

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

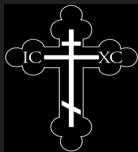
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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ON THE NEW YEAR

St. Barsanuphius of Optina, on Jan. 1st, 1913 (after the Liturgy—on the year of his repose).

St. Barsanuphius is one of our lesser known Orthodox saints who possessed the gifts of clairvoyance and of healing people afflicted with physical and spiritual ailments. A small story best demonstrates the divine gifts the saint possessed.

One of his spiritual sons, Fr. Innocent Pavlov, recalled his first Confession with the elder. He became fearful because the saint seemed to know his innermost thoughts, reminding him of people and events which he had forgotten. St. Barsanuphius spoke gently and told him that it was God who had revealed to him these things about Fr. Innocent. "During my lifetime, do not tell anyone about what you are experiencing now," he said, "but you may speak of it after my death."

† † †

I greet all of you gathered here with the New Year.

I congratulate you with the joys that I hope the Lord might send you in the coming year. I congratulate you also with the sorrows that will inevitably visit you this year: perhaps today, perhaps tomorrow, or in the near future.

Incidentally, do not be confused by sorrows or fear them. Sorrows and joys are closely bound up with each other. This may seem strange to you, but remember the words of the Savior: *A woman when she is in travail bath*

sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.

(Jn 16:21). Day turns to night, and night turns to day, bad weather turns to good; so also does sorrow turn into joy, and joy into sorrow.

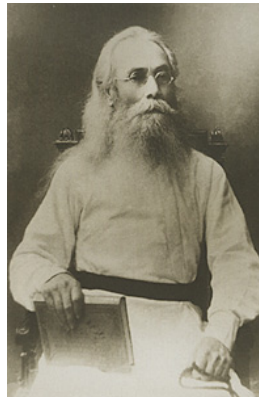
The Apostle Paul pronounced threatening words against those who do not endure any punishment that comes from God: *If you are left without punishment, you are illegitimate children. Do not be depressed; let those be depressed who do not believe in God. For them, of course, sorrow is onerous, because they know only earthly pleasures. But*

people who believe in God should not despond, because through sorrows they receive the rights of sons, without which one cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Scorning the impious decree, the Children brought up together in godliness feared not the threat of fire, but standing in the midst of the

flames, they sang: 'O God of our fathers, blessed art Thou. (Irmos of the Nativity of Christ, tone 1, canticle 7).

Sorrows are that very threat of fire, or trial, but we must not fear them; rather we must be like the godly children and sing unto God in our sorrows, believing that they are sent to us by God for our salvation. May the Lord save you all, and lead you to the Kingdom of Unwaning Light! Amen.



The Brotherhood of St. POIMEN wishes our readers a blessed and prosperous 2013. We completed our tenth year of publication, in spite of the challenges we have faced and ONLY through the prayers, ideas, feedback and monetary support of our many readers, world-wide. We humbly wish to remind you that this publication is made possible through your donations and thus ask that you not forget your 2013 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 20th century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

If you wish to receive this periodical, please write or e-mail us with your address. We suggest to all that share our views and wish to assist us to donate \$24 per annum. This amount will greatly assist us in the costs it takes to bring these articles to you, as well as to aid in our other educational and philanthropic activities.

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THE SECOND COMING OF OUR LORD

By Elder Cleopa of Romania, from "The Truth of Our Faith," Ch. 15.



Inquirer: Father, what can you tell us about the exact date of the Second Coming of Christ?

Elder Cleopa: Christ's true Church provides us with a number of apt testimonies which show that God did not entrust this date to anyone, neither to angels, nor to men, nor even to His own Son as man.

Listen to the divine words of

Scripture on the subject:

But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be ... Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. (Mt 24:36-51).

If neither the angels in heaven nor the Son of Man Himself as man know the appointed time, how is it possible for it to be known among men? From the words of the Saviour it is

understood only that we must be ever vigilant and mindful of our salvation, ever ready for the coming of the Lord, for we know neither the day nor the hour of His coming, nor even the hour of our own end in this life. His appearance will be unexpected, as the Lord forewarned us when he said, *Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh. (Mt 25:13).*

Inquirer: It is true that at first the Apostles didn't know the exact date of the Second Coming of the Saviour (Mt 24:36), however, from the time they were strengthened from on high at the descent of the Holy Spirit they were made aware of all. For, as the Saviour foretold, by the Holy Spirit all the mysteries were revealed: *I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come. (Jn. 16:12-13).* From the time of the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the Apostles, as well as all faithful Christians, with the illumination and wisdom given them by the Holy Spirit, were made able to know all truth. In other words, they became aware of the entirety of the divine plan for the history of the world and its end, and thus were able to determine through Holy Scripture the events of the future, such as the date of the Second Coming. Isn't such a determination possible?

Elder Cleopa: William Miller calculated that, according to Scripture, the Second Coming of Christ would take place between the first of March 1843 and the first of March 1844. He had announced this date as early as 1833 in the brochure "Prophecy from Holy Scripture of the Second Coming of the Lord in the year 1843." Another "prophet," Joseph Chimes, had proposed in the journals "The Voice of

Midnight" (1842) and "The Bell of Danger" that the Lord would come in the year 1843.

The closest disciple of Miller, a Mr. Snow, decided to add to the prophecy of Miller another seven months and ten days, predetermining the date of the Second Coming of the Lord as the tenth of October 1844. He was also put to ridicule along with his teacher. Those who believed their pronouncements spent their fortunes, handing out all they had and buying white garments and candles in order to go out and meet the Lord.

It is possible that the shop windows were even filled then with white garments for those "travelling to heaven" on the tenth of October 1844. Yet, this day passed like all others. The so-called prophets became the recipients of every kind of shame, derision and mockery from those deluded people who had scattered their fortunes trusting in the false prophecies.

From these pitiful experiences we must at least come to understand that the promise of our Saviour Jesus Christ concerning the revelation of the future by the Holy Spirit did not refer to the date of the Second Coming, as it appeared to many, but rather to prophecies pertaining to various events and signs due to come to pass in the Church. For, indeed, there have been revelations through the Holy Spirit, as we see, for example, in the Book of Revelation and other books of Holy Scripture. These revelations contain a variety of eschatological teachings (on the appearance of the Antichrist, of the false prophets, the unleashing of the persecutions of Christians), as well as the indispensable wisdom of the Apostles which enabled them to present the divine teachings when they were led to give a defence before their accusers (Mt 10:19-20). These are the future events of which the Saviour speaks in the text that you read.

Inquirer: The Apostle Paul writes: *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.* (1Thess 5:4-5). From these words it follows that Christians can and should know the exact date of the Second Coming in order to be ready to accept it.

Elder Cleopa: Why have you read from only verses four and five of chapter five from First Thessalonians, leaving out verses one and two which serve to interpret verses four and five? Listen to what the Apostle Paul says there: *But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.* (1 Thess 5:1-2). This is the truth to which the Christ's Church has remained faithful.

The true Church teaches, equally with the Apostle Paul, that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night and that no one knows the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man will come.

It is possible **only for the approach of the Second Coming** to be known by the signs which must come before:

~ The preaching of the Gospel throughout the world. (Mt 24:15).

~ The turn of the Jews to Christianity after the preaching of the Gospel in the entire world. (2 Rom 11:25-34).

~ The appearance of the Antichrist, also called the man of iniquity or the beast, together with his representatives, pseudo-christs, false prophets, and every type of false wonder worked by the power of Satan in order to deceive the people. The Antichrist will sit in the place of God acting as if he were God and as an unrelenting beast he will pursue

with all rage and furor the chosen servants of God. (1 Jn 2:18; 2Thess 2:3-11; Rev 13:1-8, 20:1-10; Mt 24:9).

~ The multiplication of wickedness and the growing cold of love between men, hatred and betrayal of one another. (Mt 24:10-12).

~ A torrent of bloodshed, wars and rumors of wars between nations, people and states. (Mt 24:6-7).

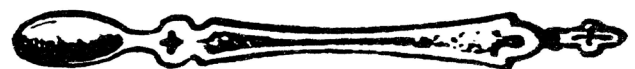
~ The appearance of calamities such as mass starvation, sicknesses, etc. (Mt 24:7-9).

~ The appearance of certain signs in the world such as the darkening of the sun and moon, the falling of stars from the sky, the passing away of heaven and earth.

~ The appearance in the heavens of the sign of the Son of Man, the True Cross, because this is the sign of victory of our Lord and no other sign so alerts us of His imminent arrival as does His Cross.

The Lord explains these signs thus: *Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh. So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors.* (Mt 24:32-33).

Therefore, concerning the signs that will precede the Second Coming of the Lord, we have explanations and confirmation from the Saviour Himself, while of the exact date of His coming neither the angels nor even the Son of Man Himself, as man, are informed, but the Father alone knows.



Send your treasures to the heavenly storage room. Deposit your wealth in God's Bank, distributing it to the poor, the orphans and the widows, so that you can receive a million times more in the Second coming of Christ...

Elder Philotheos Zervakos (+1980)



ALPHA AND OMEGA

From the Editor of "Orthodox America," Issue 161, Vol. XVIII, no. 5, January, 2000.



The arrival of a new year traditionally prompts reflections and resolutions, and when this new year brings with it not only a new century but a new millennium, it simply expands our time frame. Our thoughts

are drawn back to the origin of time and the creation of the world, and forward to the end of time, to the end of this world and the beginning of *a new heaven and a new earth*.

When the new millennium was still some distance away, there was a noticeable increase in end time speculations, heightened by the spectre of a Y2K disaster. But the millennial fervor cooled as the media downplayed the prospect of a catastrophe. Ministries and ministers, such as Jerry Falwell and Midnight Cry, who marketed end-time messages, did not find the anticipated demand for their tapes and other materials. Meanwhile, the Center for Millennial Studies, when asked whether it would close its books, indicated that it would turn its attention to study disappointment about failed prophecies in end-time groups ("Religion Watch," 12/99).

In the mid 1970s, I was involved in a group that had grown out of the Jesus Movement. The fervor and singular devotion of its members was due in part to a perception that Christ was coming "soon." One fellow told me, only half jokingly, that if Christ did not come within five years, he was going to leave the group and, presumably, his faith in Christ. It may be that this came from being immersed in the New Testament—where one does find the expectation that the Second Coming is imminent—without an appreciation for the two intervening millennia of church history. In any case, these Protestants often quoted passages such as, *Believe on the Lord Jesus and ye shall be saved* (Acts 16:31; cf Jn 3:16), but never, *He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved* (Mt 24:13), or, *In patience possess ye your souls* (Lk 1:19).

Guarded by Sacred Tradition, Orthodox are less prone to eschatological speculation. It is understood that while we should know the signs of the times, we should be more concerned about the end of our lives than about the end of the world. Here we have as much need for a lesson in patience and endurance as our Protestant friends.

Ours is a fast-paced world, where speed and efficiency are regarded as virtues. We drive fast cars, we eat fast food, we expect fast service; technologies compete to provide us with instant communication, instant gratification, and the more they succeed, the further they raise our expectations. Anything that interferes, that causes delay, that causes us to have to wait, anything that disrupts our tight schedules, becomes

reason for annoyance, vexation, irritation: we fume at the slower drivers on the highway, we become irritated with ourselves for invariably choosing the slow line at the checkout, we itch to get going when someone stops to chat. (It is one of the blessings of old age that time ceases to be such a relentless task master.) Daily we encounter numerous occasions that test our patience. They are not inconsequential.

The Holy Fathers emphasize the need for patient waiting and perseverance in the Christian struggle. It is not at the beginning but at the finish line that crowns are awarded. The Apostle Paul writes: *We are of Christ's household if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end* (Heb 3:14); and the Apostle James writes, *Behold, we count them happy which endure* (Jas 5:11), bringing to mind the patience of Job. Tertullian wrote a most instructive homily on the subject of patience, revealing it to be an essential companion of many other virtues. "[Patience] fortifies faith, is the pilot of peace; assists charity; establishes humility; waits long for repentance; sets her seal on confession; rules the flesh; preserves the spirit; bridles the tongue; restrains the hand; tramples temptations underfoot; drives away scandals; ... is beautiful in either sex, in every time of life." ("Of Patience," XV.) Saint John Chrysostom writes further, "*Patience means practicing forgiveness*." (Homily on Ephesians).

Patience is essential to prayer. The Apostle Paul enjoins the Ephesians to pray always, with all perseverance and supplication for all saints (6:18). Patience cannot be sustained without hope. The farmer patiently cultivates his fields with the hope that they will yield fruit in due season. The athlete runs with his eye on the prize. It is in the hope of a just settlement that the sisters continue to endure. Similarly, it is the hope of eternal blessedness promised by our Lord Jesus Christ that gives us the will to persevere in the Christian struggle.

Jesus Christ is our consummate desire, the very reason for our patience and perseverance, the object of our hope. In Him we embrace all eternity, for *He is eternal, Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last*. (Rev 22:13). It is He Who set in motion the millennia, and it is He Who shall halt their advance. For centuries, science has been trying to unlock the mystery of creation. For us it is sufficient to know that God created the heaven and the earth, and the time will come when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and these, too, shall be "good." As Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich writes: "When we know that the beginning is good, then we know that it tends towards and that its end will be good. Lo, in the words about the beginning there is hidden a prophecy about the end. As is the beginning, so will be the end. The end will be found in Him Who made the beginning."

Therefore, if we desire to partake of this good, *Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith*. (Heb 12:1-2).

THE MODEL OF THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN PRAYER

By St. Philaret the Confessor, Metropolitan of New York (+1985).



For Orthodox Christians, the model of prayer is, of course, the “Our Father” (the “Lord’s Prayer”). If we look at its composition and content, we see that, externally, it is divided into three parts: invocation, seven petitions, and a glorification. In its inner content, it can be divided into three common parts: the main one, which encompasses an invocation and the first three petitions; the petition about daily bread; and, three

petitions about our personal sins.

What is the foremost thing about which a Christian must pray? About that goal for which we must strive most of all: the Kingdom of God and His Truth. We see that this is the first part of the prayer. In appealing to God as the Heavenly Father, an Orthodox Christian testifies that our true fatherland is not on earth, but in heaven. *Our abode is in the heavens*, the Apostle firmly says.

In this appeal to the Father, an Orthodox Christian prays that God’s name be hallowed, both in the personal life of each of us and in human history. It is especially hallowed when we Orthodox Christians, through the example of our own lives, lead unbelievers to glorify the name of our Heavenly Father. Further, we pray that the Kingdom of God be manifested on earth.

Observing life, we see in it a constant struggle between two principles: light and darkness, truth and falsehood, good and evil. When we see this, we cannot but pray that there will be a victory of light over darkness and that there will be a triumph of God’s Kingdom—the kingdom of Truth and Good.

In the third petition of the Lord’s Prayer, we pray that God’s will be fulfilled in man’s life in the same way that it is fulfilled in the Heavenly world. The Christian conscience is aware and firmly convinces us that not only is it our duty, but it is real wisdom and the truth of life to submit to God’s will. The Heavenly Father knows what is beneficial and necessary for each one of us, and through His infinite love and goodness, wishes us good and salvation even more than we desire it for ourselves. Therefore, Apostle Peter says, *Cast all your cares on Him; for He cares for you.* (1Pet 5:7).

The fourth petition of the Lord’s Prayer is the only one which deals with bodily needs. We also turn to God and ask for all that is necessary for bodily life.

The fifth petition of the Lord’s Prayer concerns forgiveness of sins. In this petition, as elsewhere in His teaching, our Saviour makes it clear that an indispensable precondition of our receiving forgiveness of sins from God is our own forgiveness of our neighbors. But how often this petition is spoken falsely! We read, *Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors*, while in reality, we neither forgive nor forget, but are offended and conceal vexation in our heart, and even a desire for revenge. Therefore, each time a Christian repeats this petition, he must consider whether he has forgiven his enemies and offenders. If not, how can he expect forgiveness from God for himself?

The two last petitions, the sixth and seventh ones, speak of one thing: the causes of sin. At first we ask that its embryos be removed from us, that is, that we be delivered from enticements and temptations, and then that we be delivered from the evil one, that is, from the root of all sins, Satan. People usually fear external misfortunes: failures, illnesses, poverty, etc. Christianity teaches us to be more fearful for our immortal soul. *Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot harm the soul*, our Lord said, *but rather fear the one who can destroy the body and the soul...* Concerning external misfortunes, particularly trials and persecutions endured for the Faith, our Lord said to those who suffer them, *Rejoice and be glad, for great is your reward in the heavens.*

It is not external misfortunes and poverty that the Orthodox Christian must fear, but rather he must fear his own sins and falls. Everyone knows how much we become accustomed to sinning, literally sinning at each step and at each moment of our life. Sin is a violation of the Truth of God’s Law, and the result of sin is suffering and grief. The Lord’s Prayer instills in our hearts a great aversion to these spiritual evils, so that while humbly confessing our weakness and inclination toward sin, we ask God to preserve us from falling into sins and to deliver us from the evil master of sin—the devil.

At the end of these seven petitions, there has been added a solemn glorification of God’s power, authority and glory.^[*] This glorification of God’s grandeur contains a filial expression of unwavering and clear conviction that everything we ask for will be given to us from the love of the Heavenly Father: for His *is the kingdom and the power and the glory, unto the ages of ages. Amen.*

The Lord’s Prayer is not the only prayer of glorification, however. There are prayers which are purely and simply glorifications, such as *Praise the name of the Lord* or *Holy, Holy, Holy...* We do not use them as often, but they are representative of the endings of our prayers, especially in the Divine Services. Prayers of glorification must be seen as

especially elevated, for in them, we express Christian love for God and bow before the Most High.

The third aspect of prayer is thanksgiving. Quite understandably, a Christian who loves God and knows of His love, mercy and benefits cannot but experience feelings of thanksgiving in his heart. The most important prayer of thanksgiving is the most important Divine Service—the Holy Liturgy. Its main part, referred to as the *Thanksgiving (Eucharistic) Canon* begins with the words, *We thank the Lord...* And the pure, bloodless sacrifice, a sacrifice of truth, a sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ which is given us in the Holy Communion, is fulfilled by Christ Himself, by His Grace and almighty power, and it is only received by us, with a devotion of thankful love. This is why in the most important moments of the Liturgy, the priest solemnly exclaims, *Thine Own of Thine Own, we offer to Thee, in behalf of all and for all*, while the faithful respond with the hymn of thanksgiving, *We hymn Thee, we praise Thee, we give thanks to Thee, O our God...*

† † †

[*]The words, *For Yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory...* are not part of the Lord's prayer as such, but a liturgical response to it, included by the Evangelist. The fact that it appears in the Gospel shows how old the Liturgy is.



Pray as often as possible. Try to feel compunction and to weep, and you will see how much you will be relieved from thoughts and grief.

Prayer is a conversation of man with God. He who prays with a broken and humbled spirit is filled with divine gifts and blessings—that is, with joy, peace, comfort, illumination, and consolation—and he, too, becomes blessed. Prayer is a doubled-edged sword that slays despair, saves from danger, assuages grief, and so on. Prayer is a preventative medicine for all diseases of soul and body.

Be extremely careful with your imagination. Do not accept any image, because it will become an idol that you will worship. A wandering mind is a shameless bird and paints the most grotesque images: it enters into the depths of our neighbor's conscience and depicts his secret and hidden things. Immediately destroy the image with the prayer as soon as it begins to form. The more you delay, the more you will toil and suffer later.

By Elder Ephraim of Philotheou
From "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

IN HIS SERVICE...

From the sermon of Metropolitan Joseph of Petrograd (new martyr) at his consecration as bishop on March 15, 1909. According to KGB archives, Metropolitan Joseph was shot with Metropolitan Cyril in Chimkent on November 7, 1937, on the eve of the Feast of the Holy Archangel Michael.



In this unique, exceptionally significant, and most sacred moment of my life, when the call of our Lord—*follow me*—has touched even my extreme unworthiness, both joy and trembling, both blessedness and suffering embrace my lowly soul. Before my mental gaze stand the choirs of holy apostles, the ranks of great hierarchs, the builders and disseminators of Orthodox Faith and Christ's Church on earth... From the simple to the highly-educated, from the greatly infirm to those strong and rich in the powers of soul—they have all offered and placed their life and all their strength on the altar of Christ's love, have given themselves as food to that sacred Fire of Christ by which the whole universe blazes in Grace.

For me, too, to touch this Grace-giving Fire; for me, too, to offer my feeble powers—or rather infirmities—to the altar of the Universal Church; for me, too, to place my life in the furnace of the Flame of Christ, to hear the Lord's call to serve such a great work of God and receive the possibility of answering this call with the labor of the highest Apostolic expression of love and devotion to the Sweetest Heavenly Hierarchy.

Oh, how many grounds there are in this for joy! How sufficient this is to fill one with a feeling of unutterable heartfelt consolation and tender feeling! Yet, the source of such joy and consolation at the same time represents for me a source as well of an oppressive fear, of apprehensions, of heartfelt trouble and suffering. The beauty of the Apostles' feat, the beauty of the highest expression of love and devotion to the Savior, of the highest service of the Church of God on earth appear to my gaze not as mere words, but as true deeds, as the most living reality, outside all embellishments of thought and word.

And what labors, what ascetic feats, what sufferings has this reality not given us as an example, instruction, and fortification! Behold the bloody wounds on the bodies of the absolute prisoners of Christ's love, wounds lifted up with a meek prayer for their torturers upon their lips and with the shining of an unearthly joy in their faces! Behold all the horrors of persecution, torments, tortures—every kind and every endurance of death by means of which hell has attempted to unbalance the emissaries of the Crucified One, only deepening thereby its own defeat and disgrace!

WE MUST BE BORN AGAIN!

Transcribed, abridged, and translated from a taped talk with the nuns of the Lesna Convent, 1997; printed in "Pravoslavnaya Rus," no. 4 (1649), 2000, Jordanville.

When Christianity came to the human race, naturally there were found those people who, having read the Gospel, desired to realize it in their lives, at least to some small degree, at least one letter.

Indeed, when we read the Gospel, we understand that this is not just words, for in these words there is a power, in them is fire. This fire is not immediately apparent to everyone, but when it does become apparent to a person, he begins to think: Who am I, after all? And, how shall I lead my life in the light of these evangelical commands?

Those people who desired to fulfill in their lives the words of our Saviour, very soon realized that they are very difficult to realize in the circumstances in which we normally live. What happens normally? People get married, they have children; the children need to be brought up, to be cared for; someone has to work to support the family... And in this way they are overtaken by the cares of earthly life. Many understood that under such circumstances it is extremely difficult (although not impossible) to realize the Gospel ideal in their lives. How, then, was one to find a way that would allow one to realize to the maximum the evangelical precepts? It was this consideration that gave birth to monasticism.

Monasticism worked out specific forms of living. First there appeared great hermits, but not everyone could emulate them, inasmuch as it is very difficult to lead an ascetic life on one's own. Then there appeared the first communal monastic community, which at that time was not yet called a monastery; it was simply people who came together for the sake of their salvation. Gradually, monasticism acquired its customary character: it began not only to live apart, but also adopted a distinctive dress. The heart of monasticism is the sincere desire to realize the Gospel in one's life.

From monasticism came yet another very important concept: the need not only to avoid sin but to do something even greater. It is what the Saviour said to Nikodemos, who came secretly to converse with Him. Nikodemos was interested in learning the very essence, the ultimate meaning of the Saviour's mission on earth. And the Lord answered him. Now, He did not cite common truths: that one must

not sin, that one must live well, be good, etc. No. He said that one must be born again!

To be born again: this is the essential meaning of Christianity. And this is the meaning not only of monasticism, but of Christianity in general (although, of course, this task—to change oneself completely—stands at the center of monastic life). It is not only monastics but lay people who must be very vigilant towards themselves, towards their relations with others, who must control each movement of their soul. Because the aim is not only not to sin but to be totally reborn!

Can it be that the Lord descended from heaven, took on flesh and became man only in order to repeat to us, for the thousandth(!) time, what had been said by all the prophets: *Do not sin?* No. Everyone knows that one must not sin, even pagans and primitive peoples, for the law of conscience is written upon their hearts, as the apostle says. Go, find the most savage tribe of men, and you will be persuaded that even they know that one should not steal, one should not take another's wife, one should not kill. This is part of the natural law, which is known to all mankind. Nevertheless, the unbelievable, the unique, the astounding happened: God became man. And the Lord, throughout the course of His earthly mission, three and a half years, tried to explain, at first to the Apostles at least, that He is God. And He could not.

This was very difficult, because the human heart had hardened, people had become spiritually coarse; they could not understand that Christ was God. For them this was unfathomable: What did He mean, He was God? Even the devil, as our Orthodox Church teaches, did not believe and did not know that Christ was God. He saw in Him an extraordinary man, a wonderworker, but the devil had seen miracles before the time of Christ. Moses struck his rod and divided the sea, and the water stood *this way and that*. Do not think that it was divided by some kind of winds, as some Protestants teach. In the Holy Scripture it is said specifically that the waters became like two walls, forming a passageway.

The devil saw all this, but it did not impress him, for he was a former angel, and he was proud of the fact that he himself could perform many wonders. The devil thought that Christ was one of the righteous, and he knew that all the righteous had gone down into Hades: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others—with the exception of the prophet Elijah and Enoch, who were taken up into heaven.



The Saviour performed miracles. Once He said, *Sea, be calm*, and the waters became still and smooth as glass. It was then that the apostles asked themselves for the first time: *Who is this that even the water and the winds obey Him?* But the thought that God Himself had become man remained for them unbelievable. They still had a difficult way to go before they came to an understanding of this idea.

We already know that our Lord is Christ God. The age-old tradition of the Church tells us this. Now our principal task is to attain the Gospel ideal and to become united to our Saviour.

I happened to come into conversation with a young woman in Canada, who had graduated from university and became a psychiatrist. I asked her, "Tell me, what ideal do you hold up to people who are mentally ill? What are they to strive towards?" She answered, "The ideal of an average person, the common man." "What is that?" I responded. "Who can define the ideal of the common man? That is very vague. We have..." "Who is 'we'?" she asked. "We Christians," I answered. "We have a definite ideal—our Lord Jesus Christ. He is both God and Man, and for us He is the image of the ideal man."

And so we must strive to resemble, at least to some small degree, the Son of Man. This is what constitutes the meaning of Christianity. But here arises another question: How is one to approach this, what is one to do? Of course, the Lord also said simple things, that one must not sin, but this is not what constitutes the essence of Christianity. The essence is to make oneself incapable of sinning, to make oneself a stranger to sin. And what hinders our becoming so? Passions! Therefore we must become dispassionate.

Here we must understand what is meant by passion. Saint Makarios the Great explains that God gave us gifts; the greatest of these was love, then wisdom, then righteous zeal. These are the three principal gifts. And what have we done with them? We have distorted them, perverted them, and turned them into passions. For example, love... My God, what this word doesn't cover!—a whole succession of terrible sins, and all this is now called "love." Who did this? Of course we did, tempted by the devil, who put on as it were human nature. These passions now torment us, for we have become a depraved humanity. Everyone, from childhood, is depraved.

According to Saint Makarios, we have been given the task of transforming these passions back into virtues. For example, from lust to return to true, pure love for God and

neighbor. To put wisdom in its place. We deceive, we are cunning, we become rogues and cheats—these are manifestations of a perverted wisdom. The same goes for anger, scorn, hatred, murder—these are perversions of that zeal given us by God, for anger is to be used against our sins, against Satan, not against our neighbor.

Therefore, the task set before us consists not only in not sinning but in making ourselves incapable of sinning, in attaining dispassion. This is the aim of Christianity. If we do not understand this, then we do not understand what is Christianity. If, on the other hand, we do understand all this, then, in looking at an evildoer—and evildoers can also be highly gifted—we should say, "What a pity that this fellow is so gifted in evil. He could be a great wise man, but he has perverted the gift granted him." When we see a profligate, we should not despise and laugh at her (certainly not take advantage of her) but say, "What a pity that this woman, having such a great gift of love, is making such foul use of it and is distorting it."

This is what our attitude should be towards sinners. To become incapable of sinning is a difficult task indeed; it is the task of our whole life, for the Saviour said that in order to do this one must be born again. When the Jewish teacher Nikodemos heard these words from the Saviour, he exclaimed, *This is as difficult as entering again into our mother's womb.* Then the Saviour accused him: *You are a teacher of the people and yet you do not understand this.* That is, he did not understand that one must be born again spiritually.

Yes, this is a great task: to become dispassionate, that is, to become saints. We mustn't be afraid of this word. What is a saint? A saint is a normal person, a person as God made him. It is all the rest who are abnormal. We are all abnormal, for we have departed from God's norms. The Lord, after all, created man sinless, immortal, pure, holy, wise. What have we done with these gifts? We have perverted them so now there acts in all of us passions that compel us to do things that are sinful. Passion is a great and terrible power. We repent of our sins, but it is shameful to confess the same sins over and over again, our whole life long. It begs the question: Will that day ever come when we no longer fall into the same sinful actions? It will, if we seriously undertake to war against our passions.

Take the *Octoechos* [liturgical book containing the weekly variable texts in each of the eight tones, *Ed.*] or a canon to any saint; there is not a single liturgical text in which the passions are not mentioned, in which there is not an appeal



to the Lord, to the Mother of God or to a saint, asking for help in uprooting our passions. We read all this, and it's as if we do not understand; we continue to fall into the same sins. Instead, we should take deeply to heart the idea that we must rid ourselves of sin and become normal—from the spiritual point of view—people.

In our prayers, we must always have the thought: “Lord, deliver me from my passions.” There is nothing more important than this. Let this prayer constantly be with you; whether you pray in the morning, or at night, knock on the door of God’s mercy, that the Lord help you to rid yourself of passions.

A true physician, a good psychologist, and especially a spiritual father, if they look at our face, can immediately identify the passion that principally affects us. Look, for example, at the face of an alcoholic. Similarly, each of us must come to know his chief passion. Here again, we must ask God to reveal this to us. And He will, either directly or through some person or through our guardian angel, or in a dream—if it is a spiritual dream and not some foolish fantasy, which is what most often comes to us.

When we learn what is our chief passion, we must rise up against it with our whole soul. This is of utmost importance. And then we will see what this passion will begin to do. It will begin to roar like a lion; it will refuse to take on its primordial nature, given by God as an undistorted gift. We will see how many difficulties and temptations must be endured by that person who has come to know his soul.

We often say, proudly, “Oh, I can see right through that person.” We see nothing, we penetrate nothing, we do not know even our own selves. Try to understand yourself first of all, then you will begin to understand others. When we come to understand our own sinful essence, then we begin to pray day and night that God deliver us from our passions. What else should we pray for if not this? For if we cease to be vessels of passion, many sins will simply fall away from us. Where will sinful actions come from if the passion that provoked the person to sin no longer exists in that person? From nowhere!

For that person who understands this, there awaits a frightful battle, but the Lord will help him, together with his guardian angel. And what about the prince of this world, the devil? He also keeps a sharp eye over all humanity, and just imagine, suddenly he sees that some little soul wants to quit his realm. Immediately he assigns a horde of demons to attack that person, and they begin to tempt him, particularly, trying to divert him from heartfelt prayer. How? A demon will say very artfully, “Make more prostrations. You are making a thousand? Not enough. Do more. And say the Jesus Prayer.” Meanwhile, he is sneering. And what happens? There is no Jesus Prayer; there is only a drum rattle. The essence of the Jesus Prayer lies in its meaning, its purpose,

which is to open the heart to the Lord, that He might free it from demons. Remember, the heart is never empty: it is always occupied with something. For this reason, one must first free the heart from passions. Passions are not always crude, as, for example, murder or hatred; they can also be very subtle. And being full of them we think that we are dispassionate, while we are all passionate.

Freeing ourselves from passions is the beginning of our spiritual struggle. When the Lord frees us from them, then we begin to pray with the heart. And once we attain to prayer of the heart, demons can no longer lodge there, for the heart is filled with God’s grace. We become deified, and with the help of Divine grace we pray to the Source of this grace—God. In this way we become united with God.

If the Lord gives us, even for just a moment, to know the grace of prayer of the heart, we will never forget it, not for as long as we live. Remember how the elder Zosima saw Saint Mary of Egypt standing in the air during such prayer? This is how prayer uplifts a person. The way to heartfelt prayer is the only true way for us; do not seek another way. Whoever has come to know such prayer remains outwardly the same as other people, but inwardly he will be completely different, because he will be with God. This way is open to all, to both monastics and lay people. Therefore, let us strive for prayer of the heart, for dispassion and for holiness. The acquisition of this is the greatest miracle.

It is easier to turn a stone into bread and a serpent into a fish than it is to change one’s soul and to be freed of passions. But with God’s help, even this can be accomplished. Let us hold fast to this holy path.



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

Prayer leads up to the heights of divine vision. Misael, my elder, when he prayed, the whole of him glowed with light. And when he reached this state, he no longer prayed with words, but noetically. Words are like the kindling wood, until the fire is lit. When the fire is kindled, in other words, when contrition and compunction come, a person is no longer able to speak. He senses and hears God within himself. Then come tears. This is a great gift. Then the man abandons the senses, and nothing speaks but the heart—the longing, the *sighs that cannot be uttered*. (Rom 8:26).

Elder Ieronymos of Aigina (+1966)

ON HEART TRANSPLANTS

An Orthodox view on heart transplants, by Saint Philaret the Confessor, from "The Orthodox Word," Vol. 4, No. 3 (May-June 1968), pp. 134-137.

The world, including most people who would identify themselves as Christians, receives every new attainment of modern science as an undoubted blessing to be accepted as a matter of course. Orthodox Christians, however, must be more discriminating, for our hope is not in this world that passes, but in eternal life. Here this saintly former chief hierarch of the Russian Church Abroad speaks on the latest such attainment, to and for those whose spiritual consciousness has not been totally deadened by modern worldliness and rationalism.

† † †

This age is a strange age. We know that throughout the extent of human history there have been moments of spiritual and cultural crisis, of moral decline and restoration; there have been moments also of a so-called "reevaluation of values." But only in our age has there arisen in the world a manifestation much more frightening and menacing; namely, the loss of values, their catastrophic disappearance from the life, from the spiritual and intellectual horizon, of contemporary humanity.

