properly be called intelligent. [St. Anthony the Great]*

† † †



**F**rom the beginning of our marriage and during courtship, my wife and I discussed our concerns about the breakdown in marriage and family life. We scrutinized our own childhood experiences with our parents and brothers and sisters, their subsequent marriages and our own fears, values and commitments. We were most concerned that our family be God-centered. We saw as

specific threats to our family a value system that requires maximizing material successes. We also saw the public schools as a potential threat to our home life—the long hours, the bus rides, the values clarification, the atheism and the peer groups. We thought we would like to educate the children at home. This meant, of course, more time at home for both of us and some material and financial sacrifices. We have been homeschooling now for nearly thirteen years, since the birth of our first child.

Now homeschooling has gained tremendous support nationwide and presents a substantial threat to the public schools in some areas, causing them to upgrade their activities and programs and to lend a newly listening ear to parents who insist on improvements. In our own state, homeschoolers have increased in number nearly ten-fold in the last ten years. In the Russian Church Abroad, some of our own hierarchs have stepped out boldly to endorse homeschooling as not only an alternative to public schools, but as a MUST in order to maintain an Orthodox perspective on life.

When we had first come to our parish, many of the older parishioners expressed real concerns about our children not being in public schools. Now, however, the prevailing comment is totally in support of homeschooling, and of our keeping the children out of the public school. We have heard many concerns about homeschooling, and questioned ourselves thoroughly on these concerns, and discussed some of them at length. The most frequently repeated concern is about

socialization for the children. The other concern is about our ability to teach advanced subjects to our children.

At first glance the concern about socialization seems valid. However, in most homes this is not a problem. First of all, we have an active family life and communicate freely with one another. Secondly, we are in Church and there our children's friends vary widely in age, experience, and culture, but have a common Orthodox Christian foundation. Thirdly, the children are in town and in the stores and libraries and circulate successfully, without the aid of the "socialization" of a public school. The image of the children in the Laura Ingalls Wilder series rises to mind frequently, as well as all the pioneer and missionary children in the world. They tend to do well, even though they may only see other children who share their own values and culture infrequently.

The concern about our ability to educate our children is also valid, but the history of homeschooling shows the home to often be a healthier learning environment than the classroom. Every parent is a natural teacher. However, parents cannot teach all things. We, personally, certainly cannot do all of it. For reading, we didn't need to teach our children to read; we only supported their efforts and they are fine readers. For math it has been the same. For history, biography, literature and science, the children are avid readers and gobble it up whether it is "assigned" or is for their own free reading pleasure. Of the more involved academic skills, we cannot really say from personal experience since our oldest child just turned twelve this year, but homeschool literature shows that homeschoolers in general achieve their academic goals using a variety of resources other than the public school classroom that are available to the average family. There are the books available in nearly every subject. We have friends and neighbors in just about every major field of study who can often lend a hand to eager young learners. Statistics consistently show that homeschooled children, as a whole, score very highly on SAT exams.

But these questions and concerns do not address our primary concerns as Orthodox Christian parents in the education of our children. Our primary concern for our children is that they learn to love God, to know God, and learn to love their neighbor as their own selves. This is the foundation of our home, and everything that is taught in our home despite our many shortcomings and failures. But something else altogether lies at the foundation of the public education system. It is not the spirit of God that breathes through the curriculum, but the spirit of Antichrist. The public school has become the channel for much subtle (and at times, very overt) and skillful persecution of the Christian faith. The public school has also become the government tool for social and moral reform, most of which is distinctly new-age, relativistic and humanistic in spirit. This is of Antichrist. This spirit is a direct threat to our society and to our children.

Of course, it is not only indigenous to the public school; it permeates every corner of public life. Our children are very vulnerable and impressionable and we have chosen to not submit them to forty or more hours of exposure at these tender ages to this anti-Christian environment that threatens the very foundation of the Christian faith, and constantly pits its authority and the opinion of the "peer group" against our authority and that of the Church.

It would be very convenient to use the public schools to provide our children with a basic education. But they seem dedicated to destroying our primary educational goals, rendering this morally indefensible for us. If, in the process of homeschooling, our children do not have access to the latest lab equipment, advanced training in team sports, and opportunities to play in orchestras, or perform on stage, then so be it! These small deprivations are the least of our worries. If homeschooling means added stress, financial sacrifice and a very, very full schedule, so be it!

In the former Soviet Union, to even be known as a Christian was to severely limit the educational, economic and job opportunities of the individual, and could, at times, lead to imprisonment, even death. We are exceedingly grateful to God and our neighbor that we are able to homeschool in a manner that is obedient to conscience without persecution! We feel called upon to make these small sacrifices now by recoiling from a system that is so dedicated to its anti-Christian work.



**L**isten: God, along with the temptations, also gives patience. He never gives more than we are able to endure. For people who love God, all things work for good. Pray and beseech God to give you faith and patience—to be freed from thoughts of despair. The Saints had the power to rebuke the enemy. We, when we have temptations, ought to take refuge in our Christ and Panaghia—just as a little child runs to his mother.

**I**t is better for us not to believe in dreams at all, because many have gone astray on their account. There are three kinds of dreams: those from God, those from our thoughts, and those from the enemy. If they are from God, and we don't believe them, God does not take offense; because we do not believe them out of fear, lest we be led into deception. Wine and vinegar have the same appearance. From the taste, you understand the difference. If the dreams are from God, they bring calm; if they are from the enemy, they bring turmoil. Beware of deceptions. Better to protect yourself, and not believe anything outside of what our Church teaches.

**Elder Ieronymos of Aigina (+1966)**

## CURING THE ILLNESS OF PHARISAISM

*Transcript of a homily by Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol, Cyprus (as transcribed by the Orthodox Center for Dogmatic Enquiries—translated by the staff of “Orthodox Heritage,” edited for length).*

Having promised yesterday, I will say a few words on the topic of Pharisaism.

All these things that take place—everything that we do—our pilgrimages, our candles, our night-vigils, our prayers, our fasts, our gestures of charity—everything that we do in our life—are for what purpose and what is the reason that we do them? The answer to this question is very important, because correctness about our spiritual life is dependent on it.

Let me give you an example: I ask children at our summer camps: “what is God’s greatest commandment? What is God’s most important commandment, my children?” And all the children—all of them—quote various commandments: do not steal... do not lie... do not be unjust to your fellow-man... respect your parents... love your neighbor... However, none of the children suspect that not a single one of these is God’s first commandment. I suspect that the same is likely true among most grown ups as well.

God’s first and only commandment—all others are in reality the result of this first one—is to love God with all of your heart. Christ Himself said that the first commandment is: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.* (Mk 12:30)

And a second commandment, similar to the first—which springs from within the first commandment—is the one that says *love thy neighbor*. Everything else is a result of these. If you love your neighbor, you will not rob him, you will not lie to him, you will not be unjust with him, you will not take his things, you will not tamper with his wife, you will not interfere with his home, you will not censure him... That is what we mean by “it springs from the first commandment.” The *love thy neighbor* is likewise a result of the first commandment. If you truly love God, it is impossible to not love your neighbor. Therefore, the first and only commandment by God is to love God Himself with all our heart. Subsequently, whatever we do in church, has that precise purpose. And that is why we go to pilgrimages, why we fast, why we pray, why we go to confession, why we light candles, why we read the lives of saints, ... It is our way of loving Christ.

Now, where is our mistake? The mistake is that, unfortunately, we say that we do all these things in order to just become good people... and that is where the big hoax lies. It is the step that we all stumble over. Because, if the purpose of the church was just to make us better people, then there wouldn’t be any need for a personal relationship with Christ,

nor would there be any reason for Christ to have come to the world. Why do you think we aren’t able to understand the saints? Or, to ask it in a simpler manner, why is it that we cannot understand those who love God?

We often ask whether it is necessary to do certain deeds in order to be saved, to be near to God. Is it necessary, let’s say, to depart to the mountains or the desert (as some saints did)? Of course not. If we could understand that our relationship with God is not only for the sake of salvation, but is a relationship of love, only then will we understand the saints and why they did the things they did (much of which cannot be interpreted rationally). This is because love transcends logic. Even secular love—the way that one person loves another person—for example when one wants to get married, he loves the young lady that he will wed, and the same applies to the young lady—then they do things that seem totally irrational. If, for example, you were to ask her or him who is the most beautiful or handsome one in the world, they will probably say it is their beloved. Naturally, they are seeing the other through their own eyes... Our eyes see something entirely different... The prospective bride will describe her man with the finest words. She sees no flaws in him, no faults... she can’t see anything bad about him, because love transcends all these things. And, of course, the same holds true for the groom as well.

Love cannot be forced into the molds of logic. Love is above logic. That is how God’s love is. God’s love surpasses human logic. That is why we can’t judge with logical criteria those people who love God. That is why the saints reacted with a logic of their own; they had a different kind of logic, and not the logic of humans; because their logic was the “logic” of love. So, the church does not teach us just to become good people, not in the least. It is only natural, that we have to become good people, because if we don’t, then what have we succeeded in doing? Our Church teaches us to love Christ, to love the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Inside the church, a relationship develops. It is a personal relationship between man and Christ; not with the teaching of Christ and not with the Gospel. The Gospel is something that helps us to reach the point of loving Christ. When we reach that point of truly loving Christ, the Gospel “will no longer be needed.” Nothing will be needed... all these things will cease... only man’s relationship with God will remain. That is the difference between the church and religion.

Religion teaches you to do your duties, the way the idolaters did. An example: let’s say that we went to our pilgrimage sites, paid our respects, left some money in the charity box, left some lit candles, some oil, or even our entreaties, our names, our offering-bread, everything. All these things are religious duties, but our heart has not changed in the least. The hour of duty ends, and we are the same as we were before: we are ready to attack the other, ready to protest about the other,

ready to be sour again, the way we were before.... Our heart has not changed. And thus, we do not acquire that relationship with Christ, because we simply confine ourselves to duties—to religious duties.

And you must know that such people—you know, “religious” people—can become the most dangerous kind in the church. May God protect us from them... Once, when I was officiating in church and we were citing the words *Lord, save the pious...*; a Holy Mountain monk jokingly remarked: “Lord, save us from the pious...” In other words, God save you from those “religious” types, because their behavior often implies a warped personality, which has never had a personal relationship with God. These types [of persons] merely perform their duties towards Him, but without any serious relationship involved and that is why God says nothing about this type of person. And I too, must confess, that—from my own experience—I have never seen worse enemies of the church than this type of “religious people.”

Whenever the children of religious people, or of priests and theologians—or even of those who in church act like theologians and with self-importance—tried to become monks or priests, they [the parents] became even worse than demons. They would become exasperated with everyone. I remember parents who would bring their children to our homilies, and when their child progressed spiritually, they became the worst among all and found faults with all others. And I would say to them: “But you were the ones who brought the child to the homily; I didn’t bring him...” One other time, I told a father whose daughter I could tell had a zeal for the church: “Make sure you don’t bring her again to any homily. Don’t bring her to talk with me, because your daughter will become a nun and afterwards you will say that I was to blame.” He replied: “Oh no, father, far be it! We adore you!” And his daughter did in fact become a nun... It has been seven years now, and he still isn’t talking to me...

People who wouldn’t miss a single homily, all those who were always the first to show up at homilies, night-vigils, Bible studies... they would also bring their children along; however, when the time came for the children to exercise their freedom—to decide by themselves which path to choose—then those people would move to the extreme opposite camp, thus proving that Christ had never spoken to their hearts. They were merely “religious people.” That is why religious people are the toughest kind in the church. Because you know what? Sometimes, people like these will never be cured, because they only think they are close to God.

Sinners, on the other hand—the “losers,” so to speak—at least they are aware of their sinful nature. That is why Christ said that publicans and prostitutes will go to the Kingdom

of God, whereas to the Pharisees He had said: *This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.* (Mt 15:8). They had merely adhered to the observance of religious formalities.

Therefore, we should all pay close attention and understand that the church is a hospital that cures us and helps us to love Christ, and our love for Christ is a flame that ignites inside our heart so that we can examine ourselves, to see if we are within God’s love. If we discern all those forms of malice and selfishness and wickedness inside us, then we should be concerned, because it is not possible for Christ to be in our heart when we are full of “vinegar” inside. How can you be praying and at the same time be full of bile towards another person? How is it possible to read the Gospel and not accept your brother? How is it possible to be part of the church for so many years—either as a monk or a priest or whatever—and yet, where is the alpha and omega of our faith, which is love? Where is that patience towards your brother? By not embracing true love, it means that you have accomplished absolutely nothing.

We saw how Christ reached the point of telling those virgins that He would have nothing to do with them. He threw them out of the wedding hall even though they had all the virtues; what they didn’t have was love. It is as if He was telling them that “you may have external virtues, you may have remained virgins, you may have done a thousand things, but you didn’t achieve the essence of that which is the most important.” What’s the use, whether I consume olive oil today, or I don’t? I may [fast and] not eat olive oil, for example, but I devour my brother from morning to night... They used to say on the Holy Mountain “don’t ask if I eat fish; as long as one doesn’t eat the fisherman, he can eat fish”; or, “as long as you don’t eat the oil-bearer, you can have a drop of olive oil to eat.” To “devour” someone with a sharp tongue is far worse than consuming a spoonful of olive oil. And yet, we focus on things like that: we eat oil, we don’t eat oil; we eat fish, we don’t eat fish...

You can see how ridiculous these things are and how the demons make fun of us, as well as all those who are outside of the Church. And when such non-Orthodox minded folks approach us, instead of seeing the people of our Church transformed into Jesus Christ—into sweet-natured people and mature people, well balanced, fulfilled people, full of harmony inside them—they instead observe us driven by all of our passions and the sourness that accompanies them; and they will inevitably say: “What? And become like one of them? I’d rather not!”

You, who are a churchgoer, tell me how the church has benefited you. You have visited several pilgrimage sites, you saw the fathers, you saw the holy relics, you saw the Holy Mountain, the Holy Mother at Tinos Island. What was the end benefit of all these experiences? Was your

heart transformed? Did you become humbler people? Did you become sweet-natured? Did you become meeker people in your homes, your families, your monastery? Or at your place of work? That is what truly counts. If we did not achieve those things, let us at least become humbler, with true repentance. And, if we did not manage that either, then we are worthy of many tears—we are truly pitiful...

When asked how many years he had lived on the Holy Mountain, Elder Paisios used to say: "I came here the same year as my neighbor's mule." (His neighbor, old Zitos, had a mule—and you know how every cell on Mount Athos has an animal, a mule, for carrying their things. That animal has a long life span; you don't buy a mule every day—they are too expensive). "Well, the year that I came here, to the Holy Mountain, my neighbor purchased his mule in the same year. We have the same number of years on the Holy Mountain, and yet that poor beast remained a mule, but then so did I. I didn't change at all."

So, we quite often say "I've been here for forty years;" and we, priests and monks, tend to say these words: "I have been in the monastery for forty years." But what we do not realize is that all these years are not in our favour. God will say to us: *Forty years, and you still haven't managed to become something? You are still angry after forty years, you still censure, you still contradict, you still resist, you still are not submissive to your Elder? You've had forty years, and you still have not learnt the first thing about monastic life and about Christian life. What am I supposed to do with your years? What am I to do with you, if you have spent fifty years with frequent confessions and you cannot respond to another person with a kind word? What use are all these things to Me?"*

All of these facts weigh against us. And I am saying all these things first about myself. Because they apply to me first... And because I know these things from myself, that is why I am telling you about them (and why you must also think I am saying them to each one of you). People think that I'm referring to them, but it is not so. It is first about me that I mentioned these things... about me first... We need to consider these things to at least humble ourselves; let's keep our mouth shut, as all those egotistically-driven behaviors ridicule us and make us look foolish in the presence of the Lord.

If we humble ourselves and cease to have grand ideas about ourselves, maybe then can we begin to correct ourselves, gradually, through true repentance, which is born out of true humility. He who does not strive to justify his actions truly repents. He who keeps justifying himself will never repent; and that person who always justifies himself—either externally or internally—will never learn the meaning of repentance. That is why we should always examine ourselves. As the Apostle says, let us test ourselves, to see if there is a

love of God inside us, if we are living within the realm of repentance, so that God can cure our existence; this kind of association with the Church can heal us, and thus we can become people who have been cured of their passions and their sins.

Many ask how we can reach this point. How do we get there? Well, we do it by leaving ourselves in the hands of the Good Physician—God; when we leave ourselves trustingly in His hands; because when we are in various circumstances, in difficulties, God knows what is best for each one of us and will lead us along those paths that will slowly, over the years, perfect us. All we need to do is give ourselves to God with trust, the way we give our trust to a doctor, or the captain of a ship. We show trust. He leads us, and we do not worry about the destination and the arrival timer; we know that the one steering the ship is mindful, vigilant, and he knows the way and is careful.

Another important element that I would like to discuss a little further with you (also because some of you have asked me to do so) is on the issue of time.

Did you notice during these days that we have been spending on this ship, how we had no external distractions? We had nothing to draw our attention elsewhere, like at home, for example our televisions. Did you see how much time we had available? We even conversed among ourselves. You who are married had time to talk to each other. The children played together, they talked amongst themselves, and we had lots of time to ourselves and we communicated with each other, and that is the most important element of all: that we could communicate. The most tragic thing is at home, when everyone is sitting in front of the television and they don't talk to each other... time slips away and people do not communicate with each other. And even worse than this are the program we see on television! They are the source of the worst corruption for us, for our children and for our souls.

One day, when we had disembarked and were walking about, I noticed in one of those refreshment cafes, that a television was on; and, even though nobody was paying attention to it, the TV was still on. So I stood there for a moment, to see what it was showing; I guess it was something like some people who were chasing after some other people all the time, and there was a constant chase, there were guns, bullets, cars, explosions, jumping from one house to another, etc. But these are things that your children, your young children, sit and watch; so much violence... and I'm not even discussing the obscenities that can be heard, which have destroyed even elderly folks. I hear about such things during confession. Elderly people, very old people, who are otherwise very respectable, have been ruined by television, from all that vulgarity that they are exposed to every day. I'm not referring to that specific damage right now; I am

referring to all the other things—all the violence that the television projects. Our children become over-familiarized with violence and will naturally become unruly and disobedient; they will do things that are entirely foreign to their human nature!

Have you any idea what an ugly sight it is, when you see young children mimicking older people? They mimic adults, and they destroy their innocent childishness. Sometimes, when I am invited to an event, they bring along tiny toddlers and tell them to dance. And you see these little girls or boys, ten or twelve years old, full of innocence, making dance moves that they have seen older men and women do, entirely disgraceful, with another morality altogether. You can actually see how those children are being destroyed, with their emulations of the adults that they see on television. And also doing all sorts of things and entertaining themselves with choices that are catastrophic. And I am not saying this from the spiritual aspect only, but from every aspect—psychological, social and family.

Keep your children as far away as possible from such things. Help your children to not be dependent on television, because they will be filled with obscene images, and so will you. If you don't allow your children to watch obscene movies, but you the adult does, then what's the use? And what about those silly warnings that they write on screen—that the movie is not suitable under 17 or 13 or... Does that mean that if they turn 13 this sight becomes a suitable one? Of course those warnings only arouse the youngsters' curiosity, and every one of them will inevitably watch the film. They think to themselves that if this movie is forbidden for those younger than 13, it must have something that is deserving of every curiosity...

In my opinion, the destruction that is inflicted on people's inner world is incalculable. All positive and good images that one absorbs are extremely beneficial in one's spiritual life. The same applies in reverse; the bad images that a person observes create damage that is literally extreme, and sometimes, we cannot tell if it can be cured.

If someone would study this phenomenon, he would see just how great a catastrophe television can wreak on a person's psyche, and especially in younger people. But that is only the beginning; one evil will bring on another. It will be a whole chain of evils, because it destroys communication, it destroys time, it destroys the innocence of a person's soul, and then man becomes exhausted; and being exhausted, he has no desire to do anything, especially anything spiritual. His soul gets filled with things that wearied him, and then he wonders why he is tired—he cannot understand why... Try eliminating television and the like (or at least minimize these evils), and you will see how much more relaxed you will become and how much free time you will have at your disposal.

Naturally, these things are not unrelated to our spiritual life, because a person's spiritual life is a product of all the activities that a person does. By this, I don't mean to say stop watching television altogether. I am not against it per se; it's just that things like these make our life more difficult instead of making it easier, and they destroy it, the way it was destroyed by technological "progress" which has—otherwise—facilitated our lives. You catch a plane, and you are there. You get on a ship, and you get there quickly... or a thousand other conveniences. In the long run, such conveniences may have facilitated our lives, but they also trapped us and made us lose ourselves; they made us lose the beauty of our life and we eventually destroyed the world we live in, and now we want even more sciences and discoveries, to see if we can salvage what is left of it...

All these things that constitute the tragedy and by-product of our Fall make it abundantly clear just how impossible it is to humanly tackle this problem; and yet, if one turns to God, then we will see that which Christ had said that: *With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.* (Mt 19:26). We can see around us that miracle by God, which, even in our day, with all the information and all these provocations taking place around us, and the accessibility to sin, still, there are people who love God and from among the thorns, we see roses spring forth.

Roses blossom from among the thorns, and the immense miracle of man's salvation becomes reality, regardless of our own human weaknesses, our wretched state, our problems, the difficulties with our self, our church, our family, our society and the other elements that unfortunately bombard every person. That is why, to return from all these things, we need to return where we started from, when we said that the solution and the answer to all problems is for man to turn towards loving God, and that when man loves God, then God will cure him; God will resurrect him—even if that person is dead and decomposing—God will restore him, provided man discards from inside him all that is useless and put in his heart a love for God, and build his life around that love for God. And atop that love for God, to build his life, his marriage, his family, his path, his studies, his course in life. If man does that, then he will truly come to enjoy life and his life will become a paradise, because paradise is nothing more than God's love, whereas "hell" is nothing more than the absence of God's love.

So, it is my wish, as a conclusion to this homily, that the love of God will always accompany all of you, and that we should not forget that everything we do, we must do for that reason, and not just to be religiously behaving people. We must become God-loving people, so that our lives can be transformed correctly and we ourselves be transformed into Jesus Christ our Lord.

God be with you.

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## A PRAYER TO THE MOST HOLY THEOTOKOS

*By St. Philotheos, Patriarch of Constantinople (+1379, commemorated October 8<sup>th</sup>).*



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.



# 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]

[HTTP://WWW.ORTHODOXHERITAGE.ORG](http://www.OrthodoxHeritage.org)

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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## ARE WE SEEKING CHRIST?

By St. John of Kronstadt.

The holy Apostle of Christ, Andrew the First-called, was originally a disciple of St. John the Baptist who prepared the people to receive the Messiah. When the Saviour came out of the wilderness, the Forerunner told the people: *Behold, the Lamb of God* (Jn 1:36).

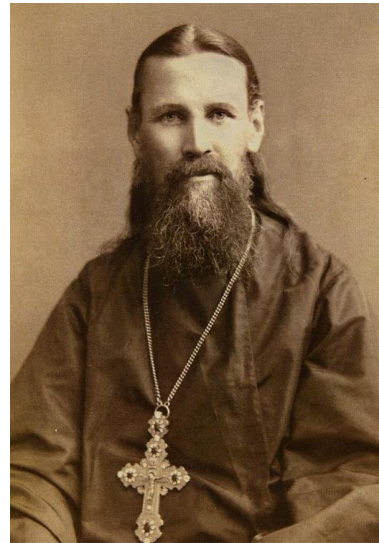
Immediately Andrew followed after Him. Turning round and seeing him together with John's other disciples, the Lord asked them: *What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day.* (Jn 1:38-39). Soon after this the Lord called Andrew and his brother Peter to follow after Him and told them that they were to become fishers of men unto the salvation of many. From that time forth, they remained with Christ; they were faithful to Him to the end and gave their very lives out of love for Him.

Dear brothers and sisters, on this day I would ask you the same question: What are you seeking? Why did you come to church today? What are we all seeking in our lives? Are we seeking Christ, as He was first sought by the humble fishermen, among whom was the Apostle Andrew?

What is it that people seek in life? health, riches, success, acquaintances, friends, prestige, various worldly plea-

tures, vain knowledge... Only a few seek Christ the Saviour. Some may even think it strange to seek Christ. They say, we call ourselves Christians after Christ, we see His holy image both in our homes and at church; we pronounce His sweetest name and hear it in God's temple. It appears we have no need to seek for Christ. People seek that which they don't have, that which they need. But we seem to have Christ.

It's true, we have icons of Christ, but we do not have Christ Himself; we have His name, but only on our lips—not in our hearts; we know Him, but only in word—not in deed. Here, beloved, is a big difference; it is the same difference as between a shadow and the object which casts the shadow. It is, however, precisely with the heart that Christ is truly known, that is, in our inner man—in our soul; because Christ, as God, is Spirit, *Who is everywhere and filleth all things.*



*The kingdom of God is within you* (Lk 17:21), says the Lord. The holy Apostle Paul earnestly desired that through faith, Christ would dwell in the hearts of Christians. He wrote: *May God grant you according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.* (Eph 3:16-17).

We have to admit that most of us do not have Christ in our hearts. Instead, our hearts are occupied with that which is opposed to Christ—our God and Saviour—that which is opposed to our own good, which hinders the salvation of our souls. And because of this we do not lead a genuine Christian life.

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What is it that occupies our hearts? Is it God alone, *Who searchest out the hearts and reins* (Pss 7:9), sees what is in our hearts, its attachments? If the Lord granted us to see the full depths of our hearts, we would turn our eyes away in horror from such an overwhelming accumulation of filth. Let each of us look into his heart and say before the witness of our conscience what it is that occupies our hearts most of all. Passions, sins voluntary and involuntary—are these not our heart’s constant inhabitants?

But where does Christ dwell? In pure hearts, hearts that are humble and contrite, there where He is not grieved by doubt or unbelief, by indifference towards Him Who is God and Saviour; there, where men do not prefer the temporal sweetness of sin; where the idols of the passions have been chased out; where crude materiality is not preferred to the kingdom of God; where Christians often turn their thoughts to the heavenly, as those created for heaven, for eternity; there, where they seek God’s truth, where every day and every hour they are attentive to His commandments. That is where Christ dwells. And what does He do there? If only we knew (some, of course, do know) what He does in souls worthy of His abiding presence—what rest, comfort and joy He imparts, what paradisaic bliss He gives them to experience while still on this earth...

Having once embraced Christ, the holy Apostle Andrew became entirely committed to Him, and no matter what difficulties, sorrows, misfortunes and persecutions—unavoidable in preaching the Gospel—came his way, he remained faithful to Christ, enduring everything out of love for Him, even crucifixion.

It is of utmost importance that we seek after Christ—and find Him. Without Christ, who will save us from our sins

which ensnare us every day and hour, and from the eternal torments? Only the Son of God has power on earth to forgive sins; He alone has the keys to hell and death, the keys to the kingdom of heaven and life.

To find Christ is not difficult. He is everywhere, filling the world with Himself. God says to us through His prophet Jeremiah: *I am a God nigh at hand...and not a God afar off.* (Jer 23:23). As soon as He sees our hearts incline to receive His grace, He immediately enters, bringing with Him peace and comfort. *I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me* (Rev 3:20), says the Lord. Oh, how often He converses with His faithful servants, as with true friends. Christ Himself is seeking you: if you but incline your heart toward Him, you will surely find Him.

But how are we to know if we have found Christ and are close to Him? Those close to Christ often turn to Him in prayer with faith and love; they often pronounce from their heart His sweetest name, often call upon Him for help; they often read or listen to His word with childlike simplicity and love; they seek frequent union with Him in His life-giving Mysteries; they are satisfied with whatever they have and accepting of what happens to them; they strive according to their strength to fulfill Christ’s commandments. It happens that they also experience trials which are allowed by the loving Master—in order that their hearts be cleansed of every sinful impurity. Those who desire to be with Christ must not run away from trials, but even in times of joy, they must not forsake the carrying of their cross.

My dear brothers and sisters! Seek Jesus Christ with faith and love. Do not forget that He gave His life on the Cross

for our sakes, to deliver us from sin and eternal torment, and to dwell in our hearts, that we might have great joy. Do not forget, we have all been bought with the price of His blood, and we should belong to Him, as to our Redeemer.

Our days are numbered. Every stroke of the clock reminds us to seek Him Who created time and Himself stands above the measure of time. He alone is able to pluck us out from the ravaging torrent of time. Every stroke of the clock tells us: Be watchful! You now have one hour less until you must cross the threshold into life after death which knows neither days nor hours. Do not be seduced by the momentary sweetness of sin which vanishes like a dream, leaving the soul empty, ailing, anguishing; it steals away precious time and ruins it forever. Do not waste time in useless occupations or idleness.

Every one of you has a God-given talent to put to use. Busy yourselves in acquiring incorruptible wealth in the kingdom of heaven. Take the example of the thousands who have gone before you, having attained eternal rest and joy through their ceaseless labors in this temporal life, through sweat and tears. Make haste to uproot from yourselves sin in all its various manifestations, through the help of Christ the Saviour. Remember, *man sows what he reaps* (Gal 6:7), according to the immutable law of God's righteousness.

While there is still time, therefore, let us hasten to find Christ and in faith create for Him an abode in our hearts that we not fall prey to the fire of gehenna, as it is written: *If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.* (Jn 15:6).

Amen.



**B**orn into this world, we are bound to it by the strong bonds of kinship. We love the world. Within its bounds we fashion our eternity. But we suffer in it—it cramps the love commanded of us. We cannot fail to love it but this does not mean walking its fallen ways. We cannot help loving the world but when our attraction to it triumphs over our love for God, we must find the strength in ourselves to act like Abraham—take the fire in his hand, and a knife (Gen. 22:6)—and offer in sacrifice all that we hold dear for the sake of the victory of Divine love in us.

Elder Sophrony of Essex (+1993)

## THE BEHEADING OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

COMMEMORATED AUGUST 29 (SEPTEMBER 11)

*By Saint John Maximovitch of Shanghai and San Francisco.*

Having suffered for the truth, thou hast gone rejoicing to declare to those in hell the good tidings of God having appeared in the flesh.

† † †

**T**he whole life of St. John the Forerunner, from its first days, was entirely dedicated to the One Who came after him. In the days of infant massacres in Bethlehem, he was also sought by Herod, and his mother Elizabeth fled with him into the desert, where she died on the fortieth day. About the same time, his father Zacharias was killed by the servants of Herod, in the Temple. The desert raised John, and he remained there in silence, for thirty years, until the word of God came unto him, commanding him to preach repentance and call on men to prepare the way of the Lord: *The word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.* (Lk 3:2-4).

About half a year after the beginning of his ministry, having prepared the Jews to expect the speedy coming of the Messiah, and surrounding himself with disciples, most of whom became the first disciples of Christ, John the Baptist baptized Christ. The mystery of the Holy Trinity was then revealed to him. Having informed those with him, that the *Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world* was present, John gradually faded into the shadows and everyone began to follow the new Teacher.

However, John, rather than grieving over this, rejoiced. When his especially devoted disciples asked him about his lack of concern over his decreasing fame, he replied with words that clearly expressed his personality. *I am not the Christ, but I am sent before Him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: therefore this my joy is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.* (Jn 3:28-50).

Soon after this, his word thundered forth, accusing Herod, so he was cast into a prison, where his earthly life ended. He was beheaded during Herod's banquet. The beheading of St. John the Baptist, which cut off his earthly life, at the same time, started his new and glorious ministry as Forerunner.

The soul of St. John the Baptist, departing his ascetic body, went to hell, the place where the souls of all who died before the Savior's death on the Cross. The souls of everyone beginning from Adam were there.

However, the holy and righteous soul of St. John the Baptist did not go there in order to experience a dark condition of alienation and distance from God. The *friend of the Bridegroom*, who had baptized Him, suffered for his righteousness; he bore the hope of the coming kingdom of God, preached to all preparing the way for Him, was inseparably bound to Him through his devotion, testifying everywhere for Christ, as His messenger, sent before Him.

Having descended to hell, John continued the ministry that he had performed on earth—the preaching about the kingdom of God drawing near. The souls of the righteous ones, from the Old Testament were languishing in hell, awaiting the fulfillment of the coming of the One Who would conquer the serpent, as had been told to Adam by God. The prophets, who had seen beforehand, in spirit, the coming of the Messiah, awaited the fulfillment of the revelations that had been made to them. These souls, deprived of the light of God's glory, tormented with waiting for the fulfillment of their hope. John came, having descended to hell, bringing the Joyful tidings that soon the kingdom of hell would be destroyed. Those who awaited the Redeemer would soon behold Him and be liberated by Him. John testified that the Son of God had already come to earth and that after baptizing Him, he had witnessed the Holy Spirit descending and remaining on Him (John 1:33-34).

The preaching of John concerning the coming of the Messiah was addressed not only to the souls of the righteous, but to all who were in hell. He appeared in hell to prepare the way of the Lord, just as he had prepared it on earth. John the Baptist's descent to hell and his preaching of the Gospel was the proclamation of joy to those who were languishing there.

The souls of all the dead, save for the most inveterate sinners, heeded the preaching of the Baptist. Therefore, when Christ descended to hell after His death on the Cross, He was greeted not only by the Old Testament righteous ones, but also by the souls of those who *once were disobedient* and opposed the *long suffering of God* in the days of Noah and during the rest of the time that sin reigned among men (1 Pet 3:20).

Hell was destroyed by the Christ's soul's descent into it; the dark confinement shone with light; the souls of the reposed were led into the kingdom of heaven. The entryway to this ruin of hell was the descent of the Baptist. Having fulfilled his ministry as Forerunner on earth, he appeared as the Forerunner of Christ, in hell. His beheading is not only the culmination of his earthly exploit, but also the beginning of a new and glorious ministry.

*Among them, that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist* (Mt 11:11; Lk 7:28), Christ said of him. This is he, of whom it is written, *Behold, I send my messenger before Thy face, which shall prepare Thy way before Thee.* (Lk 7:27).

These words of the Lord Himself, testify of the spiritual greatness of John and his high purpose in the work of the salvation of the human race. He appeared as the servant and preacher of God as no other single man in the world, having begun to preach and praise Christ before his birth, and finishing it even after his death, ascending with Christ into the kingdom of heaven after the destruction of hell. As the greatest of the righteous, a worthy place was prepared for him in the kingdom of his Friend, where he remains now, awaiting its revelation in all glory and the triumphant feast of the Lamb of God in the Second Coming, when *He will gather His wheat into the garner, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.* (Mt 3:12; Lk 3:17).

His beheading was his final exploit on earth, and the last step for the receiving of the greatest reward in the kingdom of heaven; while for all those in hell it was the rising of the morning star, before the appearance of the Son of Righteousness.

Just as the nativity of St. John the Forerunner and Baptist is the beginning of the Gospel for the living, so is his beheading the beginning of the Gospel for the dead:

*The glorious beheading of the Forerunner is part of a certain Divine dispensation, for he preached to those in hell the coming of the Savior.* (Kontakion of the Feast).

*Be glad, Baptist, and let thy spirit dance: for thou dost accuse the godless Herod, and dost preach to those in hell, saying: Our salvation hath drawn near.* (Canticle 4 of the Canon).

*He who came before Thy Birth and Thy Divine Passion is, through a sword, in the nethermost parts of the earth. John, the prophet and messenger of Thy descent there, cries as the voice of the Word: Do ye dead, as Giver of life, do ye blind, as Giver of light, do ye prisoners, as Deliverer, exalt Christ above all forever.* (Canticle 8 of the Canon).

Amen.



By its nature, water is soft while a stone is hard. However, when it runs along a watercourse and drips on a stone, it slowly but surely makes a hole in it. Likewise the word of God is soft while our hearts are tough. However, if a person frequently listens to the Word of God, his heart softens and becomes capable to accept the fear of God.

Abba Poimen the Great



## SUFFER THE LITTLE CHILDREN...

*An excerpt from the diary of Sergei Nilus, "On the Banks of God's River," translated from "Na Beregu Bozhyei Reki," St. Elias Publications, Forestville, CA, 1975. Nilus' diary was first published in 1916 by Holy Trinity-Sergius Lavra. When it was later sent for publication abroad, the author supplied names of people who had died, which he had originally noted simply by initials. The "Vera" within the subject story was in fact Seraphima Nikolaevna Vishnevskaya, from Tambov.*

June 1, 1909. Today there left Optina our new acquaintance who, in the brief time she spent at the monastery, became close to us like a sister; closer still, like a true sister in Christ. I shall call her Vera, for her faith is great. [Vera in Russian means "faith", Ed.].

In early January of this year I received a letter from the city of T., in which some womanly Christian soul wrote some warm words encouraging my labors in Christ's vineyard. The letter bore the woman's full signature, but I didn't recognize the name.

On May 25<sup>th</sup>, my wife and I were at Liturgy. Before the Cherubic Hymn a lady passed by where we were standing; she was modestly dressed and led by the hand a boy of about five. For some reason she attracted our attention. At the end of the service, before the royal moleben (it was the birthday of the Empress Alexandra), we saw her again as she went to get a candle.

Now that's a servant of God! I thought to myself. One of her children from his early years and another still in the womb—both are sanctified by the mother's prayers and holy contemplations. Smart woman! May the Lord and the Mother of God bless her!

At that moment she approached the icon of the Mother of God "Quick to Hear," before which we usually stood in the church of the Entrance of the Mother of God into the Temple, and she kneeled down to pray. By chance I caught sight of her expression, directed at the icon. And what an expression it was, what faith emanated from it, what love for God, for what is divine, what is holy!... Oh, if only I could pray like that!

—Mother of God, my heart prayed for her, answer her prayers according to her faith!

In leaving the church through the north doors, in front of the icon "Surety of Sinners," we again saw the woman. She was holding a prosphora.

—Are you not Sergei Aleksandrovich Nilus? she asked me with a shy smile.

—Yes. With whom have I the honor...?"

It turned out that it was the same woman who wrote to me in January from T. This was that Vera with her five-year old son Seryozha, whom we saw off today from Optina. It's worth focusing one's attention on this God-loving pair, to return love for love, to preserve in our grateful

memory their pure image, with its illuminating rays of otherworldly light.

—Today, said Vera, Seryozha and I will be preparing to receive Holy Communion and Holy Unction tomorrow. After the unction service, allow us to pay you a visit. It is such a joy to find people who share the same spirit. One wants so much to rest from the oppression of the world. Don't refuse us your hospitality.

And what a joy it was, this new acquaintance. We recalled the day we had first met Vera, in front of the icon of the Mother of God, "Surety of Sinners;" my wife and I were walking past the dear graves of Optina's great elders, and we stopped in to venerate them as usual. Entering the chapel over the grave of Elder Ambrose, we found Vera and her Seryozha. The boy stretched his hands in front, palms up, and said:

—Batiushka Amvrossy, bless! Just then the boy's mother noticed us.

—Seryozha and I have this custom. After all, Batiushka Amvrossy is alive and is present here invisibly with us. And one should ask his blessing, as one would of a hieromonk.

I barely restrained my tears...

The next day I stopped by Elder Anatole's cell while he was performing the service of unction. Besides Vera and her son there were about twelve others, slaves of God of various ranks and occupations, who had gathered in Optina from different corners of Russia. One should have seen with what serious concentration the five-year-old boy approached the Mystery of Holy Unction! This is how pious mothers begin right from their breast to prepare the souls of their children for the kingdom of heaven! Is this not how the pious boyars, Kyrill and Maria, raised the soul of him whom the Lord placed as a lamp for all Russia, a pillar of Orthodoxy, St. Sergius [of Radonezh]? [Note: a "boyar" is a member of the highest rank of the feudal Russian aristocracy, Ed.]

—When I am pregnant, Vera told us later, I often partake of the Holy Mysteries and I pray to that Saint whose name I wish to give the child, if he is born of that sex. On the fourth day of Nativity 1905, I lost my firstborn son, Nicholas, who was born on Great Saturday, 1900. When I was still carrying him, I prayed to the great wonderworker St. Nicholas, asking him to take my child under his care. When a son was born he was named in honor of the Saint. Seryozha here was born on Nativity, 1903. I had prayed for him to St. Sergius. There was a lot about his birth that was unusual, even remarkable. He was born at eight months. Due to his godfather, the baptism had to be postponed until Theophany. He was churched on the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord. And there was also something unusual with his name. I had prayed for him to St. Sergius, but when the priest asked what name I wished to give him, I hesitated and replied, "I'll tell you at the baptism."

—The reason for this was that that year was the glorification of St. Seraphim, in whom I'd always had great faith.

As a girl I had gone on foot from my village to Sarov, to his grave. And the first time I felt the child in my womb was during the vigil service on the eve of his feast, July 19th. So I didn't know what to do—to call him Sergius, as I'd planned originally, or Seraphim. I began asking the Lord to reveal to me His will. And on the eve of Theophany, when the baptism was scheduled, I had a dream in which I took my newborn to Trinity-Sergius Lavra. And I concluded from this that it was pleasing to the Lord that my son be given the name Sergius. This put me at rest, the more so since St. Seraphim had such love for St. Sergius, and was buried with an icon of this great God-pleaser in his coffin.

As I listened to this quietly bubbling stream of living waters of childlike faith, there beat in my heart the words of the Lord's great promise to His Church: The gates of hell shall not prevail against it! Will not prevail! Truly, they shall not prevail if even in times like ours there are still children such as these to be found in the Church.

Vera continued her inspiring story.

—You seem to like my Seryozha. What would you have thought had you met my Kolya! Even here on earth he was already a citizen of heaven... One night I tucked him



into bed together with the other children. It was about eight o'clock. I heard his voice calling me from the bedroom.

—What is it, child? I asked.

He was sitting up in his bed and whispered to me ecstatically:

—Mama, mama! Just look how many angels are flying about here.

—Good heavens, Kolya, I replied, where do you see them? My heart was pounding, as if driven by a pair of bellows.

—Why, everywhere, he whispered. Mama, they're flying around... Just now they anointed my head. Touch my head; do you see? It's anointed!

I felt his head: the crown was wet, while the rest of the head was dry. I thought perhaps the boy was delirious, but no, he had no fever; his eyes were calm, shining but not feverish. He was healthy, happy, smiling... I felt the heads of the other children—they were all dry, and the children were sleeping; they didn't wake.

—How is it, Mama, that you don't see the angels? There are so many of them. And, Mama, the Saviour sat on my bed and spoke to me.

Just what the Lord said to the child I don't know. Either Vera didn't say, or else I can't remember. It wouldn't have been wise to choke on the torrent of living faith which gushed

forth upon us, its miracles which seemed to transgress the boundary between the earthly and the heavenly.

—Kolya even foretold to me his death, continued Vera, glad that she could pour forth her heart to people willing to listen. He died on the fourth day of Christ's Nativity, having told me about it in September. One day he came up to me and said, out of the blue:

—Mama, soon I'm going to leave you.

—Where will you go, my child?" I asked

—To God.

—How will this be? Who told you about this?

—I'm going to die, Mama! he said, embracing me. But please don't you cry. I'm going to be with the angels, and I will be very happy there.

My heart fell, but I calmed myself at once. After all, could one attach such significance to the words of a child? Of course not. Some time went by and again Kolya interrupted his play to come up to me and tell me not to cry when he dies...

—Mama, it's going to be so nice there, so nice, dear Mama! He repeated insistently, comforting me. But however much I asked him where he got such an idea, who told him about this, he

wouldn't give an answer; he deliberately evaded the question. Perhaps this is what the Saviour told the boy, as the angels were flying around his bed...

—He was such an amazing child, continued Vera. Judge for yourself by the following story.

—There worked in our house an elderly carpenter, and one day he accidentally sliced his finger with an ax. The man ran to the kitchen. I was there at the time and he showed me his finger, which was streaming with blood. Kolya was also in the kitchen. On seeing the carpenter's finger he shrieked and took off running to the dining room where we have an icon of the Holy Trinity. Falling to his knees before the icon and choking through his tears, he began praying:

—Most Holy Trinity, heal the carpenter's finger!

At that moment I came into the dining room with the carpenter. Kolya was so concentrated in his prayer that he didn't even notice us, and he continued tearfully:

—Most Holy Trinity, heal the carpenter's finger!

I went after some medicine and a bandage; the carpenter remained in the dining room. By the time I came back, Kolya had managed to climb up to the vigil lamp for some oil and was anointing the finger of the carpenter, who stood trustfully holding out his wounded hand and weeping with emotion:

—What a child, what a child!

Thinking he was crying from pain, I said to him:

—What are you crying for, old man? You were in the war and you didn't cry, and now...!

—Your son, he said, could make a man hard as nails to cry!