One may readily observe today the loss of normal conceptions of nation and family, the loss of the value of life itself, in itself and as the greatest gift of God, and the striving to get away from the obligation to live—in the fantasy-world of narcotics, so to speak in a temporary suicide. And parallel to the disappearance of true values there appear counterfeit values. For today literally everything is counterfeited: Christianity is counterfeited, religiousness is counterfeited, the very Gospel is counterfeited; culture in its best manifestations, the striving for peace, etc., etc.—everything is steeped in lie and falsehood, and a man with a living soul and conscience suffocates in the reign of the lie and the counterfeit.

In this stifling atmosphere of evident and undoubted spiritual decomposition, the "last word" is the most terrible of all. We speak of the newest "attainment" of medical science: the rapidly expanding medical "breakthrough" of human heart transplantation.

Here before us is the most terrifying of all counterfeits: the counterfeit of life itself—this greatest gift of the Creator! A man lives out his life, his powers decay and fade away, the organism dies away, and the heart, this center of the organism's life, is just about to stop... No medicines, no remedies or attempts to prolong, to detain this departing life, can help any longer. But now—a solution is found! The man is given a new, strange heart, and with this is introduced into his organism a new, strange life, belonging to another man.

The heart is the center, the mid-point of man's existence. And not only in the spiritual sense, where heart is the term for the center of one's spiritual person, one's "I"; in physical life, too, the physical heart is the chief organ and central point of the organism, being mysteriously and indissolubly connected with the experiences of one's soul.

It is well known to all how a man's purely psychical and nervous experiences—joy, anger, fright, etc.—are reflected immediately in the action of the heart, and conversely how an unhealthy condition of the heart acts oppressively on the psyche and consciousness. Yes, here the bond is indissoluble—and if, instead of the continuation of a man's personal spiritual-bodily life, concentrated in his own heart, there is imposed on him a strange heart and some kind of strange life, until then totally unknown to him—then what is this if not a counterfeit of his departing life; what is this if not the annihilation of his spiritual-bodily life, his individuality, his personal "I"? And how and as whom will such a man present himself at the general resurrection?

But the new attainment does not end even here. It is intended also to introduce into the organism of a man the heart of an animal—i.e., so that after the general resurrection a "man" will stand at the Last Judgement with the heart of an ape (or a cat, or a pig, or whatever). [As we all know, the use of an animal heart into humans has now become medically possible, *Ed.*]. Can one imagine a more senseless and blasphemous mockery of human nature itself, created in the image and likeness of God?

Madness and horror! But what has called forth this nightmare of criminal interference in man's life—in that life, the lawful Master of which is its Creator alone, and no one else? The answer is not difficult to find. The loss of Christian hope, actual disbelief in the future life, failure to understand the Gospel and disbelief in it, in its Divine truthfulness—these are what have called forth these monstrous and blasphemous experiments on the personality and life of man. The Christian view of life and death, the Christian understanding and conception of earthly life as time given by God for preparation for eternity—have been completely lost. And from this we observe the obvious result: terror in the face of death, seen as the absolute perishing of life and the annihilation of personality; and a clutching at earthly life—live, live, live, at any cost or means prolong earthly life, after which there is nothing!...

How far from this is the radiant Christian view of life and death. Imagine a deeply-believing Christian who has labored his whole life on the fulfillment of the Lord's commandments and on the purification of his own heart, and who finally draws near to that Christian end for which he has prayed and for which he has been preparing his whole life; if suddenly one were to say to him: "Don't you want to live a while longer? Here—we will cut out your heart and

put in its place a different one, perhaps an ape's—and you will live for a while yet..." What would a believing Christian answer to this but the words of the Gospel: *Get thee behind me, Satan! Thou savourest not the things that be of God, but these that be of men.* (Mt 16:23).

The Holy Apostle Paul cried once: *See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.* (Eph 5:15-17). Oh, how circumspectly we must walk in our day—with caution, lest we apostatize spiritually and fall into the snare of the enemy. For in truth, our days are yet more evil than the times of the Apostles. And it was not for nothing that in these latter, already post-revolutionary days, one of the Far-Eastern archpastors prayed constantly to God thus: *Cut off the allurements of lies, loosen pressing temptations, and with the power of Thy Grace protect and keep all of us, and grant our hearts to sense the truth.*

For contemporary humanity for the most part has lost completely the feeling, the sense, the acceptance of truth and the ability to discern in its spiritual essence what is happening in the world. And the threatening, sorrowful prophecy of the Apostle is being accomplished concerning those who did not learn to love the truth: *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.* (2Thess 2:11-12).

Christian! Remember what life is, and what is death! And thanking your Creator for the most precious gift of His goodness—for your life—use this gift as is proper, so that at the end of your earthly life you may, without clutching faintheartedly at this passing life, die in such a way that upon you may be fulfilled the joyful promise of the Apocalypse: *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.* (Rev 14:13).

† † †

TEACHINGS FROM OUR FAITH

From Orthodox Tradition, Vol. VII, No. 2, p. 15.

The Human Heart. It was a belief among the ancients—among physicians in the age of the Egyptian Pharaohs, for example—that the heart is the center of the body, responsible for regulating all of its functions.

The teachings of the Orthodox Church also hold that the heart is the center of the person, containing not only our individual identity, but harboring, in its chambers, many of the spiritual virtues to which we strive. The hesychastic teachings of St. Gregory Palamas, drawn from an ancient tradition of the Church, concentrate human activity in the heart. It is the physical regulation of the heart beat and breathing which, in part, accounts for the intensity of concentrated

prayer achieved by those who reach up in prayer with their bodies to touch and be transformed by the Grace of God. Our bodies correctly used, St. Gregory Palamas tells us, are not evil, but are the very temple of the Holy Spirit. And the heart is the repository of Divine Grace.

In our times, when the brain is considered the center of the human person and the repository of the personality, it seems absurd to imagine that the heart, a "mere pump," could literally play a role in spiritual life. For that reason, many Orthodox theologians have begun to speak of the heart as a metaphor for the soul and deny that the heart plays a physical role in our spiritual life.

Nonetheless, some contemporary scientists are beginning to take a new look at the heart. Dr. Nikolai Khokhlov, a member of the advisory board of the Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, spoke informally at the St. Gregory Palamas Monastery some years ago of research that he was about to investigate during an appointment at the prestigious Max Planck Institute. This research suggested that the heart, contrary to current theory, is a kind of regulating mechanism for the human body, controlling metabolism, overall body functions, and even some brain activity. This research wholly supports the assumptions of the ancients and the experience and teachings of the Orthodox Fathers.

We must be very cautious, then, about dismissing the teachings of the Fathers on the human heart simply because modern science, which may not yet fully understand the more subtle workings of the heart, seems to attribute to the brain those things which the Fathers attribute to the heart. Science may yet vindicate the Fathers and once again show us the divine source of their knowledge.

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Embalming and Autopsies. In the Orthodox Church we do not make the dualistic distinction between the body and the soul that one finds in some ancient, pre-Christian sects and in certain early Christian heresies. The body and soul, according to Orthodox teaching, are integrally bound together. The good health and correct, moral use of the body can affect the soul, just as a healthy and sound soul can reflect itself in the external appearance of the body (and especially in the eyes).

When a Christian dies, we show tremendous respect to his body as the place where the spirit of the human being resided. The body of a holy person, for example, is highly revered, since even his flesh and blood have been permeated by the holiness of his life. To embalm and disfigure the dead body for no reason—and embalming is not required in most states in the U.S.—is to show disrespect to it. And autopsies, when they are done for no specific purpose and routinely, are blasphemous. One need only attend an autopsy to understand that this statement is not hyperbolic, but wholly

accurate. Except when indicated by forensic considerations or specific needs in medical research, autopsies should be discouraged among Orthodox Christians.

The bodies of monastics and bishops, whose lives are dedicated to spiritual principles and aims, should under no circumstances be embalmed or, except in the case of suspected foul play, subjected to post-mortem examination. This is a rule which every Orthodox Christian physician should understand and one which he should attempt to uphold with every possible means. Since monastics should, if possible, repose in their monasteries—rather than in the hospital, as is usually the case in the Western world now—Orthodox physicians should be available and ready to assist in the preparation of the needed certificates of death, so as to avoid the eventuality of an autopsy.

If our faith is one limited only to intellectual precepts, and not to the world of our bodies as well, then it is an artificial and incomplete faith.



TENDER CARE FOR OUR NEIGHBOR HELPS THE FAMILY

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.

People today will have as many problems as the amount of material goods they acquire. They neither thank God for His benefactions, nor notice the grief of their fellow-man that they may provide some kind of charity. They squander what they have and don't even think of their neighbor who does not even have enough to eat. How can the Grace of God come after such things? The head of a family therefore must manage his things to set aside something in order to give alms. He should say to his wife and children that in such-and-such a place there is a certain sick, homeless person, or some poor family who is in great need. If they don't have money to give, let them say, "Let's at least give a Christian book, as we have so many." In giving to those who have need, they do well both to the needy and to their family.

In Russia the poor faithful are in such great need! I once gave a little box of incense to a Russian priest and told him: "A humble gift." "You really consider this to be a poor gift?" he says to me. "Our incense is... 'cough-cough.'" And here in Greece, how greatly the refugees suffer! In Halkidiki I saw a refugee, a tile-setter, who made only a dollar a square meter [1]. He said, "Glory to Thee, O God, that we have bread." For that reason, when a certain contractor told me that in his line of work they were burdened by many sins, I told him, "If you will support those

refugees and help them financially, you will be unburdened of your sins. They have nowhere to live. Compared to them you are like Onasis."

In order for us to practice the virtues, God allows there to be the sick, the poor, etc. He could have taken care of everyone, both the sick and the poor, but then we would have had the illusion that we were virtuous people. For example, we would have said that we were all merciful while we are not, whereas now our works make clear our virtues. Glory to God that people exist who sacrifice themselves for their fellow-man. I knew someone who, as soon as he was released from the military, accepted to be unjustly convicted of a great crime in order to save a family. He neither considered the ridicule nor his future.

Everywhere I see how God takes care to ensure that at least one member of each family has faith and piety, that the others will be helped! I knew a family in Konitsa in which, all but one person was completely indifferent towards the Church. Only one daughter was different. As soon as she heard the church bell her feet flew; she would leave half-way through her chores and go to church. Moreover, even when the Germans came, when the church caretaker rang the bell for the people to flee from their homes, she instead went to church for Vespers!

Although she was also very charitable, her parents were totally stingy. Her father, instead of eating food, would eat a dry rusk which he would dip in a little water; and her mother was very tight-fisted! Even when her children had good jobs and were well off, to light a fire she would grab a smoldering ember from the fireplace and light it up with bug spray, so as not to waste a match! For a coffee pot she used an old tin can! When I was at Stomiou Monastery, because her mother loved me so much, if her daughter wanted to take something from their house to give to the poor and couldn't do it secretly, she would say: "Mother, the monk wants this." "Give it, give it to him," she would tell her. Only for the monks would her mother not get angry.

Even during the German Occupation the girl secretly helped the poor. She would take wheat from the family pantry, carry it to the mill, grind it, and then distribute it to the poor families. Once she was caught by her mother who grabbed her. She then prayed, "My God, help me to find a job and to give all my earnings as alms." The next day a certain establishment called for her. O, the joy she had! She kept her vow too: she didn't even buy herself a pair of socks from her wages; she gave it all as alms. How many people now say to her: "God save you, and bless the bones of your parents!" You see, through her alms, God even took care of her mother.

† † †

[1] This was said in 1992. It is quite clear that both in Russia and also among Greek refugees, this wage rate may no longer be the case (albeit the recent economic struggles in Greece may invalidate such a supposition), *Ed.*

Φοβερή Όπτασία

Φοβερή όπτασία τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἀντωνίου γιὰ τοὺς αἰρετικούς: Ἄλογα κτήνη γύρω ἀπὸ τὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζα. Ἀπὸ τὸ «Ρωμαϊκὸ Ὀδοιπορικόν», 17 Ἰανουαρίου, 2013.

Εἶναι ὄντως φοβερὸ τὸ ὄραμα ποὺ εἶδε ὁ Ἅγιος Ἀντώνιος σχετικὰ μὲ τὴν παρουσία αἰρετικῶν μέσα σὲ Ὁρθόδοξους ναοὺς. Τὸ ὄραμα αὐτὸ αἰτιολογεῖ καὶ ἐξηγεῖ παραστατικὰ γιὰ ποῖο λόγο οἱ Ἅγιοι Πατέρες ἀπαγορεύουν μὲ συνοδικοὺς κανόνες τὴν εἴσοδο αἰρετικῶν σὲ καθαγιασμένους χώρους, τὴν συμμετοχὴ τους σὲ ἀκολουθίες καὶ λειτουργίες, τὶς συμπροσευχές καὶ τὰ συλλείτουργα. Οἱ αἰρετικοὶ μὴ δεχόμενοι τὴν διδασκαλία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, τῶν Ἀποστόλων καὶ τῶν Ἁγίων, ἐπηρεάζονται ἀπὸ τοὺς δαίμονες καὶ τὸν πατέρα τους τὸν διάβολο, στὴν προβολὴ πλανεμένων ἀπόψεων. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἡ διδασκαλία τους «μᾶλλον ἄγνοος καὶ ἄλογος καὶ διανοίας ἐστὶν οὐκ ὀρθῆς, ὡς ἡ τῶν ἡμιόνων ἀλογία».

Συγκλονίσθηκε λοιπόν, καὶ ἐτρόμαξε ὁ Ἅγιος Ἀντώνιος, ὅταν ἐπέτρεψε ὁ Θεὸς νὰ δῆ στὸ ὄραμά του τοὺς Ἀρειανοὺς νὰ περικυκλώνουν τὸ Ἅγιο Θυσιαστήριο ὡς ἡμίονοι (= μουλάρια), νὰ τὸ λακτίζουν καὶ νὰ τὸ μιαίνουν. Τόση ἦταν ἡ λύπη καὶ ἡ στεναχώρια του, ὥστε ἔβαλε τὰ κλάμματα, ὅπως πικράθηκαν καὶ ἔκλαυσαν πολλοὶ εὐσεβεῖς, ὅταν εἶδαν τὸν αἰρεσιάρχη πάπα νὰ εἰσάγεται μέσα στὸν ναὸ τοῦ Ἁγίου Γεωργίου στὸ Φανάρι (τὸν ὁποῖο μάλιστα Ἅγιο κατήργησε τὸ Βατικανό) καὶ νὰ τὸν μολύνῃ. Εἴμαστε βέβαιοι πὼς, ἂν διαβάσουν καὶ μάθουν αὐτὸ τὸ ὄραμα τοῦ Ἁγίου οἱ πατριάρχες, οἱ ἀρχιεπίσκοποι καὶ οἱ ἐπίσκοποι, ἂν βέβαια ἐξακολουθοῦν ὡς Ὁρθόδοξοι νὰ σέβονται καὶ νὰ ἀκολουθοῦν τὴν ζωὴ καὶ τὴν διδασκαλία τῶν Ἁγίων, θὰ διακόψουν τὶς λειτουργικὲς ἀμοιβαῖες φιλοξενίες καὶ ἐπισκέψεις, τὶς ἐβδομάδες συμπροσευχῆς καὶ τὶς ἀποστολὲς ἀντιπροσωπειῶν στὶς θρονικὲς ἐορτές. Γιατὶ διαφορετικὰ θὰ συμπεριλαμβάνονται καὶ αὐτοὶ ὡς συνεργοὶ στὸ φρικτὸ ὄραμα τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἀντωνίου.

Κατὰ τὴν διήγηση τοῦ Μ. Ἀθανασίου στὸ «Βίο», ἐνῶ ἠσχολεῖτο μὲ τὸ ἐργόχειρό του καθιστὸς ὁ Μ. Ἀντώνιος, περιῆλθε σὲ ἓνα εἶδος ἐκστάσεως καὶ ἀναστέναξε πολὺ βλέποντας τὴν ὄπτασία. Μετὰ ἀπὸ ἀρκετὴ ὥρα στράφηκε πρὸς τοὺς παρισταμένους μοναχοὺς, ἐξακολούθησε νὰ στενάξῃ καὶ νὰ τρέμῃ. Ἔπεσε στὰ γόνατα γιὰ νὰ προσευχηθῇ καὶ ἔμεινε

γονατιστὸς ἐπὶ πολλὴ ὥρα. Ὅταν σηκώθηκε ἔκλαιγε ὁ Γέροντας. Ἐτρόμαξαν οἱ παριστάμενοι καὶ ἐφοβήθηκαν πολὺ, γι' αὐτὸ τὸν παρακάλεσαν νὰ τοὺς ἐξηγήσῃ. Καὶ ἀφοῦ τὸν ἐπίεσαν πολὺ καὶ τὸν ἐξεβίασαν ἀναστέναξε πάλι καὶ εἶπε:

«Παιδιά μου εἶναι καλύτερα νὰ πεθάνω, πρὶν νὰ συμβοῦν ὅσα εἶδα στὴν ὄπτασία. Θὰ πέσῃ στὴν Ἐκκλησία ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ θὰ παραδοθῇ σὲ ἀνθρώπους ποὺ εἶναι ἄλογα κτήνη. Εἶδα τὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζα τοῦ ναοῦ, στὸ Κυριακὸ τῆς σκῆτης νὰ περικυκλώνεται σ' ὅλες τὶς πλευρὲς ἀπὸ μουλάρια, τὰ ὁποῖα κλωτσοῦσαν καὶ χοροπηδοῦσαν, ὅπως συνηθίζουν νὰ κάνουν αὐτὰ τὰ ἄλογα κτήνη. Εἶδατε καὶ ἀντιληφθήκατε πὼς ἐστέναξα προηγουμένως; Τὸ ἔκανα γιὰτὶ ἄκουσα φωνὴ ποὺ ἔλεγε: «Θὰ μιανθῇ τὸ θυσιαστήριό μου».

Αὐτὰ εἶδε ὁ Γέροντας. Καὶ μετὰ ἀπὸ δύο ἀκριβῶς ἔτη ἔγινε ἐπίθεση τῶν Ἀρειανῶν καὶ ἡ ἀρπαγὴ τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν. Ἀρπαξαν τὰ ἱερὰ σκευὴ μὲ τὴ βία, τὰ ἔδωσαν σὲ εἰδωλολάτρες νὰ τὰ κρατοῦν, τοὺς ἐξανάγκασαν νὰ μετέχουν στὶς συνάξεις τους καὶ παρόντων αὐτῶν ἔκαναν στὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζα ὅ,τι ἤθελαν. Τότε καταλάβαμε ὅλοι μας, λέγει ὁ Μ. Ἀθανάσιος, ὅτι τὰ λακτίσματα ἐκεῖνα τῶν ἡμιόνων προεμήνυαν στὸν Ἀντώνιο ὅσα πράττειν τώρα οἱ Ἀρειανοὶ ὡς κτήνη.

Μετὰ τὴν ὄπτασία ἐνίωσε τὴν ἀνάγκη ὁ Γέροντας νὰ ἐνθαρρύνῃ καὶ νὰ παρηγορήσῃ τοὺς γύρω του λέγοντας:

«Μὴ λυπᾶσθε, παιδιά μου, γιὰτὶ ὅπως ὀργίσθηκε ὁ Κύριος, ἔτσι πάλι καὶ θὰ θεραπεύσῃ τὸ κακὸ. Σύντομα ἡ Ἐκκλησία θὰ ἐπαναποκτήσῃ τὴν ὁμορφίαν της καὶ θὰ λάμψῃ. Θὰ δεῖτε αὐτοὺς ποὺ ἐξορίστηκαν νὰ ἐπιστρέφουν, τὴν ἀσέβεια νὰ ὑποχωρῇ καὶ νὰ κρύβεται, καὶ τὴν εὐσεβῆ πίστη νὰ ἐμφανίζεται καὶ νὰ κυριαρχῇ παντοῦ, ἀρκεῖ σεῖς νὰ μὴν μιανθῆτε ἀπὸ τὴν αἵρεση τῶν Ἀρειανῶν, γιὰτὶ δὲν εἶναι ἡ διδασκαλία τῶν Ἀποστόλων, ἀλλὰ τῶν δαιμόνων καὶ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῶν τοῦ διαβόλου, ἄλογη καὶ ἄκαρπη, σὰν τὴν ἀλογία τῶν ἡμιόνων».



Ἡ 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 Μᾶρκος

Μαρτυρία τοῦ Μητροπολίτη Λεμεσοῦ Ἀθανασίου γιὰ τὸν Γέροντα Παῖσιο

Πηγή: Ἱερομονάχου Ἰσαάκ, «Βίος Γέροντος Παΐσιου τοῦ Ἀγιορείτου», σελίδες: 256-261. Ἐκδόσεις Καλύβης Ἀναστάσεως, Καψάλα, Ἅγιον Ὄρος, 2004.

Πήγα στὸν Γέροντα τὸν Σεπτέμβριο τοῦ 1977, ἡμέρα Δευτέρα, παραμονή τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ. Χτύπησα τὴν πόρτα πολὺ πρωί, ὁ Γέροντας μοῦ ἀνοιξε. Ἦταν πολὺ χαρούμενος καὶ εὐδιάθετος.

Ἄ, εὐτυχῶς ποὺ ἦρθες διάκο, μοῦ λέγει, καὶ ἔχω πανήγυρη αὐριο. Θάρθουν ψάλτες, παρήγγειλα ροφὸ καὶ ἔλειπε ἕνας διάκος. Ἦρθες ἐσύ, ἐντάξει ἢ πανήγυρη.

Ἔλεγε καὶ ἄλλα τέτοια ἀστεία. Ὑστερα μοῦ εἶπε:

—Θα μείνης ἐδῶ ἀπόψε.

Ἦξερα ὅτι ὁ Γέροντας δὲν κρατοῦσε κανέναν τὴ νύχτα μαζί του. Μόλις μοῦ τὸ εἶπε πέταξα ἀπὸ τὴν χαρὰ μου.

Πήγαμε στὸ Ἐκκλησιάκι, μὲ ἔβαλε καὶ τακτοποίησα τὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζα, ξεσκόνισα, σκούπισα τὸν διάδρομο, ἔκανα διάφορες δουλειές. Μέσα μου αισθανόμουν πολὺ μεγάλη χαρὰ. Τὸ μεσημέρι πήγαμε νὰ φᾶμε. Ἔκανε τσάϊ, ἔφερε παξιμάδι καὶ ἔβγαλε ἄγρια λάχανα ἀπὸ τὸν κήπο του. Μοῦ ἔκανε ἐντύπωση ὅταν κάναμε τὴν προσευχή. Ὁ Γέροντας εἶπε τὸ «Πάτερ ἡμῶν...» σήκωσε τὰ χέρια του καὶ τὸ εἶπε μὲ τόσο πόθο καὶ τόσην εὐλάβεια ποὺ ἦταν σὰν νὰ μιλοῦσε πραγματικὰ μὲ τὸν Θεό.

Μετὰ μὲ πήγε στὸ κελλι καὶ ξεκουράστηκα καμμιὰ ὥρα. Ὑστερα κάναμε τὸν μικρὸ Ἑσπερινὸ μὲ κομποσχοίνι.

Ὅταν τελειώσαμε μοῦ εἶπε ὁ Γέροντας:

—Κοίταξε, διάκο, τώρα θὰ κάνουμε ἀγρυπνία μὲ κομποσχοίνι καὶ τὸ πρωὶ θὰ ῥθει ὁ παπὰς νὰ μᾶς λειτουργήσει. Ξέρεις νὰ κάνης κομποσχοίνι; Θὰ σοῦ πῶ τί θὰ κάνεις, καὶ μοῦ ἔδωσε ἕνα πρόγραμμα.

Ἦταν ἕνα σοφὸ πρόγραμμα γιὰ νὰ μὴν νυστάξω τὴν νύχτα. Μοῦ εἶπε νὰ κάνω ἕνα κομποσχοίνι τριακοσάρι λέγοντας τὸ «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησον μέ». Ἔπειτα νὰ κάνω ἕνα κομποσχοίνι ἑκατοστάρι στὴν Παναγία. Ἐνα κομποσχοίνι τριακοσάρι στὸν Χριστὸ γιὰ τοὺς ζῶντες. Ἐνα κομποσχοίνι ἑκατοστάρι στὴν Παναγία γιὰ τοὺς ζῶντες. Ἐνα κομποσχοίνι τριακοσάρι στὸν Χριστὸ γιὰ τοὺς κεκοιμημένους. Ἐνα κομποσχοίνι ἑκατοστάρι στὴν Παναγία γιὰ τοὺς κεκοιμημένους. Ἐνα κομποσχοίνι τριακοσάρι στὸν Τίμιον Σταυρὸ καὶ μετὰ ἕνα τριακοσάρι «δόξα σοί, ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, δόξα σοί». Πρῶτη φορὰ ἄκουγα ὅτι γινόταν αὐτὸ τὸ

πραῖγμα. Μοῦ ἐξήγησε:

—Αὐτὸ τὸ κομποσχοίνι εἶναι δοξολογία. Θὰ τὰ τελειώνεις καὶ θ' ἀρχίζεις ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχή.

Μοῦ εἶπε,

—Αν ἀκούσης κανένα θόρυβο, μὴν τρομάξεις. Κυκλοφοροῦν ἐδῶ ἀγριογούρουνα, τσακάλια κ.ἄ..

Μὲ ἔβαλε στὸ μικρὸ Ἀρχονταρῖκι του καὶ εἶπε ὅτι κοντὰ στὰ μεσάνυχτα θὰ μὲ φωνάξει νὰ πᾶμε στὴν Ἐκκλησία νὰ διαβάσουμε τὴν Θεία Μετάληψη. Ἄκουγα τὸν Γέροντα κατὰ διαστήματα ν' ἀναστενάξει βαθεῖα. Κάπου-κάπου χτυποῦσε τὸν τοῖχο καὶ ρωτοῦσε:

—Ε, διάκο, κοιμᾶσαι; Εἶσαι καλά;

Στὶς μία παρὰ, περασμένα μεσάνυχτα πήγαμε στὸ Ἐκκλησιάκι. Μὲ ἔβαλε στὸ μοναδικὸ στασίδι ποῦ ὑπῆρχε, καὶ μοῦ ἔδωσε ἕνα κερὶ νὰ διαβάσω τὴν Θεία Μετάληψη. Αὐτὸς στεκόταν δίπλα μου, σ' ἀριστερὰ καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ λέη τοὺς στίχους: «Δόξα σοί, ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, δόξα σοί». Κάθε φορὰ ποὺ ἔλεγε τὸν στίχο ἔκανε τὸν σταυρὸ του καὶ ἔσκυβε μέχρι κάτω.

Ὅταν φθάσαμε στὸ τροπάριο «Μαρία Μήτηρ Θεοῦ...», θυμᾶμαι ὅτι τόσο μόνο διάβασα, μετὰ τὸ «Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκε σώσον ἡμᾶς», ποὺ εἶπε ὁ Γέροντας, αἰσθάνθηκα ἕνα πραῖγμα... δὲν ξέρω, δὲν μπορῶ νὰ τὸ ἐκφράσω καὶ σταμάτησα. Ἄρχισε τότε νὰ κουνιέται τὸ καντήλι τῆς Παναγίας, ὄχι ἀπότομα, ἀλλὰ



σταθερὰ διέγραφε μία κίνηση ὅσο εἶναι τὸ πλάτος τῆς εἰκόνας καὶ ὅλο το Ἐκκλησιάκι πλημμύρισε ἀπὸ φῶς. Εβλεπα χωρὶς τὴν λαμπάδα καὶ σκέφθηκα πρὸς στιγμὴν νὰ τὴν σβήσω.

Γύρισα πρὸς τὸν Γέροντα. Τὸν εἶδα νὰ ἔχη τὰ χέρια τοῦ σταυρωμένα στὸ στήθος καὶ σκυμμένον μέχρι κάτω. Κατάλαβε ὅτι ἤθελα νὰ τὸν ρωτήσω καὶ μοῦ ἔκανε νόημα νὰ μὴν μιλήσω. Ἔμεινα στὸ στασίδι καὶ ὁ Γέροντας σκυφτὸς δίπλα μου. Αἰσθανόμουν τόση ἀγάπη καὶ εὐλάβεια πρὸς τὸν Γέροντα καὶ ἔνιωθα ὅτι βρισκόμουν στὸν παράδεισο.

Μείναμε σ' αὐτὴν τὴν κατάσταση μισή, μία ὥρα, δὲν μπόρεσα ἀκριβῶς νὰ καταλάβω. Δὲν ἤξερα τί νὰ κάνω. Ἄσυναίσθητα συνέχισα νὰ διαβάζω ἀπὸ μόνος μου τὴν Μετάληψη καὶ ὅταν ἔφθασα στὴν εὐχή «Ἀπὸ ρυπαρῶν χειλέων...», σιγά-σιγα ἔσβησε τὸ φῶς πρῶτα καὶ μετὰ σταμάτησε νὰ κουνιέται τὸ καντήλι. Τελειώσαμε τὴν Μετάληψη καὶ βγήκαμε ἔξω στὸν διάδρομο. Μὲ ἔβαλε νὰ καθίσω σ' ἕνα скаμινάκι καὶ αὐτὸς κάθησε σ' ἕνα μπαουλάκι σιωπηλός.

Μετὰ ἀπὸ ὥρα, τὸν ρώτησα:

—Γέροντα, τὶ ἦταν αὐτὸ τὸ πραῖγμα;

—Γέροντα, τὶ ἦταν αὐτὸ τὸ πραῖγμα;

—Ποιό πράγμα;
 —Τὸ καντήλι. Πῶς κουνιόταν τὸ καντήλι τόση ὥρα;
 —Τί εἶδες;
 —Κουνιόταν τὸ καντήλι τῆς Παναγίας δεξιά—
 ἄριστερά.
 —Μόνο αὐτὸ εἶδες;
 —Καὶ φῶς.
 —Ἄλλο;
 —Δεν εἶδα ἄλλο τίποτε. (Ὁ Γέροντας γιὰ νὰ ρωτάει
 τί ἄλλο εἶδα, φαίνεται ὅτι εἶδε κάτι παραπάνω).
 —Καλά, δὲν ἦταν τίποτε.
 —Πῶς δὲν ἦταν τίποτε, Γέροντα; Κουνιόταν τὸ
 καντήλι καὶ εἶχε φῶς!
 —Ἔ, δὲν ἄκουσες ποὺ γράφουν τὰ βιβλία, ὅτι ἡ
 Παναγία γυρνάει ὅλα τα κελλιά τῶν μοναχῶν καὶ
 βλέπει τί κάνουν; Νά, πέρασε καὶ ἀπὸ δῶ καὶ εἶδε δυὸ
 παλαβοὺς καὶ εἶπε νὰ μᾶς χαιρετίσει καὶ κούνησε τὸ
 καντήλι της.

Ἵστερα ἀπὸ μόνος του ἄρχισε νὰ μοῦ διηγῆται
 διάφορες ἐμπειρίες του. Μοῦ ἀνέφερε πῶς εἶδε τὴν
 ἁγία Εὐφημία, καὶ πολλὰ ἄλλα. Εἶχε ἀλλάξει ὅλη ἡ
 διάθεσή του. Μέχρι τὸ πρῶί μου μιλοῦσε πνευματικά.
 Μοῦ τόνισε:

—Σου τὰ λέω αὐτά, διάκο, ἀπὸ ἀγάπη γιὰ νὰ σὲ
 βοηθήσω, ὄχι νὰ νομίσης ὅτι εἶμαι κάτι.

Στὶς 5:30 ἦρθε ὁ παπᾶς καὶ ὁ Γέροντας ἠθελε νὰ
 λειτουργήσω, ἀλλὰ ἐγὼ δὲν εἶχα διακονικά ἄμφια.
 Μοῦ ἔφερε ἓνα στιχάρι παλαιό, ἔφερε ἓνα πετραχῆλι,
 τὸ ἔκανε ὀράριο καὶ τὸ ἐπίασε μὲ παραμάννα, βρῆκε
 κάτι ἐπιμάννα, μοῦ τὰ τύλιξε στὰ χέρια. Ἦμιον σὰν
 παλιάτσος, ἀλλὰ ἦταν ἡ ὠραιότερη λειτουργία τῆς
 ζωῆς μου. Ἦμασταν μόνο οἱ τρεῖς μας.

Μὲ κράτησε μαζί του μέχρι τὸ Σάββατο. Μὲ ἔστειλε
 μία φορὰ στὸ Μπουραζέρι, νὰ δῶ τοὺς πατριῶτες μου
 καὶ νὰ μείνω τὸ μεσημέρι γιὰ νὰ φάω. Καὶ ἄλλη μία
 φορὰ μὲ ἔστειλε στὴν Σταυρονικήτα πάλι γιὰ νὰ φάω,
 γιατί στὸ Κελλί του εἶχε μόνο τσαί καὶ παξιμάδι...



Ο Θεός, ἡ μόνη ἐλπίδα, καταφυγή καὶ σωτηρία
 μας, ἄκουσε μὲ προσοχή, στὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Μονο-
 γενοῦς Σου Υἱοῦ, τὶς δεήσεις μας. Ἀξιῶσέ μας, μὲ τὴν
 ἀγαθότητα καὶ τὸ ἔλεός Σου νὰ γίνουμε μέτοχοι τῶν
 αἰωνίων ἀγαθῶν τῆς Βασιλείας Σου, ποὺ ἐτοίμασες
 ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχὴ τοῦ κόσμου γιὰ ὅσους Σε ἀγαποῦν.
 Καὶ ἔτσι νὰ δοξάζουμε τὸ πάντιμο καὶ μεγαλοπρεπὲς
 ὄνομά Σου καὶ τοῦ Μονογενοῦς Σου Υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ
 παναγίου καὶ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ ζωοποιοῦ Σου Πνεύματος
 εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων. Ἀμήν.

π. Εὐσέβιος Ματθόπουλος

Μέγας Βασίλειος: Περί Τόκων καὶ Δανείων

Δημήτρης Νατσιός, ἀπὸ τὸ «Ἀντίβαρο», 29.12.2010.