—And what do you suppose? The blood stanchd immediately and the wound healed without any medicine, just a bandage. That was my beloved Kolya, extraordinary little boy.

Vera continued:

—Before Nativity my stepfather and the boy's godfather asked if the boy could visit with him in his village. Kolya was his favorite. The trip proved fatal. There, Kolya fell ill with scarlet fever and died.

—Since I learned about my son's illness only through a courier—there were strikes everywhere at the time and I didn't get the telegram—I arrived barely twenty-four hours before he died. When my husband and I reached my stepfather's place, we found Kolya still quite energetic; it appeared as if the scarlatina (scarlet fever, Ed.) had run its course, and it didn't occur to any of us that the boy's final hours were numbered. We asked that a moleben be served for his recovery. During the service Kolya himself prayed earnestly and kept asking to be given icons that he might kiss them. After the moleben he felt so well that, in spite of my request, the priest decided not to give him Holy Communion, saying that he was well and there was no need to commune him.

We all cheered up, and after a bite to eat went off to rest. I sat at Kolya's bedside, far from any thoughts that his last minutes were approaching. Suddenly he said to me:

—Mama, when I die, you will carry me around the church.

—God be with you, my child, I said. We're still going to be alive and together for some time, God willing.

—And godfather will soon follow after me, continued Kolya, paying no attention to my objection.

He was silent for a moment and then said:

—Mama, forgive me.

—What is there to forgive?" I asked.

—For everything, forgive me for everything, Mama!

—God will forgive you, Kolya, I replied. You forgive me; I've been stern with you at times.

I had no idea this was my final farewell with my dying child.

—No, protested Kolya, I have no reason to forgive you for anything. I can only thank you, my dearest Mama.

For some reason I was overcome by a feeling of dread. I awoke my husband.

—Get up," I said. "I think Kolya is dying.

—What are you talking about? He's better; he's sleeping.

Kolya was lying with his eyes closed. On hearing my husband he opened his eyes and with a joyful smile he said:

—No, I'm not sleeping; I'm dying. Pray for me!

He crossed himself and began praying himself:

—Most Holy Trinity, save me! St. Nicholas, St. Sergius, St. Seraphim, pray for me! Make the sign of the cross over me! Anoint me with oil. Pray for me, everybody!

And with these words my dear boy's life on earth came to an end. His face lit up with a smile, and he died.

Vera continued, after a few moments of silence:

—For the first time in my life my heart rebelled. So profound was my grief that there at his bedside and later at his grave I refused to believe that the Lord had taken from me my treasure. I asked, I insisted, I almost demanded that He, for Whom everything is possible, would restore my child to life; I couldn't reconcile myself to the thought that the Lord might not desire to answer my prayer. On the eve of the funeral, seeing that the body of my child continued, in spite of all my entreaties, to be without breath, I all but fell into despair.

—Suddenly, at the head of the coffin where I was standing burdened by my thoughts, I was drawn to take the Gospel and read the first passage I opened up to. It was the sixteenth verse of the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. In it I read: *Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of God.* (Lk 18:16). For me these words were an answer to my grief from the Saviour Himself. Instantly they softened my heart, and I submitted to God's will.

—At Kolya's funeral, his words were fulfilled. Deep drifts of snow had swept against the church, and in order to get the coffin onto the porch it had to be carried around the whole church. This was for me a sign, and a source of joy. But when they buried my little one in the frozen ground, and a harsh winter covering lay on his grave, my heart was again gripped by anguish, and again I began entreating the Lord for my son. I knew no peace. Day and night I begged God to give me back my consolation and my joy. I was preparing to receive the Holy Mysteries on Kolya's fortieth day. In my grief I reached such a state that I had begun demanding God for a miracle to resurrect my son. And... on the fortieth day I saw my Kolya in a dream, as if alive. He came up to me, happy and bright faced, illumined by some kind of radiance, and he said to me three times:

—Mama, you mustn't! You mustn't! Mama, don't!

—What mustn't I do? I cried out in despair.

—Don't ask that, you shouldn't ask that, Mama!

—Why not?

—Ah, Mama, Kolya replied, you wouldn't even think of asking such a thing if you only knew how splendid it is for me there with God. It's better there, it's infinitely better there, dear Mama!

And with a smile in her face, Vera concluded:

—I woke up, and with this dream all my grief vanished. Three months went by and Kolya's second word came to pass: his godfather followed him into God's heavenly mansions.

The slave of God Vera told me of many wondrous occurrences in her life, but one cannot communicate everything, even to one's notes: there are still people living who could be upset by my words. No one has yet repented of silence: it's better to be silent this time!...

## THE PONTIAN GENOCIDE

By Olga Balytnikova-Rakitienskaja, from "Orthodoxy in the World," May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2010, edited for length.

The Pontian genocide of 1916-1922 is one of the most tragic pages of Greek history. The Pontians had suffered much throughout their history of nearly 3,000 years, but the genocide was the most terrible of their misfortunes, for it deprived the Greeks of the Black sea, their native land, and not just of their friends and relatives. Remembrance of this genocide is necessary not only for the relatives and descendants of the lost; such terrible facts of human history must be known to all. For if people forget about the pain of other people, if they pass it by with indifference, they kill inside their souls a part of their "humanity." This must not be allowed to happen, lest tragedies of this kind be repeated...

### Pontian Greeks—A Brief Historical Overview

Euxinos Pontus (Εὐξεινος Πόντος) or just Pontus (Πόντος)—this is how the Greeks used to call the Black sea from ancient times. The first Greek settlements appeared on its southern coast (modern Turkey and the Caucasus) as early as 800 BC. They were founded by Ionian Greeks, natives of Attica, Anatolia, and the islands of the Aegean. The first city, Sinop, was built in 785 BC. Very soon not only the southern, but also the northern Black sea coast was completely Hellenized. Many renowned Greek men of antiquity, such as Diogenes and Strabo, were born and raised in southern Pontus.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, an independent kingdom of Pontus was established on the southern coast of the Black sea, headed in 301 BC by king Mithridates I. Since that time, Pontus began to develop independently from all other Greek lands.

The dynasty founded by Mithridates successfully ruled in Pontus until the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. The kingdom of Pontus prospered, science and arts flourished in its cities. The last king of the dynasty was Mithridates VI, who ruled from 120 to 63 BC. He resisted the Roman expansion much longer than other Greek rulers, but was finally defeated, and Pontus lost its independence, having become a subject of Rome.

In 35 AD, St. Andrew preached Christianity in Pontus. This marked the beginning of the new, Christian era of Pontian history. Pontus gave to the world many great Saints, such as Saint Martyr Eugene of Trebizond, St. Basil the Great, and St. Philaretus the Merciful. In 386 AD, one of the first Christian monasteries was founded on Mount Melas in western Pontus—the monastery of Our Lady of Soumela (Panagia Soumela, from Pontian "σοῦ Μελᾶ", which means "on the Melas"). In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Sts. Barnabas and Sophronius brought to the monastery an ancient miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary from Athens, the Panagia Athinotissa, which, according to the tradition, was painted by St. Luke the Evangelist. From that time, the icon was known as the image of Our Lady of Soumela. It was regarded as the most sacred

belonging of Pontus, and during the terrible years of the genocide, it "went into exile" together with the Pontian people.

In the Middle Ages, Pontus formed a part of the Byzantine Empire. In the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, when almost the entire Byzantine territory of Asia Minor was occupied by the Seljuks, a Byzantine general, St. Theodore Gavras, successfully defended the territory of Pontus, having thereby initiated the process of restoring its independence. And after Constantinople had been sacked by the Crusaders in 1204, a grandson of the Byzantine Emperor Andronicus I Comnenus, Alexius Comnenus, founded a new state on the territory of Pontus, the so-called Empire of Trebizond (named after its capital, the city of Trebizond). This Empire continued to exist under the rule of the Grand Comneni dynasty even after Constantinople had been freed from the Crusaders, until 1461, when the Empire was conquered by the Ottoman Turks.

Throughout the hard years of Turkish occupation, the Pontians spared no effort to keep alive their faith, language, and culture, despite numerous and often very cruel attempts of their conquerors to convert them to Islam and otherwise assimilate the local population. Only a small portion of the Pontians—the inhabitants of Oflu—succumbed to the repressions and became Muslims. But even among these people, most continued to worship Christ in secret, having become the so-called "Crypto-Christians." The Pontians of Oflu continued speaking Pontian and observing Pontian customs as well. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Pontian people could boast of almost three thousand years of continuity of rich political and cultural tradition.

### Pontian Language and Culture

The Pontians had been developing almost independently of other parts of the Greek nation since late Antiquity; this was due to historical circumstances as well as to the remoteness of Pontus from continental Greece. Thus, the Pontian people (who call themselves "the Romei") developed their own original culture, which differs in many ways from that of the rest of Greece, although there are many commonalities as well. The dialect of the Greek language spoken by Pontians today also differs greatly from common Modern Greek—the differences are so great that some linguists regard it as a separate Pontian language, and not as a "dialect."

Owing to its partial isolation in the Black sea region, the Pontian language retains many archaic features: its grammar and vocabulary have much more in common with Ancient Greek than with the language of modern Greece. At the same time, owing to the long years of contact with other ethnicities of Asia Minor and the Caucasus, Pontian borrowed many words from Persian, Turkish, and various Caucasian languages. All these make it very difficult—in fact, almost impossible—for a Greek from Greece to understand Pontian. Lastly, the Pontian culture also retains many archaic—Ancient Greek and Byzantine—features.



### Genocide: How it Happened

By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman government seriously feared losing its power over Pontus, as had already happened with Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria. This was aggravated by the fact that a substantial percentage of the Pontian population in Turkey consisted of highly educated intellectuals and successful businessmen, who occupied a prominent position in society and exerted considerable influence upon the Ottoman economy. Therefore “drastic measures” of extermination of the Greek element had been planned by the Turkish government long before—and were put into practice after 1908, when the party of “Young Turks” came into power and advanced the slogan of “Turkey for the Turks.” In September 1911, the participants of the Young Turks conference in Thessaloniki openly discussed the issue of extermination of the ethnic minorities (especially Christians) in Turkey, the most important of which were Greeks and Armenians.

On July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1909, the German Ambassador Wangenheim, writing to German Chancellor von Bulow, quoted the Turkish Prime Minister Sefker Pasha: “The Turks have decided upon a war of extermination against their Christian subjects.”

The martyrdom of the Pontian people began in 1914, when Turkey entered WWI as an ally of Germany. Under the pretext of being “politically unreliable,” a great number of Pontian men from 18 to 50 years old were convoyed to the so-called “labor battalions” (“amele taburu”) far inland. These “battalions” were in fact concentration camps, where people were forced to work under inhuman conditions, almost without food, water or medical care. For a slightest fault, any worker could be shot dead by the guards. The “amele taburu” became a common grave for thousands of Pontians, as well as other Christian men.

But, contrary to the expectations of the Young Turks, the repressions did not break the spirit of the Pontians—on the contrary, they prompted the Pontian patriots to drastic actions. Many men of Pontus left their homes and formed guerilla troops in the mountains, while among the Pontian intellectuals of the Caucasus (which at that time belonged almost entirely to Russia) the decision to establish an independent Pontian Republic finally matured. Besides the guerilla troops, Pontians also hoped to get help from the Russian Empire, which was engaged in operations against Turkey, as a German ally.

In 1916, the Russian army entered Trebizond. A few days earlier, the Turkish governor Mehmet Djemal Azmi officially handed the city over to Bishop Chrysanthos, with the following words: “Once we took Trebizond from the Greeks, and now we are giving it back.” When Russian troops approached the city, they were welcomed by the Bishop himself and other inhabitants of Trebizond, who carried flowers. Everyone thought that the centuries-old Pontian dreams of freedom were finally coming true.

But the extremely difficult situation at the Austrian-German front hindered the Russians from advancing inland, while the Greek guerillas did not yet possess enough forces and weapons for independent struggle. Therefore, while the Russian troops were in the Trebizond region, the Young Turks government cruelly dealt with the inhabitants of the Pontian territories that still remained under the Turkish control: the Pontians were now officially declared “traitors” and “Russian accomplices.” According to the government plan, all the urban male population of Pontus were to be put to death, and the rest deported inland. This plan was put into practice immediately.

Here is just a little example of the vast documentary evidence of that time: “The entire Greek population of Sinope and the coastal region of the county of Kastanome has been exiled. Exile and extermination in Turkish are the same, for whoever is not murdered, will die from hunger or illness.” (Herr Kuchhoff, German consul in Amissos in a despatch to Berlin, July 16, 1916).

“On November 26<sup>th</sup>, Rafet Bey told me: ‘We must finish off the Greeks as we did with the Armenians’... On November 28<sup>th</sup>, Rafet Bey told me: ‘Today, I sent squads to the interior to kill every Greek on sight.’ I fear for the elimination of the entire Greek population and a repeat of what occurred last year—referring to the Armenian Genocide.” (Herr Kwiatkowski, Austro-Hungarian consul in Amissos to Baron von Burian, Foreign Minister of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, November 30, 1916).

Pontian Greeks—women, children, and elderly people—were evicted from their houses in 24 hours, not being allowed to take with them anything of their property, and in long columns, under armed convoy, were marched far inland. The deserted villages were plundered and burnt—often before the very eyes of the evicted. On the deportation march, people were treated with utmost cruelty: they received little food, were forced to march forward for hours, days on end, without rest, over the wilderness, under the rain and the snow, so that many of them, unable to endure the hardships, dropped dead from exhaustion and illnesses.

The convoy men raped women and young girls, shot people for the slightest reason, and sometimes without a reason at all. Most of the deported died on the way, but even those who survived the deportation march found themselves in no better situation—the places of destination turned out to be real “white death” camps. In one such place, the village of Pirk, the deported inhabitants of the city of Tripoli were kept. According to the reports of the survivors, out of 13,000 Pontians who had been sent to Pirk, only 800 survived.

In 1917, the October revolution took place in Russia, and power was seized by the Bolsheviks. Immediately after the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Russian troops left Trebizond, abandoning its people to the wrath of the Turks. The Turkish army and the “chet” (criminal gangs, unofficially

encouraged by the Turkish government) poured into the city and the surrounding villages, robbing and killing. To escape death, many Pontian families of eastern Pontus fled to the Caucasus.

But the struggle for independence, once started, could not be stopped. On the Russian territory, in the city of Rostov, the local Pontian activists formed the Central Pontian Committee; people donated money and weapons for the struggle, while Constantine Constantinides was sending proclamations from Marseille to the inhabitants of Pontus and the leaders of the European states.

In the meantime, the guerrilla resistance movement in the mountains of Pontus gathered force. The regions of Pafra, Sanda, and Ordu became the main centres of the struggle; soon guerrilla troops appeared in Trebizond and Kars, too. The Pontian palikare (warriors) of the Resistance fought bravely: their deeds became legends. The success of the movement was also favoured by the fact that the troops were headed by leaders of great experience and talent. In the past, some of them had served as officers in the Russian Caucasian army, and had taken part in many battles; for example, Vassil-aga had received a gilded sword from Tsar Nicholas II for his courage. As a leader of Pontian guerrilla troops, Vassil-aga became so famous for his valor and military talent, that often his name alone was enough to put a Turkish detachment to flight.

In 1919, only a year after the end of the World War I, the Greek-Turkish war of 1919-1922 began. The Greek advance in Asia Minor gave rise to the next stage of extermination of the Pontians—all of them were outlawed. All the fury of the Turks fell upon those who could not put up a resistance: the civilian population of Pontian cities and villages. Unprecedented atrocities—robberies, murders, rapes—started throughout Pontus.

Whole Greek families were shut in churches and schools and burnt alive—for example, in the city of Pafra 6,000 people, mostly women and children, were destroyed in this manner. Of those inhabitants of Pafra who escaped death by fire, about 90% (22,000) were slaughtered; all women and even little girls were raped by Turkish soldiers before being killed, while babies were disposed of by crushing their heads against walls. In the city of Amaseia and the neighbouring villages, 134,000 Pontians out of 180,000 were slaughtered; in the city of Mertzifunda, all the inhabitants were killed; in Tripoli, Kerasounda, Ordu, and many other places almost the entire male population was destroyed... And these facts are but a small part of what was happening throughout Pontus at that time.

The mass deportations continued now on a larger scale and with greater cruelty. Here is, for example, the testimony of Maria Katsidou-Simeonidou, one of the few survivors of those terrible times: "I was born in Mourasoul village, Sevasteia/Sivas district, on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1914. I remember the deportations well. In 1918, I was about four years old, when

one day I saw my father in the village square. I ran to him and asked him for the pie he brought me every day from the family-owned mill. He replied: 'O my child, the Turks are going to kill me and you will not see me again.' He told me to tell my mother to prepare his clothes and some food for him. That was the last time we saw him. They killed him along with another ten men.

I remember another time when a Turk warned our village, saying that all the young men should leave because the next day, Topal Osman would be coming. Indeed, those that departed, were saved. They still killed fifteen men, including the teacher, the village president and the priest. Topal Osman had caught three hundred and fifty men from neighboring villages. He had them bound, murdered and thrown into the river that ran through our village. I still remember the echo of the shots. They were hauling the bodies by ox-cart for nine days to bury them. Most of them were unrecognizable, as their heads had been cut off.

In 1920, around Easter, the Turkish Army came and told us to take with us everything we could. We loaded up the animals, but the saddle-bags tore open and most of us were left without food. On the deportation march, the Turkish guards would rape the women. In the Teloukta area, about half our group was lost in a snow storm. From there, they took us to a place without water, Sous-Yiazousou; many died of thirst. Soon afterwards, as we passed a river, all of us threw ourselves at the water; people fell over each other in the rush; many drowned. We reached Phiratrima, which was a Kurdish area and they left us at a village near a bridge. It was here that a pregnant girl gave birth, to twins. The Turks cut the newborns in two and tossed them in the river. On the riverbank, they killed many more of the group..."

The Pontians of the Caucasus, who had access to means of communication, were calling to the leaders of the European states for help. But Greece was preoccupied by political wrangles, as well as by the failures on the Anatolian front; Great Britain occupied a "neutral" (de facto anti-Greek) position, while the rest of the "great powers" openly opposed the interests of the Pontian people. The only hope of the civilian population of Pontus was now the guerilla Resistance. The guerillas were still fighting heroically, but even they, having been left completely without support and lacking even the possibility of being supplied weapons (while the Turkish army of Kemal constantly received money and weapons from the Bolsheviks), could not change the course of the war. It was practically impossible to defend the independence of Pontus at the time when its inhabitants were facing the danger of total extermination. The chief goal of the guerillas was now to save their people from death: they fought against the Turkish army for the life of Pontian Christians and conveyed the refugees outside Pontus. Over 135,000 Pontians who found refuge in the Caucasus region and over 400,000 evacuated to Greece owe their lives to this heroic resistance of the guerillas.

On July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1923, a year after the defeat of Greece in the war, a peace treaty was signed between Turkey and Greece, which included the convention for the exchange of populations. In accordance with this convention, the remaining Greek population of Pontus was deported to Greece.

This eviction from their homeland did not affect the Muslim Greeks of Oflu, who were considered “co-religionists” by the Turks and therefore escaped persecutions, as well as those few families who managed to pass themselves off as “Turks.” These people had to lead a double existence of “Crypto-Greeks” ever since, finding themselves in an even more difficult position than other Crypto-Christians. On the whole, according to the estimations of contemporary official sources and modern historians, about 350,000 Pontians were slaughtered by the Turks between 1914 and 1923. The survivors were expelled from their homeland and live in exile to this day.

Nowadays, compact groups of Pontians live in the Caucasus (Southern Russia, Georgia, Armenia) and northern Greece (the provinces of Macedonia and Western Thrace). A considerably large Pontian diaspora exists in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Germany, Australia, Canada, and USA; Pontian communities can be found in many other countries around the world.

In Pontus itself, according to Turkish sources, about 300,000 Muslim Greeks live today; approximately 75,000 of them still retain Pontian language and customs (as had been mentioned above, many of these people are Crypto-Christians). One can say with certainty that “Crypto-Greeks” also exist in Turkey, although their numbers, for evident reasons, cannot be estimated. Thus, the total number of indigenous population of Pontus still living in the territory of Turkey approaches several hundreds of thousands of people.

### Conclusion

At present, the Pontian Genocide is officially recognized only by Greece, Cyprus, Armenia, Sweden, and the American State of New York. This is not due to any doubts as to the historical fact of extermination of the Pontian people; after all, official documents of those times and testimonies of eye-witnesses of various nationalities provide sufficient evidence for the reality of the genocide. It is instead due to insufficient awareness and (which is even more important) insufficient interest of the international community. The issue of international recognition of the Pontian Genocide has been raised for the first time on the 27<sup>th</sup> September 2006, at a meeting of the EU Parliament. At present, May 19<sup>th</sup> has been established as Commemoration day of the Pontian Genocide.

Pontians around the world do not lose hope of restoring historical and human justice. And this means that there is also hope for the Pontian people to return to the land of their ancestors. The activity of Pontian organizations under the slogan “Pontus is alive!” (Ζεῖ ὁ Πόντος!) has this return as a goal. As a Pontian folk song says, “our people will flourish and bear fruit once again.”

## THROUGH ASCETICISM, MAN BECOMES IMMATERIAL

Source: Translation from the Book: “Family Life” by Elder Paisios the Athonite, published by the Sacred Hesychastirion of St. John the Evangelist – Souroti, Greece – 2002. Translated by Fr. Luke Hartung – The Dalles, Oregon, U.S.A.



—Geronda, you once had told us: “A blockade is needed in spiritual warfare.” What did you mean?

—In a war they try to blockade the enemy. They surround him, confine him within the city walls, and deprive him of food. Then they cut off his water: for if the enemy is left without basic supplies and ammunition, he will be forced to surrender.

Therefore, I mean to say that in the same way, with fasting and vigil, the devil is disarmed and retreats. *Through fasting, vigil, and prayer, thou didst receive heavenly gifts...*, as the hymn says.

Through asceticism man becomes immaterial. Obviously, one aspiring to a higher, spiritual goal must abstain. If someone practices abstinence in order to lose weight, he is only caring for the well-being of his body. Then his asceticism resembles yoga. Unfortunately, the issue of asceticism has been cast aside even by people of the Church. They say, “I need to eat my food, to enjoy this and that, for God created everything for us.” Do you know what an archimandrite told me once at a dinner he prepared for us? I couldn’t force myself to eat any more because of how much I’d already eaten. He noticed and said, *If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.* (1 Cor 3:17)

“Perhaps you have it backwards?” I told the archimandrite. “Is this referring to asceticism or debauchery? The passage refers to those who destroy, who obliterate the temple of God with debauchery or with intemperance; it doesn’t refer to those who practice asceticism out of love for God.” And look: he then proceeded to comfort his own thoughts by saying, “We need to eat, so as not to destroy the temple of God”!

Someone else, after a visit to a certain monastery, told me, “I went to a monastery and the monks were sick from all their fasting. Their vats of oil were untouched. Father, they practice fasting and vigil!”

What can you say? Such people don’t want to suffer at all. They eat their food, their fruit, their sweets, and afterwards, so as to justify themselves, they reproach those who practice asceticism. They haven’t experienced the spiritual joy of asceticism. Someone else will tell you, “I need to drink this much milk. I’ll fast during Great Lent, but afterwards I’ll make up for it, because I need a lot of calcium.” It’s not that his body

needs it, but that he feels entitled to it; his thoughts are thus put at ease that it's OK, that it's not a sin.

Goodness, even thinking in this way is a sin. How far will a man's logic go? He does fine during the fasting periods prescribed by the Church, but don't lament what you are deprived of during the fast. Tell me, how can the Holy Spirit remain after such things?

See what *filotimo* ("responsive gratefulness") some family men have! Once, a very simple man with nine children went to confess. His spiritual father then told him to commune. "Me? How can I commune?" He said. "We put a little oil on our food on strict fast days because my children and I work." "How many children do you have?" His spiritual father asked him. "Nine." "How much oil do you put on the food?" "Two spoonfuls." "And how much of these two spoonfuls is your portion my poor child?" His spiritual father replied. "Now go and commune!" Between the eleven of them they ate only two spoonfuls of oil, and his thoughts troubled him!

I know a layman who became holy with the asceticism he practiced. Yes, not many years ago there was a man and his son who worked for years on the Holy Mountain. Later, a good job opportunity presented itself back in his homeland, and the man decided to leave and take his son with him so that the entire family could be together again. His son, however, had been greatly affected by the ascetic life of the monks; and remembering the worldly life with its many pressures, he didn't want to follow his father and return to the world.

"Father, since you have other children," he told him, "leave just one of them in the Garden of the Panaghia." Because he insisted, his father was forced to leave him. That little warrior was illiterate, but he was very softhearted and had much *filotimo* and simplicity. He considered himself totally unworthy to become a monk because he thought that he wouldn't be able to fulfill his monastic duties. So he found a small *kalyvi* (hut) which had been used in the past for keeping animals.

He completely covered the windows and door with rocks and ferns—all except for a small, round opening for squeezing in and out. He could only close the door from inside by using a raggedy old blanket he had found. He didn't even light a fire. The birds' nests were thus in better shape than his "nest," and the dens of the forest animals were nicer than his den. But his soul had a joy that not even those who live in wealthy palaces had; for he was struggling for Christ, and Christ was with him—not only in his *kalyvi*, but within his spiritual house, in his body and his heart. Because of this he lived in Paradise.

From time to time he would leave his little nest and visit the monastic cells where the fathers were doing work in the gardens. He would help, and they would give him a little bit of dry rusk and a few olives. But if they wouldn't let him

work he would refuse these blessings. He always felt that he should repay them for the blessings with double the work. Of course, only God knew his spiritual life; for he lived in obscurity, in a simple way and unobtrusively.

From one incident in his life which became known to me, however, one is able to learn a great deal: Once he passed by one of the monasteries and asked when Great Lent started—even though for him the whole year was basically Great Lent. Afterwards he went and shut himself up in his nest. About three months passed without him realizing it. Then one day he left and went to a monastery to ask if it was Pascha yet. He went in for the service, communed at Divine Liturgy, and afterwards went with the fathers to *trapeza*. At *trapeza* he saw the red eggs—for it was the *Apodosis* (Leavetaking) of Pascha—and he was taken aback. He asked a brother, "My goodness, is it already Pascha?" "What do you mean Pascha?" Answered the brother. "Tomorrow is Ascension!"

In other words, he had fasted all of Great Lent plus the forty days until Ascension! In this same way he struggled until the hour of his death. A hunter found him two months after he had died, and informed the police and a doctor. The doctor told me, "Not only did he not smell, but on the contrary, he exuded a heavenly fragrance."



Because modern conveniences have exceeded all bounds, they have become inconveniences. Machines have multiplied, and so have distractions; man has been turned into a machine. All kinds of machines and inventions now rule over man. This is why human hearts too are turning into steel. All of these modern comforts make the cultivation of conscience in people difficult.

In the old days, people used to work with animals and were more compassionate. If you overloaded an animal, and the poor thing knelt down, you felt bad for it. If it was hungry and looked at you sniveling, it broke your heart. I remember when a cow of ours fell ill, we suffered with it; because we considered it a member of the family. Today, people own lots of devices made of steel, but - unfortunately - even their own hearts have turned to steel.

Is the equipment broke? It is welded together. Is the car not running? It is taken to the repair shop. If it cannot be fixed, then throw it away; they have no feelings for it. After all, it is just a piece of iron. The heart does not take part in these decisions, and this is how selfishness and pride find fertile ground and take root.

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

## Τὸ «Ἐχειν» καὶ τὸ «Εἶναι»

Σεβ. Μητροπολίτου Σύρου κ. Δωροθέου, ἀπὸ τὸ περιοδικὸ «ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΑ ΘΕΜΑΤΑ», τεύχος 46, Αὐγουστος 2012.

Καθώς, ἐπὶ δεκαετίες, εἴχαμε ταυτισθεῖ μὲ τὴν ψευδαίσθηση τῆς αὐτάρκειας καὶ τὴν αὐταπάτη τῆς μόνιμης εὐημερίας, ἡ ἐπέλαση τῶν παρόντων δύσκολων καιρῶν ἀνέτρεψε βίαια καὶ ἀπτόμα τις βεβαιότητες καὶ τις σταθερότητες τῆς ζωῆς μας καὶ κλόνησε τὴν αἴσθηση τῆς ἀσφάλειας καὶ τῆς διαρκοῦς εὐημερίας, μέσα στὴν ὁποία ἐγκλωβισμένοι ζούσαμε τὴ φενάκη μίας ἀληθινὰ νιτσεικῆς παντοδυναμίας.

Ἀπὸ τὴ μία μέρα στὴν ἄλλη, ὅλα ἄλλαξαν! Ἡ ἀνασφάλεια, τὸ ἄγχος καὶ ὁ φόβος μίας ἐπερχόμενης ἀπώλειας, ἡ ἀβεβαιότητα γιὰ τὸ σήμερον καὶ ἡ ἀγωνία γιὰ τὸ αὔριο, μᾶς δημιουργοῦν ἓνα μεγάλο ὑπαρξιακὸ κενό, πὸν μεταφράζεται σὲ παθητικότητα, ἀπελπισία καὶ μειωμένη αἴσθηση ἐλέγχου τῆς ζωῆς, ἐνῶ ἐκδηλώνεται συχνὰ μὲ τάσεις καὶ πράξεις αὐτοκαταστροφῆς.

Αἰσθανόμαστε ὅτι ἡ ζωὴ ἔχει χάσει τὸ νόημα, τὸ περιεχόμενο, τὸ σκοπὸ καὶ τὴν ὁμορφιά της, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ πολλοί, σὲ ἀνησυχητικὸ βαθμὸ πολλοὶ συνέλληνες, ἐπιλέγουν συνειδητὰ τὴν ἄρνησή της καὶ καταφεύγουν στὴν αὐτοκτονία, μία ἐνέργεια ἡ ὁποία ἔρχεται σὲ πλήρη ἀντίθεση ὄχι μόνον μὲ τὸ νόμο τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ τὸ νόμο τῆς φύσης, τὸ ἔνστικτο τῆς ἐπιβίωσης...

Δὲν εἶναι, μάλιστα, λίγοι καὶ ἐκεῖνοι πού, ἀντὶ νὰ προσεύχονται γι' αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ὅπως πράττει ἡ Ἐκκλησία, θεωροῦν τὸ φαινόμενο τῶν αὐτοκτονιῶν «παράπλευρη ἀπώλεια» τῆς οἰκονομικῆς συγκυρίας, δικαιολογημένη, ἀν ὄχι καὶ «ἀξιομίμητη» ἔμπρακτη διαμαρτυρία γιὰ τὴν ἐπικρατοῦσα ἀδιέξοδη, πρὸς τὸ παρόν, κατάσταση καὶ τοὺς πραγματικοὺς ἢ ὄχι ὑπευθύνους γι' αὐτήν, ἐνῶ κάνουν ἀναλύσεις καὶ καταγράφουν στατιστικῆς, ἐνίοτε δὲ ἡρωοποιοῦν τοὺς κατὰ τὴν ἄποψή τους «ιδανικοὺς αὐτοχειρες». Ἄλλη μία ἀπόδειξη ὅτι ἡ παροῦσα κρίση δὲν εἶναι τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα, ἀλλὰ ἡ αἰτία μίας πολύχρονης ἀλλοτριώσεως, πὸν ἐπῆλθε στὸν ψυχισμὸ καὶ τὴ νοοτροπία τῶν Ἑλλήνων, οἱ ὁποῖοι, μαγεμένοι ἀπὸ τὴν Κίρρη τῆς ὑλικῆς εὐδαιμονίας, ταύτισαν τὸ «ἔχειν» μὲ τὸ «εἶναι».

Ἀφοῦ ἐπὶ χρόνια ἀφυδατώσαμε τὶς ψυχές μας ἀπὸ κάθε ἰδανικὸ, ἀφοῦ συστηματικὰ προιονίσαμε τὸ κλαδὶ πὸν μᾶς συνέδεε μὲ τὸ ζωοπάροχο δέντρο τῆς

Ἑλληνορθόδοξης παράδοσής μας, ἀφοῦ δυσφημίσαμε κάθε ἀξία καὶ ἀπορρίψαμε κάθε τί τὸ πνευματικὸ, ἡ ζωὴ μας ἔχασε τὸ ἀληθινὸ τῆς νόημα καὶ διαστράφηκε ὁ σκοπὸς τῆς ὑπαρξῆς μας.

Ἐπάρχουμε μόνον ἂν ἔχουμε καὶ ἀξίζει νὰ ὑπάρχουμε μόνον ἂν ἀποκτοῦμε... Ἀπὸ τὴ στιγμή, λοιπόν, πὸν δὲν «ἔχουμε» ἢ δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ ἀποκτήσουμε περισσότερα, ἢ χάνουμε αὐτὰ πὸν ἔχουμε, γιὰ τὴν ὑπάρχουμε;

Ἔτσι, ἡ αὐτοκτονία φαντάζει σὰν φυσιολογικὴ ἀντίδραση, ἀν ὄχι καὶ σὰν πράξη ἀξιοπρέπειας ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου, ὁ ὁποῖος προτιμᾷ νὰ πεθάνει παρὰ νὰ στερηθεῖ, ὄχι τὰ ἀναγκαῖα, ἀλλὰ τὰ περιττά!...

Ἄλλη μία ἀπόδειξη τῆς ἐπελθούσης ἀνατροπῆς τῆς κλίμακας τῶν ἀξιῶν!

Ἄλλοτε θυσιάζαμε τὴ ζωὴ μας γιὰ ιδέες καὶ ἰδανικά, γιὰ τὸ Θεό, τὴν Πατρίδα καὶ τὸ συνάνθρωπο! Σήμερον, θυσιάζουμε τὴ ζωὴ μας γιὰ τὰ χρήματα! Στὴ γνωστὴ ἀπειλὴ τῶν ληστῶν «τὰ λεφτὰ σου ἢ τὴ ζωὴ σου», ἀπαντᾶμε «τὴ ζωὴ μου»!

Εἶναι γεγονός, καὶ κανεὶς δὲν τὸ ἀμφισβητεῖ, ὅτι ζοῦμε σὲ καιροὺς δυσχεῖμερους καὶ μέρες χαλεπές, ἀλλὰ ὄχι πρωτόγνωρες καὶ μοναδικές! Ἡ σύγκριση, μάλιστα, τῆς σημερινῆς κατάστασης μὲ τὴν περίοδο τῆς Κατοχῆς εἶναι συντριπτικὰ καταλυτικὴ καὶ ἔντονα ἀποκαλυπτικὴ!

Οἱ τότε Ἕλληνες δὲν αὐτοκτονοῦσαν οὔτε ἐπειδὴ δὲν εἶχαν νὰ φάνε, οὔτε ἐπειδὴ πέθαιναν κυριολεκτικὰ τὰ παιδιά τους ἀπὸ τὴν πείνα, οὔτε ἐπειδὴ ζοῦσαν καθημερινὰ τὴ βία καὶ τὸ θάνατο καὶ τὴν καταπίεση τοῦ κατακτητῆ. Ἀντίθετα, ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ δεινὰ χαλύβδωναν τὴν ἀποφασιστικότητά τους, ἐνίσχυαν τὴν ἀγωνιστικότητά τους καὶ γιγάντωναν τὴ θέλησή τους νὰ ἀγωνιστοῦν καὶ νὰ θυσιαστοῦν γιὰ ἓνα καλύτερο μέλλον, καλύτερο ποιοτικὰ, ὄχι ποσοτικὰ!

Ἡ ἀδυναμία νὰ πληρώσουμε τὰ χρέη μας καὶ ἡ στέρηση λίγων ἢ πολλῶν ἀπὸ τὶς θεωρούμενες ἀπαραίτητες, ἀλλὰ στὴν οὐσία περιττές, ἀνέσεις μας, μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι λόγος γιὰ ἀπελπισία, κατάθλιψη, ἀπομόνωση, γκρίνια, ἀπαισιοδοξία, ἀλλὰ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι λόγος αὐτοκτονίας!

Ἄν πρέπει κάτι νὰ «σκοτώσουμε» καὶ νὰ ἀρνηθοῦμε εἶναι τὸ σύστημα ἀξιῶν, βάσει τοῦ ὁποῖου ἀξιολογούσαμε μέχρι σήμερον τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας καὶ τὸ περιβάλλον μας! Νὰ μιμηθοῦμε τὴ σωτηριώδη μετάνοια τοῦ Πέτρου, ὄχι τὴν ἄσκοπη μεταμέλεια τοῦ Ἰούδα, ὁ ὁποῖος «μεταμεληθεὶς ἀπήγγατο»...



Κι' ἂν αισθανόμαστε «γυμνοὶ» ἀπὸ ὑλικά ἀγαθὰ καὶ ἀνέσεις, ἂν μᾶς πνίγουν τὰ χρέη καὶ οἱ ὑποχρεώσεις, ἄς στρέψουμε τὸ βλέμμα μας πρὸς τὸ Χριστό!

Πάνω στὸ Σταυρὸ δὲν ἔχει ἀπολύτως τίποτε! Ἀκόμη καὶ ὁ ἱματισμὸς Του γίνεται ἀντικείμενο κληρώσεως τῶν Ρωμαίων στρατιωτῶν. Κι ὅμως τὴ στιγμή ἀκριβῶς αὐτὴ ἀποκαλύπτεται τὸ «εἶναι» στὴν πιὸ σημαντικὴ του ἐκδήλωση, στὴν προσφορὰ τῆς θυσίας καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης.

Ἰσως, ἔφτασε καὶ γιὰ τὸν καθένα μας ἡ προσωπικὴ του ὥρα, νὰ χάσουμε τὰ περιττὰ καὶ νὰ κερδίσουμε τὰ ἀναγκαῖα, νὰ χάσουμε τὰ πράγματα καὶ νὰ κερδίσουμε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, νὰ χάσουμε τὸν κόσμον καὶ νὰ κερδίσουμε τὴν ψυχὴ μας, νὰ ζήσουμε, μὲ λίγα λόγια, γνήσια καὶ ἀληθινά!

† Ὁ Σύρον Δωρόθεος Β΄



**Α**γωνίσου μὲ ὅλη τὴν δύναμη τῆς ψυχῆς σου νὰ κρατᾶς καθαρὸ τὸν νοῦ σου τὴν ὥρα τῆς προσευχῆς καὶ νὰ συγκεντρώνεις ὅλο σου τὸν λογισμό στὴν κατανόηση τοῦ λόγου καὶ τῆς εὐχῆς ποὺ κάνει.

**Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Σιναΐτης**

**Η**κακία ποὺ γίνεται δεκτὴ μὲ τὸ λογισμό, κάνει τὴν καρδιὰ θυμώδη καὶ ἀπειλητικὴ, ἐνῶ ὅταν πολεμηθεῖ μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ καὶ τὴν ἐλπίδα προκαλεῖ μετάνοια καὶ συντριβή.

**Ἀββᾶς Μάρκος**

**Μ**ε τὴν ἀνάμνηση τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ συγκέντρωσε τὸν σκορπισμένο σου νοῦ.

**Ἅγιος Φιλόθεος ὁ Σιναΐτης**

**Η**προσευχὴ εἶναι ἐκεῖνο τὸ ὄπλο, χωρὶς τὸ ὁποῖο ὅ,τιδήποτε κι ἂν κάνει ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὁσοδήποτε κι ἂν ἀγωνισθεῖ, δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κατορθώσει τίποτε. Ὅλα ὅσα κάνει, ἐπιδιώκει, καὶ ἐργάζεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος, κατευοδώνονται καὶ πραγματοποιοῦνται μὲ τὴ χάρη καὶ τὴ βοήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ

**π. Εὐσέβιος Μαθόπουλος**

**Η**καρδιακὴ προσευχὴ βοηθάει ὄχι μόνον τοὺς ἄλλους ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν ἑαυτό μας, γιατί βοηθάει νὰ ἔρθει ἡ ἐσωτερικὴ καλοσύνη. Ὅταν ἐρχόμαστε στὴν θέση τοῦ ἄλλου, ἐρχεται φυσιολογικὰ ἡ ἀγάπη, ὁ πόνος, ἡ ταπείνωση, ἡ εὐγνωμοσύνη μας στὸν Θεὸ μὲ τὴν συνεχή δοξολογία, καὶ τότε ἡ προσευχὴ γιὰ τὸν συνάνθρωπό μας γίνεται εὐπρόσδεκτη ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ τὸν βοηθάει»

**Γέροντας Παΐσιος**

## Ὁ «θεὸς» Σίβα ὡς Προστάτης τοῦ Ἐρευνητικοῦ Κέντρου CERN...

*Φυσικὰ «πιστεύουν» σέ... κάτι, ἀρκεῖ ΝΑΜΗΝΕΙΝΑΙ ὁ Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, ἀλλὰ ἓνας νεοεποχίτικος ἀχταρμάς, διανθισμένος μὲ ἀνατολίτικες μυστηριακὲς «δοξασίες», ποὺ χρησιμεύουν ἀφάνταστα στὴν ΠΑΝΘΡΗΣΚΕΙΑ ποὺ ἐπιδιώκουν! Τοὺς ξεμπροστιάζει ὁ «Ὀρθόδοξος Τύπος».*



**Ὅ**ποιος ἀμφιβάλλει ὅτι καὶ ἡ ἐπιστήμη ἀκόμη ἔχει ἐπιστρατευτεῖ νὰ στηρίξει καὶ νὰ διαδώσει τὸν ἀποκρυφισμό τῆς «Νέας Ἐποχῆς», ἄς προσέξει τὸ ἔξις:

Πολλὸς λόγος ἔγινε τελευταία γιὰ τὸ Εὐρωπαϊκὸ Κέντρο Ἐρευνῶν Μοριακῆς Φυσικῆς, στὴ Γενεύη, τὸ περίφημο CERN καὶ τὰ πορίσματα τῶν ἐρευνῶν του, γιὰ τὸ λεγόμενο σωματίδιο τοῦ Χίγκς.

Γιὰ ἐκεῖνο ποὺ δὲ δόθηκε σημασία ἦταν ἡ ἐξωτερικὴ «διακόσμηση» τοῦ κέντρου. Στήθηκε ἓνα δίμετρο ἄγαλμα τοῦ Ἰνδουιστικοῦ «θεοῦ» Σίβα Νάταρατζ, μὲ τὴ γνωστὴ παράσταση τοῦ «συμπαντικοῦ χοροῦ»! Γιὰ ὅσους δὲ γνωρίζουν τὸν ἐν λόγω «θεό», τοὺς πληροφοροῦμε ὅτι ἀνήκει στὸ πάνθεο τοῦ Ἰνδουισμού καὶ λατρεύεται ὡς ὁ «θεὸς» τῆς καταστροφῆς! Ἐπίσης πληροφοροῦμε τοὺς ἀναγνώστες μας ὅτι ὁ Ἰνδουισμὸς εἶναι ἡ κύρια πηγὴ ἀποκρυφισμοῦ τῆς «Νέας Ἐποχῆς». Ὁ «συμπαντικὸς χορὸς» τοῦ Σίβα, παραπέμπει ἀβίαστα στίς περὶ κόσμου δοξασίες τῆς, καθ' ὅτι διδάσκει τὴν ἀϊδιότητα, δηλαδή τὴν αἰωνιότητα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὴν συνεχή του ἀνακύκλωση. Αὐτὸ λοιπὸν τὸ νεοεποχίτικο σύμβολο δὲ θὰ μπορούσε νὰ τοποθετηθεῖ σὲ πιὸ περίοπτη θέση ἀπὸ τὸν περίβολο τοῦ παραπάνω ἐρευνητικοῦ κέντρου, διότι τὰ φῶτα τῆς δημοσιότητας ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου εἶναι στραμμένα σ' αὐτό!

Ἡ «διακοσμητικὴ» ἐπιλογή τοῦ ψευδοθεοῦ Σίβα γιὰ τὴν εἴσοδο τοῦ Κέντρου, δὲν εἶναι λοιπὸν καθόλου τυχαία. Ἀνησυχοῦμε βαθύτατα, διότι δὲν ἔμεινε τομέας, ποὺ νὰ μὴ ἔχει ταχθεῖ στὴν ὑπηρεσία τοῦ σύγχρονου ἀποκρυφισμοῦ, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶναι στὴν οὐσία ἐπέκταση καὶ ἐδραίωση τοῦ κράτους τοῦ διαβόλου. Ἄς εἴμαστε προετοιμασμένοι καὶ γιὰ ἄλλες «μεγαλύτερες» ἐκπλήξεις!



**Ἄ**ν δὲν ἔχεις ταπείνωση πνευματικὴ ἢ προσευχὴ πνευματικὴ, ἀπόκτησε ἔστω σωματικὴ. Κι ἀπ' αὐτὴν θὰ σοῦ ἔρθει καὶ ἡ πνευματικὴ.

**Ἀπὸ τὸ Γεροντικὸ**

## Ὁμολογία Ἐναντι τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ

Γέροντος Παΐσιου Ἀθωνίτου. Ἡ τοιαύτη σοφή καὶ διακριτικὴ ἐπιστολὴ τοῦ Γέροντος Παΐσιου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου ἐστάλη στὸν π. Χαράλαμμο Βασιλόπουλο τὸ 1969.

Ἐν Ἁγίῳ Ὄρει τῆ 23ῆ Ἰανουαρίου 1969  
Σεβαστὲ πάτερ Χαράλαμπε.

Ἐπειδὴ βλέπω τὸν μέγαν σάλον ποὺ γίνεται εἰς τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν μας, ἐξ αἰτίας τῶν διαφορῶν φιλενωτικῶν κινήσεων καὶ τῶν ἐπαφῶν τοῦ Πατριάρχου μετὰ τοῦ Πάπα, ἐπόνεσα καὶ ἐγὼ σὰν τέκνον Της καὶ ἐθεώρησα καλόν, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τίς προσευχῆς μου, νὰ στείλω καὶ ἓνα μικρὸ κομματάκι κλωστή (ποὺ ἔχω σὰν φτωχὸς μοναχός), διὰ νὰ χρησιμοποιηθῆ καὶ αὐτό, ἔστω καὶ γιὰ μία βελονιά, διὰ τὸ πολυκομματιασμένο φόρεμα τῆς Μητέρας μας. Πιστεύω ὅτι θὰ κάμετε ἀγάπην καὶ θὰ τὸ χρησιμοποιήσετε διὰ μέσου τοῦ θρησκευτικοῦ σας φύλλου. Σὰς εὐχαριστῶ.

Θὰ ἤθελα νὰ ζητήσω συγγνώμην ἐν πρώτοις ἀπ' ὅλους, ποὺ τολμῶ νὰ γράψω κάτι, ἐνῶ δὲν εἶμαι οὔτε ἅγιος, οὔτε θεολόγος. Φαντάζομαι ὅτι θὰ μὲ καταλάβουν ὅλοι, ὅτι τὰ γραφόμενά μου δὲν εἶναι τίποτε ἄλλο παρὰ ἓνας βαθύς μου πόνος διὰ τὴν γραμμὴν καὶ κοσμικὴν ἀγάπην, δυστυχῶς, τοῦ πατέρα μας κ. Ἀθηναγόρα. Ὅπως φαίνεται, ἀγάπησε μίαν ἄλλην γυναῖκα, μοντέρνα, ποὺ λέγεται Παπικὴ Ἐκκλησία, διότι ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Μητέρα μας δὲν τοῦ κάμνει καμμίαν ἐντύπωσι, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι πολὺ σεμνή. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγάπη, ποὺ ἀκούσθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν Πόλι, βρῆκε ἀπήχησι σὲ πολλὰ παιδιά του, ποὺ τὴν ζοῦν εἰς τὰς πόλεις. Ἄλλωστε αὐτὸ εἶναι καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἐποχῆς μας: ἡ οἰκογένεια νὰ χάσῃ τὸ ἱερὸ νόημά της ἀπὸ τέτοιου εἴδους ἀγάπης, ποὺ ὡς σκοπὸν ἔχουν τὴν διάλυσιν καὶ ὄχι τὴν ἔνωσιν.

Μὲ μία τέτοια περίπου κοσμικὴ ἀγάπη καὶ ὁ Πατριάρχης μας φθάνει στὴ Ρώμη. Ἐνῶ θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ δεῖξῃ ἀγάπην πρῶτα σὲ μᾶς τὰ παιδιά του καὶ στὴ Μητέρα μας Ἐκκλησία, αὐτός, δυστυχῶς, ἔστειλε τὴν ἀγάπην του πολὺ μακριά. Τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα ἦταν νὰ ἀναπαύσῃ μὲν ὅλα τὰ κοσμικὰ παιδιά, ποὺ ἀγαποῦν τὸν κόσμον καὶ ἔχουν τὴν κοσμικὴν αὐτὴν ἀγάπην, νὰ κατασκανδαλίσῃ ὅμως ὅλους ἐμᾶς, τὰ τέκνα τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, μικρὰ καὶ μεγάλα, ποὺ ἔχουν φόβον Θεοῦ.

Μετὰ λύπης μου, ἀπὸ ὅσους φιλενωτικούς ἔχω γνωρίσει, δὲν εἶδα νὰ ἔχουν οὔτε ψίχα πνευματικὴ οὔτε φλοιό. Ξέρουν, ὅμως, νὰ ὀμιλοῦν γιὰ ἀγάπην

καὶ ἐνότητα, ἐνῶ οἱ ἴδιοι δὲν εἶναι ἐνωμένοι μὲ τὸν Θεόν, διότι δὲν τὸν ἔχουν ἀγαπήσει.

Θὰ ἤθελα νὰ παρακαλέσω θεομὰ ὅλους τοὺς φιλενωτικούς ἀδελφούς μας: Ἐπειδὴ τὸ θέμα τῆς ἐνώσεως τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν εἶναι κάτι τὸ πνευματικὸν καὶ ἀνάγκην ἔχουμε πνευματικῆς ἀγάπης, ἃς τὸ ἀφήσουμε σὲ αὐτοὺς ποὺ ἀγαπήσανε πολὺ τὸν Θεόν καὶ εἶναι θεολόγοι, σὰν τοὺς Πατέρας τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, καὶ ὄχι νομολόγοι, ποὺ προσφέρανε καὶ προσφέρουν ὀλόκληρο τὸν ἑαυτὸν τοὺς εἰς τὴν διακονίαν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας (ἀντὶ μεγάλης λαμπάδας), τοὺς ὁποίους ἄναψε τὸ πῦρ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ὄχι ὁ ἀναπτήρας τοῦ νεωκόρου. Ἄς γνωρίζωμεν ὅτι δὲν ὑπάρχουν μόνον φυσικοὶ νόμοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ πνευματικοί. Ἐπομένως, ἡ μέλλουσα ὀργὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀντιμετωπισθῆ μὲ συνεταιρισμὸν ἁμαρτωλῶν (διότι διπλὴν ὀργὴν θὰ λάβωμεν), ἀλλὰ μὲ μετάνοιαν καὶ τήρησιν τῶν ἐντολῶν τοῦ Κυρίου.



Ἐπίσης, ἃς γνωρίσωμεν καλὰ ὅτι ἡ Ὁρθόδοξος Ἐκκλησία μας δὲν ἔχει καμμίαν ἔλλειψιν. Ἡ μόνη ἔλλειψις ποὺ παρουσιάζεται, εἶναι ἡ ἔλλειψις σοβαρῶν Ἱεραρχῶν καὶ Ποιμένων μὲ πατερικὲς ἀρχές. Εἶναι ὀλίγοι οἱ ἐκλεκτοί. Ὅμως, δὲν εἶναι ἀνησυχητικόν. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ Αὐτὸς τὴν κυβερνάει δὲν εἶναι Ναός, ποὺ χτίζεται ἀπὸ πέτρες, ἄμμο καὶ ἀσβέστη ἀπὸ εὐσεβεῖς καὶ καταστρέφεται μὲ φωτιὰ βαρβάρων, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστός. «Καὶ ὁ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὸν λίθον τοῦτον συνθλασθήσεται

ἐφ' ὃν δ' ἂν πέσῃ λικμήσει αὐτόν.» (Ματθ. 21:44). Ὁ Κύριος, ὅταν θὰ πρέπη, θὰ παρουσιάσῃ τοὺς Μάρκους τοὺς Εὐγενικούς καὶ τοὺς Γρηγόριους Παλαμάδες, διὰ νὰ συγκεντρώσουν ὅλα τὰ κατασκανδαλισμένα ἀδέλφια μας, διὰ νὰ ὁμολογήσουν τὴν Ὁρθόδοξον Πίστιν, νὰ στερεώσουν τὴν Παράδοσιν καὶ νὰ δώσουν χαρὰν μεγάλην εἰς τὴν Μητέρα μας.

Εἰς τοὺς καιροὺς μας βλέπομεν ὅτι πολλὰ πιστὰ τέκνα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, μοναχοὶ καὶ λαϊκοί, ἔχουν, δυστυχῶς, ἀποσχισθῆ ἀπὸ αὐτήν, ἐξ αἰτίας τῶν φιλενωτικῶν. Ἐχω τὴν γνώμην ὅτι δὲν εἶναι καθόλου καλὸν νὰ ἀποχωρίζωμεθα ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν κάθε φορὰ ποὺ θὰ πταίῃ ὁ Πατριάρχης. Ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ μέσα, κοντὰ στὴν Μητέρα Ἐκκλησία, ἔχει καθῆκον καὶ ὑποχρέωσι ὁ καθένας ν' ἀγωνίζεται μὲ τὸν τρόπον του. Τὸ νὰ διακόψῃ τὸ μνημόσυνον τοῦ Πατριάρχου, νὰ ἀποσχισθῆ καὶ νὰ δημιουργήσῃ ἰδικὴν του Ἐκκλησίαν καὶ νὰ ἐξακολουθῆ νὰ ὀμιλῇ

ύβριζοντας τὸν Πατριάρχη, αὐτό, νομίζω, εἶναι παράλογον.

Ἐὰν διὰ τὴν α΄ ἢ τὴν β΄ λοξοδρομησι τῶν κατὰ καιροὺς Πατριαρχῶν χωριζώμεθα καὶ κάνωμε δικές μας Ἐκκλησίες—Θεὸς φυλάξει—θὰ ξεπεράσωμε καὶ τοὺς Προτεστάντες ἀκόμη. Εὐκόλα χωρίζει κανεὶς καὶ δύσκολα ἐπιστρέφει.

Δυστυχῶς, ἔχουμε πολλὰς «ἐκκλησίες» στὴν ἐποχὴ μας. Δημιουργήθηκαν εἴτε ἀπὸ μεγάλες ὀμάδες ἢ καὶ ἀπὸ ἓνα ἄτομο ἀκόμη. Ἐπειδὴ συνέβη στὸ καλύβι των νὰ ὑπάρχη καὶ ναὸς (ὀμιλῶ διὰ τὰ ἐν Ἁγίῳ Ὁρει συμβαίνοντα), ἐνόμισαν ὅτι μποροῦν νὰ κάνουν καὶ δική τους ἀνεξάρτητη Ἐκκλησία. Ἐὰν οἱ φιλενωτικοὶ δίνουν τὸ πρῶτο πλήγμα στὴν Ἐκκλησία, αὐτοί, οἱ ἀνωτέρω, δίνουν τὸ δεύτερο.

Ἄς εὐχηθοῦμε νὰ δώσῃ ὁ Θεὸς τὸν φωτισμὸν Του σὲ ὅλους μας καὶ εἰς τὸν Πατριάρχη μας κ. Ἀθηναγόραν, διὰ νὰ γίνῃ πρῶτον ἢ ἔνωσις αὐτῶν τῶν «ἐκκλησιῶν», νὰ πραγματοποιηθῇ ἡ γαλήνη ἀνάμεσα στὸ σκανδαλισμένο

Ὁρθόδοξο πλήρωμα, ἡ εἰρήνη καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη μεταξὺ τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων Ἀνατολικῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν καὶ κατόπιν ἄς γίνῃ σκέψις διὰ τὴν ἔνωσιν μετὰ τῶν ἄλλων «Ὁμολογιῶν», ἐὰν καὶ ἐφ' ὅσον εἰλικρινῶς ἐπιθυμοῦν νὰ ἀσπασθοῦν τὸ Ὁρθόδοξον Δόγμα.

Θὰ ἤθελα ἀκόμη νὰ εἰπῶ ὅτι ὑπάρχει καὶ μία τρίτη μερίδα μέσα εἰς τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν μας. Εἶναι ἐκεῖνοι οἱ ἀδελφοί, ποὺ παραμένουν μὲν πιστὰ τέκνα Αὐτῆς, δὲν ἔχουν ὅμως συμφωνίαν πνευματικὴν ἀναμεταξὺ τους. Ἀσχολοῦνται μὲ τὴν κριτικὴν ὁ ἓνας τοῦ ἄλλου καὶ ὄχι διὰ τὸ γενικώτερον καλὸν τοῦ ἀγῶνος. Παρακολουθεῖ δὲ ὁ ἓνας τὸν ἄλλον (περισσότερον ἀπὸ τὸν ἑαυτὸν του) εἰς τὸ τί θὰ εἰπῇ ἢ τί θὰ γράψῃ, διὰ νὰ τὸν κτυπήσῃ κατόπιν ἀλύπητα. Ἐνῶ ὁ ἴδιος ἂν ἔλεγε ἢ ἔγραφε τὸ ἴδιο πράγμα, θὰ τὸ ὑπεστήριζε καὶ μὲ πολλὰς μάλιστα μαρτυρίες τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς καὶ τῶν Πατέρων. Τὸ κακὸ ποὺ γίνεται εἶναι μεγάλο, διότι ἅφ' ἐνὸς μὲν ἀδικεῖ τὸν πλησίον του, ἅφ' ἑτέρου δὲ καὶ τὸν γκρεμίζει μπροστὰ στὰ μάτια τῶν ἄλλων πιστῶν. Πολλὰς φορὰς σπέρνει καὶ τὴν ἀπιστίαν σὲ ψυχὰς τῶν ἀδυνάτων, διότι τοὺς σκανδαλίζει.

Δυστυχῶς, μερικοὶ ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς ἔχουμε παράλογες ἀπαιτήσεις ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους. Θέλουμε οἱ ἄλλοι νὰ ἔχουν τὸν ἴδιο μὲ ἐμᾶς πνευματικὸν χαρακτήρα. Ὅταν κάποιος ἄλλος δὲν συμφωνῇ μὲ τὸν χαρακτήρα μας, δηλαδὴ ἢ εἶναι ὀλίγον ἐπιεικῆς ἢ ὀλίγον ὀξύς, ἀμέσως βγάζουμε τὸ συμπέρασμα ὅτι δὲν εἶναι πνευματικὸς ἄνθρωπος. Ὅλοι χρειάζονται εἰς τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν. Ὅλοι οἱ Πατέρες προσέφεραν τὰς

ὑπηρεσίας των εἰς Αὐτήν· καὶ οἱ ἥπιοι χαρακτήρες καὶ οἱ αὐστηροί. Ὅπως διὰ τὸ σῶμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἶναι ἀπαραίτητα καὶ τὰ γλυκὰ καὶ τὰ ξινὰ καὶ τὰ πικρὰ ἀκόμη ραδίκια (τὸ καθένα ἔχει τὶς δικές του οὐσίες καὶ βιταμίνες), ἔτσι ἀκριβῶς εἶναι καὶ διὰ τὸ Σῶμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας· ὅλοι εἶναι ἀπαραίτητοι. Ὁ ἓνας συμπληρῶνει τὸν πνευματικὸν χαρακτήρα τοῦ ἄλλου καὶ ὅλοι εἴμεθα ὑποχρεωμένοι νὰ ἀνεχώμεθα ὄχι μόνον τὸν πνευματικὸν του χαρακτήρα, ἀλλὰ ἀκόμη καὶ τὶς ἀδυναμίες ποὺ ἔχει σὰν ἄνθρωπος.

Καὶ πάλιν ἔρχομαι νὰ ζητήσω εἰλικρινῶς συγγνώμην ἀπὸ ὅλους, διότι ἐτόλμησα νὰ γράψω. Ἐγὼ εἶμαι ἓνας ἀπλὸς μοναχὸς καὶ τὸ ἔργον μου εἶναι νὰ προσπαθῶ, ὅσο μπορῶ, νὰ ἀπεκδύωμαι

τὸν παλαιὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ νὰ βοηθῶ τοὺς ἄλλους καὶ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, μέσω τοῦ Θεοῦ διὰ τῆς προσευχῆς. Ἄλλ' ἐπειδὴ ἔφθασαν μέχρι τὸ ἐρημητήριό μου θλιβερὰς εἰδήσεις διὰ τὴν Ἁγίαν Ὁρθοδοξίαν μας, ἐπόνεσα πολὺ καὶ ἐθεώρησα καλὸ νὰ

γράψω αὐτὰ ποὺ ἐνοίωθα.

Ἄς εὐχηθοῦμε ὅλοι νὰ δώσῃ ὁ Θεὸς τὴν χάριν Του καὶ ὁ καθένας μας ἄς βοηθήσῃ μὲ τὸν τρόπον του διὰ τὴν δόξαν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας.

Μὲ πολὺν σεβασμὸν πρὸς ὅλους,  
Παῖσιος μοναχός



### Ἡ Γιαγιούλα μας

Ἀνεβοκατέβαινε, παρὰ τὴν μεγάλην ἡλικία της, μὲ μία στάμνα στὸν ὄμο της, σὲς βουνοκορφὰς τῆς Πίνδου, προσφέροντας νερὸ στοὺς μαχόμενους στρατιῶτες τοῦ 1940.

Κάποια στιγμὴ γλίστρησε στοὺς βράχους καὶ κατατσακίστηκε σπάζοντας καὶ τὴ στάμνα.

Οἱ τραυματιοφορεῖς ἔσπευσαν τὴν σήκωσαν καὶ τὴν ἀπόθεσαν στὴν σκηνὴ τοῦ Διοικητῆ. Ἐτρεξε ἐκεῖνος τὴν ἀγκάλιασε καὶ ξέσπασε...

—Γιαγιούλα μου, τῆς εἶπε, τί ἔπαθες, ποῦ πονᾶς, τί θέλεις νὰ σοῦ δώσω; τὴν ἰκέτευε κλαίγοντας.

Τὸν κοίταξε ἐκεῖνη μὲ παγωμένα μάτια, καὶ λίγο πρὶν φύγει, τοῦ ψιθύρισε:

—Στρατηγέ μου ΜΙΑ ΣΤΑΜΝΑ, καὶ σιώπησε γιὰ πάντα...



## Ἡ Ἁγία Σκέπη τῆς Θεοτόκου καὶ τὸ Ἔπος τοῦ 1940

ΠΗΓΗ: «Πανελλήνιο Σχολικὸ Δίκτυο», δικτυακοὶ τόποι ἐκπαιδευτικῶν.

*Τῆς Σκέπης σου Παρθένε, ἀνυμνοῦμεν τὰς χάριτας, ἦν ὡς φωτοφόρον νεφέλην, ἐφαπλοῖς ὑπὲρ ἔννοιαν, καὶ Σκέπεις τὸν λαόν σου νοερώς, ἐκ πάσης τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἐπιβουλής, σὲ γὰρ σκέπην, καὶ προστάτιν, καὶ Βοηθόν, κεκτῆμεθα βοῶντές σοι, Δόξα τοῖς μεγαλείοις σου Ἀγνή, δόξα τῇ θεῖα σκέπῃ σου, δόξα τῇ πρὸς ἡμᾶς σου, προμηθείᾳ, Ἄχραντε.*

† † †

Ἀκούγεται ἐνδεχομένως παράδοξο ἢ ἀφορμική γιὰ ἕναν λόγο ἐθνικῆς ἐπετείου νὰ εἶναι ἕνας ὕμνος πρὸς τὴν Παναγία, ὡστόσο, ὅπως θὰ φανεῖ στὴ συνέχεια, ὑπάρχει ἄρρηκτη σχέση ἀνάμεσά τους, καθὼς ὁ λαὸς μας ἔχει συνδυάσει πάρα πολὺ στενὰ αὐτὰ τὰ δύο.

Δὲν εἶναι τυχαῖο ὅτι οἱ δύο σημαντικότερες ἐθνικὲς γιορτὲς τοῦ ἔθνους μας ἔχουν τὸ ἰδιαίτερο χαρακτηριστικὸ νὰ συνοροῦνται μὲ μία γιορτὴ τῆς Παναγίας. Τὴν 25<sup>η</sup> Μαρτίου γιορτάζουμε τὸν εὐαγγελισμό τῆς Θεοτόκου καί, σήμερα, τὴν 28<sup>η</sup> Ὀκτωβρίου τὴν Ἁγία Σκέπη τῆς Θεοτόκου. Ἡ γιορτὴ αὐτὴ μετατέθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία μας τὸ 1952 ἀπὸ τὴν 1<sup>η</sup> Ὀκτωβρίου τὴν 28<sup>η</sup>, ὡς ἔνδειξη εὐγνωμοσύνης πρὸς τὴ μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ τὴ Σκέπη καὶ τὴν προστασία της στὸν ἀγῶνα τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀπέναντι στοὺς ἀλαζόνες Ἴταλούς, ἀρχικά, καί, ἀργότερα, σὲ ὅλη τὴ διάρκεια τῆς ἐθνικῆς ἀντίστασης.

Μία ἀντίσταση στὴν ἀπολυταρχικὴ βία, στὴν ἄκρως ἀλαζονικὴ ἀπαίτηση νὰ παραδόσουμε μὲ τὴ θέλησή μας τμήματα τοῦ ἐθνικοῦ ἐδάφους, νὰ προδώσουμε τὰ κεκτημένα μὲ ἀγῶνες καὶ μὲ τὸ αἷμα τῶν προγόνων μας. Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ ψυχὴ ὅμως ἔδωσε τὴν ἀπάντηση ποὺ ἔπρεπε, εἶπε τὸ περήφανο ΟΧΙ καὶ ξεκίνησε ἕναν ἀγῶνα γιὰ τὰ ἱερά καὶ τὰ ὅσια τῆς πατρίδας μας, μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα νὰ αἰφνιδιάσει δυσάρεστα τοὺς εἰσβολεῖς, νὰ τοὺς χαρίσει ἰδιαίτερα ταπεινωτικὲς ἡττες καὶ νὰ τοὺς ἀναγκάσει νὰ ἀποσυρθοῦν μέσα ἀπὸ τὰ ἀλβανικὰ σύνορα καὶ νὰ περιμένουν ἐκεῖ τὴ βοήθεια τῶν συμμάχων των.

Εἶναι ὅμως ἀπαραίτητο στὸ σημεῖο αὐτὸ νὰ κάνουμε μίαν σύντομη ἱστορικὴ ἀναδρομὴ καὶ νὰ δοῦμε τὰ

γεγονότα μὲ τὴ σειρά. Στὶς 28 Ὀκτωβρίου τοῦ 1940, κατὰ τὶς τρεῖς τὰ ξημερώματα, ὁ Ἴταλὸς πρεσβευτὴς στὴν Ἀθήνα Γκράτσι, ἐπισκέπτεται, στὴν οἰκία του, τὸν πρωθυπουργὸ τῆς Χώρας, Ἰωάννη Μεταξᾶ καὶ τοῦ ἐπιδίδει τελεσίγραφο μὲ τὸ ὁποῖο ζητοῦσε, μέσα σὲ τρεῖς ὥρες, τὴν ἐλεύθερη διέλευση καὶ στάθμευση τῶν ἰταλικῶν στρατευμάτων στὴν Ἑλλάδα. Μὲ τὴ φράση «πόλεμος λοιπὸν», ὁ Μεταξᾶς ἀπορρίπτει τὸ ἰταλικὸ τελεσίγραφο καὶ ἀπευθύνει διάγγελμα πρὸς τὸν Ἑλληνικὸ λαό. Ἀρχίζει ἔτσι ἡ ἰταλικὴ ἐπίθεση κατὰ τῆς Ἑλλάδας, στὸ ἀλβανικὸ μέτωπο, τὴν ὥρα ποὺ ὁ λαὸς διαδηλώνοντας στοὺς δρόμους τῆς Ἀθήνας κατὰ τῆς Ἰταλίας, τρέχει μὲ ἐνθουσιασμὸ νὰ καταταγεῖ καὶ νὰ πολεμήσει στὸ μέτωπο.



Σὲ λίγες μόνο μέρες, οἱ εἰσβολεῖς ἐκδιώχθηκαν ἀπὸ τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ ἔδαφος ἀπὸ ἐπιστρατευμένες κυρίως δυνάμεις, μὲ ἀνεπαρκῆ μεταφορικὰ μέσα καὶ ἐφοδιασμό, ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ τὴ συνδρομὴ τῶν χωρικῶν τῆς Μακεδονίας καὶ τῆς Ἠπείρου, ποὺ ἔσπευσαν στὸ ἐθνικὸ προσκλητήριο καὶ ἔπαιξαν οὐσιαστικὸ ρόλο στὸν ἀνεφοδιασμό. Γιὰ νὰ κάμψουν τὸ ἠθικὸ τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ λαοῦ, οἱ Ἴταλοὶ ἄρχισαν τὸν βομβαρδισμό Ἑλληνικῶν πόλεων. Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ ἀντεπίθεση στὸ μέτωπο, ἄρχισε στὶς 14 Νοεμβρίου καὶ γρήγορα οἱ δυνάμεις μας διέρρηξαν τὴν ἰταλικὴ ἀμυντικὴ γραμμὴ καὶ στὶς 22 Νοεμβρίου οἱ Ἑλληνεὶ στρατιῶτες εἰσέρχονταν στὴν Κορυτσά. Ἡ προέλαση συνεχίστηκε ἀργὰ ἀλλὰ ἀποφασιστικὰ καὶ στὶς 6 Δεκεμβρίου, ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς στρατὸς καταλάμβανε τὸ λιμάνι τῶν Ἁγίων Σαράντα. Στὴ συνέχεια ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς στρατὸς πῆρε στὰ χέρια του τὴν πρωτοβουλία, πέρασε σὲ ὀρμητικὴ ἀντεπίθεση, πέταξε τοὺς ἐπιδρομεῖς ἔξω ἀπὸ τὰ Ἑλληνικὰ ἐδάφη καὶ τοὺς καταδίωξε μέσα στὸ ἀλβανικὸ ἔδαφος, κατατροπώνοντάς τους.

Μήπως ὅμως χρειάζεται νὰ ἀναζητήσουμε κάποια ἐρμηνεία γιὰ ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ γεγονότα; Καὶ ποιά σχέση ἔχουν μὲ τὴν εἰσαγωγικὴ ἀναφορὰ μας στὴν Σκέπη τῆς Παναγίας; Δὲν χωραεῖ ἀμφιβολία ὅτι ἡ ἐποποιία τοῦ 1940 ἀποτελεῖ ἕνα θαῦμα, εἶναι ἕνα ἀπὸ τὰ πολλὰ θαύματα στὴν ἱστορία τῶν Ἑλλήνων. Δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι καρπὸς ἀποκλειστικὰ ἀνθρωπίνου ἀγῶνα. Ἡ Θεϊκὴ χάρις συνεργάσθηκε μὲ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη προσπάθεια. Καὶ εἶναι δίκαιο ποὺ μαζί μὲ τὰ θριαμβευτικὰ σαλπίσματα πάνω ἀπὸ τοὺς

τάφους τῶν ἡρώων, σήμαναν δοξαστικὲς καμπάνες γιὰ ἓνα «εὐχαριστῶ» στὴν Παναγία, σ' ἐκείνη, στὴν ὁποία ἡ ἐθνικὴ συνείδηση ἀπέδωσε γιὰ μίαν ἀκόμα φορὰ «τὰ νικητήρια»: τὴ Σκέπη τῶν ἀγωνιστῶν, τὴν Ἐλευθερώτρια τῶν σκλαβωμένων.

Γιατί στὰ κρίσιμα χρόνια τοῦ πολέμου, οἱ Ἕλληνες πάντοτε ἐμπιστεύθηκαν στὰ χέρια τῆς Παναγίας τὸν ἀγῶνα τους. Ζήτησαν τὴ μητρικὴ προστασία Τῆς γιὰ νὰ ὑπερασπιστοῦν τὰ δίκαιά τους. Καὶ ἦταν τόση ἡ πίστη τους, ὥστε τὴν ἔβλεπαν νὰ τοὺς ἐμψυχώνει καὶ νὰ τοὺς σκεπάζει, καθὼς πολεμοῦσαν ἀπεγνωσμένα στὰ χιονισμένα βουνὰ τῆς Πίνδου καὶ τῆς Ἀλβανίας. Ἡ ἄλλοτε Ὑπέρομαχος Στρατηγὸς τῶν Ρωμηῶν γίνεται ἡ Ἁγία Σκέπη τῶν ἀγωνιστῶν καὶ τὸ θαῦμα ἐπαναλαμβάνεται. Χάρη στὴν πίστη ποὺ θερμαίνει τὶς ψυχές τους, οἱ μαχητὲς περιφρονοῦν τὴ λογικὴ τῶν ἀριθμῶν καὶ ἀντιστέκονται στὶς σιδερόφρακτες ἐχθρικὲς στρατιές μὲ ἡρωισμό ποὺ κινεῖ τὸν παγκόσμιον θαυμασμό.

Γιὰ τοὺς λόγους αὐτοὺς ἡ Ἐκκλησία σήμερα, δηλαδή ὅλοι ἐμεῖς, ἀνυμνοῦμε τὴ Σκέπη τῆς Παναγίας, καὶ τὴν παρακαλοῦμε νὰ μᾶς σκεπάζει πάντα μὲ τὴν ἀγάπη Τῆς καὶ νὰ στέκεται πάντα δίπλα, βοηθὸς καὶ συμπαραστάτης στὸ ἔθνος μας, σὲ κάθε καλὸ ἀγῶνα, γιατί τὴ βοήθειά Τῆς τὴν ἔχουμε τὸ ἴδιο ἀνάγκη καὶ στὸν καιρὸ τῆς εἰρήνης.

Μπορεῖ νὰ μὴν ὑπάρχει σήμερα ἄμεση ἐθνικὴ ἀπειλὴ καὶ ἄμεσος κίνδυνος πολέμου, μπορεῖ νὰ μὴν ὑπάρχει Χίτλερ ἢ Μουσολίνι, ὑπάρχει ὅμως ἓνας ἄλλος εἰσβολέας, ὁ ὁποῖος ἴσως νὰ εἶναι καὶ πιδ ἐπικίνδυνος, ὁ ὁποῖος προσπαθεῖ νὰ ἀλώσει τὶς συνειδήσεις μας, νὰ ξεχάσουμε τὴν ἱστορία μας, νὰ ἀποσπάσει τὴν προσοχή μας ἀπὸ τὰ σοβαρὰ προβλήματα, προσφέροντάς μας τέρψη μὲ θεάματα καὶ νὰ κάνει μίαν ὄχι στρατιωτικὴ ἀλλὰ μίαν πνευματικὴ τηλεοπτικὴ κατοχή στὶς καρδιές μας.

Ἔχουμε καιρὸ ὅλοι μας νὰ παρακολουθοῦμε μὲ ἀπληστία «σίριαλ», ποὺ μᾶς διδάσκουν πῶς μποροῦμε νὰ χαλάσουμε πολὺ εὐκόλα τὶς οἰκογένειές μας, τὰ κύτταρα τοῦ ἔθνους μας· δὲν ἔχουμε ὅμως καιρὸ νὰ διαβάσουμε τὴν ἱστορία μας, νὰ γνωρίσουμε μὲ ποιούς ἀγῶνες τῶν προγόνων μας μποροῦμε ἐμεῖς σήμερα νὰ ζοῦμε ἐλεύθεροι ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ διαβάσουμε συγκλονιστικὲς μαρτυρίες ἀγωνιστῶν τῆς ἐθνικῆς ἀντίστασης, οἱ ὁποῖοι στὸν ὑπεράνθρωπο ἀγῶνα τους πάνω στὰ παγωμένα βουνὰ ἔβλεπαν τὴν Παναγία ζωντανὰ καὶ ἔπαιρναν κουράγιο νὰ συνεχίσουν.

Ἄς εἶναι λοιπὸν ὁ σημερινὸς λόγος ἓνα ἔναυσμα νὰ ἀσχοληθοῦμε ὅλοι περισσότερο μὲ τὴν ἱστορία μας, ἓνα μνημόσυνο γιὰ ὅσους ἔπεσαν ἡρωικά στὸν πόλεμο καὶ μίαν ἐλάχιστη τιμὴ εὐγνωμοσύνης στὴν μητέρα μας τὴν Παναγία.

## Περὶ τῆς Ἀληθοῦς Ἐννοίας τοῦ ΛΘ' (39<sup>ου</sup>) Ἀποστολικοῦ Κανόνος

Ἀρχιμανδρίτου Ἐπιφανίου Θεοδοωροπούλου (+1989), «Ἄρθρα, Μελεται, Ἐπιστολαί», τόμος Α', Ἀθήναι 1986, σελ. 212 κ. ἑ.

*Τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια ἔχουμε ὅλοι μας γίνει μάρτυρες τοῦ δεσποτισμοῦ τῶν ἐπισκόπων. Ὁ δεσποτισμὸς αὐτός, ποὺ παίρνει διάφορες μορφές, ὄλο καὶ ἰσχυροποιεῖται δεδομένου ὅτι δὲν ἀφορᾷ πλέον μόνο σὲ προσωπικὰ θέματα τῶν κληρικῶν ἀλλὰ ἔχει βαθυτέρους σκοποὺς καὶ στόχους. Στόχος εἶναι πλέον ἡ φήμιση κάθε ἀντιθέτου φωνῆς κάθε ἀντιστάσεως στὰ κατεδαφιστικὰ σχέδια τῆς Νέας Ἐποχῆς ποὺ ἔχει δυναμικὰ εἰσβάλει στὴν «Ἐκκλησία» καὶ προσπαθεῖ μὲ καινοτομίες, καὶ προοδευτικὲς, δηθεν, ἐνέργειες νὰ ἀλλοιώσει τὸ Ὁρθόδοξο φρόνημα καὶ κριτήριον. Οἱ ἐπίσκοποί μας, στηριζόμενοι στὸν ΛΘ' ἀποστολικὸ κανόνα, τὸν μόνο ποὺ φρόντισαν νὰ ἀποστηθίσουν, ἔχουν μετατραπῆ ἀπὸ πνευματικὸν πατέρες σὲ αὐταρχικοὺς διοικητὲς δημοσίων ὑπηρεσιῶν καὶ σὲ ἀκριβῆ ἀντίγραφα τοῦ «Φύρερ». Ἄς δοῦμε ὅμως πῶς ὁ ἅγιος γέροντας π. Ἐπιφάνιος Θεοδοωρόπουλος μιλοῦσε γιὰ τὸ θέμα μερικὰ χρόνια πρὶν ὅσο κι ἂν ὁ δεσποτισμὸς δὲν εἶχε ἀκόμα τόσο πολὺ ἐνισχυθεῖ.*

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

† † †

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

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

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

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

Ούτε όμως και διὰ τὰς καθαρῶς ἐκκλησιαστικὰς ἐνεργείας αὐτοῦ χρειάζεται ἄδειαν τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου ὁ Κληρικός, ἐφ' ὅσον εὐρίσκεται ἐν τῷ κύκλῳ τῆς ἀρμοδιότητος αὐτοῦ. Σκέψασθε τὴν θέσιν Ἐπισκόπου τινός, οὐ οἱ Κληρικοὶ θὰ ἐξήτουν καθ' ἑκάστην ἡμέραν τὴν ἄδειαν, ἵνα τελῶσι τὰ Θεῖα Μυστήρια ἢ ἄλλας Ἱεράς Ἀκολουθίας, ἢ ἵνα κηρύξωσιν, ἢ ἵνα νουθετήσωσιν καὶ συμφιλιώσωσιν ἀντιμαχομένους, ἢ ἵνα συζητήσωσιν μετὰ αἰρετικῶν, ἢ ἵνα βοηθήσωσιν πτωχοῦς, ἢ ἵνα δημοσιεύσωσιν θεολογικὰς διατριβὰς ἢ γενικῶς θρησκευτικὰ βιβλία ἢ ἄρθρα κ.λ.π; δὲν θὰ ἠδύνατο νὰ ἐπαρκέσῃ εἰς τὸ ἀπαντᾶν, οὔτε καὶ ἐὰν δέκα μόνον Κληρικοὺς εἶχεν ὑπ' αὐτόν!...

Δι' οὐδὲν λοιπὸν τῶν ἀνωτέρω ἀπαιτεῖται ἄδεια τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου. Ἐὰν δὲ τι αὐτῶν δὲν τελεσθῆ ὡς δεῖ, τότε ὑπάρχει βεβαίως εὐθύνη διὰ τὸν Κληρικόν, ἀλλ' εὐθύνη παραβάσεως ἄλλων Κανόνων ἢ παραδόσεων καὶ ἐθίμων, οὐχὶ δὲ τοῦ ΛΘ' Ἀποστ. Κανόνος. Παράδειγμα: Ἱερεὺς τις, μετὰ τὴν ἀνάγνωσιν τοῦ Ἱ. Εὐαγγελίου, ἐρημηνεύει αὐτὸ εἰς τὸν λαόν. Κατὰ τὴν ὁμιλίαν δ' αὐτοῦ ἐκτρέπεται εἰς αἰσχρολογίας ἀφορήτους. Ἀναμφιβόλως πρέπει νὰ τιμωρηθῆ. Θὰ τιμωρηθῆ ὅμως οὐχὶ διότι δὲν ἔλαβε πρὸ τοῦ κηρύγματος ἄδειαν τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου (τοιαύτην ἄδειαν δὲν ἐχρειάζετο, ἐφ' ὅσον, α) εἶνε κανονικὸς ἱερεὺς καὶ β) εὐρίσκετο ἐντὸς τοῦ Ναοῦ εἰς ὃν ἀνήκει), ἀλλὰ διότι ἐγένετο, διὰ τῆς αἰσχρολογίας αὐτοῦ, αἷτιος σκανδαλισμοῦ τοῦ λαοῦ. Ἔτερον παράδειγμα: Ἱερεὺς τις δημοσιεύει θεολογικὴν πραγματείαν, ἐν ἣ ὑπάρχουσιν αἰρετικαὶ διδασκαλίας. Καὶ οὗτος θὰ τιμωρηθῆ, οὐχὶ ὅμως ἐπὶ παραβάσει τοῦ ΛΘ' Ἀποστ. Κανόνος (διότι ἐξέδωκεν βιβλίον ἄνευ ἀδείας τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου!), ἀλλ' ἐπὶ ἀθετήσει τῶν δογμάτων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Τρίτον παράδειγμα: Ἱερεὺς τις φέρει εἰς φῶς φυλλάδιον ἢ ἄρθρον, ἐν ᾧ ἀσκεῖ κριτικὴν ἐπὶ ἐκκλησιαστικῶν πραγμάτων. Εἶνε δυνατὸν νὰ κατηγορηθῆ ἐπὶ παραβάσει τοῦ εἰρημένου Κανόνος, διότι δηλ. δὲν ἔλαβε προκαταβολικῶς ἄδειαν τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου; Ἀλλ' ἂν μὴ τι ἄλλο, ὁ Ἐπίσκοπος, ὅστις θὰ διετύπου τοιαύτην κατηγορίαν, θὰ ἐκινδύνευε νὰ ἐγκληθῆ ὑπὸ τοῦ εἰσαγγελέως ἐπὶ παραβίασει τοῦ Συντάγματος, ὅπερ ἀπαγορεύει τὴν προληπτικὴν λογοκρισίαν καὶ παρέχει ἑλευθερίαν διατυπώσεως τῶν στοχασμῶν ἑκάστου. Ἐὰν δὲ τυχὸν τὸ εἰρημένον κείμενον τοῦ ἱερέως περιέχῃ ὕβρεις ἢ συκοφαντίας ἢ βωμολοχίας ἢ ὅ, τιδήποτε ἄλλο κατάκριτον πρᾶγμα, τότε βεβαίως θὰ ἐγκληθῆ μὲν οὗτος, οὐχὶ ὅμως ἐπὶ παραβίασει τοῦ ΛΘ' Ἀποστ. Κανόνος, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῆ βάσει τῶν πρὸς τὸ ἀδίκημα αὐτοῦ συναφῶν Κανόνων.

Εἰς τι λοιπὸν ἀναφέρεται τὸ «μηδὲν ἐπιτελεῖσθω»; Εἰς ὅ,τι ἀνήκει τῇ δικαιοδοσίᾳ τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου! Ἐξ' αὐτῶν πάντων οὐδὲν δύναται νὰ ἐπιτελέσῃ οἰοσδήποτε Κληρικὸς ἄνευ ἐξουσιοδοτήσεως τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου. Ἴνα

δὲ μὴ νομισθῆ, ὅτι ἡ τοιαύτη τοῦ Κανόνος ἐρημηνεῖα εἶνε ἡμετέρα αὐθαίρετος εἰκασία, ἐπικαλούμεθα τὰς γνώμας τῶν ἐγκυροτέρων Κανονολόγων:

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

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

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

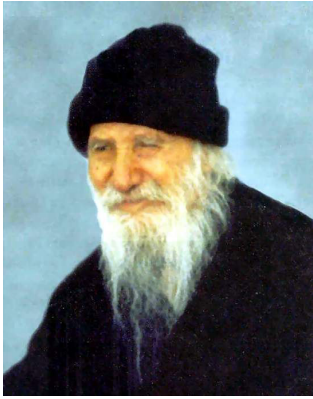
δ) Ἅγιος Νικόδημος: Ὁ παρῶν Ἀποστολικὸς Κανὼν διορίζει, ὅτι οἱ Πρεσβύτεροι καὶ οἱ Διάκονοι, χωρὶς τὴν γνώμην καὶ ἄδειαν τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου των, δὲν ἠμποροῦν νὰ ἐνεργήσωσιν κανένα ἱερατικὸν λειτουργήμα, τόσον ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνα ὅπου ἀνήκουσιν εἰς τὴν ἀρχιερατικὴν ἐξουσίαν τοῦ Ἐπισκόπου, ὅσον καὶ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνα τῶν ὁποίων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

Συμπέρασμα:

Ἐπίκλησις τοῦ ΛΘ' Ἀποστολικοῦ Κανόνος ἐναντίον κληρικῶν, οἵτινες οὔτε ἐξομολόγησαν ἄνευ ἐπισκοπικοῦ ἐνταλτηρίου, οὔτε ἐπέβαλον ἢ ἔλυσαν ἀφορισμὸν, οὔτε ἔκειραν Μοναχοὺς ἢ Μοναχάς, οὔτε ἔχειροθέτησαν Ἀναγνώστας, οὔτε Ναοὺς ἢ Μονὰς ἴδρυσαν, οὔτε ἀδείας γάμων ἐξέδωσαν, οὔτε ἀκίνητα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἐπώλησαν, οὔτε ἄλλο τι τοιοῦτον ἐποίησαν, ἐπίκλησις, λέγομεν, τοῦ εἰρημένου Κανόνος ἐναντίον τοιούτων Κληρικῶν, ἐπ' οὐδενὶ λόγῳ δύναται νὰ εὐσταθήσῃ.

## «Παχεία Γαστήρ Λεπτὸν Οὐ Τίκει Νόον»

Τοῦ Γέροντος Πορφυρίου Κανσοκαλυβίτου (+1991), ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Βίος καὶ Λόγος», ἐκδ. Τερᾶς Μόνης Χρυσοπηγῆς, Χανιά 2003.



**Δ**ὲν γίνεστε ἅγιοι κυνηγώντας τὸ κακό. Ἄστε τὸ κακό. Νὰ κοιτάζετε πρὸς τὸν Χριστὸ κι αὐτὸ θὰ σᾶς σώσει. Ἐκεῖνο ποὺ κάνει ἅγιο τὸν ἄνθρωπο εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη, ἡ λατρεία πρὸς τὸν Χριστό, ἡ ὁποία δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἐκφραστεῖ, δὲν μπορεῖ... Καὶ προσπαθεῖ ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ κάνει ἀσκήσεις, νὰ κάνει τέτοια πράγματα καὶ νὰ καταπονεῖ τὸν ἑαυτό του γιὰ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Κανεὶς ἀσκητῆς δὲν ἁγίασε χωρὶς ἀσκήσεις. Κανεὶς δὲν μπόρεσε ν' ἀνέλθει στὴν πνευματικότητα χωρὶς ν' ἀσκηθεῖ. Πρέπει νὰ γίνονται ἀσκήσεις. Ἀσκησι εἶναι οἱ μετάνοιες, οἱ ἀγρυπνίες κ.λπ., ἀλλὰ ὄχι μὲ βία. Ὅλα νὰ γίνονται μὲ χαρὰ. Δὲν εἶναι οἱ μετάνοιες ποὺ θὰ κάνουμε, δὲν εἶναι οἱ προσευχές· εἶναι τὸ δόσιμο, ὁ ἔρωτας γιὰ τὸν Χριστό, γιὰ τὰ πνευματικά. Ὑπάρχουν πολλοὶ ποὺ τὰ κάνουνε αὐτὰ ὄχι γιὰ τὸν Θεὸ ἀλλὰ γιὰ ἄσκησι, γιὰ ὠφέλεια σωματικῆ. Ὅμως οἱ πνευματικοὶ ἄνθρωποι τὸ κάνουνε γιὰ ψυχικὴ ὠφέλεια, γιὰ τὸν Θεό. Ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ὠφελεῖται πολὺ, δὲν ἀρρωσταίνει. Πολλὰ καλὰ ἔρχονται.