«Πλούσιος εἶ; Μὴ δανεῖζου. Πένης εἶ; Μὴ δανεῖζου»

(Μέγας Βασίλειος)

† † †



Μπορεῖ στὰ ἄχρηστα
 «περιοδικὰ ποικίλης
 ὕλης», τὰ κατ' εὐφημισμὸν
 βιβλία γλώσσας τοῦ Δημοτικοῦ,
 ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος «νὰ ἀπλώνει
 τὴ μπουγάδα του καὶ νὰ κρεμᾶ
 τὸ... μακρὺ του σῶβρακο»
 (γλώσσα Δ' Δημοτικοῦ, β'
 τεῦχος, σελ. 52) ἢ, σύμφωνα μὲ
 τὸ κρानιοκενοῦς ἐμπνεύσεως
 εὔρημα τοῦ «περιοδικοῦ» τῆς
 Ε' Δημοτικοῦ, νὰ ἐπιδίδεται σὲ μαγικά πράγματα,
 ὅπως, γιὰ παράδειγμα, νὰ συγκεντρώνει, ἐν εἶδει
 χαλκομανίας, ἔλατα στὸ κόκκινο παλτό του (γλώσσα
 Ε' Δημοτικοῦ, β' τεῦχος, σελ. 30-31). Ὅμως, στὰ
 βιβλία τῶν ἱερῶν γραμμάτων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας,
 διαβάζουμε γιατί εἶναι ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος ὁ φωστὴρ
 τῆς Οἰκουμένης.

Εἶναι δυνατὸν σὲ σχολικὰ βιβλία τάχα καὶ νὰ
 συντηρεῖται καὶ νὰ προβάλλεται ἀκόμη αὐτὸ
 τὸ διαφημιστικὸ παχύσαρκο ξωτικό, αὐτὴ ἡ
 χαζοχαρούμενη φιγούρα ποὺ μοιράζει παιχνίδια
 στὰ μοσχοαναθρεμμένα βλαστάρια τῶν δυτικῶν
 κοινωνιῶν, παιχνίδια ποὺ ἔφτιαξαν λιπόσαρκα
 καὶ κοκαλιασμένα χερᾶκια παιδιῶν τοῦ Τρίτου ἢ
 Τέταρτου Κόσμου; Ποιόν, αὐτὸν ποὺ καὶ τοὺς λεπρούς
 τῆς Βασιλειάδας ἀσπαζόταν καὶ ἀγκάλιαζε, αὐτὸν
 ποὺ ἔγινε εὐγλωττος καὶ σιωπῶσα παραίνεση ἀρετῆς
 καὶ φιλανθρωπίας, ποὺ «ἔπεισεν ἀνθρώπους ὄντας,
 ἀνθρώπων μὴ καταφρονεῖν».

Μᾶς τηγανίζει ἡ κρίση σήμερα καὶ μᾶς κουνοῦν
 τὸ δάκτυλο ἀπειλητικὰ οἱ δυτικὲς «ἀλώπεκες τοῦ
 σκότους», γιατί ἀνεχτήκαμε ἓνα ἐκπαιδευτικὸ
 σύστημα ποὺ ἔθρεψε καὶ πάχυνε τοὺς πειθήνιους
 ζητωκραυγαστὲς ποὺ ἀνέχονται τὶς ἀνθυπομετροιότητες
 ποὺ δῆθεν κυβερνοῦν. Νὰ κρατᾶς στὴν ἀγκαλιά
 σου Σωκράτη καὶ Πλάτωνα, Μέγα Βασίλειο καὶ
 Χρυσόστομο, Μακρυγιάννη καὶ Παπαδιαμάντη καὶ νὰ
 διδάσκεις «ὀδηγίες χρήσης καφετιέρας» στὸ Δημοτικὸ
 ἢ παιδευτικὰ ξεράσματα, σὰν τὸ τρισάθλιο
 «Ὁσάκις», στὸ Γυμνάσιο.

Πῶς ὅμως νὰ ἀνεχτοῦν, οἱ διαβίου ἀμαθεῖς, κείμενα
 ποὺ καὶ μόνο μὲ τὴν ἀνάγνωσή τους ἐλέγχεται, ὅση
 ἀπέμεινε, ἡ συνείδησή τους; Μία ὑδαρῆς καὶ μπαζωμένη
 συνείδηση δὲν ἀντέχει, καθρεφτίζεται, ὅταν διαβάξει:
 «Ἐσὺ δὲν εἶσαι πλεονέχτης; Ἐσὺ δὲν εἶσαι κλέφτης,

ἀφοῦ σφετερίζεσαι ἐκεῖνα πὸν δέχθηκες ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ γιὰ νὰ τὰ διαχειριστεῖς ὡς οἰκονόμος; Μήπως νομίζεις ὅτι θὰ ὀνομαστῆι λωποδύτης μόνον ἐκεῖνος πὸν γδύνει κάποιον καὶ τοῦ ἀρπάξει τὰ ροῦχα, ἐνῶ ἐκεῖνος πὸν δὲν ντύνει τὸν γυμνὸ, ἂν καὶ μπορεῖ νὰ τὸ κάμει, ἀξίζει νὰ πάρει ἄλλο ὄνομα; Πρόσεξε! Τὸ ψωμὶ πὸν ἐστὶν παρακρατεῖς, εἶναι τοῦ πεινασμένου τὸ ἐνδυμα πὸν φυλάγεις στὶς ἀποθήκες σου, εἶναι τοῦ γυμνοῦ τὸ παπούτσι πὸν σαπίζει στὸ σπῆτι σου, εἶναι τοῦ ξυπόλυτου τὰ χρήματα πὸν τὰ κατακρατεῖς χωμένα στὴ γῆ (σ.σ. ἢ σὲ τραπεζικοὺς λογαριασμοὺς, στὴν ἡμεδαπὴ ἢ στὴν ἀλλοδαπὴ Ἑλβετία), εἶναι ἐκεῖνου πὸν ἔχει ἀνάγκη. Ὡστε λοιπὸν τόσους ἀδικεῖς, ὅσους θὰ μπορούσες νὰ βοηθήσεις». (Μεγ. Βασιλείου «περὶ πλεονεξίας» Ε.Π. 31, 276-277).

Ἡ κρίση—καὶ οἱ γεννήτορές της—πολεμοῦνται μὲ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη βιοτή, μὲ ἀνδρεία καὶ ὄχι μὲ μυξοκλάματα. Ὁ Χριστιανὸς Ὁρθόδοξος κλαίει γιὰ τὰ πάθια καὶ τοὺς καημοὺς τοῦ κόσμου, δὲν κλαίγεται ὅμως σὰν καημένο κνώδαλο. Ἀρχοντόπουλο, μὲ πτυχία καὶ «διδασκατορικά» ἦταν ὁ Μέγας Βασίλειος. Στάχτη καὶ σποδὸς ὅλα. Τὰ πούλησε καὶ τὰ μοίρασε στοὺς φίλους τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τοὺς φτωχοὺς, γιὰτί «ὄσο πλεονάζεις τῷ πλούτῳ τοσοῦτῳ ἐλλείπεις τῇ ἀγάπῃ», θὰ πεῖ ὁ ἀσκητικώτατος Γέροντας τῆς Καππαδοκίας.

Στὰ πανεπιστήμια, τὰ φημισμένα καὶ ξακουστά, τῆς Ἑσπερίας, στὰ ὁποῖα σπουδάζουν οἱ πορφυρογέννητοι τῶν τριῶν οἰκογενειῶν, πὸν κυβερνοῦν τὸν τόπο τὰ τελευταῖα 30-40 χρόνια, μαθαίνουν γράμματα πολλὰ καὶ σπουδάματα... σπουδαῖα, ὄχι ὅμως καὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ τὰ πράματα. Γι' αὐτὸ βύθισαν τὴν χώρα στὴν οἰκονομικὴ φρίκη καὶ στὸν κοινωνικὸ κανιβαλισμὸ. Ἐπαναπατρίζονται μὲ μοναδικὸ προσὸν τὴν ἐπωνυματοφορία καὶ μετακενώνουν τὰ ἄθεα γράμματα καὶ τὶς παραλυμένες θεωρίες στὴ δόλια πατρίδα μας καί... «μαζὶ τὰ φάγαμε». («Ἡ ἀσίγαστη γενικότητα τῶν πιθήκων», θὰ ἔλεγε ὁ Καροῦζος).

Ἄν δὲν μᾶς κυβερνοῦσε τὸ μεταμοντέρνο συνονθύλευμα καὶ οἱ ἀπελέκητοι γόννοι, θὰ μπορούσε ἢ πατρίδα μας νὰ φτιάξει σχολεῖα—ὄλων τῶν βαθμίδων—τὰ ὁποῖα μὲ πνευματικὰ «προσανάμματα καὶ φυλλώματα» τοὺς κλασσικοὺς καὶ τοὺς Πατέρες θὰ μάθαινε στὰ ἀνυπεράσπιστα σήμερα παιδιὰ «τί θὰ εἶπῃ πατρίδα, τί θὰ εἶπῃ θρησκεία, τί θὰ εἶπῃ φιλοτιμία, ἀρετὴ καὶ τιμιότη» (Μακρυγιάννης). Γιὰ νὰ ἐκτιμήσεις ὅμως τὴν μεγαλοπρέπεια καὶ τὴν ἀνθρωποποιὸ ἀξία τῶν ἐλληνικῶν γραμμάτων καὶ πρὶν καὶ μετὰ τὴν γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, πρέπει νὰ ἔχεις γευτεῖ τὸν γλυκασμὸ τους στὰ ἄγουρα καὶ κρίσιμα χρόνια τῆς ζωῆς σου. Ὅταν ὅμως αὐτὰ τὰ χρόνια βοσκᾶς καὶ χορταίνεις μὲ τὰ ξυλοκέρατα τῆς Δύσης, τὰ ὄλο ἐγωισμὸ καὶ ἀπανθρωπία, τότε γίνεται αὐτὸ πὸν

ἔλεγε ὁ Κολοκοτρώνης: «καημένη Ἑλλάδα, στέλνουμε στὴ Δύση ἀητοὺς καὶ μᾶς γυρίζουν κουροῦνες».

Καὶ στὰ σχολεῖα, ἀντὶ νὰ μορφώσουμε ἀητοὺς πὸν θὰ πετοῦν ψηλὰ καὶ θὰ ἀγναντεύουν τὸ πέλαγος, μπουκώνουμε «τὸ μέλλον τοῦ τόπου» μὲ σκύβαλα, γιὰτί τέτοια μᾶς κουβάλησαν οἱ ἀτάλαντοι γόννοι ἀπὸ τὰ καλά τους πανεπιστήμια. (Μέχρι τὸ 1960 τὰ πανεπιστήμιά μας ἦταν ἀπὸ τὰ καλύτερα τοῦ κόσμου. Μετά, ὅταν ἐπέστρεψαν «δαφνοστεφεῖς» οἱ ἀντιστασιακοὶ τῶν γαλλικῶν μπιστρῶ, κατάντησαν «ἄσυλα» ἀμάθειας καὶ καταλήψεων).

Πιορτάζουμε σὲ λίγες μέρες, τὴν Πρωτοχρονιά, τὸν Μέγα Βασίλειο, πὸν τόσο ἀγαποῦσε καὶ σεβόταν ὁ λαὸς μας, ὅταν ἀκόμη βαστοῦσε τὸ ρωμαϊκὸ ἦθος. Λένε κάποιιοι δοκησίσοφοι τῆς σήμερον ὅτι ἡ Ἐκκλησία, οἱ ἱεράρχες της, δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἀνακατεῦνται μὲ θέματα τῆς πολιτείας, ἀλλὰ νὰ κοιτοῦν τὰ τοῦ οἴκου τους. Δηλαδή, νὰ βυσοδομοῦν οἱ διεφθαρμένοι πολιτικάντηδες καὶ νὰ ἐγκληματοῦν ἀνεξέλεγκτα. Γιὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησία ὅμως «τύπος καὶ ὑπογραμμὸς» εἶναι οἱ ἅγιοι, οἱ ὁποῖοι δὲν δίσταζαν νὰ συγκρουστοῦν καὶ μὲ τὸν Καίσαρα.

«Τὴν βασιλέως φιλίαν μέγα μὲν ἠγοῦμαι μετ' εὐσεβείας, ἄνευ δὲ ταύτης, ὀλεθρίαν ἀποκαλῶ», θὰ πεῖ ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλειος στὸν αἰρετικὸ αὐτοκράτορα Οὐάλη. Σήμερα ὑποταχτήκαμε στὶς ἄπληστες συμμορίες τοῦ ΔΝΤ, τῆς τρώικας καὶ γονατίζουμε ἀπὸ τὰ καταστρεπτικὰ δάνεια. «Νὰ μὴ δεχτεῖς ποτὲ δανειστὴ, πὸν σὲ πολιορκεῖ. Νὰ μὴ ἀνεχθεῖς ποτὲ νὰ σὲ ἀναζητοῦν, γιὰ νὰ βροῦν τὰ ἴχνη σου καὶ νὰ σὲ συλλάβουν σὰν ἄλλο θῆραμα (οἱ τοκογλύφοι). Τὸ δάνειο εἶναι ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦ ψεύδους εἶναι ἀφορμὴ ἀχαριστίας, ἀγνωμοσύνης καὶ ἐπιπορκίας. Ἄλλα λέει ἐκεῖνος πὸν δανεῖζεται καὶ ἄλλα ἐκεῖνος πὸν δανεῖζει... Εἶσαι φτωχὸς τώρα, ἀλλὰ ἐλεύθερος. Ὅταν δανειστεῖς, ὄχι μόνο δὲν θὰ πλουτίσεις, ἀλλὰ θὰ χάσεις καὶ τὴν ἐλευθερία σου... Ἡ φτώχεια δὲν φέρνει καμμιά ντροπὴ. Γιὰτί λοιπὸν νὰ προσθέτουμε στὸν ἑαυτὸ μας τὴν ντροπὴ τοῦ δανείου; Κανεῖς δὲν θεραπεύει τὰ τραύματά του μὲ ἄλλο τραῦμα, οὔτε θεραπεύει τὸ ἕνα κακὸ μὲ ἄλλο κακὸ, οὔτε ἐπανορθώνει τὴ φτώχεια μὲ τόκους. Εἶσαι πλούσιος; Μὴ δανεῖζεσαι. Εἶσαι φτωχός; Μὴ δανεῖζεσαι». (Μεγ. Βασιλείου, 2 ΕΠΕ 5, 78-80).

Ἄν μορφώνονταν οἱ γενιὲς τῶν Ἑλλήνων μὲ τέτοια κείμενα...



Ἡ ψυχὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας εἶναι φτιαγμένη ἀπὸ τὸ δῶρο τῆς προσευχῆς»

Vasilii Rozanov

Περί Όνειρων

Αρχιμανδρίτη π. Βαρνάβα Λαμπρόπουλου.

Πρέπει να δίνουμε σημασία στα όνειρα;

Ένα ερώτημα που μας απασχολεί συχνά. Μας απασχολεί έντονοτερα μετά από μία νύκτα που ίσως είδαμε κάποιο τρομακτικό όνειρο. Και όχι σπάνια, μας συγκλονίζει το γεγονός ότι κάποιο όνειρο που είδαμε, βγήκε αληθινό! Τότε είναι που θεωρείται ή πίστη μας στα όνειρα. Και σιγά-σιγά καταντάμε να τα θεωρούμε σίγουρες προειδοποιήσεις για το τι θα μας συμβεί στο μέλλον.

Πρέπει, λοιπόν, να πιστεύουμε στα όνειρα;

Άς μη βιαστούμε να δώσουμε απάντηση. Ποτέ δεν πρέπει να δίνουμε βιαστικές απαντήσεις σε ερωτήματα της πνευματικής ζωής. Ούτε πρέπει να

στηριζόμαστε μόνο στη δική μας «σοφία» και στη δική μας «πειρα» για να απαντήσουμε σε τέτοια ερωτήματα. Άς μην είμαστε τόσο σίγουροι, ότι τα ξέρουμε όλα! Και ως έχωμε την σύνεση να ρωτάμε τους αληθινά σοφούς και αληθινά πεπειραμένους δασκάλους και οδηγούς της πνευματικής ζωής: τους αγίους.

Κάτω, λοιπόν, από το δικό τους φως, κάτω από το φως των αγίων ως ξεετάσωμε πρώτα κάποια επί μέρους ερωτήματα. Και οι απαντήσεις σ' αυτά τα ερωτήματα, θα μας βοηθήσουν να απαντήσωμε και στο ερώτημα, αν τελικά πρέπει να δίνωμε σημασία στα όνειρα.

1^{ον} Ερώτημα

Από ποιες αιτίες προέρχονται τα όνειρα;

Απάντηση: Τρεις είναι οι αιτίες που προκαλούν τα όνειρα:

(α) Οι δικές μας επιθυμίες και σκέψεις κατά την διάρκεια της ημέρας.

(β) Ο Θεός και το θέλημά Του.

(γ) Ο διάβολος και οι παγίδες του.

Την πρώτη αιτία την καταλαβαίνωμε καλά, αν θυμηθούμε την παροιμία: «ό πεινασμένος, στον ύπνο του καρβέλια βλέπει». Κατά παρόμοιο τρόπο, όπως μας εξηγεί ο άγιος Μάξιμος, και ο διψασμένος βλέπει νερό. Ο γαστρίμαργος φαντάζεται ποικιλίες φαγητών. Ο φιλήδονος φαντάζεται μορφές γυναικών. Ο κενόδοξος όνειρεύεται δόξες και χειροκροτήματα. Ο φιλάργυρος βλέπει ότι κέρδισε

το λαχείο. Ο μνησίκακος όνειρεύεται την εκδίκηση κατά του ανθρώπου που τον λύπησε. Και ο φθονερός παραμιλάει από την χαρά του, όταν όνειρευτεί ότι ύποφέρει εκείνος τον όποιο φθονεί.

Τα πιό συνηθισμένα, λοιπόν, όνειρα έχουν την ρίζα τους στα δικά μας πάθη και στις δικές μας επιθυμίες. Όχι στον Θεό ή στον διάβολο. Το πολύ-πολύ να βρει εύκαιρία ο διάβολος εκμεταλλευόμενος τα πάθη και τις επιθυμίες μας, να μας έμπαίξει και να μας ξεγελάσει. Και να μας παρουσιάσει στον ύπνο μας, τα όποιαδήποτε «καρβέλια», με τέτοιο τρόπο που να νομίσουμε ότι μας τα στέλνει ο Θεός!

Όταν, λοιπόν, δούμε στον ύπνο μας ότι ίκανοποιήθηκε κάποια έντονη επιθυμία μας, ως μη βιαστούμε να βγάλουμε το συμπέρασμα, ότι εισακούσθηκαν... οι προσευχές μας! Άς μην είμαστε σίγουροι, ότι έτσι

μας θυμήθηκε ο Θεός! Ίσως... κάποιος άλλος μας θυμήθηκε, και βρήκε την εύκαιρία να μας κοροϊδέψει.

2^{ον} Ερώτημα

Μπορούμε με σιγουριά να διακρίνουμε από που προήλθε το όνειρο που είδαμε;

Απάντηση: Μόνο οι άγιοι έχουν τόσο φωτισμένη διάκριση, ώστε να ξεχωρίζουν, αν κάποιο όνειρο προέρχεται σίγουρα

από τον Θεό ή από τον διάβολο ή από προσωπικούς λογισμούς και επιθυμίες. Κι όμως, ιδιαίτερα οι άγιοι, είναι πολύ «κουμπωμένοι» απέναντι στα όνειρα. Η ταπεινώση, τους κάνει να είναι πολύ επιφυλακτικοί. Να μην έμπιστεύονται τον λογισμό τους. Ξέροντας από πρώτο χέρι την πονηρία του διαβόλου, φοβούνται μήπως κρύβονται δαιμονικές παγίδες πίσω από δήθεν θεϊκά όνειρα. Και ο μόνος τρόπος για να ξεφύγει κανείς από τις παγίδες του διαβόλου είναι η ταπεινοφροσύνη. «Ποιοι είμαστε έμεις», λέγει ο άγιος Έφραϊμ ο Σύρος, «που φθάσαμε σε τέτοια μέτρα άρετής, ώστε να βλέπωμε όπτασιές αγγέλων;»

Όταν, λοιπόν, άγιοι του ύψους του αγίου Έφραϊμ θεωρούν άναξιο τον έαυτό τους να δούν αγγέλους, πώς τολμάμε έμεις να θεωρούμε πολύ φυσικό(!) ότι είδαμε στον ύπνο μας τον Χριστό ή την Παναγία; Όταν οι άγιοι όμολογούν, με ταπεινώση, ότι δεν μπορούν να διακρίνουν, τι κρύβεται πίσω από το κάθε όνειρο, πώς έμεις «κόβουμε το κεφάλι μας», ότι το τάδε όνειρο που είδαμε ήταν θεϊκό; Τότε και ο διάβολος «κόβει το κεφάλι του» ότι δεν έχωμε ίχνος



ταπεινώσης. Καί ἄρα μπορεῖ ἄνετα μὲ τὶς παγίδες του νὰ μᾶς «χορέψει στὸ ταψί»!

3^{ον} Ἐρώτημα

Μὲ τὴν ὑπερβολικὴ ἐπιφυλακτικότητά ἀπέναντι στὰ ὄνειρα, μήπως ὑπάρχει φόβος νὰ θεωρήσωμε «δαιμονικὴ παγίδα» κάποιο ὄνειρο ποὺ ὄντως προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό; Δὲν εἶναι ἄραγε ἁμαρτία νὰ μὴ δώσωμε σημασία σὲ ἓνα ὄνειρο ποὺ πραγματικὰ μᾶς μεταφέρει ἓνα μήνυμα τοῦ Θεοῦ; Ἐπιτρέπεται «μαζὶ μὲ τὰ ξερὰ νὰ κάψουμε καὶ τὰ χλωρὰ»;

Ἀπάντηση: Ὁ ἅγιος Ἀντώνιος μᾶς ἐγγυᾶται, ὅτι, ἂν μαζὶ μὲ τὰ ξερὰ (δαιμονικά) κάψουμε καὶ μερικὰ χλωρὰ (θεϊκὰ) ὄνειρα, (ἀπὸ φόβο μήπως πέσωμε σὲ δαιμονικὴ παγίδα), δὲν πρόκειται νὰ θυμώσει ὁ Θεὸς μαζὶ μας! Καὶ μᾶς τὸ ἐξηγεῖ μὲ ἓνα ωραιότατο παράδειγμα:

Ἕνας νοικοκύρης, μετὰ ἀπὸ μακρινὸ καὶ πολυχρόνιο ταξίδι, γυρίζει στὸ σπίτι του. Εἶναι νύκτα. Σκοτάδι. Χτυπάει τὴν πόρτα καὶ φωνάζει στὸ θυρωρὸ νὰ τοῦ ἀνοίξει. Ὁ θυρωρὸς ὅμως δὲν πείθεται στὴν φωνὴ τοῦ ἀφεντικοῦ του. Καὶ δὲν τοῦ ἀνοίγει. Φοβᾶται μήπως εἶναι κάποιος ἄλλος, ποὺ προσποιεῖται τὴν φωνὴ τοῦ ἀφεντικοῦ του, γιὰ νὰ τὸν ἐξαπατήσει· νὰ καταφέρει νὰ μπεῖ μέσα καὶ νὰ κλέψει. Ὅταν λοιπὸν ξημερώσει, πῶς θὰ φερθεῖ τὸ ἀφεντικὸ στὸν πιστὸ θυρωρὸ; Ὅχι μόνο δὲν θὰ τὸν τιμωρήσει ποὺ δὲν τοῦ ἀνοίξε, ἀλλὰ καὶ θὰ τὸν ἐπαινεῖ! Θὰ τοῦ πεῖ «μπράβο»! Γιατί κι αὐτὴ ἀκόμα τὴν φωνὴ τοῦ κυρίου του, τὴν θεώρησε πλάνη, ἀπὸ φόβο μήπως μπεῖ κάποιος κλέφτης. Ἐπομένως, ὅταν δὲν δίνωμε σημασία ἀκόμη καὶ σὲ ὄνειρα ποὺ μᾶς φαίνονται 100% θεϊκὰ, ὄχι μόνο δὲν ἁμαρτάνομε, ἀλλὰ θὰ ἀκούσουμε ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ «μπράβο» γιὰ τὴν ταπεινώση καὶ τὴν προσοχή μας!

Μετὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὰ ἀναρωτιέται κανεὶς: Ἄραγε σὲ ποιά ἄλλα ὄνειρα θὰ ἄξιζε νὰ δώσει κανεὶς σημασία; Ἀφοῦ οὔτε στὰ ὄνειρα ποὺ μᾶς φαίνονται 100% θεϊκὰ δὲν πρέπει νὰ δίνει κανεὶς σημασία, μήπως πρέπει ὅλα ἀνεξαιρέτως τὰ ὄνειρα νὰ τὰ πετᾶμε στὸ καλάθι τῶν ἄχρηστων; Ἀλλὰ ἂς διατυπώσωμε καὶ ἓνα τελευταῖο ἐρώτημα, ποὺ μερικοὶ τὸ χρησιμοποιοῦν σὰν ἐπιχείρημα πίστεως στὰ ὄνειρα.

4^{ον} Ἐρώτημα

Εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ εἶναι δαιμονικὸ ἓνα ὄνειρο ποῦ βγῆκε ἀληθινὸ; Μπορεῖ ἄραγε ὁ σατανᾶς νὰ προβλέπει τὸ μέλλον;

Ἀπάντηση: Τίποτε δὲν προγνωρίζουν οἱ δαίμονες, βεβαιώνει ὁ ἅγιος Ἀντώνιος. Ἀπλῶς, ἀπὸ αὐτὰ ποὺ βλέπουν καὶ ἀκοῦνε ὑποπτεύονται καὶ συμπεραίνουν αὐτὰ ποὺ πρόκειται νὰ συμβοῦν. «Ρίχνουν στὰ ἄδεια γιὰ νὰ πιάσουν στὰ γεμάτα». Τὶ τὸ σπουδαῖο, δηλαδή, ἂν δοῦν κάποιον νὰ ἐτοιμάζεται νὰ μᾶς ἐπισκεφθεῖ, καὶ νᾶρθουν αὐτοὶ νωρίτερα νὰ μᾶς τὸ σφυρίζουν; Οἱ

δαίμονες μόνο αὐτὰ ποὺ βλέπουν, τὰ ἀρπάζουν σὰν κλέφτες, καὶ σὰν κατάσκοποι τρέχουν γρηγορότερα καὶ μᾶς τὰ ἀναγγέλλουν!

Ἐξ ἄλλου παρόμοιες προγνωστικὲς ἰκανότητες ἔχουν καὶ οἱ γιατροὶ σχετικὰ μὲ τὴν ἐξέλιξη μίας νόσου, καὶ οἱ μετεωρολόγοι σχετικὰ μὲ τὴν ἐξέλιξη τοῦ καιροῦ. Πηγὴ ὅμως τῆς πρόγνωσής τους δὲν εἶναι κάποια μυστικὴ ἀποκαλυπτικὴ δύναμη, ἀλλὰ ἡ παρατήρηση καὶ ἡ πείρα παρόμοιων καταστάσεων. Καὶ ὁ διάβολος εἶναι ἀπίστας καὶ στὰ δυό. Καὶ στὴν παρατήρηση τῶν σφαλμάτων μας, καὶ στὴν τεράστια πείρα τῆς ἀφελείας μας καὶ τῆς ἐπιπολαιότητος, μὲ τὴν ὁποία ἀντιμετωπίζουμε τὰ προβλήματα τῆς πνευματικῆς ζωῆς. Ἄρα, ὁ διάβολος δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ προβλέψει τὸ μέλλον. Ἀπλῶς προσπαθεῖ ρίχνοντας ἄδεια (δηλαδή μὲ κάποιες εὐλογοφανεῖς «προβλέψεις») νὰ πιάσει γεμάτα (δηλαδή νὰ κερδίσει τὴν ἐμπιστοσύνη τῶν ἀφελῶν ἀνθρώπων). Καὶ ὁ ἅγιος Ἀντώνιος, ποὺ δὲν τοῦ ξέφευγε κανένα τερτίπι τοῦ διαβόλου, καταλήγει στὴν ἐξῆς συμβουλή: «*Ἀκόμη κι ὅταν οἱ δαίμονες μᾶς λένε κάτι γιὰ τὸ μέλλον, ἐπιβάλλεται νὰ τοὺς ἀντικρουνοῦμε καὶ νὰ τοὺς ἀνατρεποῦμε μὲ τὴν ἀδιαφορία μας καὶ τὴν προσευχὴ μας. Γιατί, ἀπλούστατα, δὲν ἔχομε τὴν ἀνάγκη τους!*».

Ὅποιος ἔχει τὴν ἀνάγκη τους, ἂς δέχεται ὅ,τι τοῦ σφυρίζουν στὰ ὄνειρα. Καὶ ἂς τοὺς συμβουλευέται μὲσω τῶν μέντιουμ καὶ τῶν ἀστρολόγων! Μόνο ποὺ ἔτσι παύει νὰ εἶναι «δοῦλος Χριστοῦ»! Καὶ γίνεται παίγνιο (κοινῶς «κλοτσοσκοῦφι») τῶν δαιμόνων!

Μετὰ τὰ ὅσα ἀναφέραμε παραπάνω, ἀβίαστα βγαίνει τὸ συμπέρασμα ὅτι: ἡ πίστη στὰ ὄνειρα ὄχι μόνο δὲν ὠφελεῖ σὲ τίποτε, ἀλλὰ καὶ κρύβει τεράστιους πνευματικούς κινδύνους.

Τὰ μόνα ὄνειρα ποὺ ὠφελοῦν, λέγει ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης τῆς Κλίμακος, εἶναι τὰ ὄνειρα ποὺ μᾶς θυμίζουν τὴν Μέλλουσα Κρίση. Τὸ φοβερὸ Δικαστήριό τῆς Δευτέρας Παρουσίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτά, ἂν ἀντὶ νὰ μᾶς παρακινοῦν σὲ περισσότερη μετάνοια μᾶς ὀδηγοῦν σὲ ἀπόγνωση, πρέπει νὰ τὰ περιφρονοῦμε. Καὶ νὰ μὴ τὰ πιστεύουμε.

Νὰ προσθέσουμε καὶ κάτι τελευταῖο: Δικαιολογεῖται κάποια προσοχὴ σὲ κάποια ὄνειρα, μόνο ὅταν ἐπαναληφθοῦν ἀρκετὲς φορὲς. Ἀλλὰ καὶ τότε δὲν προσπαθοῦμε νὰ τὰ ἐρμηνεύσουμε μόνοι μας, ἢ μὲ τὴν βοήθεια τῆς γειτόνισσας! Ἀλλὰ τρέχομε νὰ τὰ θέσωμε στὴν κρίση τοῦ πνευματικοῦ μας πατρός.

Πρέπει κάποτε νὰ καταλάβωμε, ὅτι ἂν σὲ ὅλα τὰ πράγματα ἐπιτρέπονται αὐτοσχεδιασμοί, στὸ μόνο ποὺ δὲν ἐπιτρέπεται νὰ αὐτοσχεδιάζουμε, εἶναι στὴν πνευματικὴ μας ζωὴ. Καὶ μάλιστα ὅσο ζοῦμε στὴν «νύκτα» τῆς παρούσης ζωῆς, ποὺ εἶναι πολλοὶ οἱ κλέφτες ποῦ θέλουν νὰ μᾶς «ληστέψουν»!

Ὁ Κόσμος στὸν Δρόμο του...

Τοῦ Φώτη Κόντογλου.

Ποῦ ν' Ἀκούσουμε οἱ Ἄνθρωποι τοῦ Καιροῦ μας κουβέντα γιὰ Θεό, γιὰ Ψυχή, γιὰ Ἄλλη Ζωή!

Πολλοὶ ἀναγνώστες μου γράφουνε, παρακαλώντας με, καὶ μάλιστα ξεροκίζοντάς με, νὰ γράψω γιὰ νὰ χτυπήσω τὴν ἀνηθικότητα, ποὺ δέρνει τὴν κοινωνία, πρὸ πάντων τῆ νεολαία, καὶ ποὺ «τὴ σερβίρουν τὰ σινεμά», ὅπως μου γράφουνε. Φωνάζουνε: «Ψώσετε τὴ φωνή σας!». Ἔνας σπουδαστὴς μου γράφει ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀγγλία: «Μὴ σταματήσετε αὐτὸν τὸν ὠραῖον ἀγώνα, μὴν πτοηθῆτε ἀπὸ τὶς ἐπιθέσεις. Ὑπάρχουν βέβαια πολλοὶ ἀντίπαλοι, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλοὶ θαυμαστὲς τοῦ ὠραίου σας ἔργου. Σὰς χρειαζόμαστε γιὰ νὰ δώσετε φτερὰ στὶς καρδιές μας, ποὺ εἶναι γεμάτες κενὸ καὶ ἀπαισιοδοξία».

Καημένοι ἄνθρωποι, πόση σημασία δίνετε στὸ πρόσωπό μου καὶ σ' αὐτὰ ποὺ γράφω! Τί φωνὴ νὰ ὑψώσω, ποὺ εἶναι βραχνιασμένη καὶ ἀδύνατη, καὶ χάνεται μέσα στὸν κυκεῶνα τῆς σημερινῆς ζωῆς; Ὅχι φωνή, ἀλλὰ καὶ τ' ἀστροπελέκι νὰ κρατᾶ στὰ χέρια του κανένας σήμερα, καὶ νὰ τὸ σφενδονίζει γιὰ νὰ κάνει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ν' ἀλλάξουνε δρόμο, πάλι τίποτα δὲν θὰ κάνει. Ὁ ἴδιος ὁ ἅγιος Γιάννης ὁ Πρόδρομος, τὸ ἐρημοποῦλι τῆς ἐρήμου, ποὺ τὸν φοβόντανε οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ, γιατί τοὺς ἔλεγε «γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν», κι αὐτὸς μάταια φώναζε. Ἡ φωνὴ του χανότανε μέσα στὴν ἐρημο, «φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ». Καὶ πότε; Τὸν καιρὸ ποὺ ὑπήρχανε ἀκόμα κάποια αὐτιά νὰ τὸν ἀκούσουνε, κι ἀπλὲς καρδιές γιὰ νὰ τὸν καταλάβουνε. Ὅχι ἐμεῖς ποὺ χρειαζόμαστε δασκάλεμα, καὶ ποὺ ἔχουμε τόσα... στὴν καμπούρα μας! Πῶς νὰ γίνουμε δάσκαλοι γιὰ τοὺς ἄλλους; Γεμίζουμε χαρτιά μὲ μυριάδες λόγια, μὰ τί τὸ ὄφελος; Ὁ κόσμος τραβᾷ τὸν δρόμο του καὶ δὲν σκοτίζεται ἀπὸ κηρύγματα. Κι ἂν δώσει προσοχὴ καὶ κανένας στὰ γραψίματά μας, μπορεῖ νὰ θυμώσει ποὺ χαλάσαμε τὴν ἡσυχία του, καὶ νὰ πεῖ πῶς εἴμαστε ὑποκριτές, ψευτογιασμένοι, κουκουβάγιες ποὺ βγαίνουνε ἀπὸ τὰ χαλάσματα τοῦ παλιοῦ καιροῦ. Σήμερα οἱ ἄνθρωποι εἶναι τέτοιοι, ποὺ μήτε τὸ κήρυγμα τοῦ ἁγίου Κοσμά τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ δὲν θὰ ἔκανε τίποτα.