Μέσα στὴν ἄσκησι, τὶς μετάνοιες, τὶς ἀγρυπνίες καὶ τὶς ἄλλες κακουχίες εἶναι καὶ ἡ νηστεία. «Παχεία γαστήρ λεπτὸν οὐ τίκει νόον». Ἐγὼ τὸ γνωρίζω αὐτὸ ἀπ' τοὺς Πατέρες. Ὅλα τὰ πατερικὰ βιβλία μιλοῦν γιὰ τὴ νηστεία. Οἱ Πατέρες τονίζουν νὰ μὴν τρώμε δυσκολοχώνευτα φαγητὰ ἢ λιπαρὰ καὶ παχιά, γιὰτὶ κάνουν κακὸ στὸ σῶμα ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν ψυχὴ. Λένε ὅτι τὸ προβατάκι τρώει τὰ χορταράκια τῆς γῆς κι εἶναι τόσο ἡσυχό. Εἶδατε ποὺ λένε, «σὰν τὸ πρόβατο». Ἐνῶ ὁ σκύλος ἢ ἡ γάτα κι ὄλ' αὐτὰ τὰ σαρκοφάγα εἶναι ὅλα τους ἄγρια ζῶα. Τὸ κρέας κάνει κακὸ στὸν ἄνθρωπο. Κάνουν καλὸ τὰ χόρτα, τὰ φρούτα κ.λπ. Γι' αὐτὸ οἱ Πατέρες μιλοῦν γιὰ νηστεία καὶ κατακρίνουν τὴν πολυφαγία καὶ τὴν ἡδονὴ ποὺ αἰσθάνεται κανεὶς μὲ τὰ φαγητὰ τὰ πλούσια. Νὰ εἶναι πιὸ ἀπλὰ τὰ φαγητά μας. Νὰ μὴν ἀσχολούμαστε τόσο πολὺ μ' αὐτά.

Δὲν εἶναι τὸ φαγητό, δὲν εἶναι οἱ καλὲς συνθῆκες διαβίωσης, ποὺ ἐξασφαλίζουν τὴν καλὴ ὑγεία. Εἶναι ἡ ἀγία ζωὴ, ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ξέρω γιὰ ἀσκητὲς ποὺ νηστεύανε πολὺ καὶ δὲν εἶχανε καμιὰ ἀρρώστια. Δὲν κινδυνεύει νὰ πάθει κανεὶς τίποτε ἀπ' τὴ νηστεία. Κανεὶς δὲν ἔχει ἀρρωστήσει ἀπ' τὴ νηστεία. Πιὸ πολὺ ἀρρωσταίνουν ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ τρῶνε κρέατα κι αὐγὰ καὶ

γάλατα, παρὰ ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ εἶναι λιτοδίαιτοι. Εἶναι παρατηρημένο αὐτό. Νὰ τὸ πάρουμε καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἰατρικὴ ἐπιστήμη τώρα τὸ συνιστᾷ αὐτὸ τὸ πράγμα. Οἱ νηστευτὲς νηστεύουν καὶ δὲν παθαίνουν τίποτε· ὄχι ἀπλῶς δὲν παθαίνουν, ἀλλὰ θεραπεύονται ἀπὸ ἀρρώστιες.

Γιὰ νὰ τὰ κάνετε ὁμως αὐτά, πρέπει νὰ ἔχετε πίστη. Ἀλλιῶς σᾶς πιάνει λιγούρα. Ἡ νηστεία εἶναι καὶ ζήτημα πίστεως. Ὅταν ἔχετε τὸν ἔρωτα στὸ Θεῖον, μπορεῖτε νὰ νηστεύετε μὲ εὐχαρίστησι κι ὅλα εἶναι εὐκόλα· ἀλλιῶς σᾶς φαίνονται ὅλα βουνό. Ὅποιοι ἔδωσαν τὴν καρδιά τους στὸν Χριστὸ καὶ μὲ θερμὴ ἀγάπη ἔλεγαν τὴν εὐχὴ, κυριάρχησαν καὶ νίκησαν τὴν λαίμαργία καὶ τὴν ἔλλειψη ἐγκράτειας.

Ὑπάρχουν σήμερα πολλοὶ ἄνθρωποι, ποὺ δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ νηστεύουν μιὰ μέρα καὶ τώρα ζοῦν μὲ χορτοφαγία, ὄχι γιὰ λόγους θρησκευτικούς, ἀπλῶς γιὰτὶ πίστεψαν ὅτι αὐτὸ θὰ κάνει καλὸ στὴν ὑγεία τους. Ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ τὸ πιστέψεις, ὅτι δὲν πρόκειται νὰ πάθεις τίποτε, ποὺ δὲν τρῶς κρέας. Ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος βέβαια εἶναι ἀσθενής, δὲν εἶναι ἁμαρτία νὰ φάει πρὸς στήριξιν τοῦ ὀργανισμοῦ καὶ μὴ νηστήσιμα φαγητὰ.

Τὸ ἀλάτι χρειάζεται στὸν ὀργανισμὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Ὑπάρχει μιὰ φήμη ὅτι τὸ ἀλάτι κάνει κακό. Δὲν εἶναι σωστὸ αὐτό. Εἶναι στοιχεῖο ποὺ χρειάζεται. Καὶ εἶναι ὀρισμένοι μάλιστα ποὺ τὸ ἔχουν πολὺ ἀνάγκη.

Ἐγὼ τί ὄνειρα ἔχω! Γιὰ τὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος δηλαδή. Παρήγγειλα σιτάρι, γιὰ ν' ἀλέθουμε, νὰ φτιάχνουμε ψωμὶ σταρίσιο. Καὶ σκέφτομαι νὰ πάρουμε διάφορα ὄσπρια καὶ νὰ τ' ἀλέθουμε καὶ νὰ τ' ἀνακατώνουμε, σιτάρι μὲ ρύζι, σόγια, σογιάλευρο μὲ φακὲς κ.λπ. Κι ἔπειτα ἔχουμε καὶ τὰ κολοκύθια καὶ τὶς ντομάτες καὶ τὶς πατάτες κι ὅλα τ' ἄλλα χορταρικά. Καὶ μὲ τὸν πατέρα Ἡσύχιο εἶχαμε ἓνα ὄνειρο. Μιὰ φορὰ λέγαμε νὰ πᾶμε νὰ γίνουμε ἐρημίτες κάπου καὶ νὰ σπεύρουμε σιτάρι καὶ νὰ τὸ μουσκεύουμε καὶ νὰ τὸ τρώμε. Μήπως ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος ἐκεῖ, στὴν ἔρημο, ἔτσι δὲν ἔκανε; Ἀλλὰ τώρα ἐμᾶς μᾶς κακοφαίνεται...



**Τ**ὶ νὰ σοῦ κάνουν καὶ οἱ πολιτικοί; Εἶναι μερδεμένοι μὲ τὰ ψυχικά τους πάθη. Ὅταν ἓνας ἄνθρωπος δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ βοηθήσει τὸν ἑαυτό του, πῶς θὰ μπορέσει νὰ βοηθήσει τοὺς ἄλλους; Φταῖμε καὶ ἐμεῖς γιὰ τὴν κατάστασι αὐτή. Ἄν ἡμᾶσταν ἀληθινοὶ Χριστιανοί, θὰ μπορούσαμε νὰ στείλουμε στὴ βουλή, ὄχι βέβαια Χριστιανικὸ κόμμα, ἀλλὰ Χριστιανούς πολιτικούς καὶ τὰ πράγματα θὰ ἦταν διαφορετικά.

**Γέροντας Πορφύριος**

## THE “ALCOHOLIC” MONK

Source: From the web pages of «Άγιοθεϊτικό Βήμα» translated by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen.



Once on Mount Athos there was a monk who resided in Karyes. He would drink each and every day and it would not take more than two to three glasses of wine before he was intoxicated. His behavior was the source of scandal to other monastics and his actions would often shock the pilgrims.

One day he passed away. His death brought “relief” among the distraught residents of the area. Following his death, a few

pilgrims visiting Elder Paisios mentioned how glad they are that this “huge problem” is finally resolved.

The holy elder replied that he was already aware of the falling asleep of this monk; he had seen an entire battalion of angels arrive to collect his soul.

The pilgrims were shocked by the elder’s response and argued with him; some of them, trying to explain to the holy elder that he may not be aware of whom they were speaking, thinking that he misunderstood them

Elder Paisios recounted:

—This monk was born in Asia Minor. Shortly before the destruction of the Greek cities of that area, and the subsequent slaughter of the Greek families, the Turks commenced their old practice of kidnapping or forcefully gathering all boys away from their families. In order to save their son, the monk’s parents would bring him along to the fields during harvest season. It was necessary, however, that they stop the young baby from crying and thus exposing his presence; they accomplished this by pouring a very small quantity of raki (an unsweetened, anise-flavored hard alcoholic drink) into his milk. The baby would then fall asleep and be saved from abduction by the Turks.

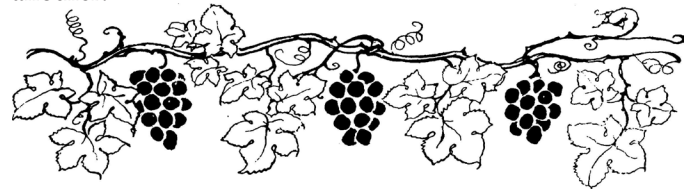
—The prolonged use of this small quantity turned the young lad into an alcoholic. Later on, when his family moved to Greece and he was a young man, doctors advised him against having a family—his alcoholism would be too disruptive for any type of a quality family life. With such advice, along with the young man’s love for God and Panaghia, he collected himself and came to the Holy Mountain to become a monk.

—There he found a wonderful elder and right away he confessed that he was an alcoholic. His elder instructed him into a thorough prayer rule that included many prostrations and prayers each night, along with a regular ap-

peal to the Holy Virgin to assist him in his struggle by helping him reduce his alcohol consumption by just one glass per day.

—After a full year, he had been able to reduce his drinking from 20 glasses per day to 19. His struggle, however, was great and he remained faithful to his elder’s instructions. Thus, through the intercessions of the Theotokos, in his later years he was consuming 3-4 glasses per day. This quantity however, due to his alcoholism, was sufficient to get him intoxicated. Those around him were unaware of his struggle and his prayers and spiritual warfare. Pilgrims and monks alike in Karyes simply observed a drunken monk that would scandalize many. God however, was observing a warrior that was a feisty fighter and a person who was slow making progress towards conquering this unfortunate passion.

—So I ask you: In the absence of any knowledge of why each one of us does what we do and what efforts a man applies to conquer a passion, is it proper for anyone to judge another?



Take refuge often in our Panaghia. I love our Panaghia very much. You love her also. She is the Mediatrix for our salvation. Every object shines under the light of the sun, according to its form. But the mirror reflects the entire sun. Our Panaghia is a mirror: she reflects all the glory of Christ. She has become the Mother of all Christians. For this reason, all men—because we fear to face Christ on account of our many iniquities—take refuge in our Panaghia, that she might intercede for our sins, even as we run to our mother with much boldness.

Everything depends on our will. My hand is not able to steal if I do not wish to. What you do apart from your own will and volition has no value. A small child takes Communion, and afterwards you tell him to spit, he will do it. [The child] doesn’t know, and, consequently, has no responsibility; but he also has no virtue. [He] has to know and not do it, in order to have virtue.

I often marvel at the works of man; the radio, for example. You turn it on, and you hear a voice from America—from the other side of the world. And I think that so it is in the spiritual realm also: we pray to God and He hears us in heaven. This is a great thing, so long as we do not become proud in what we do. We see a beautiful garment. Who gets the praise, the needle or the seamstress? The seamstress, of course. We too are a needle in the hands of God. All things are made by God through us. For this reason, we should not be proud.

Elder Ieronymos of Aigina (+1966)

## THE MYSTICAL ROOTS OF CRIME

By Fr. Alexey Moroz.

The sharp rise of crime and suicide is further evidence of the tragic influence of godlessness, materialism, and occultism on contemporary society. Rooted in materialist doctrine, professional psychologists and sociologists have been unsuccessful in trying to explain the nature of this phenomenon. People who for the most part are financially stable and from what appear to be happy families, often commit outrageous, bloody crimes, shocking even those who know them well. While professionals conjecture as to its underlying causes, they deny the existence of the soul and the unseen world. And yet it is precisely here, in the human soul and the activities of the unseen world, that the answer to this quandary is to be found.

A holy place is never vacant, and ... *no fountain can yield both salt water and fresh* (Jas 3:12), nor can a man occupy two positions in the spiritual world. His ontological nature requires that he apply himself either to good or to evil, either to God or to the devil.

As a rule, a person who does not know God or His commandments lives in the world according to the law of his passions. He strives to do that which gives him pleasure. And this is basically to satisfy the demands of his physical and/or psychological requirements. This includes eating and drinking what tastes good, having various amorous relationships, getting lots of money, having a prestigious job, enjoying respect, glory, and so forth. All of these desires, if they are not checked by faith and a striving towards God, if they are not subordinated to the principal aim of spiritual perfection, become grossly amplified; they become a goal in themselves and turn into cravings. The person's scope of interests narrows to little more than the satisfaction of the ruling passion or passions: drinking, promiscuity, lust after wealth and/or power, etc.

The demons strive by various means to intensify man's natural passions, for through them they gain access into the soul of a sinner. According to the testimony of the Holy Fathers, St. Gregory the Sinaite specifically, each demon has his own "specialty;" he prefers to operate in a particular passionate milieu, feeding and strengthening himself on energy released by the passion. One type of demon fuels lust, another prefers alcoholism, a third arouses anger, etc.

According to patristic tradition, demons adhere both to a man's intellectual sphere—suggesting to him various thoughts and imaginings, and also to the sensual—by arousing feelings of physical passion, irritation, anger, grief, despair, etc. For this reason, every Christian who desires to lead a spiritual life must be sober, i.e., he must be vigilant to all thoughts and feelings which come to him. One must not allow oneself to

blindly follow after all feelings and desires which seem to be one's own. The touch-stone, on which the quality and origin of thoughts and feelings are tested and determined, besides the innate voice of conscience, is the Sacred Scriptures, Christ's commandments, the experience of the Holy Fathers and their teachings in such matters.

Unbelievers, non-Christians, depend for their moral orientation in life solely upon the voice of conscience, and it is fortunate if it is not distorted and obscured by improper upbringing or a sinful life. Etymologically the word "conscience" is derived from the Latin verb *scire*, "to know," and the prefix "con" meaning "with", "common" or "shared;" i.e., something from the beginning given to the entire human race, and bequeathed to each individual at birth. In other words, this is the voice of God in man's soul, the spiritual/moral matrix, safe-guarding him from corruption and destruction. If a person disregards the promptings of his conscience and continues to do evil, then its voice, under the impact of sin, grows weak and eventually is silenced altogether; and the person is left without any spiritual/moral orientation.

A person who does not lead a Christian way of life is defenseless when confronted by the activity of unclean spirits, who, through the various channels mentioned earlier, find access into the soul and take control of it. As a result the person becomes possessed, i.e., submissively fulfilling the will of the demon, without even being aware of it. The degree of possession or, in other words, the measure of his subjection to another's will is directly proportionate to the degree of his passionateness which, at its apogee, becomes transformed into demon-possession, that state when a person no longer has any control over himself—his body, his words, his actions. The bond between soul and body is destroyed; a foreign, evil will wedges itself in and an unclean spirit begins to command the body. We find numerous examples of such cases in the Gospel (Mt 8:16, 15:28; Lk 6:8, 13:11).

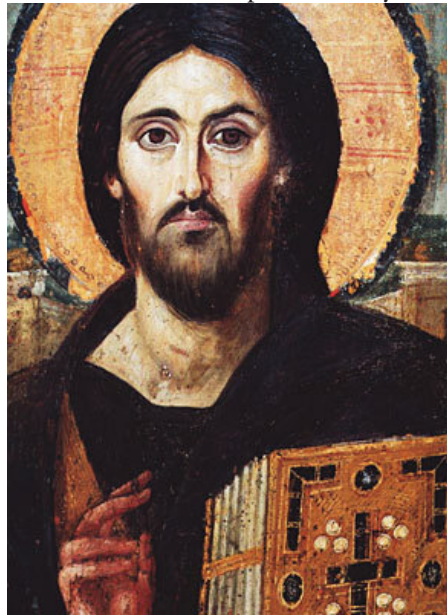
The second cause of possession is found in the involvement in the varied forms of occults. A fascination and involvement in astrology, extra-sensory perception, an interest in contact with poltergeists, UFOs and extra-terrestrials open a person to mystical contact and action on the part of the spirits of wickedness, which ultimately leads to possession of the "contactees" and their spiritual perdition. There are proven facts concerning the growth in geometric progression of the number of "UFO contactees." They have large gatherings, publish magazines, hold conferences. According to V. Davidovtza, at a single conference in Kemerovo there spoke some three hundred "contactees" from the Kuzbask region alone. St. John Chrysostom testifies that a demon does not leave a man who has sold himself to him until he has consumed him or led him to suicide.

This thesis is well supported by our contemporary life. In criminal psychiatry there is a term “*idée fixe*,” which is described as “forced inclination.” In the textbook “Criminal Psychiatry” we read: One can attribute to the disturbance of the will those impulsive states characterized by outbursts of overpowering or hard to resist impulses to do certain things without forethought. It is customary to distinguish several such impulsive states: catatonic impulsive actions are most often characterized by senseless, unmotivated, aggressive and destructive acts. Frequently the victim experiences this as subjugation to a foreign will (the Kandinsky syndrome).

But if a crime is committed contrary to a person’s own will, at the irresistible promptings of something clearly foreign to him, i.e., an outside will, then the question is, whose is this hideous will? Does it not belong to that spirit which we call evil?

In our country there has lately been a noticeable increase in the number of unmotivated murders. It seems that one man kills another for no evident reason whatsoever. In an article, “Who will Kill Me Tomorrow?” author V. Kalita describes three frightful crimes. In the first, twenty-year-old Skorobo-gatov beat up his mother, wounded his father with a knife, and five days later killed a youth trying to defend his father, whom the killer was deriding. The second case involved a tractor driver, Radopupov, who in a drunken stupor monstrously cut up his acquaintances, Anna and Alexander, for no apparent reason. In the third, a certain Zavaruyev took two young children for a drive into the forest, where he was prompted to kill one of the boys in revenge for his older sisters’ refusal to marry him. He monstrously killed both children.

The author, after studying Zavaruyev’s personality, writes: He lived and grew up like many rural youth. He went to school, served in the army, then worked in various capacities on the collective farm “Rodina.” Never and nowhere did he spend time with killers or criminals. He was never in prison or in a penal colony or corrective labor camp... And suddenly such a twist of fate: a killer, a criminal. Apart from the shock of the crime, what is even more appalling to me is the ordinariness of the killer; he’s like so many other people. It’s frightful to think that these “many people” live right next to us; they walk around, look, talk... And suddenly, for no reason at all, some hateful feelings “find place” in them and they take a knife and cut the throat of one of us or one of our children.



Commenting on these cases, Kalita writes further that “society is burning in a blaze of crime. What is frightening is that it is so pervasive; it has taken on the dimensions of an outright civil war (son against father, mother; brother against brother; friends killing one another), when each man wars against the other.” The author cites chilling facts, from which he draws accurate generalizations about the lack of motivation behind killings, and about the appearance of a new class of criminals, “who only an hour ago were ordinary people and suddenly they are murderers.” But Kalita cannot explain what has caused this phenomenon. And this is understandable, because it can only be explained from one point of view—mystical.

As has already been pointed out, someone who is not protected by the Christian faith, sacraments and prayer, is defenseless when faced by the net of temptations laid out before him. He falls into one or another mystical trap and, living in this world according to the law of his passions, he is readily controlled by unclean spirits.

As dreadful as this sounds, a majority of people in our society are zombies; that is, people who submissively fulfill the will of an unclean spirit dwelling in them, and this frequently leads them to commit horrible crimes or suicide. The degree of their possession is directly proportionate to the person’s passionateness and lack of faith. Take Kalita’s cases cited above: people who have lost control of their senses, for reasons they themselves cannot explain, decide upon barbarous, senseless acts; into an alcohol-inflamed brain comes an imperative whose voice has long become familiar, identified with the person’s own awareness, whose whims have long ago been uncontrollably and unconditionally satisfied. And here is the result: an irreparable act is committed.

We find clear confirmation of the aforementioned thesis in the article, “Bowing to the Devil.” Here is what it says. Four fifteen-year-old juveniles in the city of Chikment went for a walk to the river with a female classmate. There they cut her with a kitchen knife, drained her blood, and killed her. They buried the body and for a month calmly walked about before the murder was discovered. The youths were all from well-to-do families; there were no alcoholics or criminals among their parents. What were the motives behind the crime?

It turns out that all four were engaged in occultism. To one of them there appeared “a man in black” who ordered the killing of the classmate—a girl who went to church and

to Sunday school. The four juvenile zombies executed the order unquestioningly.

As we see here, young souls unprotected by faith and a Christian conscience, as a result of their involvement in occultism, became possessed and obediently fulfilled a monstrous order. And this is not an isolated case. We can often observe cold, senseless cruelty; bestial malice; blind indifference towards another's sufferings. Alas, all this has become the principal trait of our irreligious society.

We know that man is created in the image and likeness of God; he is called to the lofty aim of love and endless perfection. And when he isolates himself in the depraved circle of satisfying his passions, when he becomes purely carnal and egocentric, his spiritual and physical destruction become inevitable, for in falling away from God he chooses nonexistence. *Even one, who fulfills the will of God, is better than a thousand unrighteous ones*, testifies St. John Chrysostom. *Saints are the salt of the earth; they are the meaning of its existence; they are that fruit for the sake of which it is preserved. And when the earth ceases to bear saints, then that force which holds the world back from catastrophe will be taken away*, states the righteous Silouan. That is, when the measure of evil surpasses the admissible limit, then the society and the people where this occurred will perish. An example of this is the destruction of early humanity from the flood. Likewise we recall Sodom and Gomorrah and their destruction for rampant profligacy. We recall Abraham, who implored the Holy Trinity to spare the city for the sake of even ten righteous men, and who received a promise that if there should be found ten, then for their sake mercy would be shown to that city (Gen 18:32). But ten were not to be found. Righteous Lot was leaving with his family, when the city and its depraved inhabitants were destroyed.

Are we not standing on the brink of such destruction today? That measure of lawlessness which is filling the cup of God's long-suffering and, when it overflows, will call down upon us the inevitable wrath of the Creator of the world—is it not reaching its limit? Will there be found among us ten righteous men able to stave off that retribution ready to pour forth upon our earth on account of man's wickedness?

Look around. Malice, disorder, the spectre of famine, ecological catastrophe, nationalist discord, and so on. Are these not generated by our spiritual bankruptcy, our godless lives? Are these not signs from God that ought to make us stop, think and change ourselves? And if this is so, then without spiritual rebirth neither ecological reforms, nor a wise leader, nor occultists with extraterrestrial beings will help us.

But our faith in Christ the Saviour, our repentance and amendment—this is what can bring us out of our spiritual and moral crisis and give the Light of life to our future.

## RESPECT OF THE FAITHFUL FOR THE CLERGY

By Archbishop Athenagoras (Kokkinakis) (+1979)



Orthodox Christians respect and love their clergy. Knowing that the clergy are servants of God and man, devoting their life for the salvation of their flock, the Orthodox people express their gratitude and respect to them on every occasion.

First, the priest is addressed as “Father” by all, for he is the spiritual father of his flock; He is their teacher, confessor, sanctifier and healer.

Second, when people greet their priest they kiss his hand as an expression of respect, as recognition of his priesthood, as a veneration to the holiness of his sacred duties. The fact that the priest handles the Holy of Holies, that is, the Body and Blood of Christ, when he offers the Divine Liturgy, is recognized by the people, at all time throughout the world, as a great and awesome privilege.

Your priest's hands are the hands that touch and offer the Bloodless Sacrifice on the Holy Altar; (the hands that give to us the Body and Blood of Christ; the hands that baptize and anoint us with Holy Chrism; the hands that absolves us forgiveness; the hands that bless our wedlock and anoints our bodies with the healing oil of the sacrament of Holy Unction; the hands that sprinkle upon us the holy water of sanctification; the hands that bless us, alive and dead. These hands are indeed instruments of salvation. For these reasons, Orthodox Christians through the centuries kissed the hand of their priest, as we continue to do in our days. We kiss the hand of our priest when we greet him either when he distributes, at the end of the Liturgy, the blessed bread (Antithoron), or outside the Church whenever we meet him.

We close with the words of St. Paul:

*Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever. Be not carried about with diverse and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.* (Heb 13:7-9)

*Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.* (Heb 13:13)

*Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.* (Heb 13:17)



## ON HALLOWEEN

*By Bishop Kyrill of Seattle, from Orthodox Life, Vol. 43, No. 5, September - October, 1993.*

It will shortly be that time of the year when the secular society in which we live is preparing for the festival of Halloween. Because most of us are either newly Orthodox or newly aware of our Orthodoxy, it is absolutely necessary that we carefully examine every aspect of our involvement in the world—it's activities, festivals, associations and societies—in order to discern whether or not these involvements are compatible or incompatible with our holy Orthodox Faith. This is a difficult task which leads to some pain when we realize that there are popular organizations and activities in which we are unable to participate.

Though our schools, our local community organizations, and all forms of entertainment in television, radio, and the press will share in and capitalize upon the festival of Halloween, it is impossible for Orthodox Christians to participate in this event at any level. The issue involved is simple faithfulness to God and the holy Orthodox Christian Faith.

Halloween has its roots in paganism and continues to be a form of idolatry in which Satan, the angel of death is worshipped. As we know, the very foundation of our holy Church is built upon the blood of martyrs who refused under the painful penalties of cruel torture and death to worship, venerate, or pay obeisance in any way to the idols who are Satan's angels. Because of the faithfulness through obedience and self-sacrifice of the holy martyrs, God poured out upon His holy Church abundant grace and its numbers were increased daily, precisely at a time when one would have expected the threat of persecution to extinguish the flame of faith. But, contrary to the world's understanding, humble faithfulness and obedience to God are the very lifelines of our life in Christ, through Whom we are given true spiritual peace, love, and joy, and participation in the miraculous workings of His Holy Spirit. Therefore the holy Church calls us to faithfulness by our turning away from falsehood toward truth and eternal life.

With regard to our non-participation in the pagan festival of Halloween, we will be strengthened by an understanding of the spiritual danger and history of this anti-Christian feast.

The feast of Halloween began in pre-Christian times among the Celtic peoples of Great Britain, Ireland and northern

France. These pagan peoples believed that physical life was born from death. Therefore, they celebrated the beginning of the "new year" in the fall (on the eve of October 31<sup>st</sup> and into the day of November 1<sup>st</sup>), when, as they believed, the season of cold, darkness, decay and death began. A certain deity, whom they called Samhain, was believed by the Celts to be the lord of death, and it was he whom they honored at their New Year's festival.

There were, from an Orthodox Christian point of view, many diabolical beliefs and practices associated with this feast which, it will be clear, have endured to our time. On the eve of the New Year's festival, the Druids who were the priests of the Celtic cult, instructed their people to extinguish all hearth fires and lights. On the evening of the festival a huge bonfire built of oak branches, which they believed to be sacred, was ignited. Upon this fire sacrifices of crops, animals, and even human beings, were burned as an offering in order to appease and cajole Samhain, the lord of death. It was also believed that Samhain, being pleased by their faithful offerings, allowed the souls of the dead to return to homes for a festal visit on this day. It is from this belief that the practice of wandering about in the dark dressed up in costumes imitating ghosts, witches, hobgoblins, fairies, and demons grew up. For the living entered into fellowship and communion with the dead by what was, and still is, a ritual act



of imitation, through costume and activity of wandering around in the dark of night, even as the souls of the dead were believed to wander.

The dialogue of "trick or treat" is also an integral part of this system of beliefs and practices. It was believed that the souls of the dead who had entered into the world of darkness, decay, and death, and therefore into total communion with and submission to Samhain, the lord of death, bore the affliction of great hunger on their festal visit. Out of this grew the practice of begging, which was a further ritual enactment and imitation of what the Celts believed to be the activities of the souls of the dead on their festal visit. Associated with this is the still further implication that if the souls of the dead and their imitators were not appeased with "treats," i.e., offerings, then the wrath and anger of Samhain, whose angels and servants the souls and their imitators had become, would be unleashed through a system of "tricks," or curses.

From an Orthodox Christian point of view, participation in these practices at any level is impossible and idolatrous,

a genuine betrayal of our God and our holy Faith. For if we participate in the ritual activity of imitating the dead by dressing up in their attire or by wandering about in the dark, or by begging with them, then we have willfully sought fellowship with the dead, whose lord is not Samhain as the Celts believed but Satan, the Evil One who stands against God. Further, if we submit to the dialogue of “trick or treat,” we make our offering not to innocent children, but rather to Samhain, the lord of death whom they have come to serve as imitators of the dead, wandering in the dark of night.

There are other practices associated with Halloween which we must stay away from. As was mentioned above, on the eve of the Celtic New Year festival, Druid priests instructed their faithful to extinguish their hearth fires and lights and to gather around the fire of sacrifice to make their offerings to pay homage to the lord of death. Because this was a “sacred fire,” it was from this that the fire of the new year was to be taken and the lights and hearth fire rekindled. Out of this arose the practice of the Jack O’ Lantern (in the USA, a pumpkin—in older days other vegetables were used) which was carved in imitation of the dead and used to convey the new light and fire to the home where the lantern was left burning throughout the night. Even the use and display of the Jack O’ Lantern involves celebration of and participation in the pagan festival of death honoring the Celtic god Samhain. Orthodox Christians must in no way share in this Celtic activity, but rather we should counter our inclinations and habits by burning candles to the Saviour and the Most Holy Mother of God and to all the holy saints.

In the ancient Celtic rite divination was also associated with this festival. After the fire had died out, the Druids examined the remains of the sacrifices in order to foretell, as they believed was possible, the events of the coming year. Since this time the Halloween festival has been the night for participation in all kinds of sorcery, fortune telling, divination, games of chance, and in latter medieval times, Satan worship and witchcraft.

In the days of the early Celtic Church, which was strictly Orthodox, the holy Fathers attempted to counteract this pagan New Year Festival which honored the lord of death, by establishing the Feast of All Saints on the same day (in the East, the Feast of All Saints is celebrated on the Sunday following Pentecost). As was the custom of the Church, the faithful Christians attended a Vigil Service in the evening and in the morning a celebration of the Holy Eucharist. It is from this that the term Halloween developed. The word Halloween has its roots in the Old English of “All Hallow’s Even,” i.e., the eve commemorating all those who were hallowed (sanctified), i.e., Halloween.

The people who had remained pagan and therefore anti-Christian and whose paganism had become deeply inter-

twined with the occult, Satanism, and magic, reacted to the Church’s attempt to supplant their festival by increased fervor on this evening. In the early middle ages, Halloween became the supreme and central feast of the occult, a night and day upon which acts of witch craft, demonism, sorcery, and Satanism of all kinds were practiced.

Many of these practices involved desecration and mockery of Christian practices and beliefs. Costumes of skeletons developed as a mockery of the Church’s reverence for holy relics; holy things were stolen, such as crosses and the Reserved Sacrament, and used in perverse and sacrilegious ways. The practice of begging became a system of persecution designed to harass Christians who were, by their beliefs, unable to participate by making offerings to those who served the lord of death. Thus, the Western Church’s attempt to supplant this pagan festival with the Feast of All Saints failed.

The analogy of Halloween in ancient Russia was Navy Dien (old Slavonic for “the dead” was “nav”) which was also called Radunitsa and celebrated in the spring. To supplant it, the Eastern Church connected this feast with Pascha and appointed it to be celebrated on Tuesday of the Saint Thomas’ week (the second week after Pascha). The Church also changed the name of the feast into Radonitsa, from Russian “radost” joy. Joy of Pascha and of the resurrection from the dead of all of mankind after Jesus Christ.

Gradually, Radonitsa yielded to Pascha its importance and became less popular in general, but many dark and pagan practices and habits of some old feasts of Russian paganism (Semik, Kupalo, Rusalia and some aspects of the Maslennitsa) survived till the beginning of our century. Now they are gone forever, but the atheist authorities used to try to revive them. We can also recall the example of another “harmless” feast—May 1<sup>st</sup>, proclaimed “the international worker’s day.” That was a simple renaming of a very old satanic feast of Walpurgis Night (night of April 30<sup>th</sup> into the day of May 1<sup>st</sup>)—the great yearly demonic Sabbath during which all the participants united in “a fellowship of Satan.”

These contemporary Halloween practices have their roots in paganism, idolatry, and Satan worship. How then did something that is so obviously contradictory to the holy Orthodox Faith gain acceptance among Christian people?

The answer to this question is spiritual apathy and listlessness, which are the spiritual roots of atheism and the turning away from God. In today’s society one is continually urged to disregard the spiritual roots and origins of secular practices under the guise that the outward customs, practices and forms are cute, fun, entertaining, and harmless. Behind this attitude lies the dogma of atheism, which denies the existence of both God and Satan and can therefore conclude that these activities, despite their obvious pagan and idolatrous origin, are harmless and of no consequence.

The holy Church must stand against this because we are taught by Christ that God stands in judgment over everything we do and believe, and that our actions are either for God or against God. Therefore, **the customs of Halloween are not innocent practices** with no relationship to the spiritual world. But rather **they are demonic practices**, precisely as an examination of their origins proves.

Evil spirits do exist. The demons do exist. Christ came into the world so *that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil.* (Heb 2:14). It is imperative for us to realize as Christians that our greatest foe is the Evil One, who inspires nations and individuals to sin against mankind, and who prevents them from coming to a knowledge of the truth. Unless we realize that Satan is our real enemy, we can never hope for spiritual progress for our lives. *For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.* (Eph 6:12).

Today we witness a revival of satanistic cults; we hear of a satanic service conducted on Halloween night; everywhere Satan reaches out to ensnare as many innocent people as possible. The newsstands are filled with material on spiritualism, supernatural phenomena, seances, prophecies, and all sorts of demonically inspired works.

It is undoubtedly an act of Divine Providence that Saint John of Kronstadt, that saintly physician of souls and bodies, should have his feast day on the very day of Halloween, a day which the world dedicated to the destroyer, corrupter, and deceiver of humanity. God has provided us with this powerful counterpoise and weapon against the snares of Satan, and we should take full advantage of this gift, for truly *Wondrous is God in His saints.*



**I**f our thoughts are kind, peaceful and quiet, turned only towards good, then we also influence ourselves and radiate peace all around us—in our family, in the whole country, everywhere. When we labor in the fields of the Lord, we create harmony. Divine harmony, peace and quiet spread everywhere. However, when we breed negative thoughts, that is a great evil. When there is evil in us, we radiate it among our family members and everywhere we go. So you see, we can be very good or very evil. If that's the way it is, it is certainly better to choose good!

St. John Chrysostom teaches us that all evil comes first from ourselves and only secondly from the devil. If we keep our minds vigilant and our hearts strong in the Faith, the devil has no access to us.

**Blessed Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (+2002)**

## A STORY FROM THE “LEIMONARION” (THE “SPIRITUAL MEADOW”)

**I**n the reign of the most faithful Caesar Tiberius Constantine (578-582), we went to the Great Oasis and when we were there, we saw a monk named Abba Leo, a Cappadocian by race, who was great in the eyes of God. Many people told us a multitude of wondrous stories about this monk. When we made contact with him and gained some experience of him, we reaped considerable benefits; especially from his humility, recollection, poverty, and charity which he showed to all.

This ever memorable elder said to us, “Believe me, children, I am going to reign.” We said to him, “Believe us, abba, nobody from Cappadocia ever reigned. This is an ill suited thought you are harboring.” But he said again, “It is a fact, children, that I am going to reign;” and nobody could persuade him to put the idea away from him.

When the Maziques came and overran all of that region, they came to the Great Oasis and slew many monks, while many others were taken prisoner. Among those taken prisoner at the Lavra of the Great Oasis were Abba John, formerly lector at the Great Church in Constantinople, Abba Eustathios the Roman, and Abba Theodore, all three of whom were ill. When they had been captured, Abba John said to the barbarians, “Take me to the city and I will have the bishop give you twenty four pieces of gold.”

So one of the barbarians led him off and brought him near to the city. Abba John went in to the bishop. Abba Leo the Cappadocian was in the city at that time and so were some others of the fathers; that is why they were not captured. Abba John went in and began to implore the bishop to give the barbarian the twenty four pieces of gold, but the bishop could only find eight. He was willing to give these to the barbarian, but the barbarian would not take them. “Either give me twenty four pieces of gold or the monk,” he said.

The men of the fortress had no choice but to hand over Abba John, who wept and groaned, to the barbarian; they took him to their tents. Three days later, Abba Leo took the eight pieces of gold and went out into the wilderness to where the barbarians were camped. He pleaded with them in these words, “Take me and the eight pieces of gold, and let those three monks go. For, as they are sick and cannot work for you, you will only have to kill them. But as for me, I am in good health and I can work for you.” Then the barbarians took both him and the eight pieces of gold of which he spoke, letting the other three monks go free.

Abba Leo went off somewhere with them and when he was worn out and could go no further, they beheaded him. And so, Abba Leo fulfilled that which is spoken in the Scriptures, *Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.* (Jn 15:13). Then we realized what he was talking about when he used to say, “I am going to reign.” For reign he did, having laid down his life for his friends...

## ON TELEVISION

By ROCOR Archbishop Vitaly of Montreal and Canada (+2006),  
from "Orthodox Life," Vol. 31, no. 1, January - February, 1981.

We have not yet felt the huge after-shock of the coming of television which in a short time has managed to secure a niche for itself in almost every home. Its powers of persuasion and attraction have proved to be practically supernatural and are coupled with a subtle and awesome ability to corrupt. Today, the priesthood cannot and must not ignore the phenomenon of television, a phenomenon unrivalled in the extent of its influence over the human soul. Without exaggeration, a campaign against it must be our immediate and primary concern because every day and every hour its effects are being felt in our own homes.

Its power can be overcome! All we really need to do is to see it in perspective. It is indisputably a brilliant invention and our chief problem lies in the fact that our conflict is not really with it at all, but with ourselves and our own perpetually debilitated wills. We simply do not have the strength to tear ourselves away from its extraordinarily seductive spell. I am reminded of the words of St. Paul: *All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.* (I Cor 6:12).

So let us look at television objectively, see the good and the evil in it, and only then will we be in a position to make use of its positive aspects and to reject the negative.

Firstly, no invention, no mechanism nor electronic device is inherently evil; there is no such thing as intrinsic evil, for evil exists only in the will of those who act contrary to the will of God. Such phenomena as television are rather manifestations of the Divine Wisdom which man has the privilege of discovering within the laws of nature, so that he may all the better and with all his heart give praise and thanks to the Creator. Given nothing else but the sheer quantity of programming, it would be foolish to say that no good at all comes of it. The chief good (and perhaps the only good fully realized) is this: television has brought people home again.

The whole period beginning with the WWI and ending with the 1950's has been singled out by sociologists because of one characteristic, the tendency of people to "go out" in search of stimulation. People may have slept at home and even had their meals at home, but "leisure time" was spent elsewhere. People "went out," coaxed by sports events, movies, dancing, and an endless array of "entertainments." The results, especially for children, were catastrophic. "Home" became not much more than a dormitory and all the former connotations of the word were lost. It had been a place where children first learned to comprehend the things around them and to use their imaginations, a place where the newly-awakened imagination lovingly animated the lifeless forms around it

and first learned to dream. But now, the children were cast out into the streets, completely unprepared for the cruel and bitter realities they encountered, the realities of our times, which so insult the soul.

Suddenly, for the first time in five decades people came home—to watch television. Television was not presenting anything new; we cannot credit it with that. It was simply appealing to the lower instincts of the common man and bringing those same things which he had sought in the streets into his living room. So there is no use speaking of the "morality" of the change that came about, and yet the change itself gives cause for optimism. Amidst the indignity, corruption and temptation that we now live in, we must clutch at straws and hope that they will keep us afloat. Let us concede, then, that television encourages us to stay home and try to build on that. Were we to damn it outright, we would find no one to listen. Such is the power it wields over us.

Conceivably, television could graphically and comprehensively present us with the complex issues confronting science, art and technology and thus increase our knowledge and awareness. Conceivably, it could eradicate ignorance and that peculiar semi-literacy which has always brought the world to grief. Let us for a moment assume that it seeks to do these things, for the sake of the argument, and go on to examine its destructive influence on the soul.

Television keeps us from reading. Why bother when we can both hear and see everything on television? Why strain our imagination when television can do all the work for us? We are handed programs on a platter, masterfully prepared and piquantly sauced—all we have to do is eat.

Television has carried us to the ends of the earth and into space, taken us to the ocean's bottom and into the earth's crust, into factories and operating rooms where we have practically participated in the most complex surgery. It has shown us nations and peoples whom we might otherwise never have seen. And yet, paradoxically, it has made us slothful and apathetic. Television's vast storehouse of audio-visual information has proven to be an indigestible glut which has made us indifferent to the real world around us. When all is said and done, it has nurtured our ignorance.

I will try to explain. When we read, an extremely complex psychological process occurs. It involves first and foremost, an effort of the will. To choose a book and read it through requires a concentrated effort, whereas it takes no effort at all to watch television. No matter how brilliant the author of a given book may be our imagination creates its own images as we read. We create a universe of our own. In fact, we may be drawn to our favorite authors precisely because we participate with them in the mysterious process of creation.

The imagination is only one aspect of the soul. It is the source of creativity and exploration and it is developed through reading. This helps to make us not only useful

members of society but life-loving individuals as well. Television, on the other hand, far from stimulating the imagination, has no need of it. The work of the imagination is completed by the time a program is broadcast, and all we end up doing is looking at the end-product of the imaginations of others, often alien to our own. As we are deprived of our imaginations, so are we deprived of our souls, and our creative powers are paralyzed.

We see God's creation through a glass darkly and forget that *the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.* (Rom 1:20). Very subtly, television turns us into materialists who retain an intrinsic animal ability to see, but lack any inner vision—the vision of the soul. We are being encouraged to look more and more but not to see. We are becoming like the idols which King David the poet and prophet spoke of in his psalms: *They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not. They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not. They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.* (Pss 115:5-8). Once we are able to look and yet not see the essence of things and the threads that bind them all together, we have become truly ignorant.

Much has already been written about the corrupting influence of television, but I would like to bring it to mind once more.

No parent would ever take his or her children to any place of dubious repute. If someone suggested a stroll through the slums, it would be taken as a bad joke, a sign of mental instability, or of intoxication. And yet, let us not be hypocritical, all you parents of respected and honorable Orthodox families! Of course you declined the invitation to the slums, but you think nothing wrong in gathering in your living room and with a barely perceptible and innocent flick of the wrist inviting the lowest forms of human society into your homes, the walls of which are probably even graced with icons. You are about to meet every conceivable sort of maniac, murderer and psychopath. You won't even flinch and your conscience will remain clean. But your children will have nightmares; they will grow nervous, irritable and insufferably rude. Even you will not fall asleep as easily as before because of the oppressive burden of the immoral hideousness you have seen.

All of these things are a profanation of your home, which, in the highest understanding of the Orthodox Church, is your church as well. The Apostle Paul often called the Christian home the *church within the house* (Rom 16:5; I Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phil 1:2). You are also profaning your soul and the souls of your children, because your eyes and your ears are the instruments of your soul and the images you see, as well as the things you hear, enter into it. Images are stored in our subconscious like photos in an album and they can profane our heart of hearts. They re-emerge from the disturbed mind at any moment and in any place, in accordance with laws that we know nothing about at present. They interfere with our relationships with other human beings and take away the joy and the immediacy of living. It was with these things in view that the Orthodox Church stated succinctly and without equivocation, *Your eyes see the truth and what the eyes perceive goes directly to influence the soul. Wisdom tells us that this is so.*

*Therefore guard your heart above all else you treasure, for the source of life is there.* (100<sup>th</sup> canon of the Sixth Ecumenical Council of Constantinople).