Λοιπόν, ἄς τὸ πάρουμε ἀπόφαση. Τὸ κακὸ δὲν περιορίζεται πιά μὲ τίποτα, μὲ κανένα τρόπο, μὲ καμμιά δύναμη. Ὅσοι μιλοῦνε καὶ γράφουνε γιὰ νὰ φέρουνε στὸν ἴσιο δρόμο τοὺς πολλοὺς ποὺ ξεστρατίσανε, ἄς ξέρουμε πῶς δέρνουνε τὸν ἀγέρα, εἶναι «ἀέρα δέροντες», ποὺ ἔλεγε καὶ ὁ ἀπόστολος Παῦλος. Καὶ ἅγιος νὰ εἶναι αὐτός, ποὺ συμβουλεύει, πάλι δὲν θάβρει αὐτιά γιὰ ν' ἀκούσουνε τὴ φωνὴ του, ὄχι ἄνθρωποι σὰν ἐμᾶς, ποὺ ἔχουμε οἱ ἴδιοι ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ δασκάλεμα.

Ναί, ὁ κόσμος δὲν ἀλλάζει πορεία. Ἄς μὴν περιμένουμε πιά τίποτα καλύτερο, θὰ πηγαίνουμε ὁλοένα

στὰ χειρότερα. Ἀνήφορος πιά δὲν ὑπάρχει. Μοναχὰ κατήφορος. Ὅσοι ἔχουνε μέσα τους τὸν φόβο τοῦ Θεοῦ, αὐτοὶ οἱ λίγοι θ' ἀπομείνουνε, «τὸ μικρὸν ποιμνιον» ποὺ εἶπε ὁ Χριστός. Κι ἂν γράφουμε, γι' αὐτοὺς γράφουμε καὶ γιὰ τοὺς ἴδιους τους ἑαυτούς μας ποὺ κιντυνεύουμε νὰ ἀρπαχτοῦμε ἀπὸ τὰ δίχτυα ποὺ ἔναι μπλεγμένοι ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ θέλουμε νὰ δασκαλέψουνε. Γιὰ νὰ καθόμαστε ἀνύσταχοι.

Ὅσοι εἶναι αἰσιόδοξοι γιὰ τὸ μέλλον τῆς ἀνθρωπότητας, βλέπουνε μὲ ἄλλα μάτια τὸν κόσμος, ἀπ' ὅ,τι τὸν βλέπομε ἐμεῖς. Ἐμεῖς εἴμαστε οἱ γκριλιάρηδες, οἱ Ἰερεμίες, οἱ Κασσάντρες, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ὁ κόσμος μᾶς ὀχτρεύεται. Κι ἔχει δίκιο. Ὁ καθένας νοιώθει διαφορετικὰ τὴ ζωὴ, τὴ χαρὰ, τὸ καλὸ καὶ τὸ κακὸ. Γιὰ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ποὺ λέμε πῶς δὲν πᾶνε καλά, ὁ σημερινὸς κόσμος εἶναι ὁ πιὸ θαυμάσιος, ἢ σημερινὴ ζωὴ εἶναι ἢ πιὸ καλύτερη κι ἢ πιὸ βλογημένη ἀπὸ ὅλες ποὺ πέρασε ὁ ἄνθρωπος. Ἡ σημερινὴ νεολαία εἶναι μεθυσμένη ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνο ποὺ λέμε ἐμεῖς «ἀνηθικότητα», καὶ ποὺ αὐτὴ τὸ λέγει «ἐλευθερία». Τί κάθεσαι λοιπὸν ἐσὺ καὶ τσαμπουρνίζεις μὲ τὴν ἠθικὴ σου; Γι' αὐτοὺς εἶναι τὸ πιὸ μεγάλο χάρισμα ἢ ἀνηθικότητα, καὶ μποροῦνε νὰ σκοτώσουνε ἐκεῖνον ποὺ χτυπᾷ τὴν «ἐλευθερία» τους. Αἰῶνες ἀγωνιζότανε ὁ ἄνθρωπος, χωρὶς νὰ μπορέσει νὰ τὴν ἀποχτήσῃ. Καὶ τώρα ποὺ τὴν ἔκανε χτήμα του, νὰ τὴν ἀφήσει γιὰ τὴν παλαιοντολογικὴ ἠθικὴ μας;

Ποτὲ δὲν μίσησε ἄνθρωπος τὸν ἄνθρωπο τόσο πολὺ, ὅσο στὸν καιρὸ μας. Καὶ τὸν μίσησε στ' ὄνομα αὐτῆς τῆς «ἐλευθερίας», ποὺ λέγει πῶς εἶναι τὸ πολῦτιμο ἀπόκτημα τῆς ἐποχῆς μας. Μισημένες εἶναι οἱ ἠθικὲς κουκουβάγιες κι οἱ χριστιανικὲς μοιρολογηστρες. Ποτὲ ὁ χριστιανὸς δὲν μισήθηκε ὅσο σήμερα, οὔτε ἐπὶ Νέρωνα.

Ποῦ ν' ἀκούσουμε οἱ ἄνθρωποι τοῦ καιροῦ μας κουβέντα γιὰ Θεό, γιὰ ψυχή, γιὰ ἄλλη ζωὴ! Ἡ ψυχὴ τους ἔχει παραμορφωθεῖ ὀλοτέλα ἀπὸ τὶς κάθε λογῆς ἀνοησίες ποὺ βλέπουμε στὸν κινηματογράφο. Ἡ ταινία ποὺ δὲν ἔχει μέσα τῆς πολλῆ ἀνοησία, δὲν γνωρίζει ἐπιτυχία. Ἀνοησία, καὶ ἀκαλαισθησία, αὐτὰ τὰ δύο βασιλεύουνε σήμερα. Εἶναι ἀπίστευτο τὸ τί ἀκούγει κανένας γιὰ ἀστεία στὶς συναναστροφές ποὺ κάνουνε οἱ νέοι. Κρυόμπλαστα, ἀσυναρτησίες, μωρολογίες. Χάθηκε ἀπ' αὐτοὺς κι ἢ πιὸ συνηθισμένη ἐξυπνάδα. Τὰ καημένα τὰ παιδιά, παίρνουνε ἀφορμὴ ἀπὸ ἓνα τίποτα, γιὰ νὰ χαχανίσουνε. Τὰ δέρνει ἢ ἀμηχανία κι ἢ βαρυνεστημάρα κι αὐτὴ εἶναι ἢ αἰτία ποὺ τὰ κάνει νὰ χοροπηδᾶνε σὰν τρελλά, νὰ τσακίζουμε ὅ,τι βροῦνε μπροστά τους, νὰ τὰ βάζουνε μὲ ἀνύποπτους ἀνθρώπους. Γι' αὐτὰ τὰ πλάσματα ἢ ζωὴ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου εἶναι ἓνα ἀνιαρὸ πρᾶγμα δίχως σκοπὸ, δίχως ἀληθινὴ χαρὰ, δίχως ἀγνὸν ἐνθουσιασμό.

Ποιὸς φταίγει γι' αὐτὴ τὴν κατάσταση; Ὅλοι μας. Ὅλοι συνεργήσαμε γιὰ νὰ καταντήσῃ ἡ ζωὴ ἔτσι ποὺ κατήντησε. Ὅλοι δουλέψαμε γιὰ νὰ χτισθεῖ τοῦτος ὁ τερατώδης πύργος τοῦ Βαβέλ. Ἄλλοι κουβαλήσανε γιὰ πέτρες τὶς πετρωμένες καὶ ἀναίσθητες καρδιές τους, ἄλλοι κουβαλήσανε λάσπη ἀπὸ τὰ κατάβαθμά τους ποὺ φωλιάζουνε τὰ βρωμερὰ πάθη. Ἐκεῖνος ὁ παλιὸς πύργος τοῦ Βαβέλ ρήμαξε κι ἐξαφανίσθηκε. Μὰ τοῦτος θὰ στέκεται ἀσάλευτος, κι οἱ ἄνθρωποι ὀλοένα θὰ τὸν κάνουνε πιδ ψηλόν, μὲ σκοπὸ νὰ χτυπήσουνε τὸν Θεό.

Ἔσεῖς ποὺ θλιβόσαστε καὶ πονᾶτε γι' αὐτὴ τὴν κατάσταση, καλὰ κάνετε νὰ λυπόσαστε, μὰ μὴν ὄνειρευόσαστε πὼς θάρθουνε καλύτερες μέρες γιὰ τὸν κόσμο. Ὁ κόσμος τρέχει σὰν τρελλός. Κατὰ μὲν τὴ δική του γνώμη ἀνηφορίζει στὸν θρίαμβο, κατὰ δὲ τὴ δική σας γνώμη κατηφορίζει στὰ τάρταρα καὶ στὸν χαμό. Ποιὸς ἀπὸ τοὺς δύο ἔχει δίκιο, μοναχὰ ὁ Θεὸς τὸ γνωρίζει. Αὐτὸ τὸ τρέξιμο δὲν θὰ πάψει ὡς τὴν τελευταία μέρα, ποὺ θὰ λάμψει ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ θὰ δικαιωθοῦνε ὅσοι τὴν πιστέψανε σωστά, καὶ μαρτυρήσανε γι' αὐτὴ καὶ ἐμπαιχτήκανε γι' αὐτή.

Ἴσως νάρχεται κιόλας ὁ Ἀντίχριστος. Τὰ σημεῖα καὶ τὰ τέρατα ποὺ προφητεύτηκε πὼς θὰ κάνει ἀρχίσανε νὰ φανερώνονται. Ἡ ἐπιστήμη βασιλεύει κι ἡ ἀθεΐα βασιλεύει μαζί της.

Μία βροντερὴ φωνὴ ἀκούγεται ἀπὸ πάνω, μὰ τὴν ἀκοῦνε μόνο ἐκεῖνοι, ποὺ ἔχουνε αὐτιά γιὰ νὰ τὴν ἀκούσουνε. Καὶ λέγει: «*Νά, ἔρχομαι σὰν τὸν κλέφτη. Καλότυχος ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ξαγρυπνᾷ καὶ βαστᾷ καθαρὰ τὰ φορέματά του. Ὁ καιρὸς εἶναι κοντά. Ὁ ἄδικος ἄς ἀδικήσῃ ἀκόμα, κι ὁ βρωμερὸς ἄς βρωμισθεῖ ἀκόμα, κι ὁ δίκαιος ἄς κάνει δικαιοσύνη ἀκόμα, κι ὁ ἅγιος ἄς ἀγιάσῃ ἀκόμα. Νά, ἔρχομαι γρήγορα!*».



ὑπέρθεος Ὁ Πάπας!

Τοῦ θεολόγου κ. Νικ. Ἰω. Σωτηροπούλου.

Ἐγρᾶφη γιὰ τὸν Πάπα, ὅτι μὲ τὶς παμμέγιστες ἀξιώσεις γιὰ τὸ πρόσωπό του παρουσιάζεται ὡς ἡμίθεος.

Ἐπιεικὴς χαρακτηρισμὸς τὸ «ἡμίθεος», λέγουμε ἐμεῖς. Κατὰ τὴ Β' Βατικάνεια Σύνοδο, τῆς ὁποίας τὰ 50 ἔτη ἔσπευσε νὰ συνεορτάσῃ μὲ τὸν Πάπα ὁ Πατριάρχης κ. Βαρθολομαῖος, ἐὰν παρουσιασθῇ διαφορὰ μεταξὺ τῆς κρίσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τῆς γνώμης τοῦ Πάπα, οἱ πιστοὶ πρέπει νὰ προτιμήσουν τὴ γνώμη τοῦ Πάπα! Ἐπίσης κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴ Σύνοδο ὁ Πάπας δύναται νὰ ἐπεμβαίῃ στὴν Ἁγία Γραφή καὶ νὰ τὴν τροποποιῇ, νὰ προσθέτῃ,

ν' ἀφαιρῇ, νὰ διορθώῃ καὶ τοὺς Ἀποστόλους! (Ἄραγε καὶ τὸν Ἀπόστολο Πέτρο;).

Αὐτὲς οἱ ἀποφάνσεις καὶ ἀποφάσεις τῆς Συνόδου τοῦ Βατικανοῦ παρουσιάζουν τὸν Πάπα ὄχι ἀπλῶς ὡς ἡμίθεο, ἀλλ' ὡς θεό, ἢ μᾶλλον ὡς ὑπέρθεο, ναί, ὡς ὑπέρθεο, ἀφοῦ ἡ γνώμη τοῦ Πάπα πρέπει νὰ προτιμᾶται τῆς κρίσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ ὁ Πάπας δύναται νὰ ἐπεμβαίῃ στὸ θεόπνευστο καὶ αἰώνιο κείμενο τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς καὶ νὰ ἐπιφέρῃ μεταβολές. Ὁ Ἐωσφόρος φιλοδόξησε νὰ θέσῃ τὸ θρόνο του ὑπεράνω τῶν νεφῶν, νὰ γίνῃ ὁμοῖος μὲ τὸν Ὑψίστο. Ὁ δὲ Πάπας θέτει τὸ θρόνο του ὑπεράνω τῶν οὐρανῶν, γίνεται ἀνώτερος τοῦ Ὑψίστου!

Θεέ μου! Δὲν βλέπουν ὁ Πατριάρχης καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι φιλοπαπικοὶ τὴ σχιζοφρένεια τοῦ Παπισμοῦ; Πὼς ἀσπάζονται τὸ εἶδωλο τοῦ Πάπα τὸ ὑψωμένο ὑψηλότερα ἀπὸ τὴ χρυσὴ εἰκόνα τοῦ Ναβουχοδονόσορος;

Ἄλλὰ δόξα σοι, Κύριε, διότι ἔχεις καὶ στὴν ἐποχὴ μας εὐσεβεῖς ψυχές, οἱ ὁποῖες δὲν προσκυνοῦν τὸ εἶδωλο τοῦ Πάπα, ἀλλὰ προσκυνοῦν ἐσένα, τὸν μόνον ἀληθινὸ Θεό.



ὑπενθύμισις... πρὸς Ὅλους μας!

Προφητεία Ὁσίου Νείλου τοῦ Μυροβλήτου.

Ὅταν πλησιάσῃ ὁ καιρὸς τῆς ἐλεύσεως τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου θὰ σκοτισθῇ ἡ διάνοια τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη τῆς σαρκὸς καὶ θὰ πληθυνθῇ σφόδρα ἡ ἀσέβεια καὶ ἡ ἀνομία..

Τότε ἄρχεται ὁ κόσμος νὰ γίνεται ἀγνώριστος, θὰ μετασηματίζονται αἱ μορφὰι τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ δὲν θὰ γνωρίζονται οἱ ἄνδρες ἀπὸ τὰς γυναῖκας διὰ τῆς ἀναισχύντου ἐνδυμασίας καὶ τῶν τριχῶν τῆς κεφαλῆς.

Οἱ τότε ἄνθρωποι θὰ ἀγριέψουν καὶ θὰ γένουν ὡσὰν θηρία ἀπὸ τὴν πλάνην τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου. Δὲν θὰ ὑπάρχει σεβασμὸς εἰς τοὺς γονεῖς καὶ τοὺς γεροντότερους.

Ἡ ἀγάπη θὰ ἐκλείψῃ [...] Ἡ σωφροσύνη θὰ ἀπολεσθῇ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ θὰ βασιλεύσῃ ἡ ἀσωτεία. Τὸ ψεῦδος καὶ ἡ φιλαργυρία θὰ φθάσουν εἰς τὸν μέγιστον βαθμὸν καὶ οὐαὶ εἰς τοὺς θησαυρίζοντας ἀργύρια.

Αἱ πορνεῖαι, μοιχεῖαι, ἀρσενοκοιτίαι, κλοπαὶ καὶ φόνοι, θὰ πολιτεύονται ἐν τῷ καιρῷ ἐκείνῳ καὶ διὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τῆς μεγίστης ἁμαρτίας καὶ ἀσελγίας, οἱ ἄνθρωποι θέλουν στερηθῇ τὴν χάριν τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος ὅπου ἔλαβον εἰς τὸ Ἅγιον Βάπτισμα ὡς καὶ τὴν τύψιν τῆς συνειδήσεως [...] **Τότε αἰφνιδίως θέλει ἔλθει ἡ δίτομος ρομφαῖα καὶ θὰ θανατώσῃ τὸν πλάνον καὶ τοὺς ὀπαδοὺς αὐτοῦ.**

THE JESUS PRAYER

By St. Theophan the Recluse, from "The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology," by Igumen Charion of Valamo, Faber and Faber, 1966, pp 92-101.

You have read about the Jesus Prayer, have you not? And you know that our knowledge for this prayer arises from practical experience. Only with the help of this prayer can the necessary order of the soul be firmly maintained; only through this prayer can we preserve our inner order undisturbed even when distracted by household cares. This prayer alone makes it possible to fulfill the injunction of the Fathers: the hands at work, the mind and heart with God. When this prayer becomes grafted in our heart, then there are no inner interruptions and it continues always in the same, evenly flowing way.

The path to achievement of a systematic interior order is very hard, but it is possible to preserve this (or a similar) state of mind during the various and inevitable duties you have to perform; and what makes it possible is the Jesus Prayer when it is grafted in the heart. How can it be so grafted? It does happen. He who strives is increasingly conscious of this engrafting, without knowing how it has been achieved. To strive for this inner order, we must walk always in the presence of God, repeating the Jesus Prayer as frequently as possible. As soon as there is a free moment, begin again at once, and the engrafting will be achieved.

The Jesus Prayer, and the Warmth Which Accompanies It

To pray is to stand spiritually before God in our heart, in glorification, thanksgiving, supplication, and contrite penitence. Everything must be spiritual. The root of all prayer is devout fear of God; from this comes belief about God and faith in Him, submission of oneself to God, hope in God, and cleaving to Him with the feeling of love, in oblivion of all created things. When prayer is powerful, all these spiritual feelings and movements are present in the heart with corresponding vigor.

How does the Jesus Prayer help us in this? Through the feeling of warmth which develops in and around the heart as the effect of this Prayer. The habit of prayer is not formed suddenly, but requires long work and toil. The Jesus Prayer, and the warmth which accompanies it, helps better than anything else in the formation of the habit of prayer. Note that these are the means, and not the deed itself.

When we pray we must stand in our mind before God, and think of Him alone. Yet various thoughts keep jostling in the mind, and draw it away from God. In order to teach the mind to rest on one thing, the Holy Fathers used short prayers and acquired the habit of reciting them unceasingly. This unceasing repetition of a short prayer kept the mind on the thought of God and dispersed all irrelevant thoughts. They adopted various short prayers, but it is the Jesus Prayer which has become particularly established amongst us and is most generally employed: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner!*

So this is what the Jesus Prayer is. It is one among various short prayers, oral like all others. Its purpose is to keep the mind on the single thought of God. Whoever has formed the habit of this Prayer and uses it properly, really does remember God incessantly.

Since the remembrance of God in a sincerely believing heart is naturally accompanied by a sense of piety, hope, thanksgiving, devotion to God's will, and by other spiritual feelings, the Jesus Prayer, which produces and preserves this remembrance of God, is called spiritual prayer. It is rightly so called only when it is accompanied by these spiritual feelings. But when not accompanied by them it remains oral like any other prayer of the same type.

"Warmth" of the Prayer

What is the meaning of this warmth which accompanies the practice of the Prayer? In order to keep the mind on one thing by the use of a short prayer, it is necessary to preserve attention and so lead it into the heart: for so long as the mind remains in the head, where thoughts jostle one another, it has no time to concentrate on one thing. But when attention descends into the heart, it attracts all the powers of the soul and body into one point there. This concentration of all human life in one place is immediately reflected in the heart by a special sensation that is the beginning of future warmth. This sensation, faint at the beginning, becomes gradually stronger, firmer, deeper.

At first only tepid, it grows into warm feeling and concentrates the attention upon itself. And so it comes about that, whereas in the initial stages the attention is kept in the heart by an effort of will, in due course this attention, by its own vigor, gives birth to warmth in the heart. This warmth then holds the attention without special effort. From this, the two go on supporting one another, and must remain inseparable; because dispersion of attention cools the warmth, and diminishing warmth weakens attention.



From this there follows a rule of the spiritual life: if you keep the heart alive towards God, you will always be in remembrance of God. This rule is laid down by St. John of the Ladder.

The question now arises whether this warmth is spiritual. No, it is not spiritual. It is ordinary physical warmth. But since it keeps the attention of the mind in the heart, and thus helps the development there of the spiritual movements described earlier, it is called spiritual—provided, however, that it is not accompanied by sensual pleasure, however slight, but keeps the soul and body in sober mood.

Since the warmth accompanying the Jesus Prayer does not include spiritual feelings, it should not be characterized as spiritual, but rather as the warm-blooded impact of the spiritual prayer. There is nothing in itself bad about this warm-blooded feeling, unless it is connected with sensual pleasure, however slight. The rise of any sensual impact must be suppressed.

Things begin to go wrong when the warmth moves about in other parts of the body, often lower than the heart. And matters become still worse when, in enjoyment of this warmth, we imagine it to be all that matters, without bothering about spiritual feelings or even about remembrance of God; and so we set our heart only on having this warmth.

This wrong course is occasionally possible, though not for all people, nor at all times. It must be noticed and corrected, for otherwise only physical warmth will remain, and we must not consider this warmth as spiritual or due to grace. This warmth is spiritual only when it is accompanied by the spiritual impetus of prayer. Anyone who calls it spiritual without this movement is mistaken. And anyone who imagines it to be due to grace is in even greater error.

Warmth which is filled with grace is of a special nature and it is only this which is truly spiritual. It is distinct from the warmth of the flesh, and does not produce any noticeable changes in the body, but manifests itself by a subtle feeling of sweetness. Everyone can easily identify and distinguish spiritual warmth by this particular feeling. Each of us must do it for himself: this is no business for an outsider.

The Easiest Way to Acquire Unceasing Prayer

Acquiring the habit of the Jesus Prayer, so that it takes root in ourselves, is the easiest way of ascending into the region of unceasing prayer. Men of great spirituality have found, through God's enlightenment, that this form of prayer is a simple yet most effective means of establishing

and strengthening the whole of the spiritual and ascetic life; as such, in their rules for prayer they have left detailed instructions about it.

In all our efforts and ascetic struggles, what we seek is purification of the heart and restoration of the spirit. There are two ways to accomplish this: the active way, the practice of the ascetic labors; and the contemplative way, the turning of the mind to God.

By the first way the soul becomes purified and so receives God; by the second way, God of Whom the soul becomes aware, Himself burns away every impurity and thus comes to dwell in the purified soul. The whole of this second way is summed up in the one Jesus Prayer, as St. Gregory of Sinai says: "God is gained either by activity and work, or by the art of invoking the Name of Jesus."

He adds that the first way is longer than the second, the second being quicker and more effective. For this

reason, some of the Holy Fathers have given prime importance, among all the different kinds of spiritual exercise, to the Jesus Prayer. It enlightens, strengthens, and animates; it defeats all enemies visible and invisible, and leads directly to God. All of us may experience how truly powerful and effective it is. The Name of the Lord Jesus is the treasury of all good



things, the treasury of strength and of life in the spirit.

Therefore, it is very beneficial and we should, from the very first, give full instructions on the practice of the Jesus Prayer to everyone who repents or begins to seek the Lord. And only after the introduction of the beginner to the Jesus Prayer should we introduce him to other practices; the Jesus Prayer is the way that he can most quickly become steadfast and spiritually aware, thus achieving inner peace. Lack of this experience, many of the faithful end up wasting their time and labor in going no further than the formal and external "religious" activities of the soul and body.

The practice of the Jesus Prayer is called an "art," and it is a very simple one. Standing with consciousness and attention in the heart, cry out unceasingly: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me, a sinner*, without having in your mind any visual concept or image, and believing that the Lord sees you and listens to you.

It is important to keep your consciousness in the heart, and as you do so also control your breathing a little so as to keep time with the words of the prayer. But the most important thing is to believe that God is near and hears.

Say the prayer for God's "ear" alone. At the beginning, this prayer appears to be as only a lengthy activity, like any other, but in time it passes into the mind and finally takes root in the heart.

There are deviations from this right way of praying; therefore we must learn it from someone who knows all about it. Mistakes occur chiefly from the attention being in the head and not in the heart. He who keeps his attention in the heart is safe. Safer still is he who at all times clings to God in contrition, and prays to be delivered from illusion.

**"Techniques" and "Methods" Do Not Matter:
One Thing Alone Is Essential**

The prayer, *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me* is an oral prayer like any other. There is nothing special about it in itself, but it receives all its power from the state of mind in which it is made.

The various methods described by the Fathers (sitting down, making prostrations, and the other techniques used when performing this prayer) are not suitable for everyone: indeed without a personal spiritual father directing the faithful, these practices can actually be quite dangerous. It is better not to try them. There is just one method which is obligatory for all: to stand with the attention in the heart. All other things are beside the point, and do not lead to the "crux" of the matter.

Nothing in the words of the prayer and their uttering can alone bring forth its fruit. All fruit could be received without this prayer, and even without any oral prayer, but merely by directing the mind and heart towards God. However, to do this is quite difficult and it occurs only through divine grace (as does the prayer of the heart).

The essence of the whole thing is established in the clear and pure remembrance of God, and one's desire to walk in His presence. You can say to anyone: "Follow whatever methods you like—recite the Jesus Prayer, perform bows and prostrations, go to Church and do what you wish—only strive to be always in constant remembrance of God." I remember meeting a man in Kiev who said: "I must admit; I did not use any methods at all, I did not know the Jesus Prayer, yet by God's mercy I walk always in His presence. But how this has come to pass, I myself do not know; God alone granted me this gift! We must always remember this: pure prayer of the heart is always God-given; otherwise we may confuse the gift of His grace with some achievement of our own.



People say that we all must attain the Jesus Prayer, for that is inner prayer. This is not correct. The Jesus Prayer is a good means to arrive at inner prayer, but in itself it is not inner but outer prayer. Those who attain the habit of the Jesus Prayer do very well. But if they stop only at this and go no further, they stop half way. Even though we are reciting the Jesus Prayer, it is still necessary for us to keep the thought of God; otherwise the prayer is dry food. It is good that the name of Jesus should cleave to your tongue. In spite of reciting His name, it is still possible not to remember God at all and even to harbor thoughts which are opposed to Him. Consequently everything depends on consciously and freely turning to God, and on a balanced effort to hold oneself in this state.

The Jesus Prayer Is Stronger than Other Prayers

As we indicated earlier, the Jesus Prayer is an oral prayer like any other prayer. It is stronger than all other prayers only in virtue of the all-powerful Name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. But it is necessary to invoke His Name with a full and unwavering faith—with a deep certainty that He is near, sees and hears, pays whole-hearted attention to our petition, and is ready to fulfill it and to grant what we seek. There is nothing to be ashamed of in such a hope. If fulfillment is sometimes delayed, this may be because the petitioner is still not yet ready to receive what he asks.

Not a Talisman...

It is said of the fruit of this Prayer that there is nothing higher in the world. This is wrong. As if it were some "talisman" (an object with magic charm properties, *Ed.*). The Jesus Prayer is not some talisman. Its power comes from faith in the Lord, and from a deep union of the mind and heart with Him. With such a disposition, the invocation of the Lord's Name becomes very effective in many ways. But a mere repetition of the words does not signify anything.

Do not forget that you must not limit yourself to a mechanical repetition of the words of the Jesus Prayer. This will lead to nothing except a habit of repeating the Prayer automatically with the tongue, without even thinking about it. There is of course nothing wrong in this, but it constitutes only the extreme outer limit of the work. The essential thing is to stand consciously in the presence of the Lord, with fear, faith and love.

Oral and Inner Prayer

One can recite the Jesus Prayer with the mind in the heart without movement of the tongue. This is better than oral

prayer. Use oral prayer as a support to inner prayer. Sometimes it is required in order to strengthen inner prayer.

Avoid Visual Concepts

Hold no intermediate image between the mind and the Lord when practicing the Jesus Prayer. The words pronounced are merely a help, and are not essential. The principal thing is to stand before the Lord with the mind in the heart. This, and not the words, is inner spiritual prayer. The words here are as much or as little the essential part of the prayer as the words of any other prayer. The essential part is to dwell in God, and this walking before God means that you live with the conviction ever before your consciousness that God is in you, as He is in everything; you live in the firm assurance that He sees all that is within you, knowing you better than you know yourself. This awareness of the eye of God looking at your inner being must not be accompanied by any visual concept, but must be confined to a simple conviction or feeling. A man in a warm room feels how the warmth envelops and penetrates him. The same must be the effect on our spiritual nature of the all-encompassing presence of God, Who is the fire in the room of our being.

The words of the Prayer are only the instrument and not the essence of the work; but they are an instrument which is very strong and effective, for the name of the Lord Jesus is fearful to the enemies of our salvation and a blessing to all who seek Him. Do not forget that this practice is simple, and must not have anything fanciful about it. Pray about everything to the Lord, to our most pure Lady, to your Guardian Angel; and they will teach you everything, either directly or through others.

Images and Illusion

In order not to fall into illusion, while practicing inner prayer, do not permit yourself any concepts, images, or visions. For vivid imaginations, darting to and from, and flights of fancy do not cease even when the mind stands in the heart and recites prayer; and no one is able to rule over them, except those who have attained perfection by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and who have acquired stability of mind through Jesus Christ. Realize that God is everywhere; and so (among other places) there, where your thoughts and feelings are. You cannot succeed in freeing yourself entirely from images, but gradually they evaporate more and more. And through His grace, there comes a point when they disappear completely.



If we remembered that it is written, *By your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned*, we would choose to remain silent.

Abba Poimen the Great

ALEXANDROS PAPADIAMANDIS

Source: "Greece's Dostoevsky: The Theological Vision of Alexandros Papadiamandis," by Anestis Keselopoulos (Protecting Veil Press, 2011).

One of the greatest figures in modern Greek literature, Alexandros Papadiamandis was born on the Greek island of Skiathos on March 4th, 1851, "the second Sunday of Lent and the feast day of St. Gregory Palamas, while they were chanting the *triadiká* in church" [hymns sung in honor of the Holy Trinity, *Ed.*] (as we are informed by his fellow countryman Papa-George Rigas, distinguished scholar of folk traditions and specialist of the liturgical *typicon*). While this first inkling of God's favor appeared during Papadiamandis's birth, the second took place during his Baptism: "He was baptized on the Monday of Bright Week and named Alexandros. Something unusual happened while the priest, Papa-Nicholas, performed the Baptism; as he poured the oil in the baptismal font, the oil immediately made the form of the cross on the water. Papa-Nicholas interpreted this strange phenomenon, saying, 'This child will be great.'"

His father was the pious priest Adamantios Emmanuel. Papadiamandis writes that he was "a beneficent guide in all ecclesiastical questions and a sublime adornment of ecclesiastical celebrations" in the church of the Three Hierarchs and in the country chapels of Skiathos. From an early age, Alexandros followed his father around the island helping him, sometimes in the altar and sometimes at the lectern as chanter. With his exceptional sensitivity, Alexandros treasured his experiences of sharing this liturgical service with his father. His heart was filled with and his nous was instructed by images from the priestly life and the Church's services. He was so influenced by them that most of the scenes he chose to paint as a child were taken from the life of the Church. Reflecting on this time, he writes in his autobiographical memoir, "When I was young I would paint Saints, or I would write [hymnographical] verses."

From his childhood years, Alexandros had the opportunity to live the tradition of the *Kollyvádes*⁽¹⁾ fathers (those Greek Orthodox Athonite elders involved in the eighteenth century movement that inspired spiritual renewal and a return to more traditional liturgical and spiritual practices). This tradition had been preserved on Skiathos through the presence of a monastery built by the Kollyvádes, the Monastery of the Annunciation. Although the monastery was in decline during Papadiamandis's later years, the diligently preserved kollyvadian tradition remained alive in the inhabitants of the island. He would later write, "In this small monastery [of the Panagia of Kounistras in Skiathos] at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, six of my relatives were priest-monks." Papadiamandis gives an

account of the monastery's spiritual life and foundation on Skiathos:

"Papa-Gregory... the ascetic, descended from the heights of Athos together with his elder, Papa-Niphon, and thirty other monks. They sailed to the island of Gregory's birth [Skiathos], and there, in the gorge of Angallianous, they built a beautiful, awe-inspiring monastery—patriarchal, *Stavropegic*⁽²⁾, and *coenobitic*⁽³⁾—with an exquisite, very fine church, built with great care. It was so beautiful that during those years, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was famous and enjoyed great respect among the monasteries of Athos. These ascetics... were the so-called *Kollyvades*, who were under persecution on the Holy Mountain, as they insisted on *precision*⁽⁴⁾ (regarding frequent communion), and on many other things."

The renowned Elder Dionysios was a distinguished spiritual father and learned priest-monk who lived on Skiathos, whose roots were in the kollyvadian tradition. Papadiamandis knew him personally and did not hide his admiration for him. He was "the inspired spiritual father in the small monastery of the Prophet Elijah." Papadiamandis had such monks and monasteries in mind when he wrote, "the rule of prayer should be complete, following all the old *typicons*, with the vigils and pre-dawn Matins, with all the appointed verses and readings from the Psalter."

Papadiamandis was initiated into this kollyvadian—the genuine Orthodox—tradition, in his own home by his father, Papa-Adamantios, and by the broader world of the Church in Skiathos. In an unsigned obituary for his father, he wrote that Papa-Adamantios, like all of the older priests of the island, was taught how to celebrate the Mysteries⁽⁵⁾ by those venerable *Kollyvades*, who, at the end of the last century, established the Monastery of the Annunciation... which became a seedbed of humble priests for our island, priests who were lovers of the divine services. Simple and virtuous, they enjoyed the love and respect of the inhabitants, having no affectations or hypocrisy, and displaying no vanity as they lived their lives as priests.

Seeds of spiritual struggle that had been planted in Papadiamandis during his childhood and adolescence at home and in the wider environment of Skiathos were brought to fruition when he went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain for a few months, at the age of twenty-one. In one of his stories, we read about some of the events of his visit, mainly at the Skete of Xenophontos, and we perceive how the charm of the Holy Mountain was an inspiration for

him. While there, he met many ascetics and *hesychasts*⁽⁶⁾ and became familiar with the liturgical life of the monks. He was enthralled by the vigils of the monastics and recorded in his heart not only the strict *typicon* and the Byzantine melodies but also the spirit that governed it all. In this way, Athos and its traditions affected the path his life took and enriched it with unforgettable memories.

Given his rich spiritual upbringing, experiences, and heritage, it is only natural that Papadiamandis would choose to spend his life within this rich Orthodox tradition, preserving the Orthodox liturgical ethos through his writings and life. The critics of his age believed that there was little value in a detailed description of "how a village priest went to celebrate the liturgy in a country chapel for a little community of peasants or shepherds, who and how many took part in the festival, and what their customs were like." Papadiamandis, however, did not regard the celebrations as mere holidays, but himself lived the events and the life of the Church as the center and foundation of all events and all life.



Papadiamandis moved within this ecclesiastical environment and within the wider Greek tradition. He lived both aspects of this tradition, ancient and Byzantine, in a diachronic unity, which spanned the ages. He had utter integrity, both as a person and as a Greek, within whose Hellenism was Byzantium and in whose love for Byzantium might be discerned Hellenism. In his texts, Ancient Greece resembles a flower that, wilting

from its desire for the truth, then bears great fruit in the warmth of the Sun of Righteousness [Christ]. When history is viewed as a progression toward the discovery of the fullness of the truth of Orthodoxy, tradition truly lives, and history is kept from being fragmented. Other important figures in modern Greek literature such as Photios Kontoglou⁽⁷⁾ and, even more so, Nikos Gabriel Pentzakis⁽⁸⁾ would act from this perspective later on, with both their pens and their brushes. Together with our author, they are regarded as solid links in this tradition.

God favored Papadiamandis with many gifts, and he struggled to use them in a way that would bear the most God-pleasing fruit. The reverent and liturgical ethos expressed through Papadiamandis' writings and life bear witness to the successful cultivation of his gifts. His desire to glorify God is shown even more in the way his life ended and in his attitude toward death. In a prayer he offered at the end of a poem entitled, "To the Little Panagia in the Turret," he beseeches her, "comfort me, as well, my Panagia, before

I depart and will be no more.” In a letter written by Papa-George Rigas, we learn about the last moments of Papadiamandis’s life on earth:

His repose took place as follows: He became ill on the 29th of November 1910. On the third day of his illness, he fainted. When he revived, he asked, “What happened to me?” “It’s nothing, a small fainting spell,” his three brothers who were at his side told him. “I haven’t fainted,” Alexandros said, “in so many years; doesn’t it seem that it’s a prelude to my repose? Get the priest immediately and don’t delay.”

Soon after, having been called [by his brothers], the priest and the doctor arrived at the same time. Papadiamandis was, above all things, a pious Christian. So, as soon as he saw the doctor, he asked him, “What are you doing here?” “I came to see you,” the doctor told him. “Keep quiet,” the sick man told him. “I will first follow the ecclesiastical path [and call upon the help of God], and then you can come later.”

He had control of his faculties until the end and wanted to write a story. Until the end, his mind was dedicated to God. On his own, a few hours before his repose, he called for the priest to come so he could partake of Holy Communion. “Perhaps later on I won’t be able to swallow!” he explained. It was the eve of his repose and, as irony would have it, it was the day they told him that he would receive the medal of the Cross of the Savior.

On the eve of his repose, the second of January, he said, “Light a candle [and] bring me an [ecclesiastical] book.” The candle was lit. The book was about to be brought. However, Papadiamandis wearily said, “Don’t worry about the book; tonight I will sing whatever I remember by heart.” And he began to chant in a trembling voice, *Thy Hand Touching* [a troparion from the Hours of the eve of Theophany].

Papadiamandis sang this final hymn and, as day broke between the second and third of January of his sixtieth year, he wearily fell asleep. After passing through the furnace of pain and trials and tasting many of the bitter dregs of life while faithfully living the liturgical life of the Church, he now stretched out his strong wings to fly to the upper chapel of the angels, toward which he had oriented his whole life.

It snowed on the following day and, like Uncle Yiannios in the story, “Love in the Snow,” Papadiamandis lay down his worn-out body, presenting himself, his life, and his work before the Judge, the Ancient of Days, the Thrice-Holy. This was, finally, the only judgment with which he was concerned as he passed through life. Though his life and struggle in this world have ended, his work will continue to give witness to his devotion to the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox Church for generations to come.

† † †

(1) The name *Kollyvades* is derived from the Greek word *kóllyva*, the boiled wheat prepared by the faithful to be blessed in church in memory of the reposed. The use of

wheat as a Christian symbol for the soul is rooted in Christ’s words in John 12:24. The name *Kollyvades* was derisively given to this movement of spiritual renewal because one of the issues addressed was the performance of memorial services for the reposed on Sundays. The *kollyvadian* fathers were opposed to this innovation, as it was not in accordance with the traditional resurrectional character of Sunday.

(2) A *Stavropegic* monastery is one that falls under the direct supervision of the most senior bishop in any given Church jurisdiction. In the case of large parts of Greece, a *Stavropegic* monastery would fall directly under the supervision of the Patriarch of Constantinople. In the same way, the monasteries of Mount Athos are also *Stavropegic* and enjoy a similar spiritual independence from the local bishop.

(3) *Coenobitic* literally means “common life” and refers to a monastery where all members of the community share monastic life: in prayer, worship, and work. This is the most common form of monastic life.

(4) Within ecclesiastical vocabulary, *precision* [*akríveia*] generally denotes the precise keeping of the Church’s traditions (canonical, liturgical, etc.) as opposed to the use of *economy*—understood as a loosening of these traditions at a certain time, for a certain person (or persons), when *precision* obstructs the path to salvation.

(5) The Greek word *mystírion* is translated throughout this work as “Mystery” rather than as “sacrament,” as it corresponds more closely to the theological meaning of the word. It is capitalized so as to differentiate it from the common meaning of the word.

(6) *Hesychasts* are monastics that undertake the ascetic practice of *hesychia*, meaning “stillness.” It is an ancient spiritual tradition that helps the ascetic remain constantly in prayer.

(7) *Photios Kontoglou* (1895-1965): A writer, artist, and iconographer. An important figure in modern Greek literature, he is best known for his study of Byzantine iconography and his great struggle to reintroduce traditional iconography into modern Greece.

(8) *Nikos Gabriel Pentzikis* (1908-1993): A novelist, poet, artist, and pharmacist whose pharmacy in Thessalonica became a refuge for poets and painters in the mid-twentieth century. He is buried at the women’s monastery of Ormylia in Halkidiki.



The devil loves and always rejoices over the ungoverned; those who are not subject to one who has power, under God, to help them and to give them a hand.

St. Dorotheos of Gaza

A SELF-SACRIFICING LIFE: DR. IVAN LESHKO-POPEL

From "Russian Ascetics of the 19th and 20th Centuries," Holy Trinity Monastery, 1966.

There are many quiet and unsung heroes among the laity, whose good deeds and spiritual exploits remain largely hidden. May the following life take its rightful place upon a candle stand where it can shed its light abroad in our hearts, warming them with the noble beauty of self-sacrifice.

† † †

In mid-December 1903, in the town of Ekaterinoslav, there died an army doctor, Ivan Vasilievitch Leshko-Popel, a man not yet old, about 45 years of age. His death shook literally the whole town. Night and day hundreds of people streamed to his coffin, and a great multitude gathered for his funeral.

"Just let me have a last look at the dear one, at least through the window," begged an old workman on the street who was too feeble to squeeze his way into the house.

On the day of the burial, a crowd of poor folk, almost paupers, awaited the bringing out of the body. Wreaths were carried out of the house: porcelain wreaths, wreaths of flowers, metal wreaths, wreaths from his medical colleagues, wreaths from fellow army personnel, wreaths from grateful patients.

"And what about us?" asked the poor. "After all, he was our doctor. Are we going to bid him farewell empty-handed? We should also give him a wreath."

Someone took off his cap and threw into it a five kopeck piece. Dirty, gnarled hands reached into pockets and "precious" coins showered into the cap: kopecks, two kopeck pieces, three kopeck pieces. It was counted up: two rubles and some change. They went to the store.

"Give us a wreath for our dear doctor."

No luck; there was no wreath for two rubles. The prices were much higher. The proprietor came out.

"For whom is the wreath?"

"For Ivan Vasilievitch."

"Give them a nice wreath," the proprietor ordered. "And inscribe it as they request? 'To our dear doctor, from his grateful poor people.'"

The doctor-ascetic Ivan Vasilievitch Leshko-Popel was born on September 5th, 1860 in the town of Rogachov in the Mogilev province. He was educated in the Mogilev secondary school, then in the natural history branch of the Petersburg University, and finally in the army medical academy. In all his years as a student Ivan was considered an "odd fellow," an impression which he continued to enjoy among the ordinary, insensitive people, even after his professional reputation was established.

His classmates could not remember that the young Vanya ever hit, teased or otherwise offended anyone. On the contrary, he would always seek out and befriend the weaker ones. If someone was a slow learner who tried hard but couldn't manage his lessons, Popel would try to help him. "Please, let's study together," he would say to one of those having difficulty. "I find it easier." And he would make it seem as if the slow learner was granting him a favor.

In the upper classes, Popel became a real tutor. But even here his oddness revealed itself. While the other tutors enjoyed expensive, well-paid lessons, Ivan Popel arranged to give lessons for next to nothing. And on top of that, he spent 3 to 4 hours a week tutoring free of charge.

"What's a poor lad to do?" explained Popel, abashed when they laughed at his tutorial earnings. "If a father can't afford an extra ten rubles a month, must the student therefore lose a year? Time, my friend, is more precious to the poor than to the rich."

At the university Ivan Vasilievitch gave lessons with the same financial results: he expended a great deal of time but earned little.

"Riches carry many temptations," he would joke good-naturedly. "Once you begin to receive lots of money, all kinds of whims enter your head. To receive less is better for the soul."

From his meager earnings, Ivan Vasilievitch often helped his poorer classmates.

"Popel, you're rich, a capitalist," his classmates laughed. "You always have extra money."

"A rich man is not he that has a lot of money," Ivan Vasilievitch jested in return, "but he that spends little."

At home, during summer vacations, Popel was also forever taking care of the poor; he'd invite some ragged beggar in, then he'd discover some poor old sick woman and busy himself with sending her to a hospital; then he'd treat some children with rolls of coins. Sometimes they would deceive him. "Well, what of it?" he would say calmly. "Better that I be deceived in my opinion of who is poor, than to fail a poor man who has hopes that I'll be able to help him."

When Leshko-Popel entered medical school it became even more difficult for him financially. There was no time for private tutoring. All his time was taken by his studies. There was a wide range of subjects and the examinations were tough. The students used to complain that the professors were too demanding, but Popel was in favor of strictness.

"If I were a professor," he said, "I would drive my medical students without any mercy. For goodness' sake, a doctor is entrusted with the most precious thing there is—a man's life. What leniency can there be here where the most exact and thorough knowledge is required?"

During his fourth year in the medical school, he found himself a "follower." Under his care in the clinic there lay a gravely ill woman who worked as a cook. There was little

hope in her recovery. The patient herself sensed this and was becoming worn out.

"I don't feel sorry for myself, but for my son," she cried. "He's nine years old. What's to become of him?"

Popel was touched by the sick woman's grief. He comforted her, questioned her, and one day said:

"Would it be easier for you if you knew your little boy, was taken care of?"

"My dear, yes, then I would die with a prayer on my lips and peace in my heart."

"Then don't fear, Auntie Irene, I'll take your Kostya."

"Are you serious?" the sick woman could not believe her ears.

"Word of honor," he replied.

"May God bless you. Now I no longer need to fear death. I trust you and I am at peace concerning my son."

The following day towards the evening the sick woman died, and the next morning Ivan Vasilievitch took Kostya home to his apartment. The boy slept on top of a trunk in Popel's small, crowded room; for his food Ivan Vasilievitch scraped up six rubles out of his nearly empty pocket.

After graduating from the academy, Popel was assigned as a doctor of the reserve battalion in Ekaterinoslav where he remained until his death fifteen years later. This was a time of ceaseless labors for him; he knew neither rest, nor days off, nor, if you will, close friends. At seven in the morning he would begin receiving patients. Poor people, workers, blacksmiths, locksmiths and other tradesmen, old women from the market place, washer women, poor Jews—they all crowded to see him. Leshko-Popel would examine each one carefully, give a word of encouragement, write out a prescription, often giving them some medicine there on the spot.

After the clinic he would begin his round of house calls. With rapid strides the slight figure of the doctor would traverse the town from one end to the other. The thin coat was rarely buttoned—there was no time. The day was short and there were many sick people—and all in various parts of the town and on the outskirts. Later a bicycle was found, and the same thin coughing figure began to fly about town just as the wind.

"Ivan Vasilievitch," one of his patients somewhere would say of an evening, "won't you stay and dine with us?"

"I have no time. But could I have a little something to take along with me?" asked the doctor hurriedly, not having had a bite to eat all day.

One of Ivan Vasilievitch's regular patients would not let him leave her before he had eaten a piece of beef-steak and had drunk a cup of coffee or tea.

"If you don't feed the poor dear, he'll forget about food altogether," she would say.

Ivan Vasilievitch returned home late, in a state of total exhaustion. He went to bed and slept like a log. But often during

the night the door bell would ring; some poor peasant from across the valley had called asking for Ivan Vasilievitch. Other doctors living in closer proximity had declined to come at this hour, but the worn-out Popel could not refuse; he got up and went. In the morning, at seven o'clock the reception of patients began again, and another round of visits. And so it was for fifteen years.

Once, when the air was fragrant with the bloom of spring, some acquaintances met Popel in the town park. He was passing through.

"Please, sit down, doctor."

A smile ran across the pale face of the tired doctor. "Yes, it would be nice to sit down and rest." But he glanced at his watch and hurried on his way. "I have no time. Today I have to attend to several sick people."

Ivan Vasilievitch had a large practice also among the wealthy. Here he made good money and could have made himself quite a fortune had he so desired. But he could not. Everything he earned from the rich he gave to the poor.

There came to see him an impoverished schoolgirl with an emaciated green face; she had anemia. Popel prescribed iron pills. "Take them before eating."

"Can they be taken before tea?"

"God forbid. Tea and iron—make ink."

"What's to be done?" asked the skinny girl in bewilderment. "Mama and I never eat dinner; we just drink tea with rusks."

The doctor gave her a packet. "Give this to your mother for some meat." The packet contained three rubles. And for the next two months the widowed seamstress and her daughter received a package of meat daily from the butcher. "It's paid for," they were told.

Once Ivan Vasilievitch was called to a blacksmith's dwelling on the edge of town. A family of seven. The smith was afflicted with rheumatism; he was the only laborer in the family. They lived in a hut; it was cold and damp, and moisture gathered on the walls in rivulets. What hope could there be of curing rheumatism here? But they couldn't afford to leave. In three days a dry apartment was found, a half year's rent paid in advance—Dr. Popel's arrangement.

Ivan Vasilievitch Leshko-Popel was no ordinary doctor; his healing arts were directed as much towards the soul as towards the body. He knew how to comfort people, and he was a guardian angel to all the poor. There was nothing he would not do for the sake of alleviating another's suffering.

A young girl across town was dying of tuberculosis. She was beyond medical help. Nevertheless, Popel stopped in to see her every day, warding off despair and bringing sunshine to her last days.

"Why do you waste your time in coming to see us?" asked the mother, fully aware of her daughter's condition.

"If it brings some hope, some joy to the sick, surely it is not in vain," answered the doctor.

Finally it was clear that the candle was burning itself out. Friends persuaded the worn-out doctor to rest at one of their country homes. He came—and at once discovered some sick people in the nearby villages. He began treating them, busier than ever. “Go with God, Ivan Vasilievitch,” said his friends. “It’s better for you in town.”

Constantly forcing himself towards the good, the doctor-ascetic soon reached the end of his earthly sojourn. He fell ill and disregarded his condition until he collapsed—and it was too late. Even the special medicine sent by his colleagues could not help.

He received the Holy Mysteries. “Here is the end. Everything has been done for the final journey. Death. If I’m sad, it’s not because I’m dying, but because there is so much left to be done.” He smiled weakly, then turned to his children:

“Live in harmony together. Love one another. Take care of your mother. Lighten her load, and help others as much as you can, that their life, too, be made easier.”

He said nothing to his wife, but simply looked at her with a gaze which conveyed a gentle love for one who had cast warmth and light on the difficult path he had chosen.

That is all there is to the life of this simple doctor. It is a touching story of a profoundly good man, and what is best of all—it is true.

Friends and admirers of the doctor erected a handsome memorial in his honor. This is good. But it would be better still if we could preserve even a small piece of Ivan Vasilievitch Popel in our hearts, and somewhere, somehow manifest the spirit of this self sacrificing doctor-ascetic, for therein lies a rare beauty which can adorn our souls in this life and lead us into the higher realities of the world to come.



We should keep the self out of our actions. We should not act for the sake of our own comfort. This will keep Christ away from us. We should act for the comfort of others, and this way we too shall be comforted. God will then find comfort in us, and we shall cease to be merely human; we shall become deified. But if we put only the mind in charge, everything will be carnal and human.

The correct spiritual approach is to forget the good you do to others, and to remember the good others do to you. When one reaches that state of spiritual being, then he is indeed human—a man of God. But, on the other hand, if someone constantly forgets the good done to him by others, and only remembers the good he has done to others, this work is contrary to what Christ seeks from us.

Elder Paisios the Athonite

THE GREAT WAGER BETWEEN BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS

By Photios Kontoglou, from “The Soul After Death,” Fr. Seraphim Rose, Platina, 1980, pp.227-232.

On Pascha Monday, in the evening after midnight, before lying down to sleep I went out into the little garden behind my house. The sky was dark and covered with stars. I seemed to see it for the first time, and a distant psalmody seemed to descend from it. My lips murmured, very softly: *Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship the footstool of His feet.* A holy man once told me that during these hours the heavens are opened. The air exhaled a fragrance of the flowers and herbs I had planted. *Heaven and earth are filled with the glory of the Lord.*

I could well have remained there alone until break of day. I was as if without a body and without any bond to the earth. But fearing that my absence would disturb those with me in the house, I returned and lay down.

Sleep had not really taken possession of me; I do not know whether I was awake or asleep, when suddenly a strange man rose up before me. He was as pale as a dead man. His eyes were as if open, and he looked at me in terror. His face was like a mask, like a mummy’s. His glistening, dark yellow skin was stretched tight over his dead man’s head with all its cavities. He was as if panting. In one hand he held some kind of bizarre object which I could not make out; the other hand was clutching his breast as if he were suffering.

This creature filled me with terror. I looked at him and he looked at me without speaking, as if he were waiting for me to recognize him, strange as he was. And a voice said to me: “It is so-and-so!” And I recognized him immediately. Then he opened his mouth and sighed. His voice came from far away; it came up as from a deep well.

He was in great agony, and I suffered for him. His hands, his feet, his eyes—everything showed that he was suffering. In my despair I was going to help him, but he gave me a sign with his hand to stop. He began to groan in such a way that I froze. Then he said to me: “I have not come; I have been sent. I shake without stop; I am dizzy. Pray God to have pity on me. I want to die but I cannot. Alas! Everything you told me before is true. Do you remember how, several days before my death, you came to see me and spoke about religion? There were two other friends with me, unbelievers like myself. You spoke, and they mocked. When you left, they said: ‘What a pity! He is intelligent and he believes the stupid things old women believe!’

“Another time, and other times too, I told you: ‘Dear Photios, save up money, or else you will die a pauper. Look at my riches, and I want more of them.’ You told me then: ‘Have you signed a pact with death, that you can live as many years as you want and enjoy a happy old age?’

“And I replied: ‘You will see to what an age I will live. Now I am 75; I will live past a hundred. My children are free from want. My son earns a lot of money, and I have married my daughter to a rich Ethiopian. My wife and I have more money than we need. I am not like you who listen to what the priests say: *A Christian ending to our life...* and the rest. What have you to gain from a Christian ending? Better a full pocket and no worries... Give alms? Why did your so merciful God create paupers? Why should I feed them? And they ask you, in order to go to Paradise, to feed idlers! Do you want to talk about Paradise? You know that I am the son of a priest and that I know well all these tricks. That those who have no brains believe them is well enough, but you who have a mind have gone astray. If you continue to live as you are doing, you will die before me, and you will be responsible for those you have led astray. As a physician I tell you and affirm that I will live a hundred and ten years...”

After saying all this, he turned this way and that as if he were on a grill. I heard his groans: “Ah! Ouch! Oh! Oh!” He was silent for a moment, and then continued: “This is what I said, and in a few days I was dead! I was dead, and I lost the wager! What confusion was mine, what horror! Lost, I descended into the abyss. What suffering I have had up to now, what agony! Everything you told me was true. You have won the wager!

“When I was in the world where you are now, I was an intellectual, I was a physician. I had learned how to speak and to be listened to, to mock religion, to discuss whatever falls under the senses. And now I see that everything I called stories, myths, paper lanterns—is true. The agony which I am experiencing now—this is what is true, this is the worm that never sleeps, this is the gnashing of teeth.”

After having spoken thus, he disappeared. I still heard his groans, which gradually faded away. Sleep had begun to take possession of me, when I felt an icy hand touch me. I opened my eyes and saw him again before me. This time he was more horrible and smaller in body. He had become like a nursing infant, with a large old man’s head which he was shaking.

“In a short time the day will break, and those who have sent me will come to seek me!”

“Who are they?” I asked.

He spoke some confused words which I could not make out. Then he added: “There where I am, there are also many who mock you and your faith. Now they understand that their spiritual darts have not gone beyond the cemetery. There are both those you have done good to, and those who have slandered you. The more you forgive them, the more they detest you. Man is evil. Instead of rejoicing him, kindness makes him bitter, because it makes him feel his defeat. The state of these latter is worse than mine. They cannot leave their dark prison to come and find you as I have done. They are severely tormented, lashed by the whip of God’s love, as

one of the Saints has said [St. Isaac the Syrian]. The world is something else entirely from what we see! Our intellect shows it to us in reverse. Now we understand that our intellect was only stupid, our conversations were spiteful meanness, our joys were lies and illusions.

“You, who bear God in your hearts, Whose word is Truth, the only Truth—you have won the great wager between believers and unbelievers. This wager I have lost. I tremble, I sigh, and I find no rest. In truth, there is no repentance in hell. Woe to those who walk as I did when I was on earth. Our flesh was drunk and mocked those who believed in God and eternal life; almost everyone applauded us. They treated you as mad, as imbeciles. And the more you accept our mockeries, the more our rage increases.

“Now I see how much the conduct of evil men grieved you. How could you bear with such patience the poisoned darts which issued from our lips which treated you as hypocrites, mockers of God, and deceivers of the people. If these evil men who are still on earth would see where I am, if only they were in my place, they would tremble for everything they are doing. I would like to appear to them and tell them to change their path, but I do not have the permission to do so, just as the rich man did not have it when he begged Abraham to send Lazarus the pauper. Lazarus was not sent so that those who sinned might be worthy of punishment and those who went on the ways of God might be worthy of salvation.

He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still. (Rev 22:11).

With these words he disappeared...



Do you want us, our brethren, to tell you what you ought to fear? It is this: to deny Christ, instead of courageously confessing Him. This alone is truly to be feared. For if you deny Christ, then He will deny you on the day of Judgment: *But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father Who is in heaven.* (Mt 10:33).

St. Makarios of Corinth

What torments us most is our thoughts. Thoughts make us do all kinds of things, then we lose our peace and are tormented by our conscience. These pangs of conscience are nothing but the judgment of God within us. And so we must make peace with our Heavenly Father and turn to Him from our heart—asking Him to forgive us and give us of His Grace and His Divine strength; in order that we may always remain in peace and joy, like the angels and the Saints.

Elder Thaddeus of Serbia

THE POVERTY OF EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION

By Nikolaj Velimirovic, from his book *Agony of the Church* (published in 1917).

The poverty of European civilization has been revealed by this war (WWI, *Ed.*). The ugly nakedness of Europe has brought to shame all those who used to bow before Europe's mask. It was a silken shining mask hiding the inner ugliness and poverty of Europe. The mask was called: culture, civilization, progress, modernism. All was only *vanitas vanitatum* and *povertas povertatum* (vanity of vanities and poverty of poverties, *Ed.*). When the soul fled away, what remained was empty, ugly and dangerous. When religion plunged into impotence, then:

Science became a mask of pride. Art, a mask of vanity. Politics, a mask of selfishness. Laws, a mask of greediness. Theology, a mask of skepticism. Technical knowledge, a poor surrogate for spirituality. Journalism, a desperate surrogate for literature. Literature, a sick nostalgia and a nonsense, a dwarf-acrobacy. Civilization, a pretext for imperialism. Fight for right, an atavistic (the reappearance of a characteristic in an organism after several generations of absence, *Ed.*) formula of the primitive creeds. Morals, the most controversial matter. Individualism, the second name for egoism and egotism.

Christ—a banished beggar looking for a shelter, while in the royal and pharisaic palaces lived: Machiavelli, the atheist; Napoleon, the atheist; Marx, the atheist; and Nietzsche, the atheist, imperially ruling Europe's rulers.

The spirit was wrong and everything became wrong. The spirit of any civilization is inspired by its religion, but the spirit of modern Europe was not inspired by Europe's religion at all. A terrific effort was made in many quarters to liberate Europe from the spirit of her religion. The effort-makers forgot one thing, i.e., that no civilization ever was liberated from religion and still lived. Whenever this liberation seemed to be fulfilled, the respective civilization decayed and died out, leaving behind barbaric materialism in towns and superstitions in villages.

Europe had to live with Christianity, or to die in barbaric materialism and superstitions without it. The way to death was chosen. From Continental Europe first the infection came to the whole white race. It was there that the dangerous formula was pointed out: "Beyond good and evil." Other parts of the white world followed slowly, taking first the path between Good and Evil. Good was changed for Power. Evil was explained away as "biological necessity." Christianity, which inspired the greatest things that Europe ever possessed in every point of human activity, was degraded by means of new watchwords; individualism, liberalism, conservatism, nationalism, imperialism, secularism, which in essence meant nothing but de-Christianization of the European society, or, in other words, emptiness of European civilization. Europe

abandoned the greatest things she possessed and clung to the lower and lowest ones. The greatest thing was—Christ.

As you cannot imagine Arabic civilization in Spain without Islam, or India's civilization without Hinduism, or Rome without the Roman Pantheon, so you cannot imagine Europe's civilization without Christ. Yet some people thought that Christ was not so essentially needed for Europe, and behaved accordingly without Him or against Him. Christ was Europe's God. When this God was banished (from politics, art, science, social life, business, education), everybody consequently asked for a God, and everybody thought himself to be a god, and in truth there it failed, not on theories in Europe proclaiming, openly or disguisedly, everyone a god. So the godless Europe became full of gods!

Being de-Christianized, Europe still thought to be civilized. In reality she was a poor valley full of dry bones. The only thing she had to boast of was her material power. By material power only she impressed and frightened the unchristian (but not anti-Christian) countries of Central and Eastern Asia, and depraved the rustic tribes in Africa and elsewhere. She went to conquer not by God or for God, but by material power and for material pleasure. Her spirituality did not astonish any of the peoples on earth. Her materialism astonished all of them. Her inner poverty was seen by India, China, Japan, and partly by Russia. What an amazing poverty! She gained the whole world, and when she looked inside herself she could not find her soul. Where has fled Europe's soul? The present war will give the answer. It is not a war to destroy the world but to show Europe's poverty and to bring back her soul. It will last—this war—as long as Europe remains soulless, Godless, Christless. It will stop when Europe gets the vision of her soul, her only God, her only wealth.



But what advantage is it to us to foreknow these things, if it is not our lot to escape them? Therefore, with the whole bent of our mind, we must make it our business, that when the opportunity of being at liberty is ours, that we should escape the avenging torments of evildoers by the implementation of righteous life. For it is so said by Solomon, *Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave where you are going.* (Qoh 9:10). So Isaiah says, *Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near.* (Isa 55:6). And so Paul says, *Behold now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation.* (2 Cor 6:2). And he says again, *While we have opportunity, let us do good to all men.* (Gal 6:10).

St. Gregory the Great

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TWO KINDS OF FAITH

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

Fr. John Romanides is one of the most important Orthodox theologians of the Twentieth Century. He has been responsible for a renaissance of traditional (Hesychastic) understanding of salvation and Christianity in the Greek Orthodox Church and beyond.

† † †

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 what 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*. [1Cor 13:10 and 13:13; 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 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 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.

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 GREAT AND HOLY LENT

By Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (+2003), edited for length.

Contrary to what many think or feel, Lent is a time of joy. It is a time when we come back to life. It is a time when we shake off what is bad and dead in us in order to become able to live, to live with all the vastness, all the depth, and all the intensity to which we are called. Unless we understand this quality of joy in Lent, we will make of it a monstrous caricature, a time when in God's own name we make our life a misery.

This notion of joy connected with effort, with ascetical endeavor, with strenuous effort may indeed seem strange, and yet it runs through the whole of our spiritual life, through the life of the Church and the life of the Gospel. The Kingdom of God is something to be conquered. It is not simply given to those who leisurely, lazily wait for it to come. To those who wait for it in that spirit, it will come indeed; it will come like the Judgment of God, like the thief who enters when he is not expected, like the bridegroom, who arrives while the foolish virgins are asleep.

It may strike us as strange to hear that in Church we proclaim the Gospel—the *good news*—of judgment, and yet we do. We proclaim that the Day of the Lord is not fear, but hope, and declare together with the spirit of the Church: *Come, Lord Jesus, and come soon* (cf. Rev 22:20).

So long as we are incapable of speaking in these terms, we lack something important in our Christian consciousness. In spite of what we say, we are still pagans dressed up in evangelical garments. We are still people for whom

God is a God outside of us, for whom His coming is darkness and fear, and Whose judgment is not our redemption but our condemnation; we dread the moment when we will meet our Lord and do consider it to be the event we long and live for. Unless we realize this, Lent cannot be a joy, since Lent brings us both judgment and responsibility: we must judge ourselves in order to change, in order to become able to meet the Day of the Lord, the Resurrection, with an open heart, with faith, ready to rejoice in the fact that he has come.

Every coming of the Lord is judgment. The Fathers draw a parallel between Christ and Noah. They say that the presence of Noah in his generation was at the same time condemnation and salvation. It was condemnation because the presence of one man who remained faithful, of just one man who was a saint of God, was evidence that holiness was possible and that those who were sinners, those who had rejected God and turned away from him, could have done otherwise. And the same is true of the coming of the Lord.

There is also another joy in judgment. Judgment is not something that falls upon us from outside. Yes, the day will come when we will stand before God and be judged; but while our pilgrimage still continues, while there still lies ahead of us the road that leads us towards the fullness of the stature of Christ, then judgment must be pronounced by ourselves. There is a constant dialogue within us throughout our lives. Recall the parable in which Christ says: *Make your peace with your adversary while you are on the way.* (Mt 5:25). Some of the spiritual writers have seen in the adversary not the devil (with whom we cannot make our peace, with whom we are not to come

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to terms), but our conscience, which throughout life walks apace with us and never leaves us in peace. Our conscience is in continuous dialogue with us, gainsaying us at every moment, and we must come to terms with it because otherwise the moment will come when we finally reach the Judge, and then our adversary will become our accuser, and we will in turn stand condemned.

So while we are on the road, judgment is something which goes on constantly within ourselves, a dialogue, a dialectical tension between our thoughts and our emotions and our feelings and our actions; they stand in judgment before us and we stand in judgment before them. But in this respect we very often walk in darkness (due to our darkened mind, our darkened heart, and the darkening of our eye—which should be clear). It is only if the Lord himself sheds his light into our soul and upon our life, allowing us to see what is wrong and what is right in us.

There is a remarkable passage in the writings of St. John of Kronstadt in which he says that God does not reveal to us the ugliness of our souls unless he can see in us sufficient faith and sufficient hope for us not to be broken by the vision of our own sins. In other words, whenever we see ourselves with our dark side, we can then understand ourselves more clearly in the light of God, that is, in the light of the divine judgment. This means two things: it means that we are saddened to discover our own ugliness, indeed, but also that we can rejoice at the same time, since God has granted us his trust. He has entrusted to us a new knowledge of ourselves as we are, as he himself always saw us and as, at times, he did not allow us to see ourselves, because we could not bear the sight of truth.

Here again, judgment becomes joy, because although we discover what is wrong, yet the discovery is conditioned by

the knowledge that God has seen enough faith, enough hope and enough fortitude in us to allow us to see these things, because he knows that now we are able to act. We are in darkness, God is in light. We see nothing but our judgment and condemnation at the very moment when we should be emerging out of darkness into the saving act of God, which is both our judgment and our salvation.

The Orthodox Church, through Her wisdom, introduces Lent with a series of preparatory weeks in which the readings of the Gospel lead us step by step from outer darkness, as it were, to the point of light and judgment.