What a Mephistophelian joke we have become the brunt of since then! Knowing full well that we Orthodox would never knowingly engage in unlawful assembly, Satan so cleverly and completely clouded our judgment that, with our own hard-earned money, we obtain an electronic device which introduces us

to corruption, debauchery and murder, and turns our home into an insane asylum. Satan has taken away from us that sense of human dignity which the holy prophet David so treasured that he constantly and tirelessly besought the Lord not to let the devil make a laughing-stock of him.

Since we undeniably do see all the above mentioned depravity on television, it becomes important to note another critical consequence of our actions. In our everyday lives we have practical, moral, psychological and social barriers placed between us and the commission of evil. The soul, if only through inertness and laziness, tends never to remove them. But the impact and example of the realism of television effortlessly overcomes these barriers. It familiarizes us with all the approaches to sin as if they were of our own making, and consequently sin comes easily to us. This would explain the waves of appalling crimes which have become endemic in our time and which even our social agencies are concerned about—crimes which cannot be predicted—"motiveless crimes." A young boy, for no apparent reason, murders his parents one morning. A student indecently assaults his teacher. There



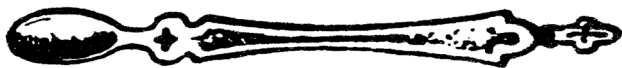
are countless examples in the police records, but it would be inappropriate to cite any more here.

What means of resistance can I suggest, for it is clear that we must resist. First of all, we must work together, both the shepherd and the flock, making this our highest priority. Of course, the best and simplest thing to do would be to sell the television set, and the sooner the better. Let me qualify that: sell it and give the money to the Church for the benefit of the poor. This first suggestion is for those righteous souls who have already taken up the sword, those elect of God whose aim in life is salvation. Even more blessed are those who never acquired the thing in the first place, who never needed it. However, I understand that for the time being this, my first suggestion, will seem too harsh for the majority of the faithful. We have been captivated by television and our wills have become so feeble and sickly that few can respond to such a call. But do not be dismayed—there have always been few heroes and even fewer martyrs. The righteous always seem to be alone.

I would like to remind us all once more, as faithful Christians, of the positive qualities of television, particularly of its ability to keep us at home and together. We have all noticed on many occasions where the family gathers in the evening, with apparent dignity and decorum, before the television set, in the semi darkness. Our struggle against the harmful effects of television comes down to taking advantage of its ability to bring us together and at the same time negating its corrupting influences.

We must revitalize our willpower and establish a firm “modus operandi” in our use of this invention. Firstly, only the parents or some responsible member of the family should be allowed to turn it on. Secondly, it must be given the aura of “forbidden fruit,” and children should be permitted to see only the occasional good movie, solely as a reward for their achievements and good behavior. It is important to accompany every such film with a discussion and one’s own conclusions, putting the subject into an historical perspective and citing related themes from literature. Everything must be seen in the light of Orthodoxy and the teachings of the Holy Fathers.

I would like to believe that those who choose to oppose fervently the corrupting influence of television will also be guided by the Lord who will suggest ways to ward off evil. During all fasts it could be made a rule to disconnect the television or even to remove it altogether. Our diligence will of course depend on the extent of our desire for salvation, on our piety as a community and on our devotion to the Church.



God does not allow the same warfare and temptations to this generation as he did formerly, for men are weaker now and cannot bear so much.

St. Anthony the Great

## THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATOR

*By Fr. Vassily Zenkovsky, Director of Religious Education at St. Sergius Institute, Paris, France.*

The Christian educator faces a hard yet inspiring task: to awaken and strengthen the religious life of the child. The task is inspiring because religious growth brings forth in a young soul the flowering of all its spiritual gifts, unfolds a perspective of eternal life and brings the radiant image of Christ into a child’s heart. There is an inexpressible beauty in childish faith, in the naive prayers of childhood and as we adults witness the awakening of this new life, we seem to share its brightness. But the task of the educator, penetrating into the world of the child’s religion, is also hard, for almost everything in our present environment is opposed to spiritual life; everything leads the soul away from God and from His eternal truth.

Technical achievements fascinate our young people and they grasp at all the advantages that technical progress puts within their reach. Life itself becomes a kind of technical assignment, for is not the whole world operating according to rational and well organized rules? Is it not sufficient to know these rules, to adjust oneself to them in order to find happiness and solve all conflicts? The tragic element of life is veiled, disguised, removed to some obscure corner, and it is difficult under these conditions to bring to children the message of the Cross, to disclose to them the need for spiritual effort.

In our modern world, we adults are lulled by the sense of our civilization’s environment; we become spiritually drowsy and superficial. The bright inner world of the child’s fantasy is focused from the very beginning on the superficial, external aspects of life. Under such conditions, how can we awaken a thirst for spiritual life? How can we light the fire of a soul’s yearning for eternal truth?

Religious education is often deformed, replaced by an appeal to the external faculties of the human soul—to the child’s intelligence, to his emotions and his activity. Information about God, about Jesus Christ and the Theotokos, about saints and church history, which are necessary as a means of bringing the soul nearer to the other-worldly values, grow to be an end in themselves; i.e., they remain unrelated to the process of coming nearer to God. Of course, this information and knowledge is necessary, for without knowledge our spiritual life cannot mature and take shape. But spiritual life as such does not consist in knowledge.

The Russian philosopher Keslov made a good distinction between knowledge *about* God and knowledge *of* God: knowledge *about* God includes our ideas about God, the way we visualize our Lord’s earthly life, His death and resurrection. But all this is only knowledge *about* God. Knowledge *of* God, on the other hand, is our

life with Him and in Him. All the knowledge we acquire *about* God should merely serve to bring us nearer to him; knowledge *about* God should give shape and expression to those spiritual experiences through which our hearts are drawn nearer to God. But if there is no spiritual life in our heart, then all the knowledge we acquire *about* God remains worthless.

Spiritual life means standing before God. It means a living consciousness of God, a soul's unfolding. Spiritual life is seeking God, and finding Him, it is directing our entire being toward Him; it is living with Him and in Him. We can and should give sufficient attention to the external forms of life, but our soul should be withdrawn in God. We can and should take care of our families, and carry out our social and professional duties, but over and above this we should be constantly conscious of our Heavenly Father Whom we love and to Whom we surrender our soul completely.

Spiritual life is hidden within us. Saint Peter spoke of the hidden man of the heart, of a meek and quiet spirit which is, in the sight of God, of great price. Yes, spiritual life remains hidden in a man's heart. This is precisely why it is possible to slumber spiritually, i.e., to live in such a way that the entire power of our attention, all our spiritual forces are devoted to external values and we remain unconcerned about the need of our spirit to live with God. Many good and kind people remain spiritually asleep and sometimes the moment of awakening comes only with the end of their life.

But if spiritual life remains hidden, it is at the same time unavoidable and indestructible. On the surface of our soul, in our conscious mind, we are completely possessed by externals, but underneath this busy and agitated existence, in the hidden depths of our being, there goes on a process of spiritual life. Unfortunately, it remains inactive and does not influence our conscious life and our behavior. Spiritual life in a human being is determined by the presence in each soul of the image of God.

The radiance of grace is constantly penetrating our soul, but if our spiritual life is suppressed into an air-tight compartment, this power of grace cannot affect us, cannot help us. This is the evil of our times in this secularized world in which our entire culture is separated from God and from his Church. Science, art, economic life, politics, social activity—all these forms of human activity have become autonomous and have drifted away from God.

Under these circumstances, how can we establish a link between the external life of our heart and mind and the hidden life of the spirit? This is the basic and ineffably difficult task that faces the Christian educator. Religious instruction is, after all, only a part of religious education. Religious instruction is important, but it will be fruitful only if a process of spiritual life goes on, however faintly, if the hidden life of the spirit is not completely separated from the rest of

our inner life. The very difficulty of Christian education, its very toil, consists in reestablishing in the human being its spiritual oneness, wholeness, in opposition to the trend of our times. The Christian educator has only one way of achieving this: **his own spiritual life**. Only if the educator lives himself in his own spirit can he awaken, call forth the hidden power of the spirit in a young heart.

We have to "instruct" our children, we have to tell them about God's creation of the world, about man's happy existence in Paradise and his fall, about the promise of the Messiah, about Mary the Mother of our Lord, about the Incarnation of the God of gods, and about the new life He brought us. But all this knowledge, however necessary it is, can remain a dead capital in our heart, without illuminating or vitalizing our spirit. This is the common danger faced by the modern Christian world, by modern culture. Christ is not forgotten, but He is not a living experience; the kingdom of God and His righteousness is not sought after "First", as the Lord taught us. Other, external values are the object of this seeking.

Yes, the path of the Christian educator is hard indeed. It is a difficult task to establish a link between the hidden life of the heart and our external active life, with our superficial emotional experiences. The truth was expressed a long time ago: "Education is first of all self-education." We cannot simply "teach Sunday school," give our children religious instruction, if we ourselves do not live the truth of the Gospel. We can light a fire in the hearts of our pupils only if our own hearts are aglow.

It is a difficult task, but there are few joys greater than the one we feel when we are able to reach the hidden life of a young soul. When we come in touch with it ourselves we gain depth and enlightenment. Anyone who has experienced this joy in his work with children, has found his vocation.

Let the words of St. Paul remain alive in his heart: *Quench not the Spirit!* (I Thes 5:19).



**M**y children, work diligently at the spiritual fragrance—I am speaking of prayer—this holy conversation with Jesus, which abundantly provides His blessings. Yes, children of the Spirit, love prayer with your whole heart so that all of you become a fragrance of grace, and that you smell sweet to those near you and make them say: *truly, monasticism makes monks give off an angelic fragrance through spiritual grace*. So, let the filthy passions be far from you, for they cause a foul smell and make a bad impression.

**Elder Ephraim of Philotheou**  
From *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*

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## THE DEATH OF A CIVILIZATION IMMERSED IN SIN

By Luiz Sérgio Solimeo.



The once Christian Western world is gradually sinking into a sea of mud in ever-thickening darkness. Vice and error are glorified as virtue, and truth is persecuted. People no longer boast of moral righteousness and

of the rule of reason but of anarchy, irrationality and the “deconstruction” of the concepts which sustain the life of thought.

The crisis of the family, the perversion of the youth, the growth of random and senseless violence, fruit of an ever more intense criminality, are spreading by the day.

We are witnessing the tenebrous sunset of a civilization; a new invasion of barbarians, not on horseback through the steppes or boldly crossing seas in rickety boats: they are born and raised in this very world they are going to destroy. They are a fruit of the counter-education received from broken homes, schools, society, and a media and entertainment industry gone awry.

No civilization can sustain itself and make progress without being based on logical and coherent thought and on solid and consistent morals. In other words, truth and good are the foundation and pillars sustaining the social, cultural and religious life that give a sense of purpose to the lives of individuals and to

the collective life of peoples. If this is missing there is chaos in people’s minds, customs, and in society.

The frantic quest for absolute and unbridled freedom has led man to shake off all restrictions imposed by morals, logic and even nature. Deconstruction of the truth and the good has led him to “deconstruct” the reality of his own body by denying the evidence of his sex stemming from anatomy and physiology; and as a consequence, he plunges himself into the surreal world of the homosexual culture.

Without the truth to guide him and morals to govern him, man has turned into flotsam and jetsam adrift in the vastness of the sea, dragged away by the waves with no defined purpose or direction.

The Renaissance, when Western civilization began to turn its back on the “philosophy of the Gospel” which, in the words of the Latin Pope Leo XIII, characterized medieval Christendom, marked the start of a long process of apostasy that has come all the way to today’s virtually atheistic society. (Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, “Revolution and Counter-Revolution”).

By rejecting Christianity, this decadent civilization has rejected Christ; and by rejecting the One who is Truth itself it started to love error and a world of unreality and fantasy. By falling away from truth and good this society began to seek satisfaction in sin, sinking into sin and revolt against God.

This is the reason why this civilization is dying; for, as Saint Paul reminds us, *the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* (Rom 6:23).



# 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 ἐδίδαχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

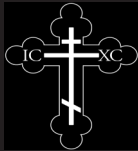
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## A MOST GLORIOUS MYSTERY

*A homily on the Nativity of our Lord and Savior by Archbishop Philaret (+1985).*

*A strange and most glorious mystery do I behold: the cave is Heaven; the Virgin, the throne of the Cherubim; the manger, the place wherein lay Christ God Whom nothing can contain...*

† † †

With these sacred words, in which the glad tidings of the great mystery of the Son of God are proclaimed, the Holy Church solemnly announces the radiant days of the feast of the Nativity of Christ.

They were heard first long before the feast itself, on the eve of another great feast—the Entrance into the Temple of the Mother of

God. And thereby the Church begins quite early on to prepare Her children to greet the Feast of the Nativity in a fitting manner

And if the holy hierarch Gregory the Theologian, speaking of our great feasts, refers to them as *mysteries*, thereby indicating the richness of their spiritual content and the exalted mysteries of the Faith which are disclosed therein, then perhaps this profound thought of the oecumenical teacher may be even more aptly applied to the feast of the Nativity of Christ, which is called *a strange and most glorious mystery*. And Paul, the preeminent Apostle, speaking in brief of the essence of our Christian evangelical task, said: *Great is the mys-*

*tery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.* (1 Tim 3:16).

Blessed was the night of the Nativity. In the fields of Bethlehem the flocks grazed peacefully. And round about them were the shepherds, *keeping watch over their flocks by night.* (Lk 2:8). There is a tradition, according to which these humble and faithful laborers were conversing on the peaceful night about the exact time of the advent of the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. And suddenly the angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them.

Man cannot encounter denizens of the world above without experienc-

ing fear and trembling; and the shepherds *were sore afraid.* Yet with what did the celestial herald begin his good tidings? *Fear not; for, behold, I bring*

*you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.* (Luke 2:10). And this great, this sacred joy the Church has received, and preserved, and proclaims to Her faithful children yearly during the radiant days of the Nativity of Christ.

Well nigh two thousand years have passed. For two thousand years the Holy Gospel has been proclaimed to the world; and therein the Church, yearly, over and over again, announces the glad tidings of the birth of Christ and takes up the angels' doxology: *Glorry to God in the Highest, and on earth peace, good will among men.* (Lk 2:14). But does contemporary humanity pay it any heed?



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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 20<sup>th</sup> 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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On the night of Christ's birth when Heaven came down to earth and earth became Heaven, in that God appeared on it incarnate, only the lowly shepherds of Bethlehem heard the angelic doxology and worshipped the Newborn, according to the Gospel. All the rest of mankind slept a deep sleep, unaware of the great event that had taken away our sorrow-filled and trying days; many are those who sleep a sound spiritual sleep from which they do not wake, who do not hearken to the good tidings of the Church! They pay no heed to the angels' song; it does not touch them. And if it reaches them in church, it leaves no trace in their souls; they are lost in earthly vanity and are not mindful of heaven.

The holy angels sang of peace, *and on earth peace...* Truly it is thus! For He Whom the Prophet called *the Prince of Peace* came to earth: He came Who, when He bid farewell to His beloved disciples, said to them; *Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you.* (Jn 15:27). Oh, if only mankind, which has lost peace, yet yearns for it and seeks after it, would but listen to these holy words of the *Prince of Peace* and ponder on them!

When the faithful Christians see the desperate attempts and efforts of the children and sages of this age to establish peace on earth in our time, they bring to mind the dreadful prophecy of the Prophet: *There is NO PEACE, saith my God, for the wicked.* (Isa 57:21). Nay, nor shall there be! And pathetic are all the attempts of the lovers of peace to attain an external peace!

It is not for naught that the Lord, after speaking of the peace which He bestows upon His disciples, added: *Not as the world giveth, give I unto you.* (Jn 14:27). And the Gospel tells us plainly that the Lord has said of the outward (political) peace for which the learned men of this age are striving: *Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not*

*to send peace, but a sword.* (Mt 10:34). Therefore, in vain are the reproaches of those who maintain that Christianity has "failed," that it has promised men peace, but has not delivered it. For the angels chanted on the night of the Saviour's birth, and the Saviour Himself spoke, not of an outward peace, but of a spiritual peace, a peace between God and man, the peace of one's conscience, an inner peace. The Lord never promised an external peace; on the contrary, having foretold wars and rumors of wars, He added: *See that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. [7] For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.* (Mt 24:6-7). He tells us that on earth there will never be that outward, political peace for which the propagandists are screaming.

The world is blind, has lost its senses, is entangled in its own passions and errors. Oh, if you could now but behold, see the light of knowledge, and understand what advances peace and your salvation.

Yet, alas! This is hidden from your eyes, for over them lies the impenetrable blindfold of vanity and the passions. The light of knowledge of God shines forth from the manger of Bethlehem, yet you do not perceive it; He Whose good pleasure it was to lie in that manger cries out to you: *Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest* (Mt 11:28)--but you pay no heed to this saving call; you follow after your own wise men, of whom the word of God said long ago that "*professing themselves to be wise, they became fools*" (Rom 1:22). And with yet greater and greater clarity, one senses in you the fetid breath of the approach of the one who will rise up before you as the full and dreadful incarnation of evil, sin and opposition to God.

Once, in the early days of the spreading of Christianity, the holy Apostle Peter, warning the first Christians, cried out: *Save yourselves from this perverse generation.* (Acts 2:40). By *perverse generation* the Apostle had in mind the implacable foes of Christ among the Jewish nation, as well as the entire pagan world, which to a great extent was depraved and debauched.

Prior to the birth of Christ, paganism had already become obsolete and moribund, having completely lost sight of the true meaning and significance of life. Christianity brought the light of understanding to pagan peoples and gave them new powers—and in Christianity pagans were regenerated spiritually. But what we see now in our own times is incomparably worse and more perilous than what took place of old. Now the Christian world has become depraved. Christians have become depraved—those whom the Saviour commanded to be the light of the world, with the awesome warning: *Ye are the salt of the earth, but if the salt has lost its savor, with what shall it be salted?* (Mt 5:13).

Is this not taking place in our midst, right before our eyes? Are not today's Christians turning into salt which has lost its taste?

Flee this dreadful spiritual destruction, O faithful child of the Church! Save yourself from this perverse generation! Lo! In these radiant days the Church commemorates the Nativity of Christ and glorifies the newborn Saviour of the world; make haste in your faith to the manger of Bethlehem, following after the simple shepherds, pure of heart, and the wise magi who laid all their wisdom and knowledge down before that manger. Bring your own gifts to the divine Infant—faith in Him, trust in Him, love for Him—and then in your faithful and devoted heart the wondrous doxology of the angels will sound: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men!*

Metropolitan Philaret

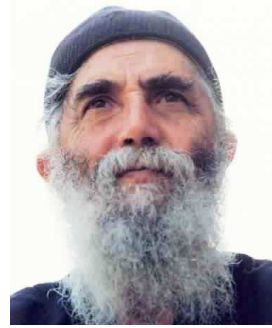


**W**e are the offspring of disobedient parents. When disobedience entered our fore-bearers, Adam and Eve, our nature suddenly changed. It became corrupt, foul-smelling, prone to decay, and mortal. Death entered us. Before the Fall, our fore-bearers were immortal. Only God can bring us back to our original state, as He created us. It was for this reason that He, Who is love, came down to earth and was born of the Virgin as a child. It is for this reason that He lived for 33 years among men. He wanted to teach us the truth, and show us that He is love.

Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (+2002)

## DISCERNMENT IN FASTING

By Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)



**A**part from the causes I've already mentioned regarding the abnormal war of the flesh, we should also be careful of other things that cause the war to increase, such as the matter of our diet. First of all, the frying pan needs to be thrown away so as not to fry our flesh, and also so that we can save our stomach from ulcers. Boiled food with uncooked oil is beneficial. From among the vegetables, you should avoid mustard

for it causes burning in the flesh.

It sometimes happens that a carnal cloud suddenly comes over us and our mind darkens and our body paralyses. While, in such cases, a struggle is necessary, man is weaponless as much in his mind, which is found inebriated, as from his flesh, which is paralyzed and desires sleep, food, etc. In these cases, which stem from a preceding spiritual negligence, a cup of coffee—or even two, if necessary—helps a great deal. Immediately all the sensual insobriety, sleepiness and numbness, as well as languor are driven away by its invigorating energy, and all of the preconditions are created for the struggle of fasting, vigil and prayer, with prostrations and other spiritual exertions. In this way man acquires his twofold health.

Avoid wine while eating, especially if you are young, for it induces carnal warfare and burning along with dizziness, and then the enemy is armed with the weapons that you yourself have provided. If you are old, or young but of a sickly constitution, then drink some wine to supplement your frugal fare.

Excessive amounts of water are not beneficial, as they cause swelling in the stomach and carnal warfare, especially at night, aside from the fact that this swelling obstructs breathing in the unceasing prayer. Therefore, it is good to avoid salty food, which is harmful; too many sweets, which make you thirsty, as well as too many dry nuts, which cause thirst but also carnal warfare. Instead, one should use light and lean foods in order to assist in his spiritual flight of prayer.

One should avoid as much as possible all fatty foods and sauces, which tarnish the soul, as well as salty or canned foods. These, apart from being unhealthy for the body, are also unhealthy for the soul on account of the burning and perspiration, which the flesh emits, obliging man to wash continually, for otherwise he stinks like a Turk who doesn't have Holy Oil.

Apart from taking care for the food we eat, we should also pay attention to the customary times we eat, that we may be assisted in our spiritual struggle, since this also is of great consequence.

## ORTHODOXY IS NOT A RELIGION

By Protopresbyter John Romanides (+2001), from "Orthodoxy and Religion," edited for length.

Many people are under the impression that Orthodoxy is one of many religions and that it is primarily concerned with preparing the members of the Church for life after death; that is, with securing a place in Paradise for every Orthodox Christian. Thus, they reckon that Orthodox doctrine offers an additional guarantee (because it is Orthodox), and that if someone does not believe in Orthodox doctrine, this serves as just one more reason for this person to go to Hell—apart, that is, from the fact that his personal sins will, in all probability, send him there. Any Orthodox Christian who believes that such a thing is Orthodoxy has associated Orthodoxy exclusively with the future life. Such people do not do much in this life, but rather wait to die in order to go to Paradise, since in their lifetime they were Orthodox Christians!

Another portion of the Orthodox are active within the domain of the Church, being interested not in the next life, but primarily in the present life. In other words, what interests them is how Orthodoxy will help them to live well in this life. Such Orthodox Christians pray to God, have priests say prayers, bless Holy Water, read supplicatory Canons, and anoint them with Holy Oil, etc., so that God will help them to have a pleasant life, to avoid falling ill, to provide for their children, to secure a good dowry and a good husband for their daughters, to have their sons find nice girls with good dowries to marry, to have their work go well, and even to help them with their stocks or businesses, etc. So we see that these Christians do not differ significantly from the faithful of other religions, who also do pretty much the same things.

In other words, from the foregoing, one sees Orthodoxy as having these two points in common with all of the other faiths: Firstly, it prepares the faithful for life after death so that they might go to Paradise, as each one imagines it; secondly, it ensures that Christians do not pass through sorrows, worries, disasters, illnesses, wars, etc., in this life—that is, God takes care of everything according to their needs or desires. Thus, for the second group of Christians, religion plays a major role in this life, and especially in everyday life.

Deep down, however, who, among all of the aforementioned Christians, is interested in whether God exists or not? Who is seeking Him? For such people, whether or not God exists is not an issue, since it would simply be better if God *did* exist, so that we can call upon Him and ask Him to satisfy our needs, that our jobs might go well, and that we might have some happiness in this life. Thus, we see that man has a very strong proclivity to want God to exist and to believe that God exists, because it is a human need for God to exist, in order that He might secure for him all of the things we have mentioned. Well then, since it is a human need for God to exist, *ergo*, God exists!

If man had no need of a God and could self-sufficiently secure a livelihood for himself in this life in some other way, then no one knows how many people would believe in God. Such is frequently the case, even in Greece.

We see, then, how many people, though previously indifferent with regard to religion, become religious towards the end of

their lives, perhaps after having been frightened by some event. For they can no longer live without calling upon some God to help them—that is, out of superstition. For these reasons, human nature helps man to become religious. This does not apply to Orthodox Christians alone; it applies to the faithful of all religions. Human nature is the same everywhere. Thus it is that man, after



his fall—darkened as he is by nature, or, rather, contrary to nature—inclines towards superstition.

### How About True Faith?

We now face the question: Where does superstition end and true faith begin?

The Fathers have clear positions and teachings on this subject. A person who follows (or rather believes that he follows) the teaching of Christ and simply goes to Church every Sunday, communes at regular intervals, and makes use of priests for blessings of the waters, anointments, etc., without exploring these things in greater depth, abiding in the *letter of the law* and not the *spirit of the law*—does such a person benefit in any particular way from Orthodoxy? Next, another person who prays exclusively for the next life, for himself and for others, while being totally indifferent to this life—does he, again, benefit in any particular way from Orthodoxy?

The first tendency is personified by a parish priest and those gathered around him with the aforementioned spirit, while

the latter tendency is personified by a monastery Elder (usually an Archimandrite), who is retired and waiting to die, with a few monks around him. To the extent that these two tendencies are not centered around *purification* and *illumination*, from a patristic viewpoint they are at fault as to the thing they are pursuing. On the other hand, to the extent that they are centered around *purification*, *illumination* and the implementation of the Orthodox patristic ascetic regimen for the acquisition of *noetic prayer*, only then are things placed on a proper foundation.

These two tendencies incline towards opposite extremes. They do not have a *common axis*. The common axis that upholds Orthodoxy and holds it together, its one and only *axis*, on all of the questions that concern Orthodoxy, and which puts everything on a correct foundation, when taken into account, is the axis: *purification, illumination, deification*.

The Fathers are not exclusively interested in what will happen to a person after his death; what is of primary interest to them is what a person will become in this life. After death, there is no *treatment of the mind*, so the *treatment* must begin in this life; for “there is no repentance in Hades.” This is why Orthodox theology is not “other-worldly,” futurological, or eschatological, but is purely “this-worldly.” For the solicitude of Orthodoxy is for man in this world, in this life, not after death.

Now, why are *purification* and *illumination* necessary? So that a person will go to Paradise and escape going to Hell? Is that why we need them? What constitutes *purification* and *illumination* and why do the Orthodox seek after them?

In order for one to find the reason and give an answer to this question, he must have the basic key in his possession, which is: All people on earth share the **same end**, from an Orthodox theological viewpoint. Whether a person is Orthodox, Buddhist, Hindu, agnostic or atheist, or whatever he may be (that is, every person on earth), **he is destined to see the Glory of God**. He will see the Glory of God at the **common end** of mankind during the Second Coming of Christ. All people will see the Glory (Uncreated Light) of God, and from this viewpoint they have the **same end**, but with one difference: The saved will see the Glory of God as a most sweet and never-setting **Light**, whereas the damned will see the same Glory of God as a consuming **Fire** that will burn them.

That we will all see the Glory of God is a true and expected fact. Beholding God—that is, His Glory, His Light—is something that will happen whether we want it or not. The experience of this Light, however, will be different from one person to another. Thus, the task of the Church and the clergy is not to help us to see this Glory, because this will come to pass one way or another. The work of the Church is focused on *how* each person will see God, not on *whether* he will see God. In other words, the task of the Church is to proclaim to people that there is a true God, that God is revealed as either

**Light** or a consuming **Fire**, and that all people will see God at the Second Coming of Christ, and to prepare its members so that they might see God not as **Fire**, but as **Light**.

### The Essence of Orthodoxy

This preparation of the members of the Church, and also of all people who want to see God as Light, is essentially a *therapeutic treatment*, which must begin and end in this life. The *therapy* must take place and be completed *in this life*. For *after death, there is no repentance*. This therapeutic treatment is the essence and primary content of Orthodox Tradition, as well as being the principal concern of the Orthodox Church. It is composed of the following three stages of spiritual ascent: *Purification* from passions, *illumination* by the Grace of the Holy Spirit, and *deification*, again by the Grace of the Holy Spirit.

It is also the case that **if someone does not at least arrive at the state of partial illumination in this life, he is unable to see God as Light either in this life or in the next**. It is, therefore, clear that the Fathers of the Church concern themselves with man as he is today, *at this moment*. And the one needing *treatment* is each person, who has the responsibility before God to begin this task today, *in this life*, because in this life he is able to do so; not after death. And this person himself will decide if he will follow this *therapeutic* path or not.

Christ said: *I am the way*. The Way towards what? Not only towards the next life. Christ is primarily the *Way* in this life. Christ is the *Way* to His Father and to our Father. Christ is revealed to man first in this life, and He shows him the path to His Father. This path is Christ Himself.

### What Is Religion then?

The question, now, is: Is religion equated with a teaching concerning the immortality of the soul, and also with a teaching concerning the existence of God for the future life? Likewise, is it equated with the victory of full justice? That is, do we need religion because there must be a Just God, Who will pronounce the final judgment on all people, so that the unjust might be punished in Hell and the just (*the good children*) be rewarded in Paradise?

If the answer is yes, well then, religion must exist, first of all so that justice might ultimately prevail and, secondly, so that man’s desire for bliss will not remain unfulfilled. Is it possible, in other words, for the *good child* **not** to live a blissful life after death? It is not possible! And let us say he was wronged in this life. In other words, is it possible for all of these wronged people, that is, the *good children*, not to be vindicated in the future life? It is not possible! And should they not lead a pleasant existence there, a life of bliss? Of course! But for this to happen, there has to be life after death, as well as a good and just God, Who must make a good and just distribution! Is it not so? There has to be [such a God], according to the understanding of the Middle Ages, that is, of Western theology.

With regard to all of these things, however, modern psychology comes along and explodes everything. It tells us that these perceptions are *psychological*; for man has inside him a sense of justice, which is what demands that the *bad children* be punished and the *good children* be rewarded! And since the rewarding fails to take place in this life, human imagination puts forth the idea that these things must be fulfilled in another life, for which reason a weak person, as well as one who loves justice and has profound and earnest feelings about justice, becomes religious and believes the doctrines of the religion that he follows. In other words, he believes because the doctrine in which he believes serves his psychological need for justice to be rendered. This reason does not have philosophical—that is, metaphysical—foundations, but only *psychological foundations*.

What is correct, however, about the foregoing line of thought is that if justice and bliss will ever prevail for good people, they will have to prevail in this life. For such people do not know if they will have another life, since the arguments we mentioned for the existence of another life are purely *psychological arguments* and not *scientific arguments*—that is, arguments founded on *experience* and the *scientific method*. Thus, these people believe in a life after death simply because they want to believe. And this is why the essence of their religion is the existence of another life where injustice is punished and justice rewarded.

For these reasons, then, one sees that sober people today in Europe and America no longer accept these foundations of religion and have been led to agnosticism, while others have been led to atheism. On the other side, there are churchgoers who continue to believe in life after death because, as we explained, they want to believe, without having scientific arguments to support their beliefs. This is the general situation.

Now, what is the Orthodox position on all of these issues?

### The Metaphysical Concept of Religion

Orthodoxy is first and foremost concerned with this life, here. The Fathers stress that *there is no repentance after death*. Modern Greek theologians, however, following their teacher, Adamantios Koraes, have a metaphysical understanding of the subject and have copied the methodology of the Roman Catholics and the Protestants in the matter of religion.

At the time when these people left to study theology in Europe and Russia, and also in America after the war, the great conflict had already begun years before between the *empiricists*, on the one hand, who are the heirs to the Enlightenment, of the French Revolution of 1789, and the *metaphysicians*, on the other hand. The basic difference between *empiricists* and *metaphysicians* is that the essence of the *empirical* approach is observation, while that of *metaphysics* is *philosophical speculation*.

At that time, all religious people were followers of metaphysics—and have been so even until recently—whereas all empiricists were agnostics, and some of them atheists. Why?

Because the essence of the empirical approach is not even philosophy. Certainly, it is presented as empirical philosophy, as the philosophy of empiricists. They prevailed over the metaphysicians in America and accomplished a great deed for Orthodoxy. They were, however, devastating for Modern Greek theology.

Nowadays, in Greece, all Marxists are empiricists, without being aware of it, of course. This is because Greek Marxist ideologists do not know what the family tree of Marxism is, as do their counterparts in Europe and America; for, here, they have merely learned their lessons mechanically, by rote, like the Jehovah's Witnesses.

I believe that it is a great tragedy—not an Aeschylean one, but a shameful one—that there are no powerful intellectual Marxists in Greece. Of course, this is fortunate for the right-wingers, as well as for Modern Greek theologians, but it is unfortunate for the search for truth. For Marxism started out on empirical bases and ended up where it has ended up.

The foundation of Marxism and the foundation of Patristic Theology, from a scientific point of view, are the same; thus, between the two of them, the Marxists and the Patristic theologians could have come to an understanding. Marxism, however, clashed with religion. Yes, but with what religion? Not with Revelation, but rather with the religion that is equated with metaphysics.

Now, as for the atheist, why does he not believe? Because he does not have the gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of *inward faith*. As for those who say that they believe, are they really believers? Not all; for example, the Calvinists, who often say that they believe because they are *predestined* [to believe]. In this way, however, they tread an anti-scientific path; that is, one that is not supported by any empirical reality. Nor do they have any metaphysical support for what they believe. They are, of course, aware of this, because they are intellectuals and know how things are, but they continue to act in this way.

This is why it has been observed that both Calvinists and Lutherans take refuge in existentialism. The same thing occurs with American Protestants, who also add emotionalism to the foregoing. American Protestants are very emotional both in their worship and in their behavior.

### Orthodoxy as the Official Religion of the Roman State

Bearing these things in mind now, we see why the Byzantine State sought to have Orthodoxy as its official religion and why it made so many efforts to preserve Orthodox doctrine intact. Why did it do so? Simply to preserve doctrine as doctrine? Or perhaps because Orthodox doctrine in particular was a precondition for the cure of its citizens, which cure would occasion a social restoration to health through the healing of the personality of each and every citizen? More likely the latter.

What was the **national anthem** of the Byzantine Empire? Was it not *Save, O Lord, Thy people, and bless Thine inheritance;*

grant victories to the emperors over barbarians, and through Thy Cross preserve Thou Thy commonwealth? This hymn expresses the ideology—if we can call it that—of the implementation of Orthodox teaching, faith, and life within the State; that is, on a nationwide scale.

Since the State foresaw the contribution to society and the benefit that would result from the Orthodox *therapeutic teaching and method*, if it were implemented, it instituted and promoted the Orthodox Faith as the official State religion, such that the State would be filled with parishes in which Priests would practice this *therapeutic regimen*. Thus, the parishes would grow with time into [communities of] healthy citizens, as would the State itself, by extension. The Church naturally did not refuse this, but rather worked in consort with the State.

It so happened, however, that this power given to the Church, together with the requisite ecclesiastical administrative organization, created a public service problem as a necessary evil. That is, many who coveted public positions pretended to be Orthodox, though they were not, and the Church began to be secularized.

Aside from all of these things, the Church had as its parallel task to protect the State from quack doctors, that is, from heretics. The local and OEcumenical Synods attended to precisely this. In the Acts of the OEcumenical Synods, we find the phrase: *It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us...* Those present at the Synods said this because they possessed *noetic prayer*, by which they were inwardly informed concerning the truth of the Decrees that they formulated.

Today, on the other hand, when the practice of *noetic prayer* has grown rare among Bishops, if a Synod of Bishops were to come together and they were to stand up at the opening and all say together: *O Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere present and fillest all things...* would the Holy Spirit illumine them without fail? That is, simply because they are canonical Bishops, assemble at a Synod, and say a prayer? The Holy Spirit does not work this way—that is, under these conditions; others are needed. The one praying needs to have *noetic prayer* already working inside him, when he attends a Synod, for the Grace of God to illumine him. Those attending false synods did not have this prayerful state.

The Bishops of old, however, did have such spiritual experience, and when they would come together as a Body, they knew what the Holy Spirit was informing them in their hearts on a particular matter. And, when they issued resolutions, they knew that their resolutions were sound. For they were in a state of *illumination*, and certain of them had even reached *glorification*, that is, *deification*. Thus, we see that in the ancient Church the charismatic element prevailed (that is, its members were governed by gifts of the Holy Spirit), and the institutional elements (that is, formal ecclesiastical and administrative qualifications) followed.

This is very clear in the New Testament, in the ancient Church, and in the great Fathers of the OEcumenical Synods, from the First OEcumenical Synod (fourth century) through the Ninth OEcumenical Synod, which took place under St. Gregory Palamas (fourteenth century). This kind of testimony of the Holy Spirit within the *heart* is well known only to those who have *noetic prayer* working in their hearts.

*Noetic prayer* is an empirical verification and assurance that a person's mind has been cured. Such a cure is feasible for all people, as long as the spiritual preconditions of the *therapeutic method are met*. In other words, this method is not destined or designed only for certain monastics—that is, for certain people wearing *rasa*—but for all people. For nowhere in Holy Scripture does any distinction seem to be made between *monastic spirituality* and *lay spirituality*. Holy Scripture speaks of only one spirituality. Have you ever found a passage in Holy Scripture that speaks separately about the spirituality of lay people and the spirituality of the clergy? There is no such thing in Holy Scripture. **Spirituality in Christ is the same for all of the faithful.**

This Christian spirituality is essentially a *therapeutic regimen*, which is offered by Christ to all people. It is designed for all people. It is not just for monastics, or the clergy, or the educated, or intellectuals, because there is no intellectualism whatsoever contained therein. Nor does it deal with the outer and visible aspects of man, but rather with the inner and hidden aspects.



The Word of God Himself, Who is before all worlds, the Invisible, the Incomprehensible, the Bodiless, the Source of Life and Immortality came to His own image; and took flesh on Him, for the sake of our flesh and mingled Himself with an intelligent soul, for my soul's sake—purifying like by like. He came forth—as God—with that which He had assumed: One Person in two Natures, Flesh and Spirit, of which the latter deified the former.

O new commingling! O strange conjunction! The Self-Existent comes into being, the Uncreated is created, That which cannot be contained is contained. And He Who gives riches becomes poor; for He assumes the poverty of my flesh, that I may assume the richness of His Godhead. He that is full empties Himself; for He empties Himself of His glory for a short while, that I may have a share in His Fullness. What are the riches of His Goodness? What is this mystery that is around me? I had a share in the image, I did not keep it. He partakes of my flesh, that He may both save the image and make the flesh immortal.

St. Gregory the Theologian

## THE JOY OF GIVING

Source: "The Messenger," parish bulletin of the Holy Virgin Cathedral, San Francisco, January, 1973.

It was the last year of the war. We had long since grown accustomed to hunger. Our father received a mere pittance in wages which supported the family with increasing difficulty. Almost the entire sum went to pay the rent of our small apartment and my lessons. Poor Papa, working long hours overtime, he was thoroughly exhausted.

Our situation became critical. We were being evicted from our apartment, there was no fuel. The family gathered to confer. What was to be done? Of the family valuables there remained only our baptismal crosses, the wedding rings, and Papa's gold medal. Papa announced that as difficult as it was, he would have to part with the medal.

Early in the morning our father left for the city. At home we waited anxiously for him. At last, towards evening, he returned. Heaviness had settled over him like a cloud; he looked aged and haggard. He had given up the last thing in the house from his distant homeland, an award he had earned and treasured dearly. For him, part of his life was now extinguished. We paid off our debts, paid up our rent, and once again were left penniless.

Christ's Nativity was approaching. With my sister's help Mama transformed the apartment into a cozy little nest, but even to think of having a tree or a special holiday dinner was out of the question.

Christmas Eve. Soon the whole family would be going off to church. All was quiet at home. The vigil lamp flickered. Suddenly the stillness was pierced by a sharp ring. Mama went to open the door. A tall, well dressed young man handed her a large parcel. Before she could say a word he gave bow and disappeared. Our astonishment knew no limits when there spilled out from the parcel sausages, cheeses, cans of butter, chocolate and lots of other delicacies. Through a kind man the Lord had sent us a feast-day meal.

The war came to an end, and at last fate took pity on us. Papa began to receive a decent salary, my sister found a position as a stenographer, and I was enrolled at a university. Life returned to its brighter side, just as it was before the war.

The Feast of Nativity drew near once again. But this time the house was bustling with preparations. We shopped for presents, painted the apartment, a maid cleaned and tidied up, we made ready a sumptuous holiday meal for the celebration...



On the eve, early in the afternoon, my sister and I were gaily decorating the tree when suddenly I was struck by the remembrance of the past year's Nativity. Against the poverty of our former circumstances I clearly saw Mama's face, her eyes full of tears as she opened the mysterious parcel. A feeling of shame came over me as I contemplated our present egotism. I threw myself at my sister with the suggestion that we make haste to help some poor family. My sister knew of just the one.

Within minutes we were striding through the frosty air. Going into a store, we bought all kinds of this and that. Then we purchased a small Christmas tree and toy decorations; we also bought some children's toys. Soon we found ourselves before the shabby dwelling. We ascended a dark, dismal staircase and knocked at the door. The gaunt face of a woman, no longer young, peered through the narrowly opened door and rested with bewilderment upon us and our bundles. We called the woman by name and she offered us to come in. There was no stove in the small room. The windows, panes missing, were pasted up with some sort of cardboard; A dim light illumined the picture of destitution.

We explained the purpose of our visit and handed the woman the bundle. When my sister placed the tree on the table, a girl of about seven ran towards us, clapping her hands with joy. The woman tried to say something but no words came forth, and she burst into tears. My sister began to comfort her as I left the room, unable to control the feeling of pity which welled up within me.

We walked home in silence. People hurried along the streets, laden with packages and presents. An electrifying holiday atmosphere was in the air. But we, somehow involuntarily, walked slowly. We couldn't join in this holiday gaiety. I shall never forget that feeling of heaviness which I then experienced. At the same time, my sister and I were exceedingly happy. Instead of life's hustle and bustle, our hearts were sparked by the true light and peace of the holy Feast.

The happiest times in a man's life are when he helps his neighbor.



If you pray without giving alms, your prayer is dead. Your hand should always be open. Give alms to orphans and widows. Alms and prayer go together.

Abba George (+1959)



## AND LO, THE STAR...

*By Fr. Gerasimos, from the Russian "Athonite Patericon."*

*And lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. [Mt 2:9-10]*

† † †

On December 28<sup>th</sup>, shortly after the Feast of the Nativity, our Holy Orthodox Church celebrates the memory of St. Simon the Myrrh-gusher through whom the Lord wrought great wonders. A star, like that which led the Magi to Bethlehem, miraculously revealed to the saint the site upon which, by divine command, he was to found a monastery. The monastery was appropriately dedicated to the Feast of the Nativity and was initially named New Bethlehem (later Simonopetra). Today, nearly eight centuries later, it is still one of the flourishing monasteries on Mt. Athos.

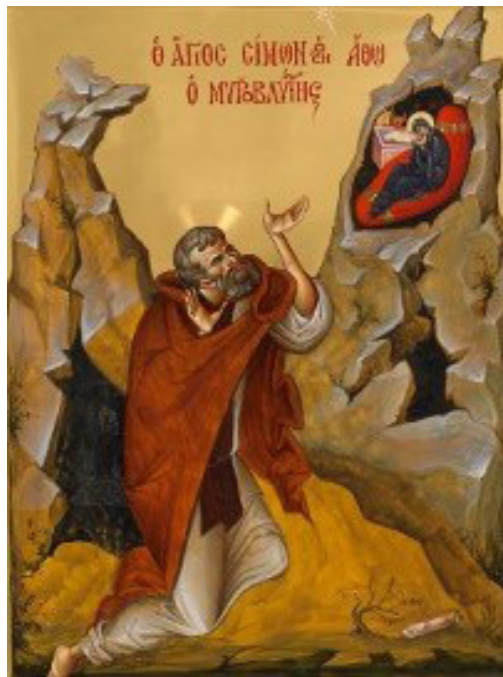
The life of the venerable Simon was arrayed with mighty ascetic feats and miracles not only during his lifetime but even after his repose, when there gushed forth from his relics an abundant fount of myrrh in a manner similar to that of the Great Martyr Demetrios of Thessaloniki. Where he came from, who his parents were, and where he began his monastic labors, no one knows. Sometime in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, he arrived on the Holy Mountain. Recalling the saying of the Fathers that without obedience one cannot be saved, the venerable Simon sought before all else to find a spiritual elder, one to whom he could entrust his soul without reserve, an elder who would be not only a faithful guide unto salvation and a radiant model of ascetic perfection, but also strict in bodily discipline.