The first, dramatic stage in which we find ourselves consists in the fact that we are blind and yet are unaware of our blindness. The first reading from the Gospel that confronts us with this aspect of our preparation for Lent is the story of Bartimaeus, the blind man at the gate of Jericho, a man who either had lost his sight or was born blind, but was left there in the darkness, in the outer darkness. There was no light for him, there was no life for him, either, and there was no joy for him. He probably had come to terms with his distress. He continued to exist, since he could not live. He continued to exist day after day thanks to the cold, indifferent charity of passers-by.

But one thing made his misery both dramatic and tragic: he lived in the time of Jesus. More than once Bartimaeus must have heard of this man of God who had come to the world, who was healing and renewing people and things, a man who had opened the eye of blind men, who had given sight to the man born blind. The presence of the possibility of salvation, of an impossible healing, must have made his darkness even darker. Possible it was, if God came his way, yet impossible, because how could he find the itinerant preacher and healer who never was still, never in the

same place? How could a blind man keep pace with him? Darkness came into his awareness because there was a possibility that he might see. His despair became deeper than ever before, because there was hope. And so, when Christ came near him he could ask for healing from the very depth of his despair and from the very depth of a total, passionate longing for salvation. The coming of God had made him aware of darkness as he had never been before, aware as never before of the tragedy which he lived.

This is the first step, which we must accept and which we find so difficult to accept: we must face our true situation, not consoling ourselves with the thought that we have some sort of life within us that can replace divine life. We must accept that we are in darkness as far as the light of God is concerned. And then we must do something about it. We must become aware of the fact that without light we are lost, because the darkness is death, the absence of God. But when it comes to doing something, there are two things that stand in our way. First, we will not act unless we are aware of our desperate state. We will instead pray and ask God to do something. Even though we are not even praying, we hope that He will come and act. And, it is only out of a sense of deadly urgency that we begin to act, like Bartimaeus, whom no one could stop from crying out, shouting for help, since he knew that this was the decisive moment. Christ was passing by. In a minute he would be gone and the darkness would become permanent, irremediable.

Another thing that prevents us from doing something is the way we are afraid of people. I remember a man in prison who told me how marvelous it was to be found out, because, as he said, "So long as I had not been found out, I spent all my time, and my effort, trying to look as though I was alright. The moment I was caught I felt, 'Now I can choose: I can either remain what I was, a thief and a cheat, or else I can change. Now I am free to become different, and no one will be any more surprised than they were to discover that I was a thief.'"

As long as you have appearances to maintain it is terribly difficult to change, and this is what the parable of Zacchaeus, which follows the story the Blind Man, brings out so clearly. The problem of Zacchaeus was this: he wanted to see Christ. Would he take the risk of being ridiculed or not? To be ridiculed is a lot more difficult than to be disapproved of, because when we are sharply disapproved of we can hide behind our own pride. But to be laughed at, to be ridiculed, is something which is beyond the courage of most of us. Can you imag-

ine a bank manager in a small town climbing a tree in the midst of a big crowd, with all the boys whistling, pointing at him with their fingers, making cat-cries and the rest, just for the sake of meeting Christ? Well, that was the position of Zacchaeus, the rich man. But for him meeting Christ was so essential, such a question of death and life, that he was prepared to disregard the ridicule, the humiliation, attached to his action; and he saw Christ.

There are two ways out of our dependence upon human opinions and human judgments. We must either do what Zacchaeus did, accept humiliation because it is essential to be saved, or we can let our hearts be hardened, and accept the pride that will negate the judgment of others. There is no third way. We have all experienced situations whereby we knew what was right, and we knew what was wrong, and never decided for either right or wrong. Why? Because whenever we turn to the wrong we are afraid of the judgment of God, while whenever we turn to the right we are afraid of the judgment of men. Pride or humility are the only two



paths by which we can leave this situation. And then there is the problem of God's judgment. The story of Zacchaeus shows how we can oscillate between the judgment of men and the judgment of God. Now comes the opportunity for another move.

Isn't it time, when we are confronted with life and death, for us to judge ourselves and not be completely dependent upon others? We see this in the Publican and the Pharisee—the first,

sharp, definite judgment which is both human and divine, because both coincide. If we ask ourselves how it is possible that the Pharisee could be so proud in spite of knowing so much about God and things divine, how it was that the Publican could be so truly humble in spite of being simple, I think we can find the answer in this: the terms of reference for the Pharisee were found in the law, the letter of the law. One can always be right as far as the law and the letter is concerned. One can always fulfill rules and commandments. One can always have "done one's duty" and feel irreproachable. The terms of reference of the Publican, however, were different. He was not a good man. What he knew of the law was this: certain aspects of the law condemned him because he knew what he was like. Certain other aspects of the law he could use in order to extort whatever he wanted out of other people. The law for him was a powerful, cruel, hard instrument in his hands or in the hands of God. And as he knew life, he knew perfectly well that the only salvation from the law was human mercy, human compassion, a human approach and attitude to one another.

That was the only thing that could save a debtor from prison or save an extortioner from the judgment of the magistrate: a human touch. The Publican's terms of reference were people, his neighbors, including that invisible neighbor, God. This is why he could stand at the threshold of the temple and beat his breast, though hopelessly: in spite of all the logic of things, he knew that in his world of hard, cruel, implacable men there were moments when all things become possible, for a man can be a man even when he is hardened and cruel. And so it was with God. The law was there to condemn him, but God was "Someone." He was not only the Law-giver. He was not only the One who made sure that the law is observed. He was free within His law to act with humanity. This knowledge made the Publican humble before God, because his terms of reference contained hope, and the object of his hope was mercy, pity, charity. This made all things possible, in spite of the fact that it is so humiliating to be loved and to be saved by love.

The same truth appears in another way in the next parable, that of the Prodigal Son. Here again we find two men, one who is righteous and another who is unrighteous. The Prodigal Son is in a way another aspect of the Publican, and the elder brother is the same as the Pharisee. But here we are confronted not only with the tension between a law that is objective, but we are also confronted with the theme of sin itself. What does it mean to be in sin? It can be clearly defined in terms of the short conversation between the son and the father at the beginning of the parable. And if you want to put it in words more modern and cruder than the Gospel, it really amounts to this: "Father, I want to live, and you stand in my way. As long as you are alive the goods are yours. Die, for all intents and purposes. Let us suppose that you are already dead. I have no time to wait until you die in fact. Let us agree that as far as I am concerned I have no father left, but I have his goods because I have inherited them."

This is the sort of speech which we find, with the same or perhaps lesser hardness, on so many occasions between children and parents, between people who are related to one another in one way or another. It really involves saying: "As a person you do not matter. You stand in my way. The only thing that is of value to me is what I can get out of you. And so that I may get all I can from you, you must surrender even your existence. You must accept not to be."

This is grave sin, sin with regard to God, and sin with regard to man. With regard to God we are happy to take everything he gives and then turn him out of our lives. We are happy to go into a strange country to spend all he has given, while denying his existence with the same ruthlessness with which, in Holy Week, the soldiers covered the eyes of Christ so he could not see, so that they would be able to laugh at him more freely. The same is so often true of our relationships with people. And this is sin as well. This is the very point: to rule the other out because he doesn't matter. What matters are things—and the use I can make of them.

And then there is another aspect in this parable: hunger, distress, loneliness, all those things which we so hate in life, and yet which come to us as our only salvation, because as long as we are surrounded with comfort, we don't notice our true situation. We prove unable to move inward and to see that we are lonely in the midst of this crowd and that we are poor in the midst of all this richness. It is important for us to realize that all that comes our way which is bitter, which is hard, which is difficult, which we hate with all our greed and with all our fear—that is our salvation. To be deprived is essential for us. And if we are not deprived, we must learn to deprive ourselves to the point of becoming aware that we are face to face with the living God, at all times!

We misjudge our situation so badly in this respect. There is a beautiful passage in the *Tales of the Hassidim* translated by Martin Buber, in which he tells about a man, a rabbi, who lived in appalling misery and yet every morning and every evening thanked God for his generous gifts. One of those who heard his prayer said to him, "How can you be so hypocritical? Don't you see that God has given you nothing?" And he said, "No, you are mistaken. God looked on me and thought, 'This man, to be saved, needs hunger and thirst and cold and loneliness and illness and dereliction.' And he has given me these things in abundance." This is the true, Christian attitude, the attitude of a believer for whom the soul really matters. And this is what the return of the Prodigal Son to himself shows us. It also shows us another thing. The Prodigal Son comes back, having rehearsed his confession, and says: *I have sinned against heaven and against thee. I am no longer worthy to be called thy son. Let me be like the hired servants.* But the father does not allow him to say the last words.



Each of us can be a prodigal son, a prodigal daughter, an unworthy son, an unworthy daughter, an unworthy friend. What no one can do is to adjust himself to a relationship, however worthy, below his rank. No one who is an unworthy son can become a worthy hireling. We cannot step down from our birthright, from the right which love gave us in the first place. And therefore we are not to look for compromise and for legal readjustments with God and say, "I can't give you my heart but I will behave well. I can't love you but I will serve you," and so forth. This is a lie, a relationship which God is not prepared to accept and will refuse to accept.

The last step on our way towards Lent is one which is shown to us in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. It sets before us the following problem: what are we going to judge and to be judged about? We may have thought that we will be judged on whether we have a deep knowledge of God, whether we are theologians, whether we live in the transcendental realm. This parable makes it absolutely clear that God's question to us, before we can enter into any kind of divine reality, is this: *have you been human?* If you have not, that you may become like the God-Man Jesus, who is the measure of all things. This is very important, because the type of judgment which we are constantly making is a falsified judgment. We notice how pious we are, how much knowledge of God we have, questions belonging to the realm of what an English writer has called "Churchianity" as contrasted with Christianity. But the question which Christ asks us is this: Are you human or sub-human? Are you capable of love or not? I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was naked, I was in prison, I was ill. What did you do about it? Were you able to respond with your heart to my misery, were you able to respond at a cost and with all your humanity—or not? At this point we must remember what we have said before concerning the Pharisee and the Publican. Christ does not ask us to fulfill the law. He will not count the number of loaves of bread and of cups of water and the number of visits we pay to hospitals and so forth. He will measure our heart's response. And this is made clear from the words of Christ in another part of St. John's Gospel, where he says, *And when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants.* The doing means nothing. We become human at the moment when, like the Publican, like the Prodigal Son, we have entered into the realm of broken-heartedness, into the realm of love which is a response both to divine love and to human suffering. This cannot be measured. We can never, on that level, say, "I am safe. I will come to the judgment and be one of the sheep," because it will not be a question of whether or not we have accomplished the law, but whether this law has become so much ourselves that it has grown into the mystery of love.

There, at that point, we will be on the fringe, on the very threshold of entering into that spring of life, that renewal of life, that newness of all things, which is Lent. We will have gone through all these stages of judgment, and will have emerged from blindness and from the law into a vision of the mysterious relationship which may be called *mercy* or *grace*. And we will be face to face with being human. But we must remember that to be human does not mean to be "like us" but "like Christ." With this we can enter Lent and begin to experience through the readings of the Church, through the prayers of the Church, through the process of repentance, that discovery of the acts of divine grace which alone can lead us towards growth into the full stature of the likeness of Christ.

I have brought you to the gate. Now you must walk into it.



The more people distance themselves from a natural, simple life and embrace luxury, the more they suffer from anxiety. And as they distance themselves from God, they naturally cannot find rest in anything they do. Worldly stress is a result of "worldly happiness," of worldly pleasures and self indulgence. Educated externally and being full of anxiety, thousands of people (even young children) are driven to psychoanalysis and psychiatry...

When we see a person, who has everything, be stressed, anxious and sad, we must know that God is missing from his life. In the end, even wealth will make people suffer; because the material goods cannot really satisfy them. Theirs is a double affliction. I know wealthy people who have everything and are miserable. They do not even have children, but they are still miserable. They are too lazy to lie down or take a walk.

"Fine," I told someone, "since you have some free time, do something spiritual: read one of the Hours of prayer, read a passage from the Gospel." "I cannot," he said. "Then," I told him, "try doing something good: go to the hospital to visit some sick person." "Why should I go all the way there," he says, "what will become of it?" "Go help some poor person in your neighborhood." "No," he says, "that does not please me either." Can you believe that this person is miserable despite the fact that he has everything: free time, numerous houses and so on? And these people suffer to the point that they lose their mind. What a dreadful thing!

By Elder Paisios the Athonite

IT IS PAST TIME FOR ALL TO TAKE ACTION

By Fr. Demetrios Carellas.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, This excellent pro-life encyclical (provided below) from the Assembly of Orthodox Bishops in North America was issued on January 22nd, 2013. I give thanks to God for these Spirit-filled words, and I pray that ALL Orthodox Christians—Clergy and Laity—will put them into ACTION in their everyday lives. It is PAST time for we Orthodox to be in the FRONT LINES defending the right to life for the innocent, defenseless child in the womb! It is PAST time for our clergy to preach and teach on this issue and to organize their faithful to join groups like 40 Days for Life, and stand in prayer in front of these death chambers, especially those of Planned Parenthood: a truly demonic organization that kills over 325,000 babies every year for profit!

And while we must give deep love and God's healing grace to those women who have had abortions and repent of their evil deed, we must also—in love—OPENLY chastise those Orthodox doctors, nurses, counselors, politicians, news media personnel, celebrities, AND clergy who have taken part in—or defended—this legalized infanticide. We do not help these people find salvation by giving them honors, when they should be given penances for the healing of their souls! Is it not PAST time to reach out to each one of these misguided people, admonishing them in love, and calling them to confession and repentance? If they refuse to change their ways, then—again out of LOVE for their souls—should we not excommunicate them, so that they can feel the pain of being separated from the Cup of Life and then return, with tears of repentance, to be restored to the Church?

During the past 40 years, over 55 MILLION babies have been slaughtered on the ungodly altar of the three-headed, secular-humanistic god of privacy, pleasure and profit. Many other Christians, especially the Roman Catholics, have been very active—in their words AND actions—in defense of these innocent ones. But where have WE been during this time, my dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ? Other than a few beautiful encyclicals and a few dedicated laity and clergy who have started Orthodox pro-life groups, the Orthodox presence in the pro-life movement has been, at best, one of “benign neglect.”

In the opinion of this sinful and unworthy priest, this Encyclical should be regarded as a FINAL CALL to all Orthodox Christians to not only “talk the talk”, but also “walk the walk” in the defense of the God-given right of every child to be born! If God came to judge the world tomorrow, what would He have to say about the deafening silence of over 90% of Orthodox Christians, while

the “silent screams” of 3600 babies being slaughtered—everyday, for 40 years—are ascending to His Throne in the heavens? When each of us stand before His fearful Throne, awaiting His righteous judgment, will those 55 million souls be our defenders or our accusers before Him?

O my beloved sojourners on the sea of life, I fear the code blue button is about to be pushed on our Nation's soul! When will we Orthodox take our rightful position in leading the fight for the ones who cannot fight for themselves? No other issue—economy, ecology, clean air, education, proper food diet, physical health, etc.—can have meaning as long as we permit this legal infanticide to continue! This most ungodly of all actions in our Nation's history (perhaps in the history of the world!), this murder-for-profit of living ikons of God, must stop! It is Satan's greatest weapon in his efforts to destroy true motherhood and the family unit.

In the midst of all this loss of personal and family identities, in this hurricane of destruction called Secular Humanism, laying waste to Christian moral principles regarding the sanctity of human life from conception to natural death, (and other things, like traditional marriage), there is still reason to have hope, still time to change, before the death rattle—in both the soul of our Nation and the souls of so many of its citizens—becomes irreversible. Of course, I am not speaking of the false and shallow hope and change being promoted by our political leaders in both parties; I speak of the One Who IS our hope, Who—alone—can transform us and our Nation: from darkness to light, from death to life, from perdition to salvation!

When the Jews cried out for deliverance under the tyranny of Pharaoh, God heard their cries and sent them a deliverer: His servant, the God-seer Moses. If WE now cry out—with our prayers, tears and actions—will not our Lord Jesus Himself come and deliver us, and our Nation, from this demonic curse of the noetic Pharaoh, the devil?

Let us begin—right this moment and several times each day—to BEG our Most Sweet Lord Jesus to intervene, so that this legalized slaughter will NEVER have another anniversary on the January 22nds that remain before Christ returns! *He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*

Unworthy priest, +Demetrios

† † †

January 22, 2013: The 40th Anniversary of Roe v. Wade

Monday, January 21, 2013

Forty years ago the Supreme Court of the United States handed down a decision, known as Roe v. Wade, granting a “right” for women of the United States to terminate the lives of their children in the womb. This decision has resulted in some 54 million children's lives ending almost before they began.

The Holy Orthodox Christian Faith is unabashedly pro-life. The Lord Jesus Christ was recognized and worshipped in His mother's womb while yet unborn by the Holy Forerunner who was also still in his mother's womb (Luke 1:44); St. Basil the Great (4th Century), one of the universal teachers of the faith, dared to call murderers those who terminate the life of the fetus. The Church has consistently held that children developing in the womb should be afforded every protection given to those outside the womb. There is no moral, religious or scientific rationale which can justify making a distinction between the humanity of the newly-conceived and that of the newly-born.

Abortion on demand not only ends the life of a child, but also injures the mother of that child, often resulting in spiritual, psychological and physical harm. Christians should bring the comfort of the Gospel to women who have had abortions, that our loving God may heal them. The Orthodox Church calls on her children, and indeed all of society, to provide help to pregnant mothers who need assistance bringing their children safely into the world and providing these children loving homes.

On the occasion of this sorrowful anniversary, and as we mourn the violence we all too often visit upon one another, as exemplified by the recent mass killings in Aurora, Colorado and Newtown, Connecticut, we pray for an end to the violence of abortion. Surely the many ways in which we as a people diminish the reverence and respect for human life underlie much of this violence. The disrespect for human life in the womb is no small part of this. Let us offer to Almighty God our repentance for the evil of abortion on demand and extend our hearts and hands to embrace life.

On the occasion of this 40th Anniversary of "Roe v. Wade," we republish the following "Agreed Statement" issued in 1974 by the Orthodox-Roman Catholic Bilateral Consultation in the United States (composed of representatives from the former SCOBA and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops) a statement as timely now as it was then:

An Agreed Statement on Respect for Life

We, the members of the Orthodox-Roman Catholic Bilateral Consultation in the United States, after extensive discussions on the sanctity of marriage, feel compelled to make a statement concerning the inviolability of human life in all its forms.

We recognize that human life is a gift of God entrusted to mankind and so feel the necessity of expressing our shared conviction about its sacred character in concrete and active ways. It is true that the Christian community's concern has recently seemed to be selective and disproportionate in this regard, e.g., in the anti-abortion campaign. Too often human life has been threatened or even destroyed, especially during times of war, internal strife, and violence, with little

or no protestation from the Christian leadership. Unfortunately, the impression has frequently been given that churchmen are more concerned with establishing the legitimacy of war or capital punishment than with the preservation of human life. We know that this has been a scandal for many, both believers and unbelievers.

We feel constrained at this point in history to affirm that the "right to life" implies a right to a decent life and to full human development, not merely to a marginal existence.

We affirm that the furthering of this goal for the unborn, the mentally handicapped, the aging, and the underprivileged is our duty on a global as well as a domestic scale.

We deplore in particular the U.S. Supreme Court's decision failing to recognize the rights of the unborn--a decision which has led to widespread indiscriminate early abortion.

We affirm our common Christian tradition with regard to the right of the unborn to life.

We acknowledge our responsibility to mediate the love of Christ, especially to the troubled expectant mother, and thus make possible the transmission and nurturing of new life and its fully human development.

We urge our churches and all believers to take a concrete stand on this matter at this time and to exemplify this evangelical imperative in their personal lives and professional decisions.



Source: The above statement is available at: <http://www.assemblyofbishops.org/news/2013/jan-22-roe-vs-wade-anniversary>.



Don't pressure your children. In your prayers, say the things you want to tell them. Children don't listen through their ears, but only when divine grace comes to enlighten them. Then they listen to the things we want to tell them. When you want to say something to your children, tell it to the Panaghia and she will bring it to pass. This prayer of yours will be like a spiritual caress that will embrace your children and grab their attention. Sometimes we try to caress them and they react, but they never react against the spiritual caress.

Children are not edified by constant praise. They become self-centred and vain. All their lives they will want everyone to be praising them constantly, even if they are being told lies. Unfortunately, nowadays all people have learned to tell lies and the conceited accept those lies as their daily sustenance. "Say it, even if it's not true, even if it's ironical," they say. God does not want this. God wants truth. Unfortunately, not all people understand this and they do the very opposite.

Blessed Elder Porphyrios (+1991)

ON FASTING

A commentary from an Orthodox pamphlet on the related teachings by St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessaloniki (+1359); the saint's feast days are November 14th and the second Sunday of Great Lent, known as the "Sunday of St. Gregory Palamas."

But fasting is not simply abstention from certain foods, nor the selection of certain foods. Of course, this too is called fasting, because by obeying the Church and the way in which the Church appoints fasting, we can do nothing else but submit our personal will to the catholic will of the Church. In other words, we obey Christ and the holy Fathers of the Church, who have decreed it. Beyond this, fasting is a broader virtue.

In the first place, fasting is also purity of the senses to the maximum extent possible. The saint writes: "If you fast from foods, but you have your eye on adultery and curiosity and jealousy in the inner chamber of your soul, and your hearing is susceptible to insults, unchaste songs, and evil whisperings, and the other senses are receptive to things which harm in a similar way, what is the use of fasting? Absolutely none." That is to say, there is no use in bodily fasting if you do not at the same time fast with the other senses, such as sight and hearing, which are the doors through which sin enters the soul and arouses passion. Therefore at the season of fasting (and at all times) Orthodox Christians must take care to control all of their senses.

Here we see from the teaching of St. Gregory that theology is not independent of purity even of the senses, because a theology which is not interested in that is simply not Orthodox. True fasting is abstention from evils, and therefore we can speak of fasting from evil. St. Gregory, referring to a passage in the Old Testament and especially to the words of the Prophet Isaiah, *Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink* (Isa 29:9) says that there is a surfeit and fiendish drunkenness. Indeed he writes that in those who fast and pray the devil suggests thoughts to remember the faults of others, sets in motion thoughts about rancor and sharpens the tongue for gossip. And the saint suggests that at the time of fasting we should cultivate love for our neighbor.

Another great sin, particularly at the time of fasting is conceit and pride. Of course a great temptation during fasting is self-esteem, when the person fasting tries to show it to people, so that he will be considered a fine Christian. A characteristic type of this tendency is the

Pharisee, who makes a display of his fasting, and in general of all his keeping of the Law. But self-esteem makes "useless our labour of fasting and prayer." The point is that self-esteem spoils both the reward and the labour itself of fasting and prayer.

But fasting should be joined with all the virtues. And naturally when we speak of virtues, we do not mean a few acts of an autonomous moral *deontology* (*ethical theory concerned with duties and rights*, Ed.), but the works of God. And when a person keeps the will of God, he participates in His works and therefore has peace, justice, love and so forth. Thus fasting should be joined with the virtues.

The greatest of the virtues are self-control, mourning, compunction, repentance, brokenness of heart. Fasting should be joined with these in order to be acceptable to God and to give fruits to the person fasting. The saint writes: "For

there must be self-control with fasting. Why? Because even satiety with cheap foods prevents the cathartic mourning and the godly sorrow in the soul and the compunction which shapes firm repentance for salvation; for without a broken heart it is not possible to enter truly into repentance. But decreasing nourishment and sleep and sensations in accordance with the will of God breaks the heart and brings it to mourn over its sins."

Repentance, mourning, and all the other motions of the soul cannot be brought back to their original beauty where there is satiation with material food. Fasting helps towards this aim. But mere fasting, without this necessary atmosphere for it, which is penitence in its full orthodox

sense, does not help in the spiritual life. So one also needs bodily labour, as well as compunction of heart. Otherwise fasting becomes a formal procedure and an outward formal practice, without any essential meaning.

At many points in his homilies, St. Gregory refers to the spiritual atmosphere in which fasting takes place. There is a characteristic passage worth citing. The saint writes that we should fast and pray with a broken heart, with self-reproach and humility "in order that our fasting and our watching and waiting in the temple may be pure and pleasing to God." The fasting that is pure and pleasing to God should be done with self-reproach, a broken heart and humility.

A fast which is not connected with this whole spiritual, ascetic atmosphere is not pleasing to God. The saint writes impressively that a fast which is not connected with the whole ascetic life "has rather an affinity with the evil angels," because even the demons fast, but their own undernourishment is connected with anger, hate, pride, and the opposition to God. So then we are in danger of fasting in the way



of the demons when we do not link our fasting with the whole ascetic life.

But beyond this, a fast also means purity of the nous from fantasies and impassioned thoughts. Interpreting Christ's saying: *But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face.* (Mt 6:17), he says that here the Lord is legislating that we should not try to show that we are fasting and so solicit glory and praise from men. Beside this interpretation, St. Gregory also makes an *anagogic* (*mystical*, Ed.) interpretation of the passage. In this we can see his hesychastic life, but at the same time also an extension of the fast which we should not particularly follow, because in this way we can escape the great temptation which lies in wait, the external standardization of fasting and of all the gospel virtues.

The head of a man's soul is his nous, which is the ruling part, that is to say the center of his existence. The imaginative part of the soul, "which is the permanent seat of the sensory energies" is the person. When we want to make a real fast, we must anoint our nous with oil, that is to say we must make the nous charitable. And naturally, our nous becomes charitable when it receives the Grace of God. In this state the nous is illuminated and practices noetic prayer. At the same time we must wash away from our imagination the shameful and unclean thoughts and all anger and cunning. Such a fast not only cures a person from the passions and banishes the devil, but it numbers with the angels those who fast.

These things show the scope of fasting. In other words fasting is not only the avoidance of some foods, even though this is necessary, but at the same time it is purification of the whole inner world, especially of the imaginative part of the soul, from thoughts and images, and furthermore, illumination of the nous, which is the ruling part of the soul.

Those people who connect fasting simply with outward practices, and not with the whole ascetic life, are deluded.



God is present in a mysterious way in every being—most especially in the heart, which is the center of life. It is impossible to unite with God when the stomach is full, for a full stomach causes many cares and worries. All our thoughts, all our emotions, and all our will must be concentrated. When they are not, we are restless and lose our peace.

Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (+2002)

FLEEING SIN'S DESTRUCTIVE PLACES AND WAYS

By St. Theodore the Studite.

A physical harbour is not like a harbour of the mind. When someone comes to anchor in the former, they ease off and have no worries about the storms and dangers of the sea. In the latter on the contrary, the passions become more ferocious with the relaxation of the flesh, and the spirits of wickedness join in the assault like storms: the spirits of fornication, gluttony, avarice, despondency, dejection, pride. The fear is that we may be sunk in harbour. David once looked unguardedly on Uria's wife, and readers know what he suffered. *Jacob ate and was filled, says Scripture, and the beloved kicked.* (Deut 32:15). Someone touched without meaning to and they were enflamed to lust and gave birth to iniquity.

Take care, you who are listening to this. Flee the destructive places and ways of sin. Govern your sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, your food, drink and sleep, that you may keep from being overwhelmed by the tempest of the passions. This is worth remembering: someone who sails across the physical sea is subject to storms and tempests without their wanting it, while someone who crosses the water of the mind is lord of tempest and of calm. For if they manfully shake off unseemly thoughts, they are filled with calm, having the Holy Spirit as the companion of their voyage. But one whose senses are unbridled and who lets in desires like streams, stirs up a most dreadful storm for themselves.

Unless the person does not swiftly smooth out their tempestuous thoughts, will end by repeating those miserable words, *I entered the depths of the sea, and a tempest drowned me.* (Pss 68:3). Therefore let reason be in control, and let the better not be dragged down by the worse, but let the spirit be master and act for the better. Or don't you know what sin produces? Didn't it introduce death into the world? Didn't it destroy the earth? Hasn't it filled the inhabited world with graveyards and tombs from the beginning of time until now? For humanity was 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 (Pss 48,13:21).

And so, because sin is like all this, destructive and deadly, we must flee from it, brethren, with all our might, and choose virtue, which makes humans angels, raises them from death, resists the demons, overcomes the rulers of this age, and finally betroths them to the kingdom of heaven. May we all reach it too by the grace and love for humankind of our Lord Jesus Christ, with whom to the Father and the Holy Spirit belong glory, might and honour, now and for ever, and the ages of ages. Amen.

A WELL-PRESERVED BYZANTINE CHAPEL [SEALED UNDER TURKISH MUD, AND DISCOVERED DURING THE MYRA-ANDRIAKE EXCAVATIONS]

By Jennifer Pinkowski, January 7, 2013.

DEMRE, Turkey—In the fourth century A.D., a bishop named Nicholas transformed the city of Myra, on the Mediterranean coast of what is now Turkey, into a Christian capital. Nicholas was later canonized, becoming the St. Nicholas of Christmas fame. Myra had a much unhappier fate.

After some 800 years as an important pilgrimage site in the Byzantine Empire it vanished—buried under 18 feet of mud from the rampaging Myros River. All that remained was the Church of St.

Nicholas, parts of a Roman amphitheater and tombs cut into the rocky hills.

But now, 700 years later, Myra is reappearing. Archaeologists first detected the ancient city in 2009 using ground-penetrating radar that revealed anomalies whose shape and size suggested walls and buildings. Over the next two years



they excavated a small, stunning 13th-century chapel sealed in an uncanny state of preservation. Carved out of one wall is a cross that, when sunlit, beams its shape onto the altar. Inside

is a vibrant fresco that is highly unusual for Turkey.

The chapel's structural integrity suggests that Myra may be largely intact underground. "This means we can find the original city, like Pompeii," said Nevzat Cevik, an archaeologist at Akdeniz University who is director of the excavations at Myra, beneath the modern town of Demre.

Mark Jackson, a Byzantine archaeologist at Newcastle University in England, who was not involved in the research, called the site "fantastic," and added, "This level of preservation under such deep layers of mud suggests an extremely well-preserved archive of information."

Occupied since at least the fourth century B.C., Myra was one of the most powerful cities in Lycia, with a native culture that had roots in the Bronze Age. It was invaded by Persians, Hellenized by Greeks, and eventually controlled by Romans.

Until the chapel was unearthed, the sole remnant of Myra's Byzantine era was the Church of St. Nicholas. (The bishop, also known as Nicholas the Wondermaker, was a native Lycian of Greek descent.) First built in the fifth century A.D. and reconstructed repeatedly, it was believed to house his remains and drew pilgrims from across the Mediterranean. Today, Cyrillic signs outside souvenir shops cater to the Russian Orthodox faithful.

But Myra attracted invaders, too. Arabs attacked in the seventh and ninth centuries. In the 11th, Seljuk Turks seized the city, and the bones thought to be those of Nicholas were stolen away to Bari, in southern Italy, by merchants who claimed to have been sent by the pope.

By the 13th century, Myra was largely abandoned. Yet someone built the small chapel using stones recycled from buildings and tombs.

Decades later, several seasons of heavy rain appear to have sealed Myra's fate. The chapel provides evidence of Myra's swift entombment. If the sediment had built up gradually, the upper portions should show more damage; instead, except for the roof's dome, at the surface, its preservation is consistent from bottom to top.

"It seems incredible," said Engin Akyurek, a Byzantine archaeologist with Istanbul University who is excavating the site. He and his team dug down 18 feet to the base of chapel, where they discovered a few artifacts from the early 14th century. (At the time, Turks were gaining control of Anatolia, and after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 the Ottomans ruled for nearly five centuries.)

In the layers of mud between the 14th-century ground level and the late-Ottoman level—which is just shy of the modern surface—they discovered nothing at all.

Ceramics unearthed at the chapel and at St. Nicholas Church indicate that Myra remained unoccupied until the 18th century. And while a sunken city "may sound romantic," said Dr. Jackson, the British scholar, "this mud promises to have preserved a treasure trove of information on the city during an important period of change."

How classical cities transformed into Byzantine cities during the Christian era, especially between 650 and 1300, is a



subject of much scholarly debate. “Each city was different,” Dr. Jackson said, “and so we need high-quality, well-excavated evidence in order to contribute to the debate about the nature of urban change in this period.”

The fresco in the excavated chapel is especially striking. Six feet tall, it depicts the *deesis* (“prayer” or “supplication” in Greek). This is a common theme in Byzantine and Eastern Orthodox iconography, but the Myra fresco is different. Where typically these depictions show Christ Pantocrator (Christ the Almighty) enthroned, holding a book and flanked by his mother, Mary, and John the Baptist, whose empty hands are held palms up in supplication, at Myra both John and Mary hold scrolls with Greek text.

John’s scroll quotes from John 1:29: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” Mary’s is a dialogue from a prayer for the Virgin Mary in which she intercedes on behalf of humanity, asking Jesus to forgive their sins. Dr. Akyurek said this scroll-in-hand version had been seen in Cyprus and Egypt, but never in Turkey.

The chapel is part of a larger dig that includes the Roman amphitheater—largely reconstructed in the second century after an earthquake leveled much of Lycia—and Andriake, Myra’s harbor, about three miles south. Long a major Mediterranean port, Andriake was where St. Paul changed ships on his way to Antioch (now Antakya). Finds there include a workshop that produced royal purple and blue dye from murex snails and a fifth-century synagogue, the first archaeological evidence of Jewish life in Christian Lycia.

Much of Myra is under modern buildings in Demre, so archaeologists are unsure where they will dig next. They are buying property from local residents to prevent illegal excavations, though judging from the paucity of artifacts found so far, looters might be disappointed: the last residents of Myra seem to have looked at the rising floodwaters and packed their bags before they left.



Remember that not a single word is lost during prayer, if you say it from your heart; God hears each word, and weighs it in a balance. Sometimes it seems to us that our words only strike the air in vain, and sound as the voice of one crying in the wilderness. No, no; it is not so!... The Lord responds to every desire of the heart, expressed in words or unexpressed.

St. John of Kronstadt

WISDOM FROM OUR ORTHODOX WORLD

From various Orthodox periodicals, translated from Greek by the staff of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen.

We easily admit to our lesser faults so as to convince ourselves that the greater ones do not exist...

Virtues have many teachers but few imitators.

He who knows other’s character is an educated man; he who knows his own character is a wise man.

Go on and spontaneously offer to others those things that they dare not ask you for...

Withstanding injustice and forgiving those who commit it is a greater virtue than performing kind acts.

The torture of conscience is the hell of the living.