After looking all over the Holy Mountain, he finally chose out of the multitude of monks leading virtuous lives, an unknown elder, perfect in all respects in the ascetic life. He labored in complete submission to his elder, fulfilling all his obediences with love and zeal and soon attained to such great spiritual heights that he became known all over the Holy Mountain for his irreproachable life. Finally, the time came when the elder was convinced that his period of trial was over. Casting aside his paternal kindness towards the venerable Simon, he decided to dwell with him as with a brother and on several occasions he even asked for his advice and counsel.

But instead of rejoicing over the benevolence and honor bestowed upon him by his elder, Simon was utterly grieved. He decided to leave, seeking for himself total reclusion. Expressing his intention to his elder, he asked his blessing amidst a shower of tears, desiring with heartfelt sorrow that the elder would grant his consent. In this way, he took leave of his dear elder for whom he had already become not so much a disciple as another mighty co-struggler in the angelic life.

For a long time St. Simon searched all over the Holy Mountain for a secluded hermitage where no one would know of his existence and no one would find him. Finally, with God's help, he found a deserted mountainside with caves on the southern part of the Holy Mountain. Knowing that before him lay the relentless struggle of unseen warfare, the saint clothed himself with spiritual armor with the help of the Holy Spirit, taking the cross, prayer, faith, patience, fasting, and everything that could crush the wily schemes of the demons and raise a man to angelic purity and childlike simplicity. It is difficult to recount the fierce schemes and hidden traps with which Satan tormented and tried to catch unaware Saint Simon. The holy ascetic, however, boldly trampled upon the brazen arrogance of his adversary and crushed all his plans. For many years St. Simon remained secluded within his cave where he manfully endured the constant battle with the unseen enemies of his soul. He lived in sorrows and utter deprivation, lacking even the assurance of his own salvation.

Meanwhile, hearing of the severity of his life and in particular of his spiritual discernment and insight, many monks on the Holy Mountain began to come to him and to receive great spiritual benefit from his soul-profitting counsel, thus fulfilling the word of God: *A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.* (Mt 5:14). Together with those who came to him, Simon was accounted worthy to receive from the Lord the gift of foreknowledge. However, through his humility he grew weary of such earthly honor, and he sought refuge from the disturbance created by all those who came to him. He was burdened by the stream of visitors which, it seemed to him, only served as a hindrance to his desire for a life of seclusion. He yearned, therefore, to abandon his dwelling for a yet more isolated one. But God, desiring the well-being and salvation of each and everyone, prevented the realization of his desire in the following way.



One night, while persevering in prayer, the righteous one saw outside his cave, as if before his very eyes, the effulgence of a divine light; an ineffable fragrance spread all around him and he heard a loud voice: *Simon, Simon, thou faithful friend and servant of my Son! Do not go away from here. I shall glorify this place; you shall be its guiding light, and your name shall be glorified.* Out of caution, Simon chose at first not to believe this vision, not desiring to fall into the nets of the evil one; for he knew, according to the word of the Apostle, that Satan could transform himself into an angel of light. Nevertheless, he continued to ponder upon the actual source of the voice. This took place shortly before the Feast of the Nativity of Christ. Then, one night, walking outside his cave, he saw a strange apparition: a star descended from the heavens and came to rest just above the rocky cliffs where later the holy monastery was to be situated. This same vision repeated itself on the following evenings; but the venerable Simon was still fearful. Was it possible that this was solely one of the consequences of his intense spiritual warfare? And he continued to distrust the vision.

When the Eve of the Nativity of Christ arrived, he saw in a dream a brilliant star and heard a divine voice: *Simon! You must build a monastic dwelling here. I myself shall help you. Cast aside your doubts, or you shall be punished for your unbelief.* The same voice spoke to him three times. At that time (as he later related to his disciples) it seemed to him that he was in Bethlehem of Judea, in the very place where the shepherds were tending their flocks, and he heard the sweet sound of angelic singing: *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men: fear not, for, behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.* (Lk 2:14, 2:10). After this, said the saint, all fear and uneasiness were dispelled from my soul and I rejoiced in spirit, and secretly beheld the scene in Bethlehem; there, before the manger, the Sovereign Lady stood before the Divine Child, lying in swaddling clothes.

Several days after the Feast of the Nativity, three rich men, brothers after the flesh, came to the venerable one. They confessed all their sins and began persuasively to entreat him to permit them to live in obedience under his direction. After a brief period of trial and testing, St. Simon revealed unto them, as to his own sons according to the spirit, the divine vision. More than once he related to them the vision concerning the building of a monastery on the neighboring cliffs, asking them not to speak of this to anyone while he

was still alive until the proper time. Hearing all this, the brothers with love offered to the saintly elder all of their earthly wealth for the construction of the monastery, and in accordance with the saint's wish and blessing, they offered immediately to prepare everything necessary for such an important and God-pleasing labor.

All necessary preparations were made. They had yet to learn, however, of the exact site for the foundation upon which the monastery was to be built. When St. Simon directed the brothers to the location where the church and other buildings were to be constructed they were horrified, seeing the sheer cliffs which, according to his orders, were to serve as the monastery's foundation. "Are you trying to fool us, Abba?" they asked the saint, "or are you speaking the truth? How can this be the site, when that cliff might be quite dangerous for the workers and even more so for those that will dwell here. If this is your desire, we shall surely oppose you!"



The matter was left undecided. In the meantime, seeing that he could not convince them to proceed with the work, St. Simon ordered the trapeza meal to be served. While they were eating, one of the saint's disciples who was bringing wine to the table, lost his balance, through the prompting of a demon, and fell off the cliff into a great abyss; still hold-

ing in one hand a pitcher and in the other several glasses of wine. Stricken with horror at this sudden tragedy, the spokesman of the brothers strongly rebuked the venerable one: "Behold, Abba, what has already been wrought by these deadly crags before you have even begun your undertaking. How many similar incidents of such a frightful death will occur if we should agree to build the monastery here."

The saint did not answer but secretly prayed to the Sovereign Lady Theotokos that he would not be put to shame in placing his trust in her intercession. "Who can tell of all thy miracles, O Sovereign Lady, and who can praise thy majesty?" What happened next was entirely unexpected: the brother who had fallen over the precipice suddenly appeared before them. Through the intercession of the Most Holy Theotokos he was not only perfectly whole and unscathed, but he even held the glasses and pitcher from which not a drop of wine had spilled!

Such a miracle brought fear and trembling upon the laborers. They fell to their knees before the saint and beseeching forgiveness said: "Now we know, O father, that you are truly a man of God." With heartfelt sincerity they were all

grateful to be numbered among the saint's disciples and were soon accounted worthy of the angelic habit. Then, under the immediate supervision of the venerable Simon himself, his disciples, formerly simple laborers, proceeded with the construction of the Monastery.

The situation, however, was such that before anything else it was necessary to lay the foundation. According to the instruction of the saint, they were to use a nearby stone of enormous size. The elder ordered them to move it, but they, forgetting about the miracle of the unspilled wine, were of the firm opinion that not only was it impossible for them with their combined efforts to move that massive weight, but that it could not even be budged. They stood there bewildered, not having the slightest idea what to do.

Seeing this, the saint approached them and, making the sign of the life-giving Cross on the stone, he single-handedly lifted it upon his shoulder and carried it to the designated site. In this way he demonstrated in actual fact the truth of the word which the Lord spoke unto the Apostles: *Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove.* (Mt 17:20). That such a man, whose body was weakened by fasting and ascetic labor, should lift such a weight far exceeding human strength, can only serve as a testimony of God's almighty power and His readiness to help those who turn to Him with faith.

Having established the monastery which he named New Bethlehem, and having spent his life in God-pleasing labors, St. Simon reposed on the 28<sup>th</sup> of December, 1287. On the morning of the next day, in the presence of the entire brotherhood, the face of the righteous one shone with a wondrous light. After his soul had ascended unto the choirs of the righteous, a fragrant myrrh issued forth from his holy relics through which St. Simon worked many miracles to the glory of God, for kings, monks, and laymen.

Many years after the saint's earthly departure, a pious Serbian king helped to greatly enlarge and rebuild the monastery in honor of its founder. Since that time it has been known as Simonopetra, or the "Rock of Simon." Today it is perhaps one of the most awe-inspiring architectural monuments in the world, a standing testimony to the power of faith and God's good will toward men.



**T** rue love is like the flame of a candle. However many candles you light from the flame, the initial flame remains unaffected. It doesn't lessen at all. And every freshly lit candle has as much flame as the others do.

Elder Epiphanius of Athens (+1989)

## THE TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

Source: *Orthodox Word*, Vol. 3, //16-17, 1967.

**T**he Nativity of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ has been celebrated with all solemnity and joy since the very earliest period of the Church. Until the fourth century this Feast was kept on January 6<sup>th</sup>, when the Church also remembered the baptism of our Lord in the river Jordan. It was called the Theophany and was dedicated especially to the manifestation of God in the flesh.

The early Church knew that there was a mystical relationship between the first and the Second Adam, between the one that brought death into the world and the One Who brought life and salvation. According to very ancient tradition, Christ, the *Second Adam*, was born on the same day on which Adam, the first-created one, was born, that is, on the "Sixth Day," which corresponded to the sixth day of the first month (January 6<sup>th</sup> on the Julian Calendar).

### Fighting Errors

In the fourth century many errors were being taught, especially by the followers of Arius. They denied that Jesus was of the same substance as God; they believed that He was only the highest of created beings (a false teaching—also fashionable in our own days). According to this error, Orthodox Christians could not celebrate the birth in flesh of God Himself (which is called the Doctrine of the Incarnation), but only the birth of a very special creature who was not in reality God...

In order to combat this heresy it was agreed that the commemoration of the Birth of the Son of God should be separated from the feast of His Baptism: the Church intended by this to make even clearer the truth about the incarnation. Many different dates were suggested for the celebration of Christmas, but in order to remove a temptation from the Christians of that time it was decided to use December 25<sup>th</sup>.

The Romans had a pagan festival on this day called *dies natalis Solis invicti*, a celebration of the return of the sun to summer, as if renewing itself. The Romans used this day as an excuse for unbridled merry-making and immorality (much as it has again become in the 20<sup>th</sup> century). Since the Church had already decided to establish a separate feast day for the Nativity of Christ, December 25<sup>th</sup> was chosen in order to preserve the faithful from the temptation to participate in pagan revels. The Church Fathers also wanted to make use of the symbolism of the sun on that day, thinking to ennoble or elevate the pagan feast to a Christian understanding because Christ is often spoken of in the New Testament as the *Sun of Justice*, *The Light of the World*, etc. (The fact that the early Church deliberately chose a pagan feast for the celebration of Christmas has been confused in the minds of many modern sectarians—viz., Jehovah's Witnesses—who do not understand the authority of the Church, and are themselves latter-day Arians.)

By establishing the Feast of the Lord's Birth on December 25<sup>th</sup>, the Church did two things; first, She clearly rejected pagan ideas about life, death, birth, etc., and showed that Christ had come to replace those lifeless and gloomy teachings; secondly, the Church confessed Her undying faith in a great dogma: that God had taken flesh from a woman and come to dwell among and save men.

In the center is the cave in which the Saviour was born; the two animals fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah (1:3): *The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel does not know Me, and the people has not regarded Me.* Surrounding the cave, the whole of creation offers what it can in thanksgiving to the new-born Saviour: *Angels their song, the heavens a star, the Magi gifts, the shepherds wonder, the earth a cave, the wilderness a manger, and we the Virgin Mother.* (Christmas Vespers). At the bottom are two details handed down in iconographic tradition: two women wash the Child and St. Joseph is tempted to doubt the Virgin Birth by the Devil disguised as a shepherd.

At the same time, by means of special hymns and prayers on this day, Orthodoxy instructs the world in ways of holiness and morality, wishing to kindle in the hearts of people a determination to be reborn from a life of sin to a life pleasing to God. As one writer explains: *"Not in glory and magnificence, but in poverty, wretchedness and humiliation does the Creator and Lord of heaven and earth appear in the world; not a luxurious palace, but a humble cave, receives the King of those who reign and the Lord of those who rule. By this we are shown the greatness of humility, poverty, meekness and simplicity, and the ruinousness of pride, riches, vainglory and luxury ... By this it is suggested to us that the Lord receives all and everyone: He is pleased by unlettered simplicity, when it is united to faithful fulfillment of one's calling, to purity of conscience and life; and He does not reject human wisdom, when it knows how to submit itself to illumination from above and make use of its learning for the glory of God and the benefit of one's fellow men."*

### The Spirit of Christmas

Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas in a manner directly opposed to the way in which it is kept by the world. While western countries are involved in weeks of partying and eating, from Thanksgiving on, Orthodox Christians are deep in a preparatory fast of 40 days. We do not participate in Christmas parties before the Feast itself because we are trying to understand what it must have been like for the righteous ones of the Old Testament, who waited so many generations for the coming of the Messiah. This fast period is of very early origin and was universally known at the time of the great

Church Councils. We do not break this fast from meat and dairy products until after receiving Holy Communion on Christmas Day itself, although the Feast actually begins with Divine Services after the appearance of the first star on Christmas Eve. Furthermore, since many of our Orthodox brethren still observe the Julian Calendar (which is 13 days behind the civil calendar), Christmas is celebrated on January 7<sup>th</sup> by them, according to the latter; after the world has removed its tinsel, then these Orthodox Christians are able to meet the Feast of the Nativity in peace and true spiritual joy much more akin to the first Christmas in Bethlehem.

The celebration of the Birth of Christ begins at nightfall on December 25<sup>th</sup> and continues for three days. With the exception of Pascha (Easter), it is the greatest of all Church Feasts; St. John Chrysostom calls it *the mother of all feasts*. On this day we also celebrate the memory of the Three Magi (who later received baptism from the Apostle Thomas) and the simple shepherds who were the first of the Chosen People to learn of the Birth of the long awaited Messiah.

The second day of Christmas is dedicated to the honor and memory of the one from whom our Redeemer took His flesh: the Most Holy Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, whom Orthodox call by the dogmatic title *Theotokos* (*She who gave birth to God*), and for whom all true Christians have had immense reverence, love and feelings of closeness since the beginning of Her Son's ministry.

Lastly, the word *incarnation*, as applied to the Birth of Christ is worthy of a special note: the dictionary defines the word as "a manifestation or the act of making manifest in bodily form." It comes from the Latin *incarnare*, to make flesh: *in-* (to cause or make) + *carn-* (from the stem, *caro*, flesh). Our word "carnal" comes from the same root, as does "carnage," "carnival" (festival of flesh), "carnivorous", etc. Thus, God, Who is pure being and pure spirit, took flesh from a woman, uniting Himself to human nature, and made His tabernacle among men in a human body.



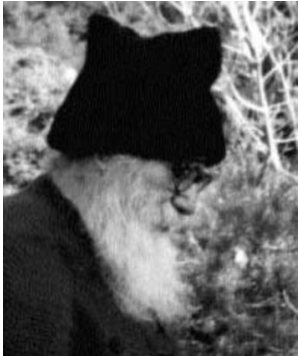
Everyone who speaks contrary to what has been prescribed, even if he fasts, even if he is a virgin, even if he prophesies, even if he works miracles, you should see him as a wolf in sheep's clothing, who is contriving the destruction of the sheep.

St. Ignatius of Antioch



## Ἐξομολόγησις: Ἡ Θεία Ψυχανάλυσις

Γέροντος Πορφυρίου Καυσοκαλυβίτου (+1991).



Όταν εξομολογείται ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἡ χάρις τὸν ἐλευθερώνει ἀπὸ τὰ ψυχικὰ τραύματα.

Δὲν εὐθύνεται μονάχα ὁ ἄνθρωπος γιὰ τὰ παραπτώματά του. Τὰ λάθη, οἱ ἁμαρτίες καὶ τὰ πάθη δὲν εἶναι μόνο προσωπικὰ βιώματα τοῦ εξομολογούμενου. Ὁ κάθε ἄνθρωπος ἔχει πάρει μέσα

του καὶ τὰ βιώματα τῶν γονέων του καὶ εἰδικὰ τῆς μητέρας του· δηλαδή τὸ πὼς ζοῦσε ἡ μητέρα του, ὅταν τὸν κυφοροῦσε, ἂν στενοχωριόταν, τί ἔκανε, ἂν κουραζόταν τὸ νευρικό της σύστημα, ἂν εἶχε χαρὰ, ἂν εἶχε θλίψη, ἂν εἶχε μελαγχολία.

Ἐ, ὅλο τὸ νευρικό σύστημα τὸ δικό της ἐπηρεάσε τὸ νευρικό σύστημα τοῦ ἐμβρύου της. Ὅποτε, ὅταν γεννηθεῖ τὸ παιδί καὶ μεγαλώσει, παίρνει μέσα του καὶ τὰ βιώματα τῆς μητέρας του, δηλαδή ἄλλου ἀνθρώπου. Δημιουργεῖται μία κατάσταση στὴν ψυχὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐξαιτίας τῶν γονέων του, ποὺ τὴν παίρνει μαζί του σ' ὅλη του τὴ ζωή, ἀφήνει ἴχνη μέσα του καὶ πολλὰ πράγματα ποὺ συμβαίνουν στὴ ζωή του εἶναι ἀπόρροια τῆς καταστάσεως αὐτῆς. Τὰ φερσίματά του ἔχουν ἄμεση σχέση μὲ τὴν κατάσταση τῶν γονέων του. Μεγαλώνει, μορφώνεται, ἀλλὰ δὲν διορθώνεται. Ἐδῶ βρίσκεται μεγάλο μέρος ἀπὸ τὴν εὐθύνη γιὰ τὴν πνευματικὴν κατάσταση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.

Υπάρχει, ὅμως, ἓνα μυστικό. Υπάρχει κάποιος τρόπος ν' ἀπαλλαγῆ ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἀπ' αὐτὸ τὸ κακό. Ὁ τρόπος αὐτὸς εἶναι ἡ γενικὴ ἐξομολόγησις, ἡ ὁποία γίνεται μὲ τὴν χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ. Μπορεῖ, δηλαδή, νὰ σοῦ πει ὁ πνευματικός:

- Πὼς θὰ ἤθελα νὰ ἦμασταν σ' ἓνα ἡσυχὸ μέρος, νὰ μὴν εἶχα ἀσχολίες καὶ νὰ μοῦ ἔλεγεσ τὴ ζωή σου ἀπ' τὴν ἀρχή, ἀπὸ τότε ποὺ αἰσθάνθηκες τὸν ἑαυτό σου, ὅλα τὰ γεγονότα ποὺ θυμᾶσαι καὶ ποια ἦταν ἡ ἀντιμετώπισή τους ἀπὸ σένα, ὄχι μόνο τὰ δυσάρεστα ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ εὐχάριστα, ὄχι μόνο τὶς ἁμαρτίες ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ καλά. Καὶ τὶς ἐπιτυχίες καὶ τὶς ἀποτυχίες. Ὅλα. Ὅλα ὅσα ἀπαρτίζουν τὴ ζωή σου.

Πολλὲς φορὲς ἔχω μεταχειριστεῖ αὐτὴ τὴν γενικὴ ἐξομολόγησις καὶ εἶδα θαύματα πάνω σ' αὐτό. Τὴν ὥρα ποὺ τὰ λὲς στὸν ἐξομολόγο, ἔρχεται ἡ θεία χάρις καὶ σὲ ἀπαλλάσσει ἀπ' ὅλα τὰ ἄσχημα βιώματα καὶ τὶς πληγὲς καὶ τὰ ψυχικὰ τραύματα καὶ τὶς ἐνοχές, διότι, τὴν ὥρα ποὺ τὰ λὲς, ὁ ἐξομολόγος εὐχεται θεομὰ στὸν Κύριο γιὰ τὴν ἀπαλλαγὴ σου.

Εἶχε ἔλθει σ' ἐμένα πρὸ καιροῦ μία κυρία, ποὺ ἔκανε αὐτοῦ τοῦ εἶδους τὴν ἐξομολόγησις καὶ βρῆκε μεγάλη ὠφέλεια. Βελτιώθηκε ἡ ψυχολογικὴ της κατάσταση, διότι τὴν βασάνιζε κάτι. Ἔστειλε, λοιπόν, αὐτὴ μιά φίλη της καὶ πήγαμε ἔξω στὸ βράχο, στὰ Καλλίσια. Καθίσαμε καὶ ἄρχισε κι ἐκείνη νὰ μοῦ μιλάει. Τῆς λέω:

- Νὰ μοῦ πεῖς ὅ,τι αἰσθάνεσαι. Ἄν σὲ ρωτήσω ἐγὼ γιὰ κάτι, νὰ μοῦ πεῖς. Ἄν δὲν σὲ ρωτήσω, νὰ συνεχίσεις νὰ τὰ λέγεις, ὅπως τὰ αἰσθάνεσαι.

Ὅλ' αὐτὰ ποὺ μοῦ ἔλεγε, τὰ παρακολουθοῦσα ὄχι ἀπλῶς μὲ προσοχή, ἀλλὰ «ἔβλεπα» μέσα στὸν ψυχικό της κόσμον τὴν ἐπίδραση τῆς προσευχῆς. Τὴν παρακολουθοῦσα μέσα στὴν ψυχὴ της κι «ἔβλεπα» ὅτι πήγαινε χάρις μέσα της, ὅπως τὴν κοίταζα ἐγὼ. Διότι στὸν πνευματικὸ ὑπάρχει χάρις καὶ στὸν παπὰ ὑπάρχει χάρις. Τὸ καταλαβαίνετε; Δηλαδή, ἐνῶ ἐξομολογεῖται ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ὁ ἱερέας προσεύχεται γι' αὐτόν. Συγχρόνως ἔρχεται ἡ χάρις καὶ τὸν ἐλευθερώνει ἀπ' τὰ ψυχικὰ τραύματα, ποὺ γιὰ χρόνια τὸν βασανίζουν, χωρὶς νὰ γνωρίζει τὴν αἰτία τους.

Ἦ, αὐτὰ ὅλα τὰ πιστεύω πολὺ!

Στὸν ἐξομολόγο μπορεῖς νὰ μιλήσεις ὅπως αἰσθάνεσαι, ἀλλὰ δὲν εἶναι αὐτὸ τόσο σημαντικό, ὅσο εἶναι τὸ ὅτι κοιτάζει μέσα στὴν ψυχὴ σου προσευχόμενος ὁ παπᾶς καὶ βλέπει πὼς εἶσαι καὶ σοῦ μεταδίδει τὴν χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἔχει ἀποδειχθεῖ ὅτι αὐτὸ τὸ κοίταγμα εἶναι πνευματικὲς «ἀκτίνες» ποὺ σὲ ἀλαφρώνουν καὶ σὲ θεραπεύουν, μὴ νομίζετε ὅτι εἶναι ἀκτίνες φυσικὲς.

Εἶναι ἀλήθεια αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα. Καὶ μὲ τὸν Χριστὸ τί ἔγινε; Ἐπίασε τὸ χέρι τῆς αἰμορροούσης καὶ εἶπε: Ἐγὼ γὰρ ἔγνων δύναμιν ἐξελθοῦσαν ἀπ' ἐμοῦ. Θὰ πεῖς: «Ναί, μὰ ἦταν Θεός». Ὁ Χριστὸς βέβαια ἦταν Θεός, ἀλλὰ μήπως καὶ οἱ Ἀπόστολοι δὲν κάνανε τὸ ἴδιο;

Ὅλοι οἱ πνευματικοί, οἱ ἐξομολόγοι, ἔχουν αὐτὴν τὴν χάρι κι ὅταν εὐχονται, τὴν ἐκπέμπουν ὡς ἀγωγὴ. Γιὰ παράδειγμα, θέλουμε ν' ἀνάψουμε ἐδῶ πέρα μιὰ θεομάστρα καὶ βάζουμε ἓνα καλώδιο, ἀλλὰ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ κάνει ἐπαφή, διότι τὸ καλώδιο δὲν εἶναι στὴν πρίζα. Ἄν, ὅμως, τὸ καλώδιο μπεῖ στὴν πρίζα, μόλις κάνει τὴν ἐπαφή, ἔρχεται τὸ ρεῦμα μέσω αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀγωγοῦ.

Εἶναι πνευματικὰ πράγματα τῆς θρησκείας μας αὐτά. Μπορεῖ νὰ λέμε γιὰ καλώδιο, ἀλλὰ στὴν πραγματικότητα αὐτὴ εἶναι «ἡ Θεία ψυχανάλυσις».



Ὁ ἄνθρωπος ποὺ ἀγαπᾶ τὴ σιωπὴ κι ἀποφεύγει τὶς πολλὲς κουβέντες μοιάζει μὲ ὄρμιο σταφύλι, γεμᾶτο γλυκὸ χυμό· ὁ πολυλογᾶς μὲ ἀγουρίδα.

**Ἀββᾶς Μωϋσῆς**

## Ἀμαρτία: Ἡ Ἐσχάτη Μέθη!

Τοῦ κ. Μιχαήλ Ε. Μιχαηλίδη, Θεολόγου.

Ἦτσι τὴν εἶπε καὶ τὴν χαρακτηρίσει ὁ ἱερός Χρυσόστομος, τὴν ἀμαρτία: *Ἐσχάτη μέθη*. Καὶ τέτοια εἶναι κάθε παράβαση τοῦ θείου Νόμου.

Ἡ ἀμαρτία μοιάζει μὲ μέθη. Ὅσο πιὸ πολὺν κρασὶ πίνει κανεὶς, τόσο καὶ ὁ ὀργανισμὸς τὸ ἀποζητάει. Κι ὅσο τὸ ἀποζητάει, τόσο καὶ περισσότερο μεθάει. Ἡ μέθη δὲν ἔχει ποτὲ κορεσμό. Ὁ νοῦς θολώνει, ἡ θέληση χαλαρώνει καὶ χάνει τὴ δύναμή της, κι ὁ ἄνθρωπος δένεται στὰ σκλαβόσχοινα τοῦ πάθους του.

*Ἐσχάτη μέθη καὶ κακὸν ἔσχατον* εἶναι ἡ ἀμαρτία. Ποιὸς ἤρθε στὸν κόσμον καὶ φόρεσε σάρκα καὶ δὲν εἶδε τὴν ἀμαρτία νὰ τοῦ γλείφει τὰ πόδια; Ποιὸς ἀνάπνευσε τὸν ἀέρα καὶ δὲ μύρισε τὴν δυσωδία τῆς κακίας; Ποιὸς πάτησε τὸ πόδι του σὲ τοῦτο τὸν πλανήτη καὶ δὲ σκουντούφλησε στὰ χαλίγια καὶ δὲν τὸν τρύπησαν τ' ἀγκάθια τῆς παρανομίας; *Τις γὰρ καθαρὸς ἔσται ἀπὸ ρύπου, ἀλλ' οὐδεὶς, ἐὰν καὶ μία ἡμέρα ὁ βίος αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.* (Ἰωβ 4:5). Τὸ κακὸ λοιπὸν, εἶναι κληρονομικὸ. *Ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἐν ἀνομίαις συνελήφθην, καὶ ἐν ἀμαρτίαις ἐκίσσησέ με ἡ μήτηρ μου.* (Ψαλμ. 50:7).

Ἡ ὑπαρξη τοῦ ἠθικοῦ νόμου εἶναι ὁ ρυθμιστὴς τῆς ἀνθρώπινης ζωῆς. Ὅπως οἱ ὠροδείκτες καὶ λεπτοδείκτες δείχνουν τὴν ὥρα καὶ τὸ χρόνο τῶν ἐνεργειῶν σου, ἔτσι καὶ ὁ ἠθικὸς νόμος—τοῦ Θεοῦ ὁ νόμος—σὲ καθοδηγεῖ στὴν ὀρθὴ πορεία τῶν πράξεων τῆς ζωῆς σου.

Ὁ ἅγιος Νικόλαος Βελμίροβιτς λέγει ὅτι: «Ὅλα γίνονται κατὰ τὸ συνειδητὸ καὶ λογικὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὸ τι ἐπιτρέπει πάντοτε σὲ συνάρτηση μὲ τὴν ἠθικὴ ἢ ἀνῆθικη συμπεριφορὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ὁ ἠθικὸς νόμος τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι ὁ μοναδικὸς νόμος μὲ τὸν ὁποῖο ὁ Κύριος Δημιουργὸς καὶ Παντοκράτορας καθοδηγεῖ τὸ σύμπαν, τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς φύσης καὶ τίς μοῖρες τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τῶν λαῶν». Βέβαια, συμπληρώνει ὁ ἴδιος: «ὑπάρχουν καὶ οἱ φυσικοὶ καὶ οἱ ἠθικοὶ νόμοι, ἀλλὰ δὲν ἀλληλοαποκλείονται καὶ δὲ συμπιπτουν, ἀλλὰ κινοῦνται παράλληλα».

Ἐνας, βέβαια, εἶναι ὁ ἠθικὸς νόμος, ἀλλ' ἡ φωνὴ του μεταδίδεται ἀπὸ δύο ἡγεῖα: τὸ ἓνα ἡγεῖο μεταδίδει τὴ φωνὴ τοῦ ἔμφυτου νόμου, καὶ τὸ ἄλλο ἡγεῖο μεταδίδει τὸν τέλειο καὶ ἀποκαλυμμένο νόμο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Οἱ ἀμαρτίες μοιάζουν μὲ τὰ φάλτσα μιᾶς χορῶδίας ἢ μιᾶς ὀρχήστρας. Καὶ ὅπως ὁ μαέστρος εἶναι εὐαίσθητος καὶ στὰ πιὸ μικρὰ φάλτσα—δηλαδή, στὰ μουσικὰ λάθη καὶ τίς παραφωνίες—κατὰ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο καὶ ὁ Θεὸς γνωρίζει καὶ ἀναγνωρίζει τὰ ἐλαφρότερα τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων.

Ἡ ἀμαρτία μοιάζει μὲ ἐπιδημικὴ ἀσθένεια, ποὺ δὲν ἀναχαιτίζεται, παρὰ μὲ μετάνοια. Ἡ ἀμαρτία εἶναι καὶ δόλωμα καὶ δηλητήριο. Ἔχει γεύση ἐλκυστικὴ καὶ ἀποτέλεσμα θανάσιμο. Ἔχει γοητεία, ποὺ

ἐξαπατᾷ. Εἶναι τραγοῦδι, ποὺ σβήνει σύντομα. «Ὁ τυφλὸς δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ δεῖ τὴ διαφορὰ ἀνάμεσα σ' ἓνα ἀριστούργημα τοῦ Γκρέκο καὶ ἐνὸς ἀπλοῦ τοπίου. Ὁ κουφὸς δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ διακρίνει τὸν ἤχο ἐνὸς συριγμοῦ καὶ ἐνὸς ἐκκλησιαστικοῦ ὀργάνου ἢ ἐνὸς Μπάχ. Καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ ἔχει ἀκριβῆ ἰδέα τι κακὸ πράγμα εἶναι ἡ ἀμαρτία ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ, τοῦ ὁποῖου ὄλα τὰ δημιουργήματα εἶναι τέλεια».

Ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος μεθάει στὴν ἀμαρτία, πῶς εἶναι δυνατὸ ν' ἀντικρύσει τὸ Θεό; Μήπως ὁ ἄνθρωπος, στὸ μεθύσι του ἐπάνω, μπορεῖ ν' αὐτοσυγκεντρωθεῖ ἢ νὰ κοιτάξει στὰ μάτια τὸν ἄλλο; Κατὰ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο, λέγει ὁ Θεόφιλος Ἀντιοχείας: *ἐπὶ ἢ ἰὸς ἐν τῷ ἐσόπτρῳ, οὐ δύναται ὁρᾶσθαι τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐν τῷ ἐσόπτρῳ, οὕτως καὶ ὅταν ἡ ἀμαρτία ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ, οὐ δύναται ὁ τοιοῦτος ἄνθρωπος θεωρεῖν τὸν Θεόν.* Ἐὰν συμβεῖ, δηλαδή, νὰ χαλάσει ἡ διαφάνεια τοῦ καθρέφτη, δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸ νὰ ἰδεῖ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τὸ πρόσωπό του, ἔτσι καὶ ἡ ἀχρεΐωση ποὺ προκαλεῖ ἡ ἀμαρτία, δὲν ἀφήνει τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ ἰδεῖ καὶ νὰ νιώσει τὴν παρουσία τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Φοβερὴ σκουριά, ἡ ἀμαρτία. Ἀμαυρώνει τὴν καθαρότητα τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ μειώνει τὴν ἀντίσταση τῆς ἐλευθερίας. Σκοτίζεται ὁ νοῦς καὶ τὸ ἔρεβος μένει νὰ κυβερνᾷ τὸν ἐσωτερικὸ ἄνθρωπο. Ἡ ἀμαρτία, ὡς παράβαση καὶ παραβίαση τοῦ νόμου τοῦ Θεοῦ, δημιουργεῖ τύψεις καὶ πολλές ἀνεπιθύμητες καταστάσεις, ποὺ ἀφαιροῦν τὴν εἰρήνη καὶ ψυχραίνουν τὴ φλόγα τῆς πίστεως. Αὐτὸ ἐκφράζει καὶ ὁ ἀπόστολος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὅταν λέγει: *Θλίψις καὶ στενοχωρία ἐπὶ πᾶσαν ψυχὴν ἀνθρώπου τοῦ κατεργαζομένου τὸ κακόν... δόξα δὲ καὶ εἰρήνη παντὶ τῷ ἐργαζομένῳ τὸ ἀγαθόν.* (Ρωμ. Β' 9:10).

Ἡ ἀμαρτία ὑπόσχειται πορφύρα καὶ δίδει σάβανο, ὑπόσχειται ἐλευθερία καὶ φέρει δουλεία, ὑπόσχειται νέκταρ καὶ προσφέρει χολή. Δὲ νομίζω ν' ἀμφισβητεῖ κανεὶς, ὅτι ὄλη ἡ βία, ὁ πόνος, ἡ θλίψη, ἡ αἰσχύνη καὶ ὄλες οἱ τραγωδίαι τῆς ζωῆς, συνοψίζονται σὲ τούτη τὴ μικρὴ λέξη, ποὺ λέγεται «ἀμαρτία».

Ὁ μέγας τῆς οἰκουμένης διδάσκαλος καὶ κήρυκας, ὁ ἱερός Χρυσόστομος, πάντοτε στὰ κηρύγματά του τόνιζε πῶς, *οὐδὲν δεινὸν τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων δεινῶν, ἀλλ' ἡ ἀμαρτία μόνον.* Ἄλλοτε πάλι ἔλεγε ὅτι, *μία συμφορὰ Χριστιανῶ μόνη, τὸ προσκροῦσαι Θεῷ.*

Πράγματι, «οὐδὲν δυσωδέστερον», «οὐδὲν ἐπαχθέστερον», οὐδὲν πλέον «ἀκάθαρτον»... Ἀλλά, θὰ πεῖ κανεὶς: Ὅλοι μας εἴμαστε ἀμαρτωλοὶ καὶ ἀμαρτάνουμε κάθε ὥρα καὶ κάθε στιγμή. Λοιπὸν; Νὰ παραμείνουμε στὴ λάσπη καὶ στὴ δυσωδία τῆς ἀμαρτίας; Ὁχι, βέβαια. Ἐπάρχει ἐλπίδα. Ἐπάρχει σωτηρία. Ἐπάρχει μετάνοια. Ἐπάρχει Θεὸς τοῦ ἐλέους καὶ τῶν οἰκτιρῶν. **Ὁ παράδεισος εἶναι γιὰ ὄλους τοὺς ἀμαρτωλοὺς, ποὺ μετανοοῦν...**

## Στὸ Λουτρό

Τοῦ μακαριστοῦ Γέροντος Ἀγίουστίνου Καντιώτη (+2010).



**Ἦ**ταν, ἀγαπητό μου παιδί, ἦταν ἐποχή, ποὺ δὲν εἶχες ὄνομα. Ἄν εἶσαι ἀγόρι, σὲ φώναζαν μπέμπη· ἂν εἶσαι κορίτσι, σὲ φώναζαν μπέμπα. Ἄλλ' ἦρθε μιὰ ἅγια μέρα, ποὺ πῆρες ὄνομα Χριστιανικό, τὸ ὄνομα ἐνὸς ἀπὸ τὰ πολλὰ ἑκατομμύρια ἁγίων καὶ μαρτύρων τοῦ

Χριστιανισμοῦ, κι ἀπὸ τότε ὀνομάζεσαι Δημήτριος, Νικόλαος, Κωνσταντῖνος, Γεώργιος, Ἰωάννης..., ἢ, ἂν εἶσαι κορίτσι, Μαρία, Ἄννα, Αἰκατερίνη, Βαρβάρα, Παρασκευή... Ἀπὸ ἀνώνυμος ἕγινες ἐπώνυμος. Γράφτηκες στὸ μητρώο τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων Χριστιανῶν καὶ σὰν παιδί τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἀπολαμβάνεις ὅλες τὶς εὐλογίες τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ποιά εἶναι ἡ μέρα ποὺ πῆρες τὸ Χριστιανικό ὄνομα; Εἶνε ἡ μέρα τοῦ ἱεροῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ βαπτίσματος. Ἐσὺ τότε ἦσουν πολὺ μικρὸ παιδί, νήπιο, ποὺ δὲν καταλάβαινε τί γίνεται γύρω του. Ἀλλὰ οἱ γονεῖς καὶ οἱ συγγενεῖς θυμοῦνται τὴν ἡμέρα αὐτὴ τῆς βαπτίσεώς σου. Ἄν τοὺς ρωτήσης, θὰ μάθης ὅτι τὴν ἡμέρα ἐκείνη τὸ σπίτι ἔλαμπε ἀπὸ χαρὰ. Ἡ μητέρα σὲ πῆρε στὴν ἀγκαλιά της, σὲ πῆγε στὴν ἐκκλησία. Στήθηκε στὴ μέση τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἢ ἱερὰ κολυμβήθρα, καὶ ἕνας ταπεινὸς ἱερεὺς ἔκανε τὸ σταυρὸ του, φόρεσε πετραχήλι, εἶπε τὸ *Εὐλογημένη ἢ βασιλεία τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος...* καὶ ἄρχισε ἢ ἀκολουθία τοῦ βαπτίσματος, ποὺ εἶναι μιὰ ἀπὸ τὶς ὠραιότερες ἀκολουθίες τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας. Ὑστερα ἀπὸ διάφορες εὐχὲς ὁ ἱερεὺς σὲ πῆρε στὰ δικά του χέρια καὶ λέγοντας *Βαπτίζεται ὁ δούλος (ἢ ἡ δούλη) τοῦ Θεοῦ... εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος* σὲ βύθισε στὸ ἁγιασμένο νερὸ καὶ σὲ ἀνέσυρε τρεῖς φορές.

Μὰ, θὰ ρωτήσης, ποιά ἢ ἀνάγκη νὰ γίνῃ τὸ βάπτισμα; Ὑπάρχουν ἄνθρωποι ποὺ λένε ὅτι δὲν πρέπει νὰ βαπτίζονται τὰ νήπια, γιατί δὲν ἔχουν ἁμαρτίες.

Ναί, παιδί μου, δὲν ἔχουν ἁμαρτίες, δικές τους ἁμαρτίες, ὅπως ἔχουν οἱ μεγάλοι. Ἀλλὰ κάθε νήπιο, κάθε ἄνθρωπος ποὺ γεννιέται στὸν κόσμο, φέρνει μαζί του τὴν ἁμαρτία, τὴν ἐνοχὴ τοῦ πρώτου ἐκείνου ἁμαρτήματος ποὺ διέπραξε ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ ποὺ ὀνομάζεται προπατορικό ἁμάρτημα. Αὐτὴ ἢ ἐνοχὴ κάνει τὸν ἄνθρωπο ἁμαρτωλό, καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος, κάθε ἄνθρωπος, ἔχει ἀνάγκη νὰ καθαριστῇ. Ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ ἁμαρτωλοῦ εἶναι μαύρη σὰν τὰ φτερὰ τοῦ κόρακα. Μὲ τὸ βάπτισμα ὁμως ἢ ψυχὴ πλένεται καὶ καθαρίζεται

μὲ τὴ δύναμι τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος, καὶ βγαίνει ἀπὸ τὸ ἁγιασμένο νερὸ τῆς κολυμβήθρας ἄσπρη σὰν τὸ περιστέρι. Μιὰ μεγάλη μεταβολὴ γίνεται στὸν ψυχικὸ κόσμο, ποὺ δὲν φαίνεται στὰ μάτια τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ἀλλὰ φαίνεται στὰ μάτια τῶν ἀγγέλων καὶ ἀρχαγγέλων. Τὸ παιδί τῆς ἁμαρτίας γίνεται παιδί τῆς χάριτος, παιδί τοῦ Θεοῦ. Γι' αὐτὸ ἢ Ἐκκλησία τὸ βάπτισμα τὸ ὀνομάζει τὸ *λουτρὸν παλιγγενεσίας* δηλαδή ἕνα λουτρὸ ποὺ ἔχει τὴ θαυμαστὴ ἰκανότητα νὰ παίρῃ τὸν παλαιὸ ἄνθρωπο, τὸ φθαρμένο αὐτὸ καὶ ἀκάθαρτο σκεῦος, καὶ νὰ τὸν κἀνὴ νέο ἄνθρωπο, σκεῦος πολύτιμο καὶ ἐκλεκτὸ τῆς ἁγίας Ἐκκλησίας.

Μόλις τὸ παιδί βαπτισμένο ἀπὸ τὴν ἱερὰ κολυμβήθρα, τὸ ντύνουν μὲ ἕνα λευκὸ χιτῶνα, μὲ ἕνα ἄσπρο ρουχαλάκι, ποὺ κάνει νὰ φαίνεται τὸ παιδί σὰν ἄγγελος τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ὁ λευκὸς αὐτὸς χιτῶνας σημαίνει ὅτι αὐτὸς ποὺ βαπτίσθηκε εἶναι πιὰ καθαρὸς ἀπὸ κάθε εἶδους ἁμαρτία καὶ ὅτι στὸ ἐξῆς πρέπει νὰ προσέχη γιὰ νὰ μὴ μολύνῃ τὸν ἑαυτό του μὲ ἁμαρτίες. Νὰ προσέχη, ὅπως προσέχει τὸ παιδί ἐκεῖνο ποὺ οἱ γονεῖς του τὸ ἔντυσαν μὲ μιὰ ἀκριβὴ στολή· τὸ παιδί αὐτὸ δὲν πηγαίνει σὲ μέρη ἀκάθαρτα, γιὰ νὰ μὴ λερώσῃ τὴ λαμπρὴ του ἐνδυμασία.

Ἐνδυμα καὶ ροῦχο ἐκείνου ποὺ βαπτίσθηκε εἶναι πλέον ὁ Χριστός. Ὁ Χριστὸς στὴ γλώσσα. Ὁ Χριστὸς στὰ μάτια. Ὁ Χριστὸς στ' αὐτιά. Ὁ Χριστὸς στὰ χέρια. Ὁ Χριστὸς στὰ πόδια. Ὁ Χριστὸς στὴν καρδιά. Ὁ Χριστὸς παντοῦ. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὅταν βγῇ τὸ παιδί ἀπὸ τὴν κολυμβήθρα, ἢ Ἐκκλησία ψάλλει: *Ὅσοι εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε. Ἀλληλοῦϊα.*

Ἀλλὰ γεννᾶται τὸ ἐρώτημα· Ὑπάρχει παιδί, ποὺ ἀπὸ τὴν ὥρα ποὺ βαπτίσθηκε μέχρι τώρα ποὺ μεγάλωσε κατώρθωσε νὰ διατηρήσῃ τὸ χιτῶνα τοῦ ἱεροῦ βαπτίσματος καθαρὸ καὶ ἀμόλυντο;

Γιὰ ν' ἀπαντήσῃ ἕνα παιδί ὅτι διατήρησε τὸ χιτῶνα καθαρὸ καὶ ἀμόλυντο, ὅπως τὸν πῆρε τὴν ὥρα τοῦ βαπτίσματος, πρέπει μὲ τὴ γλώσσα νὰ μὴν ἔχει κάνει καμμιά ἁμαρτία, μὲ τὰ μάτια νὰ μὴν εἶδε τίποτα τὸ αἰσχρὸ, μὲ τ' αὐτιά νὰ μὴν ἄκουσε πράγματα ἀκάθαρτα ποὺ μολύνουν τὴν ἀκοή, μὲ τὰ χέρια νὰ μὴν ἔκλεψε, νὰ μὴ χτύπησε, νὰ μὴ ἔκανε τίποτα κακὸ, μὲ τὰ πόδια νὰ μὴν ἔτρεξε σὲ τόπους ἁμαρτωλοῦς, μὲ τὸ μυαλὸ καὶ μὲ τὴν καρδιά νὰ μὴ σκέφτηκε καὶ νὰ μὴν ἐπιθύμησε τὸ πονηρὸ. Ἐὰν ὑπάρχη τέτοιο παιδί, τότε θὰ ποῦμε ὅτι τὸ παιδί αὐτὸ διατήρησε τὸ χιτῶνα τοῦ βαπτίσματος καθαρὸ καὶ ἄσπιλο. Τι λέτε, παιδιά μου, ὑπάρχει τέτοιο παιδί στὸν κόσμο; Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸ Χριστό, κανένα ἄλλο τέτοιο παιδί δὲν ὑπάρχει.

Ὅλα ἀνεξαιρέτως τὰ παιδιὰ ἔχουν ἁμαρτήσῃ μὲ διάφορες ἁμαρτίες, ἔχουν λερώσει τὸ χιτῶνα τοῦ ἱεροῦ βαπτίσματος. Ὡ, πόσο βρωμερὴ καὶ ἀκάθαρη εἶναι ἢ ψυχὴ! Καὶ λοιπὸν τί θὰ κάνουμε, τί πρέπει νὰ γίνῃ;

Νὰ τὶ πρέπει νὰ γίνη. Τώρα ποὺ πλησιάζουν οἱ ἅγιες ἡμέρες τῆς γεννήσεως τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ὅλοι οἱ Χριστιανοὶ θέλουμε μὲ λαμπρὴ στολὴ νὰ ὑποδεχτοῦμε τὸν ὠραῖο Νυμφίον τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τὸν Σωτῆρα μας, πρέπει καὶ ἡμεῖς νὰ ποῦμε βρονταχτιά: *Λάμπρυνόν μου τὴν στολὴν τῆς ψυχῆς, Φωτοδότα, καὶ σώσόν με.*

Ἐπάρχει ὅμως τρόπος, ἡ ψυχὴ νὰ καθαριστῆ καὶ πάλι καὶ τὸ ἔνδυμα τῆς νὰ ξαναγίνη καθαρὸ καὶ λαμπρὸ; Ἐπάρχει, δόξα τῷ Θεῷ!

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας, γιὰ τὶς ψυχὰς ποὺ μετὰ ἀπὸ τὸ βάπτισμα ἔχουν ἀμαρτήσῃ καὶ αἰσθάνονται τὸν ἑαυτὸ τους ἐλεεινὸ καὶ ἀκάθαρτο, ἔχει μιὰ δευτέρη κολυμβήθρα. Καὶ αὐτὴ εἶναι τὸ μυστήριον τῆς ἱερᾶς μετανοίας καὶ ἐξομολογήσεως.

Παιδί μου! Ἐλαμπες σὰν τὸν ἥλιο ὅταν βαπτίσθηκες. Ἦσουν καθαρὸ σὰν τὸ χιόνι. Ἀλλὰ ὕστερα ἁμάρτησες. Ἀμάρτησες πολλές φορές. Καὶ τώρα ἔχεις ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ λουτρό, λουτρό πνευματικόν. Καί, ὅπως ἀγαπᾷς τὴν καθαριότητα τοῦ σώματος καὶ τακτικὰ κάνεις λουτρό καὶ καθαρίζεσαι, ἔτσι ν' ἀγαπᾷς καὶ τὴν καθαριότητα τῆς ψυχῆς. Τώρα ποὺ πλησιάζουν οἱ ἅγιες ἡμέρες, νὰ τρέξῃς στὴν ἱερὰ ἐξομολόγησι, νὰ πλυθῆς καὶ νὰ καθαριστῆς, νὰ λάμψῃς πάλι σὰν τὸν ἥλιο καὶ νὰ γίνῃς καθαρὸ σὰν τὸ χιόνι. Δύναμι ἔχει τὸ νερὸ τῆς κολυμβήθρας νὰ καθαρίζῃ τὴν ψυχὴν, ἀλλὰ δύναμι ἔχουν καὶ τὰ δάκρυα τῆς μετανοίας.

Ἐπὶ ὕστερα ἀπὸ τὴν εἰλικρινῆ ἐξομολόγησι ποὺ θὰ κάνῃς, θὰ νιώθῃς μιὰ ἀνείπωτη χαρὰ μέσα σου καὶ θὰ τραγουδάς με κατάνυξι τὸ ὁμορφὸ ἐκεῖνο τραγούδι:

«Δὲς τὰ κρίνα πέρα μέσ' στὸν κάμπο  
πὼς ἀνθίσουν καὶ μοσχοβολοῦν.  
Μοιάζει ἡ ζωὴ μας μὲ τὸ κρίνο,  
ποὺ τὸ πρῶτ' ἀνθεῖ γιὰ λίγο  
καὶ τὸ βράδυ ἔχει μαραθῆ.  
Πόσο σύντομη εἶναι ἡ ζωὴ!  
Δὲς τὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ μὲ πίστι.  
Εἶναι τοῦ Θεοῦ ὁ μόνος Γυῖός,  
ποὺ ῥθε στὴ ζωὴ νὰ μᾶς λυτρῶσῃ  
καὶ τὴ χαρὰ σ' ὅλους νὰ δώσῃ.  
Ναί, μὲ τὸ Χριστὸ μέσ' στὴν ψυχὴ  
πόσο ὁμορφὴ εἶναι ἡ ζωὴ!».

Μὲ πατρικὴ ἀγάπη,

Ὁ πνευματικὸς σου πατέρας.



Τὸ ἄνθος εἶναι ἀπαρχὴ τῆς καρποφορίας, καὶ ἡ ὑποταγὴ, ἀρχὴ τῆς ταπεινώσεως. Ὁ ταπεινόφρων εἶναι κατὰ κανόνα εὐπειθὴς ὑποτακτικὸς, σέβεται μικροὺς καὶ μεγάλους καὶ ἔχει ἐπιείκεια καὶ καλωσύνη.

Ὅσιος Ἐφραίμ

## Οἱ Ἀρχιστράτηγοι τῶν Ἀσωμάτων

Πηγὴ: *Αποσπάσματα ἀπὸ τὴ Συλλογὴ «Σαλιγκάρι στὴν Πέτρα», τοῦ Μιχαὴλ Λεβέντη.*

Παραμονὴ τῶν Ταξιαρχῶν στὰ Βίλλια. Ἀπόγευμα τοῦ 1965, κρῦο καὶ ἀέρας. Ἡ γρηὰ νεωκόρος μένει ἀπέναντι ἀπὸ τοὺς δυὸ ναοὺς: τοῦ Σωτῆρος, ἔργο τοῦ Τσίλερ στὰ 1819, καὶ τοῦ Ταξιάρχῃ. Μόλις ἔχει ἐπιστρέψῃ ἀπὸ τὸν ἑσπερινὸ καὶ ἀνάβῃ τὸ τζάκι. Κάποιος τῆς χτυπᾷ τὴν πόρτα. Ξαφνιάζεται. Μπροστά τῆς στέκεται ἕνας ὁμορφος ψηλὸς ἄνδρας, γύρω στὰ τριάντα, μὲ τσάντα, καπέλο καὶ παλτό.

-Ἐλα νὰ μοῦ ἀνοίξεις, σὲ παρακαλῶ, τῆς λέει. Θέλω νὰ προσκυνήσω τὸν Ἄγγελο.

-Μά, Χριστιανέ μου, μόλις ἔκλεισα. Νὰ βγῶ πάλι ἔξω μὲ τέτοιο καιρὸ;

-Σὲ παρακαλῶ κυρά-Μαρία...

Ἡ γυναίκα ὑπακούει. Ντύνεται καλὰ καὶ βγαίνουν. Προχωροῦν βιαστικά. Μόλις φτάνουν, ξεκλειδώνει τὴν πόρτα καὶ ὁ ξένος προσκυνᾷ μὲ τρόπο παράξενο... δὲν ἔχει ξαναδεῖ κάτι τέτοιο ἢ γυναίκα. Ἐπειτα ἀνάβῃ ἕνα μόνο κερί μὲ μεγάλη προσήλωσι καὶ τὸ ἀφήνει στὸ μανουάλι. Μένει γιὰ λίγο ἀκίνητος, κρατᾷ χαμηλὰ τὸ κεφάλι καὶ ἔχει στὸ στήθος τὸ καπέλο του.

-Δὲν θέλω νὰ μοῦ τὸ σβήσεις! Τῆς λέει μὲ ἔμφαση δείχνοντας τὸ κερί. Ἄφησέ το, νὰ καίει μέχρι τέλους!

-Ὅχι, παιδάκι μου, παίρνει γρήγορη καὶ καθησυχαστικὴ τὴν ἀπάντησι.

Ὅμως, ἐπειδὴ ἐκεῖνη φοβᾷται μήπως πάρει φωτιὰ ἢ ἐκκλησία, μόλις βγαίνει ὁ ἄλλος, τὸ σβήνει. Καὶ ἐπιστρέφει στὸ σπίτι τῆς. Φτιάχνει ἕνα ζεστὸ φασκόμηλο καὶ προσπαθεῖ νὰ συνέλθει. Φέρνει πάλι στὴ μνήμη τὸ περιστατικὸ μὲ τὸν ἄγνωστο.

Ξαφνικά, ἐκεῖ ποὺ κάθεται μὲ τὸ βλέμμα προσηλωμένο στὶς φλόγες, ἐμφανίζεται ὁ ἄντρας μπροστά τῆς. Ἐτσι, ἀπὸ τὸ πούθενά καὶ ἐνῶ ἡ πόρτα ἦταν κλεισμένη ἀπὸ μέσα μὲ μάνταλο.

-Γιατί, κυρά-Μαρία; Ἐγὼ εἶχα τάμα καὶ ἦρθα ἀπὸ τὰ Δωδεκάνησα, γιὰ νὰ ἀνάψω ἐδῶ τὸ κερί. Καὶ ἐνῶ σοῦ ζήτησα νὰ μὴν τὸ σβήσεις, ἐσὺ δὲν τὸ ἄφησες.

Ὁ τόνος τῆς φωνῆς καὶ τὸ ὕφος τοῦ εἶναι αὐστηρά. Σηκώνει τὸ χέρι καὶ τὴ χαστουκίζει. Ἐπειτα, τὸ ἴδιο ξαφνικά καὶ παράλογα ἐξαφανίζεται.

Ἡ νεωκόρος, κατάπληκτη καὶ ἔντρομη, προσπαθεῖ νὰ συνέλθει. Τὸ αὐτὸ ποὺ δέχτηκε τὸ χτύπημα πιά δὲν ἀκούει. Κάποια στιγμὴ συνέρχεται, βγαίνει στὸ κρῦο καὶ τρέχει γιὰ τὸ σπίτι τοῦ ἱερέα.

Ὁ παπα-Σωτῆρος τὴν ἀκούει προσεκτικά.

-Πᾶμε γρήγορα νὰ τὸν βροῦμε, τῆς λέει σοβαρά.

Ἀρχίζουν νὰ τὸν ψάχνουν. Παντοῦ, ὡς καὶ στὸ λεωφορεῖο τῆς γραμμῆς ποὺ ἐτοιμάζεται γιὰ τὴν Ἀθήνα. Τίποτε. Κανένας δὲν τὸν εἶδε, κανένας δὲν τὸν ἀπάντησε.



Όποτε κάνουν στροφή και γυρίζουν στο ναό του Μιχαήλ. Άνοίγουν την πόρτα του. Μπαίνουν στην ήσυχία σαν σε σύννεφο και διαποτίζονται από αυτή σε κάθε τους κύτταρο. Κοιτάζονται με νόημα. Σταυροκοπιούνται. Το κερί του ξένου ήταν πάλι άναμμένο και τους κοίταζε.

Μένει έτσι, άλιωτο, μέχρι το άλλο απόγευμα. Όταν, πάλι μόνο του ν' ανάβει στο σύμπαν του ναού και με τη νεωκόρο να το κοιτάζει έκπληκτη, απότομα σε μία στιγμή λιώνει και χάνεται όμοιο με δάκρυ στην άμμο.

† † †

Είμαστε γύρω στους 50 κι επιστρέφουμε. Το πλοίο της γραμμής έχει το όνομα του μεγάλου περιθωριακού «Θεόφιλος».

Είναι άργα το βράδυ, παραμονή της 1<sup>ης</sup> Οκτωβρίου. Κάποιος προτείνει στον ιερέα να κάνουμε απόψε τον άγιασμό του μήνα, μιὰ πού το πρωί δεν θα μπορούσε. Εκείνος δεν φέρνει αντίρρηση. Είπαμε να συναντηθούμε στην τραπεζαρία λίγο πριν τα μεσάνυχτα. Νομίζουμε πως θα τον συντροφεύουμε λίγοι, έτσι κουρασμένοι κι έτσι φορτωμένοι με πολλές συγκινήσεις.

Όσοι μαζευόμαστε, ξεπερνάμε τους εκατό. Κάποιος το ψιθύρισε και πολλοί έσπευσαν. Μαζί ο πλοίαρχος κι άλλη μιὰ δεκάδα βαθμοφόροι στα έπίσημά τους, χώρια το άλλο προσωπικό του σκάφους.

Ο παπα-Μάρκος ξεκινά. Μιὰ σιωπή περιέργη γεμίζει το χώρο. Στη μέση του άγιασμού, ή φίλη μου φέρνει τη μικρή εικόνα με τον Ταξιάρχη του Μανταμάδου που άγόρασε το πρωί και την κρατά στο στήθος της. Τότε ο πλοίαρχος, που δεν πρέπει να ξεπερνά τα 40, κάνει νόημα σε κάποιον και εκείνος μ' έναν άλλον πάνε προς το βάθος της αίθουσας. Έπιστρέφουν σε λίγο. Κρατούν προσεκτικά κάτι σαν πίνακα ζωγραφικής, σαν εικόνα. Σιγά - σιγά αφαιρούν τα χοντρά χαρτιά που το τυλίγουν και ο ιερέας ζητά να το στρέψουν προς τον κόσμο.

Και τότε... τότε νιώθουμε το καράβι να γέρνει έντονα, άργα, ύποβλητικά, μεγαλόπρεπα, και να επανέρχεται. Τρεις φορές. Σαν κάποιος να το σπρώχνει άπ' τη μία μεριά να γείρει στην άλλη έτσι για να τονίσει την παρουσία του, κι ενώ ή θάλασσα είναι ήρεμη και γλυκιά και φιλόξενη. Για δύο-τρία λεπτά.

Άκούγονται φωνές έκπληξης. Προσέχω τον καπετάνιο. Έχει το κεφάλι κατεβασμένο. Ο ύποπλοίαρχος, μελωδικός στην ψαλτική όσο λίγοι, χαμογελά. Οί άλλοι βαθμοφόροι δεν σαλεύουν. Κάποιοι από τους επιβάτες σταυροκοπιούνται. Κι όταν ο άγιασμός τελιώνει, ο πλοίαρχος μās μιλά:

-Καταλάβατε το κούνημα του πλοίου; Αυτό δεν ήταν «θάλασσα», λέει με βεβαιότητα. Ήταν ο Άρχάγγελος. Και το κάνει κάθε φορά που τον ξεσκεπάζουμε.

Άφήνει να έννοηθεί πως έχει ζήσει ο ίδιος ένα θαύμα, άρνείται να το άποκαλύψει, μόνο λέει πως τη συγκεκριμένη εικόνα την έχει μαζί του πάντοτε, όταν ταξιδεύει, ενώ, σαν γυρίζει στον Πειραιά, την παίρνει πάλι στο σπίτι του.

Έκείνο το βράδυ, άνοιγω ένα παλιό ξεχασμένο στίχο και προσεύχομαι:

*Καθάριε μου Άγγελε, Άγγελε, Άγγελε,  
που διέσχισες με ύπομονή τη μνήμη του Θεού  
μέχρι που σε άραξε το παρελθόν,  
πως βρήκες την τοιχογραφία σου κι άιωνιώθηκες;  
Με ποιό κρινάκι σαν φωνήεν να φέγγει μου  
θα με δεχθεί και μένα κάποιος ξέφωτο ποίημα;  
Καθάριε μου όμογάστριε, πως να σωθώ;*

† † †

Οί πέντε νέοι επισκέπτονται το Άγιον Όρος για πρώτη φορά. Δεν είναι άκόμη 20 χρονών.

Όταν φτάνουν στη Μονή των Ίβήρων, τους έντυπωσιάζει ή εικόνα της Παναγίας και οί μοναχοί με τα σκυμμένα κεφάλια και τις στρωτές μεάνοιες. Δυσκολεύονται να δεχθούν τον άλλο τρόπο ζωής και οί ιστορίες για θαύματα που τους άφηγείται κάποιος παλιός μοναχός τους φαίνονται άπίστευτες. Ήταν το καλοκαίρι του 1979.

Την επόμενη μέρα, με ζέστη, νειάτα και άγνοια, κατευθύνονται όλοι τους προς τη θάλασσα. Λένε ν' άψηφίσουν την άπαγόρευση και να κολυμπήσουν. Ο Κώστας ξανοίγεται λίγο περισσότερο και κάποια στιγμή νιώθει το Αίγαίο να τον παίρνει μέσα. Φοβάται, πίνει νερό και ζητάει βοήθεια. Οί φίλοι τον πλησιάζουν, κινδυνεύουν όμως και βγαίνουν στην ξηρά δύσκολα.

Στρέφονται προς τη Μονή, μήπως κάποιος από εκεί τους συντρέξει. Τους πλησιάζει ένας άντρας ψηλός, γύρω στα 30. Δείχνει σίγουρος. Κάνει νόημα να μην ταραζούνται. Φυσικά και θα βοηθήσει. Πέφτει στο νερό, πολύ γρήγορα και εύκολα φτάνει το νέο που μισοπνίγεται και τον τραβάει στη στεριά. Οί φίλοι του τον τριγυρίζουν και του δίνουν τις πρώτες βοήθειες.

Μόλις εκείνος συνέρχεται, διαπιστώνουν πως ο ξένος δεν είναι μαζί τους. Κι όχι μόνο αυτό. Άλλά, ενώ και οί πέντε έπιμένουν πως είχε πολύ ιδιαίτερη φυσιογνωμία, δεν τη θυμούνται παρά θαμπά. Ο ένας από την παρέα λέει πως ήταν μελαχρινός, μ' ένα χαλί στρατιωτικό σάκο κι έντελώς γυμνός, που αυτό όμως δεν τον σοκάρισε. Ο άλλος τον είδε ξανθό, να φοράει



μαῦρο ξιβάγκο καὶ παντελόνη τζήν. Ὁ τρίτος, ποὺ κινδύνεψε, ἰσχυρίζεται πὼς δὲν τὸν ἄγγιξε καθόλου σὰν τὸν πλησίασε, ἀλλὰ ἐνιωθε σὰν νὰ ὑπῆρχε ἓνα μικρὸ κενὸ ἀνάμεσα σ' αὐτὸν καὶ τὰ χέρια τοῦ σωτήρα του καὶ μία δύναμη περιέργη νὰ τὸν ἔλκει πρὸς τὰ ἔξω.

Ψάχνουν παντοῦ τὸ ἀπόγευμα στὴν Ἱβήρων, γιατί στὸν ἓνα φάνηκε πὼς ἐκεῖ κατευθύνθηκε. Πουθενά. Ἐξαφανισμένος. Ρωτοῦν τοὺς μοναχοῦ κι ἐκείνοι τοὺς ἀπαντοῦν πὼς δὲν ἔχουν ἐξήγηση, ἄς δώσει ὁ καθένας τὴ δική του. Ἔτσι, τὸ ἄλλο πρωὶ συνεχίζου τὴν ἀναζήτηση σὲ διπλανὰ Μοναστήρια.

Φθάνουν στὴ Μονὴ τῆς Μεγίστης Λαύρας. Κι ἐκεῖ, σ' ἓνα μικρὸ ναὸ ποὺ μπαίνουν γιὰ νὰ προσκυνήσουν, ὁ Κώστας συναντᾷ τὸ σωτήρα του στὴ μία πόρτα τοῦ ἱεροῦ. Εἶναι ὁ Γαβριήλ. Ὅποτε, γιὰ ἓνα λεπτὸ δὲν ὑπάρχει κανεὶς ἄλλος στὴν πλάση, μόνο ὁ Ἀρχάγγελος κι αὐτός. Γιὰ μία αἰωνιότητα δὲν ὑπάρχει κανεὶς ἄλλος στὴν ἀγάπη καὶ τὸ θάμβος, μόνο τὰ μάτια στὴν τοιχογραφία ποὺ γελοῦν καὶ τὰ δικά του ποὺ καίνε.

-Αὐτὸς μὲ ἔσωσε, ψελλίζει μόνο καὶ πέφτει στὰ γόνατα. Κι ἔτσι πεσμένο, τὸν τυλίγει ἡ ἴδια δύναμη, ἐκεῖνη ποὺ τὸν τράβηξε ἀπ' τὸ σκοτεινὸ νερὸ τὴν ὥρα ποὺ πνιγόταν. Πνίγεται πάλι. Μετὰ τὸ φυσικὸ, νιώθει καὶ τὸν πνευματικὸ πνιγμό. Ἀλλὰ τώρα πιά εἶναι πλάι του κάποιος μὲ φτεροῦγες, ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ τὸν ὀδηγεῖ σὲ διαφορετικὴ ὄχθη.

Καὶ δὲν περνάει πολὺς καιρὸς, ὅταν στὸν παλιὸ του κόσμον μαθεύτηκε πὼς ὁ νέος ἀποφάσισε νὰ μὴ γυρίσει. Ἀπὸ τότε ὅμως ποὺ ἄλλαξε ὄνομα, φόρεσε ράσο κι ἀπόμεινε στῆς δεύτερης σωτηρίας του τὴν ὄχθη, κανεὶς δὲν γνωρίζει ποῦ βρίσκεται. Οἱ παλιοὶ του φίλοι τὸν προφυλάσσουν, διηγοῦνται ὅλα τοῦτα μὲ δέος καὶ ἰσχυρίζονται πὼς λίγο μετὰ θὰ βεβαιώσει τὴν ἐμφάνιση τοῦ Γαβριήλ στὸ συγκεκριμένο γεγονός καὶ ὁ Γέρον Παΐσιος.

† † †

**Σ**τὶς 22 Ἀπριλίου 1994 (διηγεῖται ὁ π. Δανιὴλ Σάλικας, Ἀρχιμανδρίτης καὶ γιατρός), εἰσῆχθηκα στὸ Εὐγενίδειο Θεραπευτήριον μὲ 4,5 κιλά ἐμπύημα δεξιοῦ ἡμιθωρακίου, μὲ συμπτώματα ἀπολύτου ἄπνοιας, ἀδυναμία βάδισης, 41,5 πυρετό, ἐνῶ ὑπέστην καὶ διαβητικὸ σδκ ἀγνώστου αἰτιολογίας.

Μέσα ἀπὸ ἓνα σύννεφο ἔβλεπα καὶ ἄκουγα τὰ συμβαίνοντα μέσα στὸ χειρουργεῖο, καὶ τὸ βάσανο τὸ μεγάλο ἦταν, ὅτι, σὰν γιατρὸς γνώριζα πολὺ καλὰ τὴν κρίσιμη κατάστασή μου. Γνώριζα, ὅτι τὸ ποσοστὸ κατάληξης (θανάτου μου) ἦταν γύρω στὸ 95%. Καὶ δὲν εἶχα ἄδικο. Μάλιστα ἤμουν καὶ ἐπιεικῆς στὴν κρίση μου, γιατί ἡ ἰατρικὴ ὁμάδα ποὺ ἀποτελεῖτο ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰωάννη Μπελένη, διευθυντὴ τοῦ Εὐαγγελισμοῦ, τὸν καθηγητὴ Χρυσόστομο Μελισσινό, διευθυντὴ πνευμονολογικῆς κλινικῆς στὸ Νοσοκομεῖο Ἰγεία, καὶ μὲ τὴν Εἰρήνη Μπατάλη, ἀναισθησιολόγο, νὰ φοβᾶται

νὰ μοῦ δώσει νάρκωση γιὰ τὸν κίνδυνον ἀνακοπῆς τῆς καρδιάς λόγω βάρους μου· συζητοῦσαν δυνατὰ γιατί δὲν πίστευαν ὅτι ἄκουγα τὰ λεγόμενά τους. Τοὺς ἄκουγα νὰ μοῦ δίνουν ζωὴ μόνο 2%!

-Θὰ κάνουμε ὅ,τι μποροῦμε, ἔλεγαν, γιατί οἱ πιθανότητες ζωῆς εἶναι ἐλάχιστες, μὲ ποσοστὸ κατάληξης 98%! Ἔτσι κι ἄλλιῶς καταδικασμένοι εἶναι...

Ἐκεῖνη τὴν ὥρα αἰσθάνθηκα μόνος, κατάμονος... Ἐκανα μὲ κόπο τὸν σταυρὸ μου καὶ προσευχήθηκα στὸν προστάτη μου, τὸν Ταξιάρχη:

-Ταξιάρχη μου, Ἀρχάγγελε Μιχαήλ, μὴ μὲ ἀφήνεις, μὴ μὲ ἐγκαταλείπεις. Ἐσένα μόνο ἔχω τώρα, σ' ἔσένα ἐμπιστεύομαι τὴν ζωὴ μου...!

Ἔνας μεταλλικὸς θόρυβος διέκοψε τὴν νοερὰ προσευχή μου. Φοβήθηκα ὅτι μὲ τὴν κίνηση τῶν χειρῶν μου ἔριξα κάποιον ἐργαλεῖο, καὶ προσπάθησα νὰ γυρίσω τὸ κεφάλι μου πρὸς τὴν κατεύθυνση τοῦ θορύβου. Καὶ τότε... ὦ Θεέ μου... Ὁ Ἀρχάγγελος Μιχαήλ, ὁ Ταξιάρχης, μὲ τὴν πανοπλία του καὶ τὸ σπαθὶ στὸ δεξιὸ χέρι του, στεκόταν πλάι μου, χαμογελαστὸς καὶ ὀλοζώντανος!

-Δανιήλ, εἶμαι ἐδῶ, μοῦ εἶπε. Δὲν σὲ ἐγκατέλειψα. Σὲ προστατεύω. Ἐγὼ θὰ σὲ χειρουργήσω, καὶ θὰ γίνεις καλά. Μὴ φοβᾶσαι!

Ἦταν τὰ λόγια τοῦ Ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ καθὼς μοῦ μιλοῦσε ἀκούμπησε τὸ ξίφος στὸ στήθος μου!...

Σὲ λίγο ἦλθε ὁ καθηγητῆς Μπελένης.

-Ἄς προσευχηθοῦμε μαζὶ πάτερ Δανιήλ, μοῦ εἶπε, καὶ μὲ τὴν βοήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ ὅλα θὰ πᾶνε καλά.

Καὶ πράγματι πήγανε. Ἡ ἐγχείρηση πέτυχε. Τὸ χέρι τοῦ γιατροῦ ποὺ τὸ ὀδηγοῦσε ὁ Ἀρχάγγελος, εἶμαι βέβαιος γι' αὐτό, μοῦ ξανάδωσε πάλι τὴν ζωὴ ποὺ εἶχε ἀρχίσει νὰ φεύγει ἀπὸ μέσα μου.

### **Τροπάριον**

*Τῶν οὐρανίων στρατιῶν Ἀρχιστράτηγοι,  
δυσωποῦμεν ὑμᾶς ἡμεῖς οἱ ἀνάξιτοι,  
ἵνα ταῖς ὑμῶν δεήσεσι τειχήσετε ἡμᾶς,  
σκέπη τῶν πτέρυγων τῆς αὔλου ὑμῶν δόξης,  
φρουροῦντες ἡμᾶς προσπίπτοντας,  
ἐκτενῶς καὶ βοῶντας.*

*Ἐκ τῶν κινδύνων λυτρώσασθε ἡμᾶς,  
ὡς Ταξιάρχαι τῶν Ἄνω Δυνάμεων.*

### **Κοντάκιον**

*Ἀρχιστράτηγοι Θεοῦ, Λειτουργοὶ θείας δόξης,  
τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὀδηγοὶ καὶ Ἀρχηγοὶ Ἀσωμάτων,  
τὸ συμφέρον ἡμῖν αἰτήσασθε καὶ τὸ μέγα ἔλεος,  
ὡς τῶν Ἀσωμάτων Ἀρχιστράτηγοι.*

### **Μεγαλυνάριον**

*Δεῦτε ἐυφημήσεων οἱ πιστοί, τοὺς δυὸ φωστήρας,  
τοὺς μεγάλους καὶ φωταυγεῖς,  
Μιχαὴλ τὸν Μέγαν, καὶ Γαβριὴλ τὸν θεῖον,  
τοὺς δυὸ Ταξιάρχας, τοῦ Παντοκράτορος.*

## Μὴν Ἀφήσετε, Ἅγιοί μου...

Τοῦ Ἀείμνηστου Στρατηγοῦ Μακρυγιάννη.

**«Μὴν ἀφήσετε, Ἅγιοί μου αὐτὰ τὰ γκιντὶ πουλημένα κριγιάτα τῆς τυραγνίας νὰ μασκαρέψουν καὶ νὰ ἀφανίσουν τοὺς Ἑλληνας».**

† † †

Τότε, ἐκεῖ ποὺ καθόμουν εἰς τὸ περιβόλι μου καὶ ἔτρωγα ψωμί, πονώντας ἀπὸ τὶς πληγές, ὅπου ἔλαβα εἰς τὸν ἀγῶνα καὶ περισσότερο πονώντας διὰ τὶς μέσα πληγές ὅπου δέχομαι διὰ τὰ σημερινὰ δεινὰ τῆς Πατρίδος, ἦλθαν δύο ἐπιτήδειοι, ἄνθρωποι τῶν γραμμάτων, μισομαθεῖς καὶ ἄθρησκοι, καὶ μοῦ ξηγῶνται ἔτσι: «Πουλάς Ἑλλάδα, Μακρυγιάννη».

Ἐγώ, στὴν ἄθλιαν κατάστασίν μου, τοὺς λέγω: «Ἀδελφοί, μὲ ἀδικεῖτε. Ἑλλάδα δὲν πουλάω, νοικοκυραῖοι μου. Τέτοιον ἀγαθὸν πολυτίμητον δὲν ἔχω εἰς τὴν πρᾶματιαν μου. Μὰ καὶ νὰ τὸ ἴχα, δὲν τὸ ἴδινα κανενός. Κι' ἂν πουλιέται Ἑλλάδα, δὲν ἀγοράζεται σήμερις, διότι κάνατε τὸν κόσμον ἐσεῖς λογιώτατοι, νὰ μὴν θέλει νὰ ἀγοράσει κάτι τέτοιο».

Ἐφυγαν αὐτοί. Κι' ἕκατσα σὲ μίαν πέτραν μόνος καὶ ἔκλαιγα. Μισὸς ἄνθρωπος καταστάθηκα ἀπὸ τὸ ντουφέκι τοῦ Τούρκου, τσακίστηκα εἰς τὶς περιστάσεις τοῦ ἀγῶνα καὶ κυνηγιέμαι καὶ σήμερον. Κυνηγῶνται καὶ ἄλλοι ἀγωνιστὲς πολὺ καλύτεροί μου, διότι ἐγὼ εἶμαι ὁ τελευταῖος καὶ ὁ χειρότερος. Καὶ οἱ πῖο καλύτεροι ὄλων ἀφανίστηκαν.

Αὐτοὶ ποὺ θυσιάσαν ἀρετὴ καὶ πατριωτισμὸν, γιὰ νὰ εἰπωθεῖ ἐλεύτερη ἡ Ἑλλάδα κι' ἐχάθησαν φαμελιές ὀλωσδιόλου, εἶπαν νὰ ζητήσουν ἓνα ἀποδειχτικὸν ποὺ νὰ λέγει ὅτι ἔτρεξαν κι' αὐτοὶ εἰς τὴν ὑπηρεσίαν τῆς Πατρίδος, καὶ Τοῦρκο δὲν ἄφηκαν ἀντουφέκιγο. Πῆγε νὰ ἱεργήσῃ ἡ Κυβέρνηση καὶ βγήκαν κάτι τσασίτες καὶ σπιγοῦνοι, ποὺ δουλεύουν μῖσος καὶ ἰδιοτέλεια, καὶ εἶπαν «ὄχι». Καὶ εἶπαν καὶ βροσιᾶς παλιᾶς διὰ τοὺς ἀγωνιστὲς. Γιὰ νὰ μὴν πάρουν τὸ ἀποδειχτικόν, ἓνα χαρτὶ ποὺ δὲν κάνει τίποτε γρόσια.

Πατρίδα νὰ θυμᾶσαι ἐσὺ αὐτοὺς ὅπου, διὰ τὴν τιμὴν καὶ τὴν λευτερίαν σου, δὲν λογαρίασαν θάνατο καὶ βάσανα. Κι' ἂν ἐσὺ τοὺς λησμονήσεις, θὰ τοὺς θυμηθοῦν οἱ πέτρες καὶ τὰ χῶματα, ὅπου ἔχυσαν αἵματα καὶ δάκρυα.

Θεέ, συχώρεσε τοὺς παντίδους, ποὺ θέλουν νὰ μᾶς πάρουν τὸν ἀγέρα ποὺ ἀναπνέομεν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν ποὺ μὲ ντουφέκι καὶ γιαταγάνι πήραμε. Ἐμεῖς τὸ χρέος, τὸ κατὰ δύναμιν, ἐπράξαμεν. Καὶ αὐτοὶ βγήκαν σήμερον νὰ προκόψουν τὴν Πατρίδα. Μᾶς γέμισαν φατρία καὶ διχόνοιαν. Καὶ τὴν Πατρίδα δὲν τὴν θέλουν Μητέρα κοινή. Ἀμορῶζα εἰς τὰ κρεβάτια τοὺς τὴν θέλουν. Γι' αὐτὸ περνοῦν καὶ ρεθίζουν τὸν κόσμον μὲ τέχνες καὶ καμώματα.

Καὶ καζαντίσαν αὐτοὶ πουγγιὰ καὶ ἀγαθὰ καὶ ἀφήσαν τοὺς ἀγωνιστὲς, τὶς χῆρες καὶ τὰ ὄρφανὰ εἰς

τὴν ἄκρην. Αὐτοὶ εἶναι οἱ ἀνθρώπινοι λύκοι, ποὺ φέραν δυστυχίματα καὶ κίντυνον εἰς τὸν τόπον. Ἄς ὄψονται.

Τότε ποὺ ἡ Τουρκία ἐκατέβαινε ἀπὸ τὰ ντερβένια καὶ ὀλίγοι ἔτρεχαν μὲ ὀλίγα ντουφέκια, μὲ τριχιᾶς δεμένα, νὰ πολεμήσουν, θέλοντας λευτερίαν ἢ θάνατον, οἱ φρόνιμοι ἀσφάλιζαν τὶς φαμελιές τοὺς εἰς τὰ νησιὰ κι' αὐτοὶ τρέχαν εἰς ρεματιᾶς καὶ βουνὰ, μὴ βλέποντας ποτὲ Τούρκου πρόσωπον. Κι' ὅταν ἀκοῦγαν τὰ ντισμπάρκα τῶν Τούρκων, τρέχαν μακρύτερα. Τώρα θέλουν δικὴν τοὺς τὴν Πατρίδα καὶ κυνηγοῦν τοὺς ἀγωνιστὲς.

Ἐγίναμε θηρία ποὺ θέλουν κριγιάτα (κρέατα) ἀνθρωπινὰ νὰ χορτάσουν. Καὶ χωρίζουν τὸν κόσμον σὲ πατριώτες καὶ ἀντιπατριώτες. Αὐτοὶ γίναν οἱ σημαντικοὶ τῆς Πατρίδος καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι νὰ χαθοῦν. Δὲν ξηγιῶνται γλυκότερα νὰ φυλάξωμεν Πατρίδα καὶ νὰ δοῦμεν λευτερίαν πραγματικὴν. Ρωμαίικον δὲν φτιάχνεται χωρὶς οὔλλοι νὰ θυσιάσουν ἀρετὴν καὶ πατριωτισμὸν. Καὶ χωρὶς νὰ πάψῃ ἡ μέσσα, ἡ δικὴ μας τυραγνία.

Καὶ βγήκαν τώρα κάτι δικοὶ μας κυβερνήτες, Ἑλληνας, σπορὰ τῆς ἐβραίουργιάς, ποὺ εἶπαν νὰ μᾶς σβήσουν τὴν Ἁγία Πίστη, τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, διότι ἡ Φραγκιά δὲν μᾶς θέλει μὲ τέτοιο ντύμα Ὁρθόδοξον. Καὶ ἐκάθησα καὶ ἔκλαιγα διὰ τὰ νέα παθήματα. Καὶ ἐπῆγα πάλιν εἰς τοὺς φίλους μου τοὺς Ἁγίους. Ἄναψα τὰ καντήλια καὶ ἐλιβάνισα λιβάνιν καλὸν ἀγιορεῖτικον. Καὶ σκουπίζοντας τὰ δάκρυά μου τοὺς εἶπα:

«Δὲν βλέπετε ποὺ θέλουν νὰ κάμουν τὴν Ἑλλάδα παλιοψάθα; Βοηθεῖστε, διότι μᾶς παίρνουν, αὐτοὶ οἱ μισοἙλληνας καὶ ἄθρησκοι, ὅ,τι πολυτίμητον τζιβαῖρικὸν ἔχομεν. Φραγκεμένους μᾶς θέλουν τὰ τσογλάνια τοῦ τρισκατάρατου τοῦ Πάπα. Μὴν ἀφήσετε, Ἅγιοί μου αὐτὰ τὰ γκιντὶ πουλημένα κριγιάτα τῆς τυραγνίας νὰ μασκαρέψουν καὶ νὰ ἀφανίσουν τοὺς Ἑλληνας, κάνοντας περισσότερα κακὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὰ ποὺ καταδέχθηκεν ὁ Τοῦρκος ὡς τίμιος ἐχθρός μας».

Ἐνας δικός μου ἀγωνιστὴς μοῦ ἔφερε καὶ μοῦ διαβασεν ἓνα παλαιὸν χαρτὶ, ποὺ ἔγραψεν ὁ κοντομερίτης μου Ἅγιος παπᾶς, ὁ Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλός. Τὸν ἐκρέμασαν εἰς ἓνα δέντρον Τοῦρκοι καὶ Ἑβραῖοι, διότι ἔτρεχεν ὁ εὐλογημένος παντοῦ καὶ ἐδίδασκεν Ἑλλάδα, Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ Γράμματα. Ἐγραψεν ὁ μακάριος ἐκεῖνος ὅτι:

«Ἐνας ἄνθρωπος νὰ μὲ ὑβρίσει, νὰ φονεύσῃ τὸν πατέρα μου, τὴν μητέρα μου, τὸν ἀδελφόν μου καὶ ὕστερα τὸ μάτι νὰ μοῦ βγάλει, ἔχω χρέος σὰν Χριστιανὸς νὰ τὸν συγχωρήσω. Τὸ νὰ ὑβρίσει τὸν Χριστόν μου καὶ τὴν Παναγία μου, δὲν θέλω νὰ τὸν βλέπω»...

## Είκοσι Πρακτικές Συμβουλές για την Ταπείνωση Για τὰ Πλούτη

Πρωτ. Στεφάνου Κ. Αναγνωστοπούλου.

Αγίου Νικολάου Βδελημιρόβιτς.

1. Σὲ ξέχασαν; Δὲ σὲ πῆραν οὔτε ἓνα τηλέφωνο; Δὲν πειράζει. Καὶ προπαντὸς μὴν παραπονεῖσαι.
2. Σὲ ἀδίκησαν; Ξέχασέ το.
3. Σὲ περιφρόνησαν; Νὰ χαίρεσαι.
4. Σὲ κατηγοροῦν; Μὴν ἀντιλέγεις.
5. Σὲ κοροϊδεύουν; Μὴν ἀπαντᾷς.
6. Σὲ βρίζουν; Σιωπὴ καὶ προσευχή.
7. Σὲ ἀφαιροῦν τὸ λόγο; Σὲ διακόπτουν; Μὴ λυπᾶσαι.
8. Σὲ κακολογοῦν; Μὴν ἀντιμάχεσαι.
9. Σοῦ μεταδίδουν εὐθύνες τὰ παιδιὰ σου; Οἱ συγγενεῖς σου, οἱ δικοὶ σου οἱ ἄνθρωποι; Μὴ διαμαρτύρεσαι.
10. Θυμῶνουν μαζί σου; Νὰ παραμένεις ἤρεμος.
11. Σοῦ κλέβουν φανερά; Κἄνε τὸν τυφλό.
12. Σὲ εἰρωνεύονται; Νὰ μακροθυμεῖς.
13. Δὲν ἀκοῦνε τίς συμβουλές σου; Ἰδίως δὲν ἀκοῦνε τίς συμβουλές σου τὰ παιδιὰ σου; Πέσε στὰ γόνατα καὶ κἄνε προσευχή.
14. Ἐκνευρισμὸς στὸ ἀντρώγυνο; Ἐσὺ φταῖς. Κι ἐσὺ φταῖς. Ὅχι ὁ ἄλλος.
15. Ἐφταιξες; Ζήτησε συγγνώμη.
16. Δὲν ἔφταιξες; Πάλι ζήτησε συγγνώμη.
17. Ἐχεις ὑγεία; Δόξαζε τὸν Θεόν.
18. Ἐχεις ἀρρώστια; Ἐχεις καρκίνο, ταιλαιπωρεῖσαι, ὑποφέρεις, βασανίζεσαι, πονᾷς; Δόξαζε τὸν Θεόν.
19. Γκρίνια, ἀνεργία, φτώχεια μέσα στὸ σπίτι; Νήστευσε. Ἀγρύπνησε. Κἄνε προσευχή.
20. Για ὅλους καὶ για ὅλα προσευχή. Πολλὴ προσευχή. Πολλὴ προσευχή. Νηστεία καὶ προσευχή διότι τοῦτο τὸ γένος τῶν παθῶν καὶ τῶν δαιμόνων οὐκ ἐκπορεύεται παρὰ μόνο μὲ νηστεία καὶ προσευχή.  
Εἶθε ἀδελφοί μου, νὰ ἀκολουθήσουμε ὅλοι μας, καὶ πρῶτος ἐγώ, τίς ταπεινὲς αὐτὲς συμβουλές, καὶ νὰ εἶστε βέβαιοι ὅτι θὰ σωθοῦμε!



Σήμερα οἱ ἄνθρωποι ζητοῦν νὰ τοὺς ἀγαπήσουν καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ἀποτυγχάνουν. Τὸ σωστὸ εἶναι νὰ μὴν ἐνδιαφέρεσαι ἂν σὲ ἀγαποῦν, ἀλλὰ ἂν ἐσὺ ἀγαπᾷς τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Μόνο ἔτσι γεμίζει ἡ ψυχή.

Νὰ ξέρεις, παιδί μου, ὅτι τὰ πάντα ἐναποθηκεύονται μέσα στὴ μνήμη μας καί, ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς κρίνει κατάλληλη τὴν ὥρα, μᾶς τὰ ἀποκαλύπτει...