Faith is not just a virtue—it is the catacomb through which all virtues pass through!

Clarity is the ornament of clean thoughts.

Good and evil people are not just determined through the deeds they commit but also through those they wish to commit.

Spring arrives for those who patiently await it.

God does not count the number of years of our earthly lives; He weighs them...

He who postpones never starts...

Your good deeds belong to God and need to be attributed to Him.

Good manners demand avoiding exaggerations.

Malice is the ulcer of the soul.

Talents are strengthened in isolation; strong characters, on the other hand, are formed among the many waves of the world.

Study that which is worthy of study.

The longer we keep away from life’s material excesses the closer we draw to our Creator.

He who speaks without thinking is no different than him who shoots without aiming.

A virtuous person never discusses his virtues.

The person who has the correct faith but continues to commit sins is like a face without eyes.



If you want it, the grace of God will visit you.... All things are dependent on us, on our will. I teach you; but if you are indifferent and do not listen, you sustain the loss. I throw you an apple: if you do not catch it, I am not at fault.

Elder Ieronymos of Aigina (+1966)

HOW AN ATHEIST CANCER PATIENT CAME TO BELIEVE IN GOD

By Antonios Tenedios (Skalohori, Mytilini, Greece).



Quite a few years ago the following real-life story took place. This story was told to me by my good friend, Fr. Demetrios, the parish priest of the St. Vasilios Greek Orthodox Church located at Sah-touri Street, Piraeus, Greece.

I present this story to you just as it was narrated to me by Fr. Demetrios himself.

“One morning after the Divine Liturgy, I went to the Church office. A fifty year old man came in to talk to me. I did not know him and I had never seen him before in my Church. He spoke to me about a forty-two year old man who was admitted to the hospital in Piraeus, Greece. He was diagnosed with cancer. The disease had spread throughout his body and had metastasized into his brain. Following an examination, the doctors had told him that there is nothing that could be done to save his life. He was taking large doses of medicine but they did not help him. This gentleman told me that the hospitalized man was a close relative of his. He requested that I go to the hospital as soon as possible in order to give him Holy Communion.

As requested, I went to the hospital to fulfill this obligation, to administer Holy Communion to the sick man. As soon as I entered the patient’s room, it became apparent to me that he was in bad shape. It was further verified to me that the disease had spread to the brain and there was no chance of survival. His days were numbered. The patient was the only person in the room. The other bed was empty. At a certain point, the patient awakened from his coma and opened his eyes. He immediately saw me and with great difficulty told me the following story:

‘My family admitted me to this hospital facility thirty-five days ago. An eighty year old man was already in the room that I was assigned to. This patient was suffering from bone cancer. He was suffering horrific pains. In spite of his pain, he would continuously pray: *Glory to you, Oh God, Glory to you, Oh God* and this would be followed by a series of prayers. I was an atheist and I was hearing this for the first time in my life. I had never in my life stepped foot in a Church. This is why I became so startled when I observed that after saying his prayers he would calm down and sleep peacefully for two or three hours. But when he woke up again he would groan from unbearable pain. And then he continued to pray *Glory to You, Oh God!*

I was groaning and suffering from immense pain as well, but he, in spite of his pain, continued to glorify God. I, on the other hand, in my frustration from my pain blasphemed the name of Christ and His Holy Mother. The old man was actually thanking God for giving him cancer. Hearing him go on like this constantly and I, suffering my own pain, became upset with him. In addition to his constant praying, he would daily request to receive Holy Communion.

I, the filthy one, swore at him constantly. I would say to him ‘shut up, shut up finally! Can’t you see that the God that you glorify is torturing us severely with this cursed illness? What God? There is no God!’

The old man would calmly hear me and reply: ‘He exists, my child, God does truly exist and He is a loving Father. Through the illness that He has given us, we are being cleansed of our many sins.’ These replies of the old man made me angrier and I began once again to blaspheme both God and demons. I started yelling out and saying: ‘God does not exist! I don’t believe in anything; neither in God, His Heavenly Kingdom nor in the other world.’

Following this exchange between us, the old man would calmly reply: ‘Wait and you will see with your own eyes how the soul of a believing Christian is separated from his body. I am a sinner but the Grace of God will save me. Wait, you will see and believe!’

He continued to glorify God and His Holy Mother. He would say a specific prayer that repeated the word *hail* for the Virgin Mary (taken from the Salutations of the Akathist Hymn). He also chanted the hymns *Oh Virgin, Birth-Giver of God* and *It is truly meet to bless you*.

At one point, he suddenly stopped praying and I heard him say: ‘Welcome, my guardian angel! I thank you for coming with such a resplendent party of angels to take my soul.’

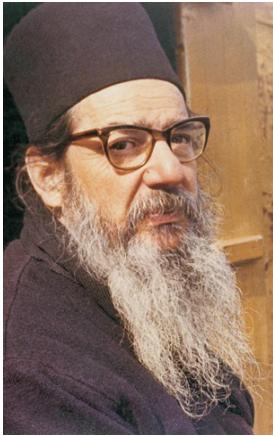
In great shock, I opened my eyes to see before me the heavenly host. The old man then made the sign of the Cross; crossed his arms on his chest and took his last breath. Suddenly the hospital room was filled with brilliant light that was brighter than ten suns. I, the unbeliever, the atheist, the materialist, saw this miracle with my own eyes. Then an extremely beautiful fragrance filled the room. I was dumbfounded by what I saw because I realized at that point that the old man was right all along.

I then called my parents and told them everything that I had witnessed and experienced. I angrily told them off because they had never spoken to me about the existence of God. I then invited my friends and relatives to come close to me and asked them to tell me everything about faith in God which I had never been taught by anyone. Dear Father, I now believe that God truly exists. This is why I am asking you to hear my confession and for you to give me Holy Communion.’ ”

Glory to God in his Saints!

Μελαγολικαὶ Ἐνοράσεις

Γέρων Θεόκλητος Διονυσιάτης (+2006). Αυτό τὸ ὄντως προφητικὸ καὶ ἐπίκαιρο ἄρθρο, δημοσιεύθηκε στὸν «Ὁρθόδοξο Τύπο» στὶς 23 Νοεμβρίου, 2001.



Ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς, μεταξὺ ἄλλων, λέγει ὅτι «οἱ Μοναχοὶ εἶναι οἱ κήρυκες τῆς ἐρχομένης Βασιλείας, οἱ προφήται τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης». Τὴν φράσι αὐτὴ μοῦ θύμισαν κάποιες συζητήσεις, ποὺ εἶχα τελευταίως μὲ τρεῖς φίλους ἡσυχαστές, ποὺ καὶ οἱ τρεῖς, ὡσὰν ἀπὸ προφητικὴ διαίσθησι, ἰσχυρίζοντο γιὰ τὴν ἐπέλευσι ἀπιθάνων ἐθνικῶν

καταστάσεων.

Καὶ ποιές καταστάσεις εἶναι αὐτές; Ὅτι, τάχα, ἡ Ἑλλάς, σταδιακῶς, δὲν θὰ συρρικνωθῆ μὲν ἐδαφικῶς, ἀλλὰ θὰ κατακτηθῆ ἐκ τῶν ἔνδον ἀπὸ τὸ Ἰσλάμ! Καὶ ἐστήριζαν τὸν ἰσχυρισμὸν των στίς ἡλεγμένες πληροφορίες, ὅπως ἔλεγαν, ποὺ τοὺς μετέδιδαν παλαιοὶ φίλοι τους κορυφαίων πολιτικῶν θέσεων, ποὺ τοὺς ἐπεσκεπτόντο στὴν Ἐρημο τοῦ Ἄθωνος ἢ τοὺς ἔγραφαν.

Καὶ στὴν ἐρώτησί μου: Ὁ Θεὸς θὰ ἐπιτρέψῃ τὴν ἀντικατάστασι τῆς ἁγίας Ἐκκλησίας Του, ποὺ «ἐπεριποιήσατο τῷ ἰδίῳ Ἀίματι», μὲ τὸν σκοτεινὸ καὶ δαιμονικὸν μουσουλμανισμὸν μέσα στὴν τοπικὴ Ὁρθοδοξία τῆς Ἑλλάδος; Μοῦ ἀπήντησαν μὲ ἓνα στόμα ὅτι, ὁ Θεὸς θὰ τὸ ἐπιτρέψῃ ἐξ ἀφορμῆς τῆς ἐκτεταμένης ἁμαρτίας. Καὶ ἀνεφέρθησαν στοὺς Βυζαντινοὺς Ρωμηοὺς, ποὺ δὲν μετανοοῦσαν.

Καὶ ὅταν πάλιν τοὺς ἐρώτησα πῶς θὰ συμβῆ αὐτὸ καὶ πότε καὶ τί θὰ γίνουν οἱ Ἕλληνες, ἀπήντησαν, ὅτι ἤδη ἐνεργεῖται ἡ ἄλωσις μὲ τὰ 2-3 ἑκατομμύρια τῶν μωαμεθανῶν, ποὺ ὀνομάζονται μετανάστες, καὶ ποὺ θὰ στερεώνωνται σταδιακῶς μὲ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν ἰθαγένεια, ποὺ θὰ τοὺς χορηγῆ εὐχαρίστως τὸ Κράτος, δηλαδὴ ἡ ἄθη κυβέρνησις. Οἱ δὲ Ἕλληνες βαθμιαίως θὰ γίνουν μειονότης, ἕως ὅτου θὰ μείνουν ἐλάχιστοι Χριστιανοὶ ὡς... δείγμα.

Μὴ ἀπορῆς, πάτερ Θεόκλητε, ἔσπευσαν νὰ ἐξηγήσουν, αὐτὴν τὴν τραγωδίαν τοῦ λαοῦ μας. Πολλοὶ θὰ ἀποδεχθοῦν τὸν μουσουλμανισμὸν ἀβιάστως. Ἄλλοι, μὲ κάποιαν βίαν ποικίλης μορφῆς. Καὶ ἄλλοι «Χριστιανοὶ» θὰ μεταναστεύσουν σὲ «Χριστιανικὲς» χῶρες, μὴ δυνάμενοι νὰ συμβιώσουν μὲ τοὺς βαρβάρους αὐτούς, ποὺ τοὺς χρησιμοποιεῖ ὁ Θεὸς ὡς μέσον παιδαγωγίας, ὅπως ἀνὰ τοὺς

αἰῶνας ἐνεργοῦσε στοὺς Ἰσραηλίτες καὶ στοὺς Χριστιανούς, ποὺ δὲν μετανοοῦσαν γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες τους. Παράδειγμα ὁ Κατακλυσμὸς, τὰ Σόδομα, ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς τῆς Ἀνατολῆς, τὸ Βυζάντιον.

Αὐτὰ ὅλα μὲ εἶχαν συντρίψει ψυχικῶς καὶ σκεφτόμουν, τάχα θὰ ἐπιτρέψῃ ὁ Θεὸς αὐτὴν τὴν ἀσύλληπτον συμφορὰν; Ἐπηκολούθησε σιωπὴ γιὰ ἀρκετὴ ὥρα. Στὴν συνέχεια, ἔθεσα τὸ ἐρώτημα: Πατέρες ἅγιοι καὶ ἀδελφοί, φαντάζεσθε σεῖς, πῶς θὰ ἀνεχθῆ ὁ Κύριος τὶς μουσουλμανικὲς δαιμονικὲς θυσίες, ἀντὶ τῶν Ὁρθόδοξων θυσιαστηρίων; Τότε ἓνας ἡσυχαστὴς μοῦ ὑπενθύμισε τὴν περίπτωσι τοῦ ἀσκητοῦ πού, μετὰ τὴν ἄλωσι τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, εἶδε ἐπάνω στὴν ἁγία Πρόθεσι ἐρειπωμένον Ναοῦ, μίαν γουρούνα μὲ τὰ νεογνά της καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ κλαίῃ καὶ νὰ ὀδύρεται. Τότε ἐνεφανίσθη Ἄγγελος Κυρίου καὶ τοῦ εἶπε: «Ἄββᾶ, τί κλαίεις; Γνωρίζεις ὅτι, αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶδες, εἶναι πρὸς εὐάρεστον τὸν Κύριον ἀπὸ τὴν ἀναξίτητα τῶν ἱερέων, ποὺ λειτουργοῦσαν;» Καὶ ὁ Ἄγγελος ἐγένετο ἄφαντος.

Ἡ συζήτησις ἐκράτησε περισσότερον ἀπὸ δύο ὥρες, ὁπότε οἱ ἡσυχαστὲς ἀνεχώρησαν καὶ μοῦ ἐτόνισαν νὰ εὐχαριστῶ τὸν Κύριον γιὰ ὅσα ἐπιτρέπει νὰ γίνωνται ἐξ ἀγάπης καὶ γιὰ τὴν σωτηρίαν τῶν ψυχῶν. Καὶ νὰ μὴ παρασύρωμαι συναισθηματικῶς ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπιφάνεια τῶν γεγονότων, ἀλλὰ νὰ εἰσδύω στὴν οὐσίαν των, ἀφοῦ εἶναι δεδομένον, ὅτι «ὁ Θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν».

Κι ἔμεινα μόνος...

Μέσα στὸν συγκλονισμό μου γιὰ τὴν τραγωδίαν τοῦ λαοῦ μας, τὸν κλαυθμὸν καὶ τοὺς στεναγμούς μου πρὸς τὸν πανυπερεύσπλαγγον Θεόν, ἄρχισα νὰ μελετῶ ὅσα εἶπαν μὲ βεβαιότητα οἱ ὅσοι ἐκεῖνοι ἐρημίτες καὶ ἄνθρωποι τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ νὰ ἀναλύω λογικῶς τοὺς ἰσχυρισμούς τους. Παρ' ὅτι καμμιὰ ἀνησυχούσα φωνὴ δὲν ἀκούεται, ὅμως, κάποια σποραδικὰ δημοσιεύματα πρὸ μηνῶν στὸν γρηγοροῦντα «Ὁρθόδοξον Τύπον» ἤρχοντο νὰ ἐπαληθεύσουν σχεδὸν τοὺς ἰσχυρισμούς τῶν φίλων μου ἡσυχαστῶν. Καὶ μάλιστα κάποια δημοσιεύματα τῶν τελευταίων ἡμερῶν, πάλιν στὸν «Ο.Τ.» ἀπὸ σφόδρονες Χριστιανούς, θεολόγους καὶ συγγραφεῖς, οἱ ὅποιοι μὲ πειστικὰ ἐπιχειρήματα κατέληγαν στὰ ἴδια συμπεράσματα, ποὺ ἐβασίζοντο σὲ ἀντικειμενικὰ στατιστικὰ στοιχεῖα.

Ἄλλὰ τὸ σκάνδαλον εὐρίσκεται στὴν σιωπὴν τῶν κοινῆς πληροφορήσεως μέσων, τῶν λεγομένων μαζικῆς ἐνημερώσεως. Ὅμως, ὅσον καὶ ἂν φαίνεται περιέργη ἢ βαθεῖα σιγὴ ἐπὶ ἐνὸς βοῶντος ἐθνικοῦ κινδύνου, τὸ φαινόμενον δὲν εἶναι ἀνεξήγητον. Πρόκειται περὶ σχεδὸν καθολικῆς πωρώσεως τῶν συνειδήσεων. Καὶ εἶναι ἱστορικῶς ἀποδεδειγμένον, ὅτι ὅταν ἡ ἁμαρτία καθολικοποιῆται, γενικεύεται, ἀκολουθεῖ, δίκην συνδρομοῦ, ἢ ἄγνοια τοῦ κακοῦ.

Ἴδου ἡ ἀπόδειξις: Ὄταν ὁ Θεὸς εἶχεν ἀποφασίσει τὸν Κατακλυσμόν, μὲ τὸ αἰτιολογικὸν «*Οὐ μὴ καταμείνη τὸ πνεῦμα μου εἰς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους τούτους, διὰ τὸ εἶναι αὐτοὺς σάρκας*», ἔδωκεν ἐντολὴν στὸν δίκαιον Νῶε νὰ κατασκευάσῃ τὴν Κιβωτόν. Εἰργάζοντο οἱ τεχνίτες ἐπὶ ἓνα χρόνον. Βλέποντες οἱ ἀπονεκρωθέντες ἁμαρτωλοὶ τὴν κατασκευαζομένην Κιβωτόν καὶ τὸν σκοπὸν, πληροφοροῦμενοι, ἔλεγαν: καὶ τί κάνουμε ὥστε νὰ πνιγοῦμε; Καὶ ὅταν οἱ Ἄγγελοι εἶπαν στὸν δίκαιον Λῶτ νὰ εἰδοποιήσῃ τοὺς συγγενεῖς του, διότι θὰ ἔρριχναν φωτιὰ νὰ κάψουν τὰ Σόδομα, ὅλην τὴν Πεντάπολιν, οἱ συγγενεῖς του γελοῦσαν μὲ τὸν γέροντα: καὶ τί κάνουμε, ὥστε νὰ μᾶς κάψῃ ὁ Θεός;

Τὸ ἴδιο συμβαίνει καὶ τώρα, σὲ κάποιο μέτρο: τὸ σύνδρομο τῆς πωρώσεως. Καμμία ἐφημερίδα δὲν ἔγραψε γιὰ τὸν ἐθνικὸν κίνδυνον μὲ ἐξαιρέσι τὴν πολὺτιμη Ὁρθόδοξη ἔπαλξι, τὸν «Ὁρθόδοξον Τύπον», ποῦ, καὶ μόνον διότι ἀπὸ ἓνα χρόνο σχεδὸν σαλπίζει, τὸ σάλπισμα τῆς μετανοίας, ἀξίζει τὸν ἔπαινον τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τὴν ἐκ Θεοῦ δικαίαν μισθαποδοσίαν. Οἱ ἀπόψεις καὶ οἱ ἀπελπιστικὲς ἐνοράσεις τῶν ἁγίων ἐκείνων ἐρημιτῶν, ὅσον καὶ ἂν δὲν εἶναι ἀποδεικτικὲς, δὲν στεροῦνται, ὅμως, σὲ κάποιον βαθμὸν, πειστικότητος, διότι βασιζονται σὲ ἀπτὰ δεδομένα, ἓνα τῶν ὁποίων εἶναι οἱ ἐνεργούμενες ἁμαρτίες ἀγνωσμένης τῆς μετανοίας, σ' ὅλην τὴν Ἑλλάδα, παρὰ τὶς ἐλάχιστες νησίδες Χριστιανικῆς ζωῆς καὶ ἠθικῆς ἀντιστάσεως.

Δεύτερον ὅτι, ὁ προφητικὸς λόγος «*ἁμαρτίαι, ἔθνη ἐλαττονοῦσι*», ἔχει πολλάκις ἐπαληθευθῆ. Τρίτον, στὴν δραστηριότητα τῆς ἁμαρτίας, περιλαμβάνονται καὶ οἱ ἓνα ἑκατομμύριον ἐκτρώσεις κάθε τριετίαν. Οἱ ὑπερτεροῦντες θάνατοι τῶν γεννήσεων. Ναρκωτικὰ καὶ ἄλλες ἠθικὲς πληγές. Καὶ τέλος, τὸ κυριώτερον, εἶναι τὰ τρία σχεδὸν ἑκατομμύρια τῶν νομιμοποιουμένων μουσουλμάνων, ποῦ αὐξάνονται καὶ πληθύνονται μὲ ταχυτάτους ρυθμούς, ἓνα φαινόμενον, ποῦ ἐρμηνεύει καὶ τὶς ἀπόψεις τῶν ἡσυχαστῶν, τῶν μουσουλμάνων ἐνεργούντων ὡς ὄργάνων ἀσυνειδήτων τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ὅπως ἐπίσης ἀσυνειδήτα ὄργανα, ὄχι ἀνεύθυνα, βεβαίως εἶναι οἱ ἄθεοι κυβερνήτες μας, ποῦ ὑποδέχονται τοὺς δεδηλωμένους ἐχθροὺς τοῦ ἔθνους μας, γιὰ νὰ μὴ κατηγορηθοῦν, τάχα, ὡς ρατσιστὲς ἢ ἐθνικιστὲς. Αὐτὴ ἡ καραμέλλα ἔχει πολλὴ πέρασι στὴν ἐποχὴ μας, μεταξὺ τῶν ἐπιπολαίων καὶ ἀθέων, ποῦ γίνονται καταγέλαστοι μὲ τὶς παραδοξολογίες των. Παράδειγμα, «τὸ ἀλβανάκι» πέρυσι καὶ τώρα ἡ γερμανιδούλα τοῦ Βόλου, ποῦ ἂν εἶναι διαποτισμένοι, ὁ πρῶτος ἀπὸ τὸν ἀλβανικὸν ἀνθελληνικὸν σωβινισμόν καὶ ἡ δευτέρα πιστεῦναι στὸ γερμανικὸ «οὐμπερ ἄλλες» τότε, στὰ χέρια των τὸ Ἑλληνοχριστιανικὸν

σύμβολον, ἡ γαλανόλευκη μὲ Σταυρόν, εἶναι τιμωρία, δὲν εἶναι τιμὴ! Εἶναι ἀντίφασις.

Τώρα τὸ πρόβλημα, τὸ παμπρόβλημα, εἶναι ἡ ἀλλοτριώσις τοῦ Ἑλλαδικοῦ χώρου, κατὰ παραχώρησιν Θεοῦ, γιὰ τὴν ἀμετανοησία τῶν πιστῶν. Ὄποτε ἀβιάστως ἀνακύπτει ἡ ὑποχρέωσις τῆς ποιμανούσης Ἐκκλησίας νὰ κηρύξῃ μετάνοιαν στὸν λαόν.

Ἄλλοιως; «*Ἐὰν μὴ μετανοήτε, πάντες ὡσαύτως ἀπολείσθε!*» (Λουκ 13:3). Τὸ γὰρ στόμα Κυρίου ἐλάλησε ταῦτα!



Τὰ Μελλούμενα... Ἡ τὰ Παρόντα;

Τοῦ μεγάλου Ἑλληνα Νομπελίστα ποιητῆ (καὶ πρόφητη;) Ὀδυσσεᾶ Ἐλύτη (ἀπὸ τῆ συνέντευξη τύπου ποῦ δόθηκε στὶς 19 Ὀκτωβρίου 1979, στὸ ξενοδοχεῖο Μεγάλῃ Βρεταννία, μὲ ἀφορμὴ τὴν ἀναγγελία γιὰ τὴ βράβευσή του μὲ τὸ Νόμπελ Λογοτεχνίας).

Ἦδη σὰς τὸ εἶπα. Εἶναι ἡ βαρβαρότητα. Τὴ βλέπω νὰ ἔρχεται μεταμφιεσμένη, κάτω ἀπὸ ἄνομες συμμαχίες καὶ προσυμφωνημένες ὑποδουλώσεις. Δὲν θὰ πρόκειται γιὰ τοὺς φούρνους τοῦ Χίτλερ ἴσως, ἀλλὰ γιὰ μεθοδευμένη καὶ οἰονεὶ ἐπιστημονικὴ καθυπόταξη τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Γιὰ τὸν πλήρη ἐξευτελισμὸ του. Γιὰ τὴν ἀτίμωσή του.

Ὅποτε ἀναρωτιέται κανεὶς: Γιὰ τί παλεύουμε νύχτα μέρα κλεισμένοι στὰ ἐργαστήριά μας; Παλεύουμε γιὰ ἓνα τίποτα, ποῦ ὡστόσο εἶναι τὸ πᾶν.

Εἶναι οἱ δημοκρατικοὶ θεσμοί, ποῦ ὅλα δείχνουν ὅτι δὲν θ' ἀντέξουν γιὰ πολὺ. Εἶναι ἡ ποιότητα, ποῦ γι' αὐτὴ δὲν δίνει κανεὶς πεντάρρα. Εἶναι ἡ ὄντοτητα τοῦ ἀτόμου, ποῦ βαίνει πρὸς τὴν ὀλική της ἔκλειψη. Εἶναι ἡ ἀνεξαρτησία τῶν μικρῶν λαῶν, ποῦ ἔχει καταντήσῃ ἤδη ἓνα γράμμα νεκρῶ. Εἶναι ἡ ἀμάθεια καὶ τὸ σκότος.

Ὅτι οἱ λεγόμενοι «πρακτικοὶ ἄνθρωποι»—κατὰ πλειονότητα οἱ σημερινοὶ ἄστοι—μᾶς κοροϊδεύουν, εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὸ. Ἐκεῖνοι βλέπουν τὸ τίποτα. Ἐμεῖς τὸ πᾶν.

Ποῦ βρίσκεται ἡ ἀλήθεια, θὰ φανεῖ μία μέρα, ὅταν δὲν θὰ μαστε πιά ἐδῶ. Θὰ εἶναι, ὅμως, ἐὰν ἀξίζει, τὸ ἔργο κάποιου ἀπ' ὅλους ἐμᾶς. Καὶ αὐτὸ θὰ σώσει τὴν τιμὴ ὅλων μας καὶ τῆς ἐποχῆς μας.

Ποιοί και γιατί Θέλουν να Άφανίσουν την Έλληνορθοδοξία;

Γράφει ο Νίκος Χειλαδάκης, δημοσιογράφος – συγγραφέας – Τουρκολόγος.

Ἐνῶ ἡ χώρα μᾶς ἔχει ριχτεῖ στὸν γκρεμὸ ἀπὸ μίᾶ διεφθαρμένη πολιτικὴ κλίκα, ἐνῶ ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ κοινωνία θρηνεῖ σχεδὸν καθημερινά τα θύματά της ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τὴν «θύελλα», ἓνα μεγάλο μέρος αὐτῆς τῆς κλίκας τὸν τελευταῖο καιρὸ ἔχει ἐντείνει τις προσπάθειες ἀποχριστιανοποίησης τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ κράτους, μὲ μίᾶ ἐπιχείρηση ἀποκαθίλωσης ὅλων των πατροπαράδοτων ὀρθοδόξων συμβόλων ἀπὸ ὅλες τις δημόσιες λειτουργίες.

Μάλιστα ὅλοι αὐτοὶ ποὺ πνέουν μένεα κατὰ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, προβάλλουν πρότυπα δυτικῶν χωρῶν

ὅπου ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς ἔχει καταστήσει ἓνα φολκλορικὸ σύμβολο χωρὶς καμία οὐσία καὶ οἱ ναοὶ γίνονται γυμναστήρια, μπαράκια, ἀκόμα καὶ μουσουλμανικὰ τεμένη. Ἡ ἐκστρατεία αὐτὴ συνοδεύεται συχνὰ καὶ ἀπὸ ἓνα ἀνθελληνικὸ μένος ποὺ σκοπὸ ἔχει νὰ σβήσει ὅλη τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ ἱστορία καὶ νὰ διαστρεβλώσει κάθε



πραγματικὴ ἀλήθεια σχετικὰ μὲ πρόσφατα ἱστορικὰ γεγονότα ποὺ σημάδεψαν τὴν πορεία μας σὰν Ἕλληνες, σὰν πρόσωπα Ὁρθόδοξα τῆς μίας ἀληθινῆς, καθολικῆς, Ὁρθοδοξίας, ἐκκλησίας.

Ἐξετάζοντας ἀπὸ ποὺ προέρχεται ὅλη αὐτὴ ἡ ἐπιχείρηση ἀποορθοδοξοποίησης τῶν Ἑλλήνων, διακρίνουμε κάποιες κυρίες ἀφετηρίες ὅλης αὐτῆς τῆς ἐκστρατείας ἡ ὁποία τελευταία ἔχει ἐντατικοποιηθεῖ σὲ μεγάλο βαθμὸ. Δὲν θὰ ἀναφερθῶ σὲ διάφορους αἰρετικὸς καὶ ἀλλόδοξους γιατί αὐτοὶ εἶναι ἐκτὸς τοῦ πεδίου μας. Ἡ προσοχή μας συγκεντρώνετε στὸ κύριο σῶμα τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ κόσμου καὶ σὲ ὅλους αὐτοὺς ποὺ στὴν συντριπτικὴ τους πλειοψηφία εἶναι βαπτισμένοι, ἂν καὶ μεταγενέστερα ἔχουν ἀπαρνηθεῖ συνειδητὰ αὐτὸ τὸ βάπτισμα.

Ἡ πρώτη κατηγορία εἶναι οἱ ἀριστεροὶ μὲ τις διαφορὲς διακλαδώσεις τους καὶ οἱ αὐτοαποκαλούμενοι «προοδευτικοί». Αὐτοὶ ἦταν πάντα καὶ ἐκ δόγματος ἀντίθετοι πρὸς κάθε θρησκεία καθὼς προβάλλονται ὡς ὕλιστές. Στὴν Ἑλληνικὴ περίπτωση ὑπῆρχε πάντα μίᾶ ἰδιαιτερότητα, καθὼς ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη παράδοση ἦταν ἀνέκαθεν δυνατὴ στὰ λαϊκὰ στρώματα ποὺ ὑποτίθεται ὅτι ἐκπροσωποῦν οἱ ἀριστεροί. Ἔτσι

παρατηρήθηκε σὲ κάποιες ἱστορικὲς συγκυρίες τὸ παράδοξο φαινόμενο ἀριστεροὶ νὰ συμπλεύσουν μὲ Ὁρθόδοξα σύμβολα.

Ἀξέχαστη εἶναι ἡ γνωστὴ φωτογραφία τοῦ παπᾶ τοῦ ΕΑΜ μὲ τὸ ὄπλο στὸ χέρι νὰ πολεμᾷ τοὺς Γερμανοὺς κατακτητὲς. Στὴν δεκαετία τοῦ ὀγδόντα ὑπῆρξε μίᾶ ἀξιοπρόσεκτη προσπάθεια σύγκλισης τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας μὲ τις ἀριστερὲς ἰδεολογίες μὲ πρωτεργάτη τὸν ἀξέχαστο διανοούμενο τῆς ἀριστερᾶς καὶ ἱστορικὸ τῆς Θεσσαλονίκης, τὸν Κωστὴ Μοσκόφ, ἐνῶ καὶ ὁ Μίκης Θεοδωράκης εἶχε δεῖ τότε μὲ θετικὸ μάτι αὐτὴ τὴν κίνηση. Σήμερα δυστυχῶς οἱ λεγόμενοι ἀριστεροὶ εἶναι πιὸ στενοκέφαλοι καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς κλασικοὺς σταλινικοὺς. Πολεμᾶνε μὲ λύσσα κάθε Ὁρθόδοξη παρουσία φτάνοντας σὲ παράλογες ἀπαιτήσεις ὅπως φορολογία τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων Χριστιανῶν κ.ἄ

Βουλευτὲς ἀριστερῶν κομμάτων, ὅπως ἡ γνωστὴ «κυρία τοῦ συνωστισμοῦ», ἀσχολοῦνται συνεχῶς λὲς καὶ ἔχουν λύσει ὅλα τα ἄλλα προβλήματα τῆς κρίσης μὲ τὸ πῶς θὰ κατεβάσουν τις εἰκόνες ἀπὸ τὰ δικαστήρια καὶ τὰ σχολεῖα καὶ τὸ πῶς θὰ καταργήσουν τὸ μάθημα τῶν θρησκευτικῶν.

Ἡ δεύτερη κατηγορία προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὸν ἀντίθετο πόλο. Εἶναι αὐτοὶ ποὺ αὐτοαποκαλοῦνται νεοφιλελεύθεροι καὶ ἐκ θέσεως ἄθεοι. Εἶναι ὀπαδοὶ μίας χρηματιστηριακῆς «δημοκρατίας», ὅπου οἱ δημοκρατικὲς ἀρχὲς ἔχουν ἀξία μόνο ὅταν λειτουργοῦν στὴν ὑπηρεσία ἐνὸς ἄτεγκου κεφαλαιοκρατικοῦ κατεστημένου. Αὐτὴ ἡ κατηγορία ἀσπάζεται ὅλα τα συστατικὰ τοῦ σύγχρονου δυτικοῦ καταναλωτικοῦ πολιτισμοῦ ποὺ ἔχει δημιουργήσει ὅλες τις σύγχρονες ψυχασθένειες τῆς καταρρέουσας δυτικῆς κοινωνίας. Καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ κατηγορία μετέχει στὴν ἐκστρατεία ἀφανισμοῦ τοῦ Ὁρθόδοξου συναισθήματος τῶν Ἑλλήνων.

Στὴν ἐκστρατεία αὐτὴ μετέχει ἐνεργὰ καὶ τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ τηλεοπτικὸ κατεστημένο· ἀπὸ τὴν δεκαετία τοῦ ἐνενήντα, ὅταν ἀφέθηκε ἐλεύθερο καὶ ἀσύδοτο, χρησιμοποίησε ὅλη τὴν δύναμή του ποὺ τοῦ ἔδινε ἡ ζωντανὴ εἰκόνα γιὰ νὰ διαστρέψει κάθε ἱστορικὴ παράδοση καὶ νὰ πλάσει ἓνα πρότυπο νεοέλληνα ποὺ τὰ ἰδανικά του εἶναι ὁ εὐκόλος καὶ χωρὶς κόπο πλουτισμὸς, ἀδιαφορώντας γιὰ κάθε ἠθικὴ ἢ ἀκόμα καὶ νομικὴ συνέπεια, ἡ ἐκπόρνευση τῆς νεολαίας καὶ ἡ διακομωδὸμησις κάθε ἔθνικοῦ καὶ Ὁρθόδοξου

φρονήματος, τὸ ὁποῖο μάλιστα καταδικάζεται σαν... φασισμὸς καὶ ἄλλες ἐξυπνες «ετικέτες».