**Γέρων Πορφύριος Καυσοκαλυβίτης (+1991)**

Ὅλα τα πλούτη μας, ἡ δόξα καὶ οἱ τιμές, δὲν εἶναι παρὰ ἓνα φευγαλέο ὄνειρο, ποὺ τελειώνει μὲ τὸν θάνατο. Κάνεις δὲν παίρνει τίποτε μαζί του στὸν ἄλλο κόσμο, οὔτε ἓνα ἔστω ψιχουλάκι ἀπὸ τὸ ἐπίγειο συμπόσιο! Εἶναι μακάριος ὅποιος κατανοεῖ πὼς ἡ ψυχή εἶναι τὸ μοναδικὸ ἀπόκτημά του, τὸ ὁποῖο ἀπὸ τίποτε δὲν φθείρεται, οὔτε καὶ ἀπ' αὐτὸν τὸν θάνατο! Ἐνας τέτοιος ἄνθρωπος σκέπτεται τρεῖς μόνον πραγματικότητες: τὸν θάνατο, τὴν ψυχή καὶ τὸν Θεὸ-Κριτὴ. Ὁ ἄββᾶς Εὐάγριος διδάσκει: *Κράτα διαρκῶς στὸ νοῦ σου τὸν ἐπικείμενο θάνατό σου καὶ τὴν Κρίση κι ἔτσι θὰ διαφυλάξεις τὴν ψυχή σου ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία.*

Ὅλες οἱ βιοτικές μας μέριμνες σὲ τούτη τὴ ζωὴ εἶναι σὰν ἄσκοπες φροντίδες γιὰ ἓνα γεῦμα ποὺ πρέπει σύντομα νὰ διακοπεῖ. Ὁ ἅγιος Ἡσαΐας ὁ Ἀναχωρητὴς λέει χαρακτηριστικά: *Ἔχε μπροστὰ στὰ μάτια σου τὸν θάνατο, κάθε μέρα συνεχῶς νὰ σκέπτεσαι τὸ πὼς θὰ χωριστεῖς ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα σου, πὼς θὰ περάσεις ἀπὸ τὴν περιοχὴ τῶν δυνάμεων τοῦ σκότους ποὺ θὰ σὲ συναντήσουν στὸν ἀέρα καὶ πὼς θὰ παρουσιαστεῖς ἐνώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ! Προετοιμάσου γιὰ ἐκείνη τὴ Φοβερὴ Ἡμέρα, κατὰ τὴν ὁποία θὰ σὲ βρεῖ ἡ Κρίση τοῦ Θεοῦ, σὰν νὰ τὴν βλέπεις ἤδη ἀπὸ τώρα!*

Κάποια μέρα ἓνας πλούσιος ἔμπορος, ὁ Ἰωάννης, πῆγε στὸν ὄσιο Σαββάτιο τοῦ Σολόφσκι καὶ τοῦ προσέφερε πλούσια ἐλεημοσύνη. Ὁ Σαββάτιος δὲν δέχθηκε νὰ λάβει τὸ παραμικρὸ καὶ εἶπε στὸν δωροδοτὴ νὰ τὰ μοιράσει ὅλα στοὺς φτωχοὺς. Ὁ Ἰωάννης πολὺ λυπήθηκε γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ ὄσιος, γιὰ νὰ τὸν παρηγορήσει καὶ νὰ τοῦ ἀποκαλύψει ὀρισμένα πράγματα, τοῦ εἶπε:

-Ἰωάννη, παιδί μου, μείνε ἐδῶ καὶ ἀναπαύσου μέχρι αὔριο καὶ τότε θὰ δεῖς τὴ δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ὁ Ἰωάννης ὑπάκουσε. Τὴν ἐπαύριο, πράγματι ὁ Ἰωάννης μπῆκε στὸ κελλί τοῦ Σαββατίου καὶ εἶδε τὸν γέροντα ὀριστικὰ ἀναπαυμένο, ἐνῶ μία γλυκεῖα εὐωδία πλημμύριζε τὸ κελλί.

Αὐτὸς ποὺ προβλέπει τὸ τέλος τῆς ζωῆς του, αὐτὸς δὲν μεριμνᾷ γιὰ τὰ ἐπίγεια ἀγαθὰ!...

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

## THE INVISIBLE IN THE VISIBLE

By St. Justin Popovich.



The invisible is the heart of the visible, the kernel of the visible. The visible is nothing compared to the invisible. Countless are the forms in which the invisible appears. It appears and disappears.

The sun is visible, but the force that gives it its warmth is invisible. The numerous constellations are visible, but the force that wisely guides them through the infinity of space, which pre-

vents them from colliding, is invisible. A magnet is visible, but its force is invisible. The earth is visible, but its gravitational field is invisible. The nightingale is visible, but the life force that gives it its being is invisible. Many creatures on the earth are visible, but the force that from the same earth brings forth a variety of herbs, a diversity of flowers and different fruits is invisible.

The earth! The most interesting and most mysterious workshop, and at the same time the most ingenious creator. She unceasingly produces from herself animals, and plants, and minerals. In her are simultaneously produced both roses and thorns, wheat and tare, basil and wormwood, incense and stinkweed. This is evidently so. But, that same obviousness raises a question: who works through her, and who creates through her, who acts through her? There, basil and wormwood grow side by side on the same square of land. And while the earth produces in the seed of basil its pleasant smell, at the same time the earth enacts in the seed of wormwood its own unpleasant odor.

The same holds for physical laws, the same conditions, the same phenomena; and the sun, and moon, and the stars, and the earth, and snow, and wind, and rain, and frost, and droughts, all the same and the results are all diametrically opposed. How is it that sunlight and drops of rain should become a pleasing aroma in basil but a foul odor in stinkweed? And furthermore: how is it that the earth's fluids become sweet in a cherry and bitter in wormwood? Who performs this unusual differentiation? On the same ground, under the same conditions, a vast variety of fruits and vegetables sprout, grow, and ripen, a diversity of animals live, and the most adverse things coexist.

Who infuses this vast secret of life and existence into all creatures and all things? In one and the same, there exist opposites; in one, there are many. Any of the thoughts of man cannot but be humbled before the truth of the Holy Bible; "And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb

yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind...and God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creatures after his kind, cattle and creeping things, and beasts of the earth after his kind: and it was so." (Gen 1:11-12, 24).

It is clear: the earth received its creative, life-giving power from God. God has transferred to the earth one part of his divine omnipotence, and the earth in a mysterious way extends God's creative, life-giving work. Hence, the many inexhaustible forces and supremely wise adaptations in the earth's creations. The word of God has fertilized the earth and has granted it creativeness, fertility, and life-giving power for all time. Not only in the beginning but now and forever the earth creates, produces, and gives life according to the word God.

There is a fact that holds true in the visible world; the things that are most important in life are invisible. The air is invisible. Yet is there anything more essential for the life of men, animals, and plants? Molecules are invisible, as are atoms and electrons. And is not the visible world built up from these invisible elements? Invisible particles make up the visible world. How does the invisible become the visible? In what manner does the invisible become the visible? How is it that these invisible particles become objective and appear as the visible material world? From where do these invisible particles receive their visible, tangible, and numerous forms? Visible matter is composed of invisible particles. This is a paradox, yet it is also a fact. And on that paradox rest the world and its existence. The visible rests on the invisible and is composed of the invisible. The fact of the matter is that in the visible we ceaselessly observe and look up the objectification and manifestation of the invisible. Such is the law that governs the visible, world; at the same time it is an endless enigma and an infinite mystery.

Man is the best example of how the invisible is transformed into the visible; his invisible thoughts, his invisible feelings, his invisible desires and wishes are transformed into visible works, visible actions, and visible achievements. No matter from what angle he is observed, man, every man, is a miracle-worker simply because he is a man. He endlessly works miracles; he transforms the invisible into the visible. If he defends his honor, look! He defends something that is invisible, and he is ready to sacrifice for that invisible thing that which is visible in him; his own body.

Like all feelings, love is something invisible, yet how many lives have been sacrificed for her, the invisible? In its own nature, conscience is the most inner and most invisible thing; but by the reality of its manifestation, what is more evident and tangible?

Men hold to their convictions, suffer death for them; but are they not something invisible? And in general, all of man's thoughts and feelings, desires and beliefs are essentially invisible, even though their manifestations may be evidently perceptible. The visible man is just a manifestation, a projection of the invisible man: the outer man a projection of the inner. The visible man rests on the invisible, he exists through the invisible and of the invisible.

The bottom line is that the foundation of everything that is visible is the invisible; of man, his invisible soul; of the world, the invisible God. The invisible is the hypostasis of everything, the basis of everything, the substance of all things, that is, it is that upon which the world and everything in it rests. Every man who seriously inquires into the mysteries of this world and this life has to feel this. At the bottom of all that is visible, an invisible force is at work. The invisible is the strongest thing in our world of earthly perception; electricity, radium. The gravitational force is invisible, yet is stronger than all of the planets. It moves them like children move marbles.

The law that presides over all other laws in this world is the following: the invisible is the core of the visible; the invisible governs the visible. This world is God's laboratory in which the invisible is manufactured into the visible, but only up to a certain point. For there are limits to the transformation of the invisible into the visible. This is because the invisible is always larger, infinitely and profoundly broader, than the visible. Just as the spirit is incomparably wider and larger and more profound than the body it inhabits, so too the invisible core of every substance is wider, larger, and more profound than the matters it finds itself in.

In fact, the visible is the materialization of the invisible. But around the visible, and behind the visible, there extends the endless sea of the invisible.



In order for a nation to be straightened out, evil habits and sin must cease. Unfortunately people today, aside from a few, are deaf in soul; they don't hear. They are blind; they don't see; they walk in the darkness of sin.

As at the time of Noah, thus also the flood of sin, of corruption, of disbelief and impiety, threatens to drown everyone...people run with eagerness along the path of perdition.

Elder Philotheos Zervakos (+1980)

## FIT FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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 fatlings are killed, and everything 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.



As a man whose head is under water cannot inhale pure air, also a man whose thoughts are plunged into the cares of this world cannot absorb the sensation of the world to come.

St. Isaac the Syrian

## ON THE VIRTUE OF THE PERFECT, AMBIDEXTROUS MAN

By St. John Cassian (+430).

There are persons, who are referred to in Holy Scripture as ambidextrous. Ehud, *who used either hand as if it were his right hand*, is described as such in the Book of the Judges (3:15). We shall also be able to possess this quality in a spiritual way if by a good and correct use we put the things which are considered fortunate and right-handed and the things which are called unfortunate and left-handed on the right side, so that whatever befalls may become for us, in the words of the Apostle, “the arms of righteousness.” For we see that our inner man consists in two parts or, as I might say, two hands. No holy person can be without what we call the left hand, but perfect virtue is discerned in the fact that by proper use he turns both into a right hand.

Let us make what we are saying more understandable: The holy person has a right hand—namely, his spiritual achievements. He has this, when fervent in spirit, he masters all his desires and lusts; when, safe from every diabolical attack, he rejects and cuts off the vices of the flesh without effort or difficulty; when, raised from the earth, he contemplates all present and earthly realities as mere smoke and an empty shadow and disdains them as soon to disappear; when, with ecstatic mind, he not only ardently desires future realities but even sees them with clarity; when he is effectively fed by spiritual theoria; when he sees unlocked to himself the heavenly sacraments in all their brightness; when he sends prayers purely and swiftly to God; and when, inflamed with spiritual ardor, he passes over to invisible and eternal realities with such utter eagerness of soul that he cannot bring himself to believe that he is in the flesh.

He also has a left hand—when he is involved in the turmoil of trials, when the desires of the flesh are seething emotions and impulses; when the fire of aggravations enkindles or vainglory; when he is depressed by a death-dealing sadness; when every virtuous practice takes on a certain unbearable and darkly loathsome quality.

Whoever, then, is on what we have referred to as the right side is not elated at the approach of vainglory and, courageously struggling with the things on the left side, is not disheartened by any despair. Rather he seizes the arms of patience from adversity for the sake of exercising his virtue, uses both hands as right hands, and having triumphed in both respects, and snatches the palm of victory from the left as much as from the right.

Take Joseph the Patriarch as an example of being ambidextrous. In prosperity he was more thankful than his

father, Jacob, more devout than his brothers, and more acceptable to God. In adversity he was chaste, faithful to the Lord, more gentle to those who were imprisoned, heedless of insults, kind to his enemies, and not only respectful of his jealous and very nearly murderous brothers but even exceedingly kind in their regard.

Joseph, and others like him, for example Job the Long-Suffering, are rightly called ambidextrous. For they used either hand as if it were their right hand and passing through those things which the Apostle enumerates, they could all say alike: *By the arms of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by glory and dishonor, by bad reputation and good reputation*, and so forth.

We shall be ambidextrous ourselves, therefore, when neither an abundance nor a lack of present things change us—when the former does not push us into harmfully lax pleasures and the latter does not draw us into despair and complaining, but when in either case we are thankful to God and draw similar fruit from both successes and failures.



The Magi brought gold, incense and myrrh. Gold befits a King; incense is offered in sacrifice to God; the bodies of the dead are embalmed with myrrh. ... Accordingly, let us also offer gold to the Lord, Who has been born, that we may say that He rules everywhere. Let us offer incense, that we may believe that He, Who appeared in time, existed as God before time. Let us offer myrrh, that we may believe that He, Who [in His divinity] is unable to suffer, was a human being with a body like ours.

We offer gold to the new-born King, if we shine in His sight with the brightness of the wisdom from on high. We offer Him incense, if we enkindle—on the altar of our hearts—the thoughts of our human minds, by our holy pursuit of prayer; so as to give forth a sweet smell to God by our heavenly desire. We offer Him myrrh, if we mortify the vices of our bodies by our self denial.

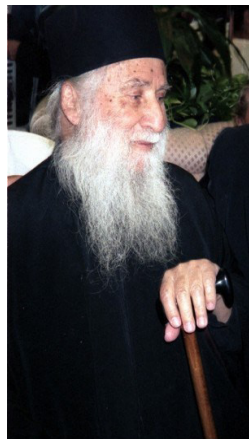
St. Gregory the Dialogist



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## THE FAITHFUL HUSBAND THAT WOULD NOT ABANDON HIS UNFAITHFUL WIFE

By Elder Joseph of Vatopaidi.



I will tell you of another characteristic of a proper spouse, which is extremely difficult to find in our day. But we did encounter one such person.

He was in every way a perfect character, a Christian, and completely social. He married late, around thirty years old, not because he was averse to marriage, but because he thought that was how it should be. So he said his prayers with faith, and found himself a young girl and married her.

The girl was young, ten years younger than him. Soon after he married her, she began her mischief. He pretended not to notice; he regarded her as his daughter and himself as her father. However, they had important business interests overseas and they had to go there, even if only temporarily. So he took her and they went abroad. When they arrived, she became very obstinate, and would say to herself: "He did this on purpose, to estrange me from my environment. I will desert him." So she abandoned and left him. She came back to Greece, and where do you think she went? To one of those "casino" places, and began to live the life of a free woman—one who is paid.

The husband however, from the day that she left him, never stopped praying with tears and insisting, in fact exhorting God: "All Good One, I will not retreat, I will not leave You alone; You were the One who gave me my wife. 'By the Lord is a man and woman harmonized' (according to the Bible). I want my wife. If the young girl has been deceived, must she be lost? Why did You come down to earth? Didn't You come to find the lost ones, to heal the sick, to resurrect the dead? I will not retreat. I will not let You rest. I want my wife; bring her back to me." He wept for two whole years.

His prayer was eventually heard and the young woman came to her senses. "Oh my," she confessed, "God will have to create another Hell, because this one is too small for me!" So she sat down and wrote him a letter, saying: "I dare not address your name; I have no such right. If I return, will you accept me as your servant?" He replied: "My love, why did you mention that word and hurt my feelings? Wasn't it me who sent you on a vacation and I was longing for my love to return to my open arms?"

So, he went and waited for her at the airport, as they had arranged. When she arrived, she fell down and began to beat herself and cry. He took her in his arms. "My love, why are

you like this and hurt my feelings? I was longing to see you again. Let's go home now; we never parted—I was always with you." And this young girl proved herself to be a faithful wife from then on.

And that is the stance that a man—a husband—should take.



### BEARING THE SHAME OF CONFESSION

From "Remember thy First Love" by Archimandrite Zacharias Zacharou.

**Question:** In taking the steps which you have presented to us, the most difficult thing, I think, is to overcome the fear of shame. This is what I try to do in my parish. People will not come to confession although their souls are burdened and things are driving them crazy, because they cannot overcome the shame to admit their sins. How do you lead people in this direction?

**Answer:** I think that the strength to bear shame is a gift from God. When I was a young and inexperienced spiritual father, Elder Sophrony told me to encourage the young people to confess precisely the things of which they are ashamed, for if they learn to do so, shame is transformed into strength against the passions, and they will overcome sin. This is precisely what occurred in the person of Zacchaeus. He bore shame voluntarily, and the Lord, Who was on His way to Jerusalem in order to suffer the Cross of shame, saw Zacchaeus bearing shame for His sake and recognized in him a kindred spirit. Zacchaeus had put himself prophetically in the way of the Christ, in the way of the Cross, and in a prophetic way the mystery of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ was activated in the heart of Zacchaeus. His heart was enlarged and he was able to enter into the power of faith. Christ has saved us through the Cross of shame, so when we suffer shame for His sake He considers this as gratitude, and in return He transmits to us His grace which regenerates our life.

This is exactly what happens in confession. Those who confess sincerely and take upon themselves the shame for their sins are regenerated. But those who shrug their shoulders and say, "Nothing special, the usual things..." they do not bear any shame, their heart remains unmoved, and they hardly receive any benefit. But those who, with shame and a contrite heart, strip their souls naked before God and before another mortal, "of like passions" (Acts 14:15) with them—that shame of theirs really finds the heart, humbles it and brings it to the surface. This then, opens the heart to receive the grace of regeneration, of consolation. We see this in the life of many that come to us: the greater the shame they bear with contrition, accusing themselves before God, the greater the grace they receive to amend their lives and make a new beginning.



## THE INCLUSIVE WISDOM OF THE CHURCH

By St. Nikolaj Velimirovic, from his book "The Agony of the Church," published in 1917.

The most magnificent sanctuary of the Eastern Churches is called *Aghia Sophia* (Holy Wisdom), whereas the most magnificent sanctuaries of the Western Churches are called St. Peter's, St. Paul's, or St. John's, etc. As every hair on our head and every line on the palm of our hand have certain significance, so these dedications of the Church have doubtless certain significance. And this significance is typical of the religion of the East and the West.

Western Christianity, grown upon the soil of a youthful individualism, preferred this or that apostle's personality and dedicated their best temples accordingly. The aged East, tired of individualistic ambitions, tired of great men, flagellated by the phantom of human greatness, was thirsty for something higher and more solid than any human personality. Adoration of great personalities being the very wisdom of this world, the East stretched its hands to a superhuman ideal, to the Holy Wisdom.

It is a psychological fact that youth sees his ideal in personal greatness, progressed age in holiness. The East asked for something more eternal than Peter, Paul or John. There is wisdom, and there is Holy Wisdom that entered the world with Jesus Christ. Christ was the embodiment of God's wisdom, the very incarnation of Holy Wisdom. This Wisdom stands above all human wisdom and revives and illuminates it. Holy Wisdom includes the essential wisdom of Peter, Paul, John, and any other apostle or seer, or any other thing or creature, as the ocean includes the water of many rivers.

In the darkest times of dissension, uncertainty or suffering, the Christian East looked beyond time and space to the Eternal Christ, The *Logos* of God, and asked for Light. And it looked to Eternity through this church in Constantinople, *Aghia Sophia*, as the all-embracing and all-reconciling, holy symbol. It was in the Holy Wisdom that they sought refuge and healing from their intellectual one-sidedness and ill-will.

### The Inclusive Wisdom of the Church's Founder

By His birth our Lord included and bound together the lowest and the highest, the natural and the supernatural: stable, manger, straw, sheep and shepherds on the one hand; stars, angels, magi and Davidic royal origin on the other. By His life He included the austerity of the Indian monks, of John the Baptist and the Nazarenes on the one hand; and on the other the Confucian moderate feasting, in the houses of friends, at the marriage feast and on other solemn occasions.

His life-drama was interwoven into the lives of all classes of people: men, women and children, Judaists and heathen,

King Herod and the proconsul Pilate, priests and soldiers, merchants and beggars, learned sophists and ignorant fools, the sick and the healthy, the righteous and the sinful, Jews and Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, and all others who could be met in Palestine, the very market of races and creeds.

He was by no means part of the establishment like the Pharisees and the doctors of law. He called both the Pharisees and their enemies to follow Him. He went to the temple to pray, but He also prayed alone in the desert. He kept the Sabbath and He broke the Sabbath by healing the sick and doing good on this sacred day. He came not to destroy the Law, but He brought something which was higher than the Law and even included the law itself, i.e., love and mercy.

He rebuked people who used to pray and say. "Lord, Lord!" And yet He prayed very often Himself. He rebuked those who were fasting, and yet He used to fast Himself. What He really looked for was neither prayer nor fasting, but the spirit in which one prayed or fasted.

He commanded the people to give to Caesar things which were Caesar's, and to God that which was God's. He did not criticize this or that form of government, nor did He accentuate Monarchism, Republicanism, or Socialism as one form preferable to another. Under His scheme all forms of government were included as equally good or evil according to what place they reserved for God, what gifts they duly gave to God, and by what spirit they were inspired.

He followed the customs of His nation, and did not break them or evade them purposely. He took food according to the Law, and washed hands according to the Law, and went to the Holy City and took part in worship in the temple (though He was *greater than the temple*), according to the Law. It seems that He excluded no form of worship or social life, though He despised the unclean and petty spirit with which the hypocrites filled these forms.

He embraced all nationalities and races. Nothing was for Him unclean that God had created, nothing but unclean spirits. When the Roman centurion asked help from Him, He gave it. And when the people beyond the Israelitish boundaries, from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, cried after Him, He did not listen to the exclusivistic warnings of His disciples, but He distributed even there His divine mercy. He was mindful even of the people of Nineveh. And when He sent His disciples, He sent them to *all nations*.

Finally, He included the natural and the supernatural. He talked with spirits. He saw Satan as lightning fall from heaven. He stood amongst Peter, John and James on one side, and Moses and Elias on the other. All the people saw lilies in the field and sparrows upon the roof, but He saw more, He saw how His Father clothed the lilies and how He fed the sparrows. He united the natural and the supernatural in His teaching.

*Love those who love thee* was a natural teaching. But He added *and those who hate and persecute thee*, which was supernatural. *Give to them who give to thee* was a natural teaching. But

He added: *and to them who do not give to thee*, which was supernatural. *Bless those who bless thee*. But He added: *and those who curse thee*, which was supernatural.

And He united the natural and supernatural in His death. He suffered and died in agony. He rose from the dead, descended to Hell and ascended to Heaven. For Him there was as little boundary between heaven and earth, between nature and supernature, as between Israel and Canaan, or as between man and man, or form and form.

His wisdom was inclusive from the beginning to the end. What did He ever exclude—save unclean spirits? He was the Holy Wisdom, in which everyone could find a mansion for himself, every disciple, every nation, every form of worship, everything—but the unclean spirit.

### The Inclusive Wisdom in the Church's Organization

Jesus Christ gave the largest possible scheme on which to work and the largest foundation to build upon. There is no other name in history upon which more has been constructed than upon His name. The ancient Church realized it from the beginning, and declared it. She was inclusive from the first, inclusive in her teaching and worship.

**Inclusive in Teaching:** Christ was put in the centre of the world's history. He represented what was the best and highest in Eastern and Western thought. The dream of Messiah was the best and highest in the Jewish conception. Well, Jesus was the Messiah. The expectation of a second Adam, the redeemer of the first, sinful Adam, was common among the peoples in Palestine and Mesopotamia. Well, Jesus was the second Adam, the expected Redeemer, and God's Messenger.

Egypt had an intuition into the mystery of the Divinity as a Trinity. However rough may have been that idea, the Trinity being thought of as a human family of Father, Mother, and Son, still it existed very vividly in Egypt. And the people expected the coming of God's only Son, the third person of their Trinity, not an imaginary being like Horus, but the real son of Osiris in flesh and blood who would bring happiness to men. Well, Jesus of Nazareth was this Son of God, and He as Christ was the eternal sharer of the Divine Trinity.

India was the cradle of the teaching of the Incarnation. The supreme God, Brahma, had already been incarnated in many persons since the dawn of history. But the highest incarnation of Him was still to come. Well, Jesus Christ was this highest incarnation of Brahma in human shape.

The cultivated polytheists did not like the idea of a monotonous theology of one solitary God. They liked rather

a divine company upon Olympus. Well, Christianity with its Trinity-teaching presented to them a limited polytheism. God was not physically one, as in Judaism, nor many, as in Hellenism. He was a Trinitarian Plurality in Unity. He was not a grim hermit, but He had the riches of an eternal life.

The intellectual Greeks and Hellenists climbed to the idea of one God and of Logos, the Mediator between God and the world, through whom God created whatever He created, and who may be incarnated for the salvation of the fallen, suffering creation. Well, Jesus Christ could include in His person this wonderful doctrine of Neoplatonism.

The mountainous Asia under Caucasus and Ararat, plunged into the mystery of Mithras, which was born out of the Zoroastrian dualistic religion of light and darkness, of Ormuzd and Ahriman. Well now, Christ, the friend of humanity, revealed Himself as the God of light struggling against Satan, the enemy of humanity.

Rome, politically ruling the world, was longing for a sacred King, for a Prince of Peace, who should come from the East and bring to the people some higher and truer happiness than that deceiving chimera of political bigness. Well, Christ should be this universal, sacred King, this Prince of Peace, and Messenger of a durable happiness. It is not true that Christ had His prophets among the people of Israel only. His prophets existed in every race and every religion and philosophy of old.

That is the reason why the whole world could claim Christ, and how He can be preached to everybody and accepted by everybody. Behold, He was at home everywhere!

**Inclusive in Worship:** Inclusive in doctrine, the primitive Church was wisely inclusive in worship too. It would be nonsense to speak of Christian worship as of something quite new and surprising. There was very little new and very little surprising in it indeed; almost nothing. The first Church met for prayer in the Jewish temple. Wherever the apostles came to preach the new Gospel they went to the old places of prayer, to the temples of Jehovah. Their Christian spirit did not revolt against the old forms of worship. Later on the naked Christian spirit needed to be clothed, and it was clothed. But when Israel looked to Christian worship they recognized much—forms, signs, vestments and administration—to be like their own. And not only Israel, but even Egypt, India, Babylon and Persia, Greece and Rome, yea, the Pagans of North and South. If Nature could speak, it could say how much it lent of its own to Christian worship.

A student of ancient history one day asked me: "How can I recognise the Christian religion as the best of all, when I



know how much it borrowed from the ancient religious forms of worship? How poor it looks without all that!”

I said: “Just this wonderful power of embracing and assimilating gives evidence of the vitality and universality of Christianity. It is too large in spirit to be clothed by one nation or one race only. It is too rich in spirit and destination to be expressed by one tongue, by one sign, or one symbol, or one form. In the same sense as Christian doctrine was prepared and prophesied by the religions and the philosophies before Christ, in the same sense Christian worship was prepared and prophesied as well. Whenever the Christian spirit is strong the Church is not afraid of worship being strange, and ample, and even grotesque. The weaker the Christian spirit, the greater exclusiveness in worship.

Some people say: “It is wicked to use pagan architecture for the Church, and incense and fire, and music, or dance, or bowing, or kneeling, or signs and symbols, in Christian worship, because it is pagan.” Yes, all this is pagan indeed, but it is Christian too if we wish it to be. The Latin language was pagan, but now it is Christian too. The English language was a vehicle of Paganism as well, now it is a vehicle of Christianity. The human body was itself pagan too, but the Eternal Christ, God’s Holy Wisdom, entered it and filled it with a new spirit, and it ceased to be pagan.

We in the East sometimes use for our sacerdotal vestments Chinese silk made by pagan hands in China, or chalices and spoons and little bells and chains made by the Moslems, or precious stones gathered and scents prepared by the fire or stone-worshippers of Africa, and no one of us should be afraid to use them when worshipping Christ, as Christ Himself was not afraid to touch the most wretched human bodies or souls with His pure hands. Christianity cannot be defiled, using for its worship the works of pagan hands, but pagan people are hereby taking a share in Christian worship, physically and unconsciously, waiting for the moment when they will share in it spiritually and consciously as well. Every piece of Chinese silk in our vestments is a prophecy of the great Christian China.

### The Inclusive Wisdom in the Church’s Destination

Judaism was destined for the people of Israel only. The Christian Church was destined for the people of Israel too, but not for them only. She included Greeks as well.

The Greek polytheism of Olympus was destined for the Hellenic race only. The Christian Church was destined for the Hellenic race too, but not for it only. She included Indians as well.

Buddha’s wisdom was offered to the monks and vegetarians. Monks and vegetarians the Christian Church included in her lap, but also married and social people too.

Pythagoras founded a religious society of intellectual aristocrats. The Christian Church from the beginning included intellectual aristocrats side by side with the unlettered.

The Persian prophet, Zoroaster, recruited soldiers of the god of light among the best men to fight against the god of darkness. His religious institution was like a military barracks. The Christian Church included both the best and the worst, the righteous and the sinners, the healthy and the sick. It was a barracks and a hospital at the same time. It was an institution both for spiritual fighting and spiritual healing.

The Chinese sage, Confucius, preached a wonderful ethical pragmatism, and the profound thinker, Lao-Tse, preached an all-embracing spiritualism. Christian wisdom included both of them, opening Heaven for the first and showing the dramatic importance of the physical world for the second. Islam—yes, Islam had in some sense a Christian ambition: to win the whole world. The difference was that Islam wished world-conquest; the Church, the world’s salvation. Islam intended to subdue all men and bring them before God as His servants; the Church intended to educate all men, to purify and elevate them, and to bring them before God as His children.

And all others: star-worshippers, and fire, and wood, and water, and stone, and animal-worshippers had a touching sense of the immediate divine presence in nature. The Church came not to extinguish this sense but to explain and to subordinate it; to put God in the place of demons and hope instead of fear.

The Church came not to destroy, but to purify, to aid and to assimilate. The destination of the Church was neither national nor racial, but cosmic. No exclusive power was ever destined to be a world-power. The ultimate failure of Islam to become a world-power lies in its exclusiveness. It was with religion as with politics. Every exclusive policy is foredoomed to failure: the German as well as the Turkish and the Napoleonic.

The policy of the Church was designed by her Divine Founder: *He that is not against us is for us*. Well, there is no human race on earth wholly against Christ and wholly unprepared to receive Him. The wisdom of the Christian missionaries therefore is to see first in what ways Providence has prepared a soil for Christian seed; to see which of the Christian elements a race, or a religion, already possesses, and how to utilize these elements and weld them into Christianity. All that in order to make Christianity grow organically, instead of pushing it mechanically.

### Conclusion

In summary let me repeat again: the wisdom of the Church has been inclusive. Inclusive was the wisdom of her Founder, inclusive the wisdom of her organization and of her destination. Exclusiveness was the very sickness and weakness of the Church. That is why we in the East, in the time of sickness of the Church, looked neither towards Peter, nor Paul, nor John, but towards the Holy Wisdom, the all-healing and all-illuminating. For *Aghia Sophia* in Constantinople, the temple dedicated to Christ the Eternal, includes in itself the sanctuaries of Peter, Paul and John; moreover, it is supported

even by some pillars of Diana's temple from Ephesus and has many other things, in style or material, which belonged to the Paganism of old. Indeed, *Aghia Sophia* has room and heart even for Islam. The Mohamedans have been praising it as the best of "their" sanctuaries!

I speak thus to you because I am sure you will not misunderstand me. And because I know all of you in the West to be a race of the world-wide spirit, I dare to make this appeal to you. Look to the Holy Wisdom! Look beyond Peter, and Paul, and John—through them and still beyond them! Every Church has her prophet, her apostle, her angel. Look now over them all to the very top of the pyramid, where all the lines meet!

Either Christianity is one, or there is no Christianity. Either the Church is universal, or there is no Church.

There lived once upon a time twelve men as different as any twelve men could be. And the Holy Wisdom united all of them into one spiritual body. Such was the first Church of the twelve, and such ought to be the last Church of the millions: different in all her parts, but cemented by the Holy Wisdom into one glorious building.

Christ, God's Holy Wisdom, includes all of us, why should we exclude each other? He was sent for the salvation of China and Japan and India as well as for that of the Jews and Greeks. Well, let us quarrel no more about the "circumcision" while a milliard of human beings are still waiting to hear for the first time the name of Jesus Christ—yea, for the first time after two thousand years!

Let the present time be the new Pentecost for us all. I speak to you, the British: don't look around you and wait; it is yours to start. All the peoples of earth are looking towards you and listening to you. Don't be too shy to start. To start what? To start a revival of the primitive wisdom of the Church, i.e., to confess and declare:

—That Christianity in its integrity is one and indivisible.

—That Christianity is not a precious stone preserved in a box called the Church of England, or the Church of the East, or Rome, but that it is the common good of mankind, destined for all continents and all races.

—That there is no constituent of the present European civilization, but the Christian religion, which could stop the brutal struggle among men, in one form or another, and guarantee a Godlike peace profitable for the whole of mankind.

All of us, small or great nations, are now looking to you with respect, not only for the victory over a revived anachronical Paganism in Central Europe, but also for a formulation of the new ideal, of saving power for all men.

Great is our expectation indeed, but it is justified by your gifts, given to you by Providence. Therefore let your hearts be larger than your Empire and your national Church, and the respect of mankind towards you will be warmed by love. Surely there can not be built a greater Empire than yours,

humanly speaking. The only greater Empire than yours will be Christ's Empire. And if you are longing for something greater than your present possession, you are indeed longing for this universal, pan-human Empire of Christ. Otherwise you would be sticking either at a stagnancy or at something impossible. Both would be unwise: nature tolerates no stagnancy and punishes experiments with the impossible.

But who am I to teach you? *A reed* (from the wilderness) *shaken with the wind*? Not I but the present despair of the world teaches you. I am only a loud amongst many suffocated cries from West and East, from North and South, directed to you: lift up your hearts and listen! God is now doing a great thing through you, and the whole world is expecting a great thing from you. What is this great thing? How to reach it? Pray and listen!

One thing only is sure, that this great thing will come neither from any Foreign Office nor from any War Office, but from the living Christian Church. Yes, she is still living, although she looks dead. She is only sleeping. But Christ is standing beside her now, calling: *Rise, ye daughter! Talitha Cumi!*



**A**lways seek in your prayers first and foremost that God grant you humble-mindedness. Persist in this request of yours, for without true humble-mindedness nothing good or worth a reward is achieved.

Just as the apostle Paul says: "*What do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?*" (1 Cor 4:7). *Everyone that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord.* (Prov 16:5). Therefore, my child, struggle against this miserable passion by being humble-minded and contemplating what **great humility the Lord of glory showed in becoming man and humbling Himself to the point of abuse, slander, and the Cross.** But also all the holy people of God showed exceptional humility, by which they became holy and attested to us that there is no road leading to salvation other than this. Espouse whatever gives you humility, even if it hurts and makes you feel as if you were dying. The outcome of the pain will be a blessing from God and progress towards the most excellent of virtues, humility.

I pray that our God, Jesus, will grant you this indelibly in your soul.

**Elder Ephraim of Filotheou**  
From "*Counsels from the Holy Mountain*"

## A TRUE STORY...

*Translated from "Raiskie Tsveti Russi Zmli," initially printed by the Russian Orthodox Youth Committee, Baldwin Place, N.Y., 1984.*

*Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. [Pss 100:6]*

† † †

During his stay in Moscow in the spring of 1707, Tsar Peter Alexeevich commissioned Prince Feodor Yurevich Romodanovsky to organize the penitentiary system. And so, Romodanovsky set out on an inspection of the Moscow prisons. In the convict prison, accompanied by an inspector and a guard, he walked along all the corridors, looking into each cell and inquiring about the prisoners.

Suddenly, one of the convicts addressed him: "Esteemed Prince! We know that you are a pious and God-fearing man, that you venerate the memory of the saints, especially that of our hierarch St. Nicholas the Wonderworker. For his sake, the merciful one, show thy generous mercy and let me go home for a visit, just for two days."

"What?!" Exclaimed the astonished Romodanovsky. "Are you crazy to think of asking such a thing?"

"I am fully aware and of sound mind," replied the convict. "I shall add that in my part of the country the feast of St. Nicholas is particularly honored. There in the village church is an altar dedicated to him. And besides, I long to see my young wife and my little children. I want to embrace and to kiss them. Let me go..."

"What kind of a man is this?" Asked the prince.

"He murdered one of the tsar's soldiers," answered the guard.

"What kind of soldier?"

"One of the Preobrazhensk regiment. True," added the guard, "it was committed in a fit of anger."

The prisoner continued: "Merciful prince! It's true, I'm a great criminal. I repent of my deed before God and man. Nevertheless, I'd like to go home for a visit. I'm asking for two days only, and be assured that on the third day I shall return here on my own."

The convict's frankness impressed the prince, and he asked him, "Who will act as surety for you?"

"St. Nicholas the Wonderworker," answered the prisoner. "He will secure me against any temptation."

Here Romodanovsky looked the prisoner straight in the eyes, and something warmly compassionate moved in his soul.

"Unfetter him and release him for two days," he ordered, pointing to the prisoner.

"Your honor," said the inspector, "I dare say he will deceive you. He has only to make it out of the prison and there'll be no trace of him. Nothing in the world is sacred for these criminals. They are masters of fine speech."

Romodanovsky pondered these words...

"It's true," he thought. "Once he leaves the prison where would one look for him? Maybe he isn't even interested in going home but just wants to be released and do what he pleases... Obviously, I wasn't thinking when I gave the order. But once said, there's no turning back; a Romodanovsky doesn't take back his words."

The prince looked once again into the open face of the convict and repeated: "Release him from prison for two days! I have faith that he will return at the appointed time. His holy surety will guarantee it."

The prisoner threw himself at the feet of the kind prince, while the inspector, sullen and pessimistic, ordered the guard to unfetter him.

† † †

Twenty *versts* from Moscow (a *verst* is Russian unit of length of approximately one kilometer, *Ed.*), in the village of Nikolsk, the feast for St. Nicholas the Wonderworker was in full swing. At the end of the Liturgy the people spilled out from the church onto the market square. There a colorful picture of a fair presented itself. The temporarily released prisoner mingled happily in the midst of the crowd. In his arms he held a beautiful child who clung tightly with his pudgy arms around the neck of his father. Beside them walked a slender young woman, holding by the hand a lively boy.

"My poor, unfortunate husband," said the woman, "don't leave us orphaned. See how agreeable life is in freedom. But there—prison, fetters. True, you killed one of the tsar's soldiers. But you did so without evil motive, unintentionally, by accident. Why must you torment yourself in eternal imprisonment and ruin your unhappy family!"

"I can't, my dear," answered the prisoner. "I promised..."

"As a prisoner, I'm sure you promised many things," continued his wife. "If you don't return, no one will be able to do anything. Let's hurry away from here, let's go to the Don. There we can live a free life. Our sons will grow up to be brave Cossacks and will serve our Tsar-batiushka for you."

The prisoner considered the tempting words of his wife. To go away to the Don, to live in freedom... But will it be like that? Will it really be good there? And the conscience? That holy sponsor, who is more powerful than any prison or earthly exile... What shall I do if I deceive his sacred memory? Everything will be lost: there will be neither success, nor joy, nor happiness. I shall pine away worse than a captive slave. It was not in vain that the prince said the Saint would not permit deception.

Under the persuasive arguments of his beloved wife, however, the unfortunate man again began to waver, and he was close to giving in to the decision to run away with his family. But there in the depths of his soul something powerful stopped him, turning his mind towards what was just and true. The prisoner listened to this and thought, "No, Saint

Nicholas won't allow it! I must act according to my conscience."

Taking leave of his family the next day, he said to them: "Although it is difficult for me to part with you, I nevertheless feel that my conscience is at peace. And I trust that he who is my surety will save me from further troubles and misfortunes."

† † †

In two days time he was already in Moscow and arrived at the prison an hour before Rodomanovsky drove up. "I was passing by," said the prince to the inspector who met him, "and I remembered about the convict who called upon Saint Nicholas to act as his surety. His term of release is up. Has he returned?"

"Yes, your honor," replied the inspector. "An altogether extraordinary case. He returned within the allotted time and is back in prison."

"Most commendable!" Exclaimed the prince. "Today I'm to see the Tsar and I shall tell him about this rare case."

The next day the convict prison was buzzing with the news that in the morning a messenger had come from the Tsar and had taken the prisoner to the palace. When the prisoner returned everyone impatiently asked him what the Tsar-batiushka had said to him.

"Our majesty," replied the prisoner, "wished to know about the crime for which I was sentenced. Then, having mercifully heard my admission, he said that he is reducing my term."

Here the prisoner crossed himself and added with emotion: "Glory to St. Nicholas the Wonderworker who, in a critical moment, helped me to vanquish my temptation."

And within a short time the prisoner was set at liberty...



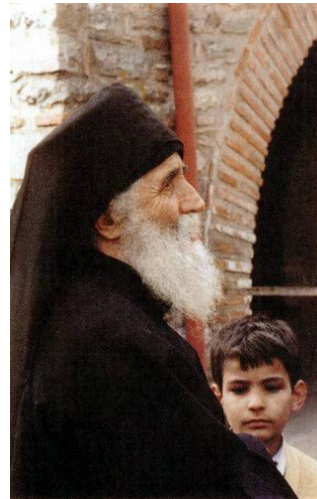
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## LONG HAIR ON MEN

*From the "Life of Elder Paisios the Athonite"*



One time a young man with long hair in a ponytail came to see the elder. The elder asked him,

"Hey, young man, what work do you do?"

"I'm a student," he answered.

"Do you have any classes left to pass?" Asked the elder.

"I have eight."

"If you want to pass them, come over here so I can give you a haircut," he told him smiling.

He went into his cell, brought his scissors and cut his hair. The young man considered it a blessing, and he told others about it, and they went to receive a similar blessing. "I've tonsured many people," he would say laughing.

"Elder, what do you do with their hair?"

Smiling, he would answer, "I keep it and give it to the bald."

Another time he mentioned humbly, "If there's a chance that I'll be saved, it will be through the prayers of mothers. Do you know how many letters I receive in which, being moved, they thank me, since I convinced their children to cut their hair and take out their earrings?"

He didn't want men to have long hair, because he considered it effeminate, and quoted the passage by the Apostle Paul, *if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him.* (1 Cor II:14)

When he would see young men with long hair he would ask them, "The dedicated (monastics) and the absent-minded [1] let their hair grow out. Which of the two are you?"

† † †

[1] This is another clever witticism of the elder's. The words that he chose, "αφιειρωμένοι" (those dedicated) and "αφηρημένοι" (the absent-minded), are phonetically similar – *Ed.*



With regard to self-control in eating, we must never feel loathing for any kind of food, for to do so is abominable and utterly demonic. It is emphatically not because any kind of food is bad in itself that we refrain from it. But by not eating too much or too richly we can to some extent keep in check the excitable parts of our body. In addition we can give to the poor what remains over, for this is the mark of sincere love.

St. Diadochos of Photiki (5<sup>th</sup> century ascetic)

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## FOOL'S WATER

*By the Theologian and Iconographer Photios Kontoglou.*



Once upon a time there was a Sultan who was good and just. This Sultan had a Vizier (chief adviser) who was equally good and just. The Vizier also happened to be an astrologer. One day the Vizier said to the Sultan that he had seen a sign in the heavens which said that it was going to rain “fool’s water,” and whosoever drinks from that water will become foolish. All the people in the land

will drink from that water and they will lose their reasoning, they will no longer have a good sense of anything, they will not be able to tell right from wrong, nor truth from falsehood, or sweet from sour, not even justice from injustice.

When the Sultan heard this he turned to the Vizier and said, “Since everybody will lose their minds we must take care not to lose ours, for otherwise how will we make just judgments?”

The Vizier told him that he was quite right and that he should order that the good water they now drank was collected and kept in special reservoirs, so that they wouldn’t drink from the ruined water and make foolish and unjust judgments, but rather just ones, as they were obliged to. That is what happened.

A little while later it really did rain, and the rain that came down really was fool’s water, and the people really did become

fools. The poor things had no longer any idea of what was happening to them. They thought that falsehood was truth, good was bad, and injustice was justice. However, the Sultan and his Vizier drank from the good water which they had stored away and so did not lose their reasoning, but rather judged everybody with justice and righteousness. However everybody took this the wrong way, and they were not pleased with the Sultan’s and the Vizier’s judgments. They shouted that they had been wronged; they nearly caused a revolution.

Sometime later, when they had seen more than enough, the Sultan and the Vizier lost their courage, and the Sultan said to the Vizier, “Those poor fellows really have lost their minds, and they see everything the wrong way around. If we carry on like this they will kill us because we want to judge them correctly with justice. Therefore my dear Vizier, let’s throw away the good water and let us also drink the fool’s water. We will become like them and then they’ll understand us and they’ll love us again.”

That’s what happened. They also drank from the fool’s water, they lost their minds and started to make foolish and unjust judgments, and all the people were happy and congratulated the Sultan for his wisdom...

For us, my fellow Orthodox Christian, let us not throw away the small amount of water that we have still kept in the reservoir of tradition. Let us rather drink from this good water, and let us call others to drink from it... Let them drink and be refreshed by the water that flows from the rock, from our good and immortal water, from the *Water of Life*.