Ἐπάρχει ὁμως καὶ ἓνα ἄλλο ἀντιορθόδοξο μέτωπο ποῦ προέρχεται δυστυχῶς μέσα ἀπὸ τοὺς ἴδιους κόλπους τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας ἐκκλησίας. Εἶναι ὅλοι αὐτοὶ οἱ ρασοφόροι ἱεράρχες ποῦ χάριν κάποιας πάλι «προοδευτικότητας» καὶ παρεξηγημένης ἀνεκτικότητας, πρεσβεύουν οὐνιτικὲς ἀπόψεις, παίρνουν μέρος σὲ συλλειτουργίες μὲ αἰρετικούς, ἀκόμα καὶ μὲ ἀλλόδοξους, παραβιάζοντας ἔτσι ὅλους τοὺς κανόνες τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας καὶ τῶν Συνόδων. Ἐδῶ σημαντικὸς εἶναι ὁ ρόλος τῆς ἱεραρχίας, ἡ ὁποία δὲν ἔχει ἀνταποκριθεῖ στὶς μεγάλες τῆς εὐθύνης σὲ αὐτὸ τὸ σημαντικό θέμα. Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία δὲν συμβιβάζεται, δὲν ἐκσυγχρονίζεται, οὔτε ἔχει ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ «προοδευτικότητας» γιατί εἶναι πέραν ἀπὸ αὐτὲς τὶς στενὲς ἀνθρωπινὲς ἀντιλήψεις καὶ καλύπτει διαχρονικὰ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη ἐξέλιξη καὶ κυρίως τὰ βασικὰ ἀνθρώπινα ἐρωτήματα.

Ὅλος αὐτὸς ὁ ἀνελέητος πόλεμος κατὰ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας ἀναμένεται νὰ κορυφωθεῖ. Γιὰ τοὺς νεοταξικοὺς ἰθύνοντες δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἐπαναληφθεῖ τὸ παράδειγμα τῆς πτώσης τοῦ Βυζαντίου ὅπου ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία ἐπέζησε. Τὸ σχέδιο εἶναι παράλληλα μὲ τὴν ἀπώλεια τῆς ἐθνικῆς κυριαρχίας μας, νὰ δοθεῖ καὶ τὸ τελικὸ χτύπημα στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία Ἑλληνικὴ ταυτότητα ἔτσι ὥστε οἱ νεοἝλληνες νὰ καταστήσουν «προβατάκια ἐπὶ σφαγῆ» καὶ ἡ χώρα αὕτη ποῦ κάποτε ἄνθισε καὶ μεγαλούργησε ὁ Ἑλληνορθόδοξος πολιτισμὸς νὰ ἀποτελέσει ἓνα τουριστικὸ μνημεῖο, χωρὶς μάλιστα καὶ πολλὲς ἀξιώσεις ἐπισκεψιμότητας. Θέλουν νὰ μᾶς κάνουν νὰ πιστέψουμε ὅτι εἴμαστε ἀπομεινάρια ἐνὸς θρησκευτικοῦ Μεσαίωνα ποῦ ἐμποδίζει τὴν «πρόοδο» τῆς χώρας. Πὼς ὅτι ἱερὸ καὶ ὄσιο μᾶς τὸ παραδῶσαν οἱ προγονοὶ μας, δὲν εἶναι τίποτα ἄλλο παρὰ ἓνα «σπασμένο βάζο» ποῦ τὰ συντρίμια του εἶναι γιὰ τὰ σκουπίδια.

Ἔχουν τόσο πολὺν παρασυρθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ μένος τους κατὰ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, ποῦ φτάνουν στὸ σημεῖο νὰ θέλουν νὰ μᾶς ἐπιβάλλουν νὰ πιστέψουμε ὅτι «πρόοδος» εἶναι ἡ... ὁμοφυλοφιλία, τὸ εὐκόλο διαζύγιο, ἡ ἀνοχή τῆς μοιχείας, ἡ ἀποδοχή τῆς εὐδαιμονισμοῦ ὡς ἀνθρώπινου δικαιώματος, ἡ ἀποδοχή τῶν ἐκτρώσεων σαν μία φυσιολογικὴ πράξη, ἀκόμα καὶ ἡ γενετικὴ ἐπέμβαση μὲ τὸ ἔλεγχο πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν γέννηση. Καὶ γιὰ νὰ ἐμφανίζονται καὶ ἀνεκτικοί, μᾶς λένε ὅτι ἂν ἡ ἐκκλησία ἐπιθυμεῖ νὰ ἔχει κάποια ἀξιοπιστία ὅσον ἀφορᾷ τὴ

«προοδευτικότητά» τῆς, θὰ πρέπει νὰ ἀπομακρυνθεῖ ἀπὸ τὰ παλιὰ ἀναχρονιστικὰ τῆς πρότυπα καὶ νὰ ἀποδεχθεῖ ὅτι ἀρρωστημένο καὶ διεστραμμένο σαν φυσιολογικὸ, ἄσχετα ἂν παραβιάζονται ἀκόμα καὶ οἱ στοιχειώδεις νόμοι τῆς φύσεως καὶ παράλληλα ὅτι παραδοσιακὸ καὶ φυσιολογικὸ σαν ἀναχρονιστικὸ καὶ ξεπερασμένο. Ἄλλωστε, ὅπως πρεσβεύουν, τὸ φυσιολογικὸ δὲν εἶναι τίποτα παραπάνω ἀπὸ μία ὑποκειμενικὴ ἀντίληψη.

Ἐτερόκλητοι παράγοντες συγκλείουν σὲ μία κοινὴ γραμμὴ ἐξόντωσης τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας ταυτότητας καὶ ἀπάλειψης κάθε ἴχνους καὶ παρουσίας αὐτοῦ ποῦ μᾶς ἐμψύχωσε καὶ μᾶς κράτησε ἐν ζωῇ χιλιετίες ἱστορίας καὶ ἀγῶνων γιατί ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία εἶναι τὸ τελευταῖο προπύργιο αὐτῆς τῆς χώρας ποῦ ἀκόμα δὲν ἔχει καταστραφεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ νεοταξικὸ καταστημένο τους. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἀκόμα τὴν ὑπολογίζουν σοβαρὰ καὶ



γι' αὐτὸ «τρίβουν τὰ χέρια τους» ποῦ στὴν κεφαλὴ τῆς ἱεραρχίας βρίσκεται ὅτι πιὸ βολικὸ θὰ ἤθελαν γιὰ αὐτὴ τὴν συγκυρία τῆς ἐθνικῆς μας συμφορᾶς. Ἀλλὰ ὡς πότε;

Ἡ σημερινὴ Ἑλλάδα περνᾷ μία ἀπὸ τὶς μεγαλύτερες κρίσεις στὴν ἱστορία τῆς. Ἡ κρίση αὐτὴ εἶναι οἰκονομικὴ, πολιτικὴ, ἐθνικὴ, κοινωνικὴ καὶ γίνεται καὶ θρησκευτικὴ. Αὐτοὶ ποῦ μᾶς ὁδήγησαν

ἐδῶ, αὐτοὶ ποῦ ἔφεραν τὴν ἐθνικὴ καταστροφὴ, ἀντὶ νὰ προσπαθοῦν νὰ λύσουν τὰ προβλήματα ποῦ συσσώρευσαν τώρα θέλουν νὰ μᾶς ἀποτελειώσουν βάζοντας στὸ στόχαστρό τους καὶ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ Ὁρθοδοξία.

Ἀλλὰ ὅπως εἶπε καὶ ὁ ἀξέχαστος παππούλης, ὁ πάτερ Παΐσιος, «Σήμερα οἱ φίλοι μας θέλουν νὰ μᾶς τσαλακώσουν λίγο καὶ οἱ ἐχθροὶ μας νὰ μᾶς ξεσκίσουν. Δὲν πειράζει ὁμως. Ἔχουν οἱ ἄνθρωποι τὰ σχέδια τους. Ἔχει καὶ ὁ Θεὸς τὰ δικά Του...».



Ὅσο ὁ ἱερέας προσεύχεται στὸν Θεὸ γιὰ τοὺς ἄλλους κατὰ τὴν Θεῖα Λειτουργία, τόσο περισσότερο ἐλεεῖται ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ ὁ ἴδιος.

Ὅσο στόχος τοῦ Πνευματικοῦ ὅταν ἐξομολογεῖ, εἶναι νὰ κερδηθεῖ ὁ ἀμαρτωλός!

Ὅταν εὐλογεῖ ὁ ἱερέας, μεταδίδει τὴ δύναμη καὶ τὴ Χάρη τοῦ Χριστοῦ διὰ τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ.

Γέρων Γερμανὸς Σταυροβουνιώτης (+1982)

Περὶ τῶν Ὀκτῶ Πειρασμῶν τῶν Μοναχῶν καὶ τῶν Λαϊκῶν Χριστιανῶν

ΠΗΓΗ: Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον «Πνευματικοὶ Λόγοι Γερομ. Κλεόπα Ἡλιε», ἐκδ. «Ὁρθόδοξος Κυψέλη», Συκιές, Θεσσαλονίκη.



Πατέρες καὶ ἀδελφοί, Ὁ μοναχὸς καὶ ὁ ἀγωνιστὴς Χριστιανὸς εἶναι πνευματικοὶ μαχητὲς σὲ κάθε στιγμή τῆς ζωῆς τους ἀπὸ τὴν γέννηση μέχρι τὸν θάνατό τους. Εἶναι ὅμως ἀνάγκη νὰ γνωρίζουμε τὴν τέχνη αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου πολέμου καὶ ἀπὸ ποῖα μέρη ἔρχεται ἐναντίον μας ὁ νοητὸς ἐχθρός.

Ὁ ἅγιος Μελέτιος ὁ Ὁμολογητὴς μᾶς λέγει ὅτι ὁ πειρασμὸς ἔρχεται ἀπὸ ἕξι σημεῖα ἐναντίον μας, ἐνῶ ὁ ἅγιος Νικόδημος ὁ Ἄγιορείτης γράφει ἀπὸ ὀκτώ, δηλαδὴ ἀπὸ ἐπάνω καὶ ἀπὸ κάτω, ἀπὸ δεξιά καὶ ἀριστερά, ἀπὸ ἐμπρὸς καὶ πίσω καὶ ἀπὸ μέσα καὶ ἔξω. Στὴν συνέχεια θὰ ὁμιλήσουμε ἐκτενέστερα γιὰ τὸν πολυμερῆ αὐτὸν πόλεμο τοῦ διαβόλου μὲ τὴν βοήθεια τοῦ Πανάγαθου Θεοῦ.

1. Ὁ ἀπὸ ἐπάνω πειρασμὸς:

Εἶναι δυὸ εἰδῶν: Τὸ πρῶτο συμβαίνει ὅταν ἀρχίζουμε νὰ κάνουμε μία ἀδιάκριτη καὶ ἀπερίσκεπτη ἀσκήση ποὺ ὑπερβαίνει τὶς δυνάμεις μας, ὅπως ἐπὶ παραδείγματι: ὑπερβολικὴ νηστεία, συνεχὴ ἀγρυπνία, πολλὲς μετάνοιες, καὶ ἄλλες ὑπερβολικὲς ἀσκήσεις. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀσκήση ἔχει ὡς ἀποτέλεσμα νὰ ἀδυνατίζει τὸ σῶμα μας καὶ νὰ ἀδυνατοῦμε νὰ ἐργασθοῦμε τὶς ἀρετὲς τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Συγχρόνως ταράζεται ὁ νοῦς μας γιατί δὲν ἀναπαύεται σ' αὐτοῦ τοῦ εἶδους τὶς ἀσκήσεις. Τὸ δεύτερο εἶδος πειρασμοῦ συμβαίνει ὅταν ἐρευνοῦμε τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή χωρὶς νὰ διαθέτουμε τὴν ἀνάλογη πνευματικὴ ἡλικία καὶ κατάσταση μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα, ἐὰν κάποιος δὲν εὗρεθεῖ νὰ μᾶς χαλιναγωγῆσει, θὰ φθάσουμε στὴν τρέλλα, τὴν αἵρεση καὶ τὴν βλασφημία τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἡ Ἁγία Γραφή εἶναι ἡ ἀπύθμενη θάλασσα τῆς σοφίας τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἀπ' αὐτὸ τὸ νερὸ ἐμεῖς πρέπει νὰ βγάλουμε ὅσο εἶναι δυνατὸν καὶ ἀπαραίτητο γιὰ νὰ ἀνακουφισθοῦμε ἀπὸ τὴν πνευματικὴ μας δίψα. Ἀπ' αὐτὸ τὸ νερὸ ὁ ἄνθρωπος βγάζει μὲ τὸν κουβᾶ καὶ ἀπ' αὐτὸν στὴν κανάτα καὶ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ παίρνει μὲ ἓνα ποτήρι νὰ δροσισθεῖ καὶ δὲν προσπαθεῖ μὲ μία φορὰ νὰ βγάλει τὸ νερὸ τῆς σοφίας τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔξω, διότι δὲν ἔχει τὰ κατάλληλα ἐργαλεῖα καὶ ὑπάρχει βεβαίως ὁ φόβος νὰ πνιγεῖ. Ἔτσι πνίγηκαν πολλοὶ ἐρευνητὲς τῶν Γραφῶν λόγω τῆς ὑπερηφάνειας των καὶ ἔγιναν ἀρχηγοὶ αἱρέσεων καὶ ὀδήγησαν μαζὶ μὲ τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς των χιλιάδες ψυχὰς στὸν Ἄδη.

2. Ὁ ἀπὸ κάτω πειρασμὸς:

Ἀπὸ κάτω ἔρχεται ὁ πειρασμὸς καὶ μᾶς πειράζει μὲ τὴν ἀκηδία καὶ ὀκνηρία γιὰ τὴν ἐπιτέλεση τῶν ἔργων τῆς ἀρετῆς καὶ τῶν ἐντολῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἔνα παράδειγμα: Ὅταν κάποιος εἶναι δυνατὸς καὶ ὑγιὴς στὸ σῶμα καὶ ἐκ προθέσεως ἀποφεύγει τὶς δουλειὲς ἢ τὰ διακονήματα τῆς Μονῆς, τὰ ὁποῖα εἶναι ἀνάλογα τῶν δυνάμεων του. Ἡ ἓνας λαϊκός, ὁ ὁποῖος δὲν θέλει νὰ κοπιᾶσει γιὰ τὰ ἔργα τῶν ἀρετῶν, τὴν νηστεία, τὴν ἀγρυπνία, τὴν ὑπηρεσία καὶ βοήθεια τοῦ πλησίον, τὴν προσευχὴ κ.λ.π. Μὲ τὴν ἀδιαφορία ἢ ὀκνηρία μας αὐτὴ στεροῦμε ἀπὸ τὴν ψυχὴ μας τὸν μισθὸ τῶν πνευματικῶν ἔργων, ἐπειδὴ δὲν κοπιᾶζουμε στὴν ἐφαρμογὴ τῶν θείων ἐντολῶν. Καθένας ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς λοιπόν, ἔχουμε καθῆκον νὰ ἀνεβαίνουμε τὶς πνευματικὲς βαθμίδες τῶν ἀρετῶν, γνωρίζοντας ὅτι ἡ μέση καὶ διακριτικὴ ὁδὸς εἶναι ἡ βασιλική, διότι τὰ ἄκρα εἶναι τοῦ διαβόλου.

3. Ὁ ἐκ δεξιῶν πειρασμὸς:

Αὐτὸς ὁ πειρασμὸς πάλι εἶναι δυὸ εἰδῶν: Τὸ πρῶτο εἶδος εἶναι, ὅταν ἐργασθοῦμε τὰ καλὰ ἔργα μὲ κακὸ σκοπὸ, ἐνῶ τὸ δεύτερο εἶναι, ἐὰν δεχθοῦμε τὴν ἐμφάνιση τῶν δαιμόνων μὲ τὴν μορφή ἀγγέλων καὶ ἁγίων, ἢ μὲ τὴν μορφή τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τῆς Θεοτόκου καὶ ἄλλων οὐρανίων μορφῶν. Ὁ ἅγιος Ἰωάννης τῆς Κλίμακος λέγει ὅτι «οἱ δαίμονες τῆς κενοδοξίας καὶ ὑπερηφάνειας ἐμφανίζονται στοὺς ἀδυνάτους στὸν νοῦ ὡς προφήται». Ἐνῶ ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος μας δείχνει στὴν Β' πρὸς Κορινθίους (11:14) ὅτι: «ὁ σατανᾶς μετασχηματίζεται εἰς ἄγγελον φωτός».

4. Ὁ ἐξ ἀριστερῶν πειρασμὸς:

Ἀπὸ τὰ ἀριστερὰ μᾶς πειράζει ὁ διάβολος ὅταν γνωρίζουμε τὴν ἁμαρτία, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴν θέλησή μας ἀποφασίζουμε νὰ τὴν ἐκτελέσουμε. Ἔνα παράδειγμα: Κάποιος γνωρίζει ὅτι εἶναι ἁμαρτία νὰ κλέπτει, νὰ πορνεύει, νὰ μεθᾶ, νὰ βλασφημεῖ τὰ Θεῖα, νὰ ἐκδικεῖται τὸν πλησίον τοῦ ἢ νὰ κάνει ὀποιοδήποτε ἄλλο κακὸ ἔργο. Παρ' ὅλα ὅμως αὐτὰ ἀφήνει τὸν ἑαυτό του νὰ νικηθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτία μὲ τὴν θέλησή του καὶ εἰς γνῶσιν του. Ὅποτε, ὅταν ἐμεῖς γνωρίζουμε τὴν ἁμαρτία καὶ ὅμως τὴν ἐπιτελοῦμε εἴτε μὲ τὸν νοῦ, τὸν λόγο, τὸ αἶσθημα ἢ τὴν πράξη, τότε πειραζόμεθα ἐξ ἀριστερῶν.

5. Ὁ ἐκ τῶν ἐμπροσθεν πειρασμὸς:

Μᾶς πειράζει ἀπὸ ἐμπρὸς ὁ διάβολος ὅταν μᾶς παρουσιάζει σκέψεις καὶ φαντασίες γιὰ ἔργα τὰ ὅποια δῆθεν θὰ μᾶς συμβοῦν στὸ μέλλον. Ἔνα παράδειγμα: Ὅταν θορυβοῦμεθα ὅτι θὰ ἔλθει ἐναντίον μας κάποιος κίνδυνος, κάποια παγίδα ἢ ἀσθένεια, ὅτι θὰ ξεσπάσει κάποιος πόλεμος, ὅτι θὰ δυσφημισθοῦμε ἀπὸ τοὺς ἄλλους, θὰ γίνουμε πτωχοί, μᾶς ταράζει κάποιος ὅτι δὲν θὰ ἐπιτύχουμε στὶς ἐξετάσεις ἢ σὲ κάποιο ἄλλο ἔργο.

Όλα αυτά μᾶς τὰ φέρνει ὁ νοητὸς ἐχθρὸς στὸν νοῦ μας μὲ σκοπὸ νὰ μᾶς ταράξει καὶ νὰ μᾶς κλονίσει μὲ αὐτὰ ποὺ νομίζουμε ὅτι θὰ ἔλθουν ἐναντίον μας.

Γι' αὐτοὺς τοὺς λογισμοὺς ἃς προσέχουμε τὰ λόγια τοῦ Σωτῆρος ποὺ λέγει: «Μὴ οὖν μερμνήσητε εἰς τὴν αὔριον ἢ γὰρ αὔριον μερμνήσει τὰ ἑαυτῆς ἄρκετον τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἢ κακία αὐτῆς.» δηλαδή μὴ μερμνᾶτε ... φτάνει ἢ στεναχώρια τῆς ἡμέρας. (Ματθ. 6:34). Δὲν δόθηκε σ' ἐμᾶς ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ νὰ γνωρίζουμε οὔτε μία ὥρα πέραν τῆς παρούσης ὥρας τί θὰ γίνῃ. Ὅποτε σὲ τέτοιου εἴδους πειρασμὸ νὰ λέγομε: «Ἄς γίνῃ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Κυρίου».

6. Ὁ ἐκ τῶν ὀπισθεν πειρασμός:

Πειραζόμεθα ἐκ τῶν ὀπισθεν ὅταν οἱ δαίμονες μᾶς ἐνοχλοῦν στὸν νοῦ μας μὲ αὐτὰ τὰ ἔργα ποὺ κάναμε στὸ παρελθόν, ὅταν εἴμασταν παιδιὰ ἢ νέοι καὶ μὲ τὶς ἁμαρτίες ποὺ κάναμε. Ἡ μνήμη μας πολὺ συχνὰ βοηθεῖ τὴν φαντασία μας στὰ κακὰ ποὺ κάναμε, προπαντὸς ὅταν περάσαμε τὴν ζωὴ μας χωρὶς προσπάθεια γιὰ τὴν φρούρηση καὶ κάθαρση τοῦ νοῦ μὲ τὴν νοερὰ προσευχή: «Κύριε Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, Υἱὲ τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἐλέησόν με τὸν ἁμαρτωλό».

Οἱ Πατέρες λέγουν ὅτι τόσο ἀνόητη εἶναι ἡ φαντασία, ὥστε ἐὰν ἓνας ἄνθρωπος ἀντίκρισε στὴν νεότητά του μία ὡραία γυναίκα μὲ ἐμπάθεια καὶ ἔλθει ὁ καιρὸς νὰ πεθάνει αὐτὴ καὶ ἴδει τὴν νεκροκεφαλὴ της, ἐν τούτοις ἡ φαντασία του τοῦ ὑπενθυμίζει τὸ ὡραῖο πρόσωπό της, ὅταν ζοῦσε. Γι' αὐτὸ ὀνόμασαν οἱ Πατέρες τὴν φαντασία «γέφυρα τοῦ διαβόλου», ἐπειδὴ καμιὰ ἁμαρτία δὲν περνᾷ ἀπὸ τὸν νοῦ καὶ τὴν αἴσθησι παρὰ μόνο ἀπὸ τὴν γέφυρα τῆς φαντασίας.

Ὅποτε, Πατέρες καὶ ἀδελφοί, γιὰ νὰ νικήσουμε στὸν πόλεμο αὐτό, ἔχουμε μεγάλη ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τὴν νοερὰ ἐργήγορη καὶ προσοχή, τὴν μνήμη τοῦ θανάτου, τῶν βασάνων τῆς κολάσεως καὶ τῆς ἀκαταπαύστου νοερῆς προσευχῆς.

7. Ὁ ἐκ τῶν ἔσω πειρασμός:

Πειραζόμεθα ἀπὸ μέσα μας μὲ τὸν ἐρεθισμὸ τῶν παθῶν, τὰ ὁποῖα ἐξέρχονται ἀπὸ τὴν καρδιά μας, κατὰ τὸν λόγο τοῦ Σωτῆρος, ποὺ λέγει: «Ἐκ γὰρ τῆς καρδίας ἐξέρχονται διαλογισμοὶ πονηροί, φόνοι, μοιχεῖαι, πορνείαι, κλοπαί, ψευδομαρτυρίαι, βλασφημίαι.» (Ματθ. 15:19). Ἡ Ἁγία Γραφή μᾶς λέγει ὅτι «βαθεῖα ἡ καρδιά παρὰ πάντα» (Ἱερ. 17:9), ἐπειδὴ ἀπ' αὐτὴ πηγάζουν ὅλες οἱ κακίες στὸν ἄνθρωπο ποὺ δὲν τὴν φυλάγει μὲ τὴν προσευχή καὶ τὴν μετάνοια· ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπ' αὐτὴ πηγάζουν πάλι, ὅλες οἱ ἀρετὲς σ' αὐτὸν ποὺ τὴν καθαρίζει μὲ τὰ δάκρυα τῆς μετανοίας καὶ τὴν συντριβὴ. Ὅποτε ἀπαλασσομέθα ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη τῆς καρδίας μας μὲ τὴν ἀκατάπαυστη προσευχή καὶ τὰ δάκρυα τῆς μετανοίας.

8. Ὁ ἐκ τῶν ἔξω πειρασμός:

Προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὰ πάθη, τὰ ὁποῖα εἰσέρχονται στὴν ψυχὴ μας ἀπὸ τὶς πέντε αἰσθήσεις ἢ ὅπως ὀνομάζονται

τὰ παράθυρα τῆς ψυχῆς, γιὰ τὶς ὁποῖες ὁ προφήτης Ἱερ. 17:9 λέγει: «ἀνέβη θάνατος διὰ τῶν θυρίδων ὑμῶν» (9:21). Αὐτὲς οἱ πέντε αἰσθήσεις εἶναι τὰ πέντε ζεύγη βοῶν μὲ τὰ ὁποῖα ζοῦμε στὴν κακία καὶ ἐμπάθεια καὶ δὲν θέλουμε νὰ πάμε στὸ Δεῖπνο ποὺ μας καλεῖ ὁ Μέγας Βασιλεὺς (Λουκ. 14:19). Ὅποτε ἡ ἀπόκρουση ἀπ' αὐτὰ τὰ πάθη γίνεται μὲ τὴν πολυχρόνια νήψη τοῦ νοῦ, τὴν ἀκατάπαυστη προσευχή, τὴν συντριβὴ τῆς καρδίας καὶ μὲ τὸ νὰ ζητᾶμε μὲ πόνο καὶ μετάνοια τὴν βοήθεια τοῦ Κυρίου.

Ἐν κατακλείδι, παρακαλῶ μὲ ταπεινώση, Πατέρες καὶ ἀδελφοί, νὰ βοηθήσετε καὶ ἐμένα τὸν ἁμαρτωλὸ καὶ ἀδιάφορο γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία μου, μὲ τὴν προσευχή σας, ὥστε νὰ αἰσθανθῶ τουλάχιστο ἐντροπὴ γιὰ τὰ ἀνωτέρω λόγια ποὺ σας εἶπα καὶ ἔτσι νὰ ξυπνήσω καὶ ἐγὼ ἀπὸ τὴν ἀναισθησία μου καὶ νὰ καλῶ τὸ Ὄνομα τοῦ Κυρίου μας γιὰ βοήθειά μου.



Ἄπλα, ἀπαλὰ θὰ κάνετε τὸ καθετί. Δὲν θὰ κάνετε τίποτε μὲ σκοπιμότητα. Νὰ μὴ λέτε «θὰ τὸ κάνω ἔτσι, γιὰ νὰ ἔλθει αὐτὸ τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα», ἀλλὰ θὰ τὸ κάνετε ἔτσι ἀπαλά, χωρὶς νὰ τὸ ξέρετε. Δηλαδή προσεύχεσθε ἀπλὰ καὶ δὲν σκέφτεσθε τί θὰ χαρίσει ὁ Θεὸς μὲς στὴν ψυχὴ σας. Δὲν κάνετε ὑπολογισμοὺς. Ξέρετε, βέβαια, τί χαρίζει ὁ Θεὸς στὴν ἐπαφὴ μαζί Του, ἀλλὰ εἶναι σὰν νὰ μὴν ξέρετε. Νὰ μὴν τὸ συζητᾶτε, οὔτε μὲ τὸν ἑαυτὸ σας. Ἔτσι, ὅταν λέτε τὴν εὐχὴ «Κύριε, Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ἐλέησόν με» νὰ τὴ λέτε ἀπαλά, ἀπλὰ καὶ νὰ μὴ σκέφτεσθε τίποτε ἄλλο παρὰ μόνο τὴν εὐχὴ. Αὐτὰ εἶναι πολὺ λεπτὰ πράγματα καὶ χρειάζεται νὰ ἐπενεργήσῃ ἡ χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἡ καρδιά σας νὰ εἶναι ἀπλή, ὄχι διπλὴ καὶ ἁνελικρινῆς, ἀγαθὴ κι ὄχι πονηρὴ καὶ ἰδιοτελής. Τὴν ἀπλή καὶ ἀγαθὴ ψυχὴ ὅλοι τὴν ἐπιζητοῦν, ἀναπαύονται σ' ἐκείνη, τὴν πλησιάζουν χωρὶς φόβο, χωρὶς ὑποψία. Καὶ ἡ ἴδια ζεῖ μὲ ἐσωτερικὴ εἰρήνη, ἔχει ἀγαθὴ σχέση μ' ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ μ' ὅλη τὴν κτίση. Ὁ ἀγαθός, ὁ καλοκάγαθος, αὐτὸς ποὺ δὲν ἔχει πονηροὺς λογισμοὺς, ἐλκύει τὴν χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ. Κυρίως ἡ ἀγαθότητα καὶ ἡ ἀπλότητα ἐλκύουν τὴν χάρι τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἶναι οἱ προϋποθέσεις, γιὰ νὰ ἔλθει ὁ Θεὸς καὶ «μονὴν εὐρήσει». Ἀλλὰ πρέπει νὰ γνωρίζει ὁ ἀγαθὸς καὶ τὶς πονηρίες τοῦ διαβόλου καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, διότι πολὺ θὰ ταλαιπωρεῖται, ἀλλιῶς θὰ ἔπρεπε νὰ ζεῖ σὲ κοινωνία ἀγγέλων

Γέρων Πορφύριος (+1991)

Τό Έθνος τών Ρωμηών

Μητροπολίτη Λεμεσοῦ Ἀθανασίου, ἀπό τήν «Ἑλληνορθόξη Πορεία», Ἀνθολόγιο κειμένων, Ἀθήνα 2008.



Εἶναι γεγονός ὅτι καυχόμαστε γιά τήν Ἑλληνική μας καταγωγή καί τήν σχέση μας μέ τόν Χριστό καί μέ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, ὄχι ἀδίκως βέβαια, παρόλο πὸν καμιά φορὰ εἴμαστε λίγο ὑπερβολικοί, ὅμως ἡ ἱστορία δικαιώνει τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ ἔθνος.

Πάρα πολλοὶ λαοὶ ἄκουσαν τὸν λόγο τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, πάρα πολλοὶ λαοὶ δέχθηκαν τὶς ἐπισκέψεις τῶν Ἀποστόλων, πρὸς στιγμὴν ἔγιναν Χριστιανοί, ἀλλὰ στὸ πέρασμα τῶν αἰῶνων εἴτε χάθηκαν γιὰ τὸ ὑποδουλώθηκαν ἀπὸ ἄλλους λαοὺς, εἴτε ἄλλαξαν θρησκεία ἐξολοκλήρου, εἴτε προσχώρησαν σὲ αἱρέσεις καί ἄλλες κακοδοξίες οἱ ὁποῖες νόθευσαν τὴν Ἀλήθεια τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου.

Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ φυλὴ, τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ γένος, οἱ Ἕλληνες, παρὰ τὶς πολλὲς δυσκολίες πὸν εἶχαν, κράτησαν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, κράτησαν τὴν πίστη στὴν Ἐκκλησία, στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη. Καί ὄχι μόνο δὲν τὴν ἔχασαν ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς Βυζαντινῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας ἔδωσαν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο καί σὲ ἄλλους λαοὺς (π.χ. Ρώσους, Βούλγαρους, Ρουμάνους, Σέρβους, Γεωργιανούς), σὲ ὅλη τὴν ἀνατολικὴν Εὐρώπη. Οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ Ρωμιοὶ προγονοὶ μας ἐπέμεναν, παρόλο πὸν ἡ Δύση ἀντιδρούσε σὲ αὐτό, ὅτι οἱ νέοι Ὁρθόδοξοι λαοὶ ἔπρεπε νὰ λατρεύουν τὸ Θεὸ στὴ γλῶσσα τους. Γι' αὐτὸ καί οἱ Ἅγιοι Κύριλλος καί Μεθόδιος πὸν μετέφεραν στοὺς Σλάβους τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο ἔφτιαξαν ἀλφάβητο, ὥστε νὰ μποροῦν οἱ ἄνθρωποι νὰ ἔχουν δική τους γραπτὴ γλῶσσα, νὰ μορφώνονται, νὰ ἐκπολιτίζονται καί νὰ ἔχουν τὴ δική τους συνείδηση καί νὰ λατρεύουν τὸ Θεὸ στὴ δική τους γλῶσσα. Οὐδέποτε χρησιμοποιήθηκε τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἕλληνες ὡς μέσο κατάκτησης τῶν ἄλλων λαῶν. Ἀντίθετα, ἦταν μία προσφορὰ σ' αὐτοὺς τοῦ φωτὸς τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, ἐπ' ἐλευθερία, ποτὲ μὲ τὴ βία. Δὲν ἔχουμε φαινόμενα στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία ἐπιβολῆς τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας μὲ τὴ βία.

Τὸ ἐρώτημα εἶναι, ἐμεῖς οἱ Χριστιανοὶ Ὁρθόδοξοι, πῶς μποροῦμε νὰ ταυτίσουμε τὴν ἀγάπη πρὸς τὴν πατρίδα μας σὲ συνδυασμὸ μὲ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη μας;

Ὡς Ἕλληνες καί ὡς Ὁρθόδοξοι, καυχόμαστε ὅτι μέχρι σήμερα βαστάζουμε τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη μας ἀπαρσάλευτη καί ἀπαραχάρακτη καί μαζί μὲ αὐτὴν ἔχουμε τὴν εὐλογία νὰ βαστάζουμε τὸ σταυρὸ, τὸν εὐλογημένο σταυρὸ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς φυλῆς μέσα στὸν κόσμο, πὸν κουβάλησε ὅλη αὐτὴ τὴν ἔνδοξή μας ἱστορία. Τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ γένος, ἔχοντας πανάρχαιες ρίζες

μέσα στὴν ἱστορία, ἔφτασε σὲ τόσο μεγάλα μέτρα γνώσεως τῆς ἀνθρώπινης σοφίας καί ἐλευθερίας, ἔφθασε σὲ τόσο ὑψηλὰ ἐπίπεδα φιλοσοφικῶν πτήσεων καί ἀποκαλύψεων ὥστε νὰ θεωρεῖται πρῶτος τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ.

Νομίζω ὅτι τὸ νὰ εἶναι κανεὶς Ἕλληνας, τὸ νὰ εἶναι κανεὶς Ρωμηός, δὲν εἶναι ὑπερηφάνεια ἀλλὰ εἶναι σταυρὸς καί μόνο σὰν σταυρὸ καί σὰν διακόνημα μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ κρατήσουμε σήμερα. Εἴμαστε Ἕλληνες, ἔχουμε μία ἱστορία, ὅπως ὁ κάθε λαὸς καί ἀναγνωρίζουμε σὲ κάθε ἄνθρωπο αὐτὸ τὸ δικαίωμα νὰ καυχᾶται γιά τὴν ἱστορία του, γιά τοὺς προγόνους του. Καυχόμαστε σὰν Ἕλληνες ὄχι γιὰ τὴν λατρεύαμε τοὺς ψεύτικους θεοὺς τοῦ Ὀλύμπου, ἀλλὰ καυχόμαστε γιὰ τὴν εἴμαστε ἕνας λαὸς μὲ φιλοσοφικὲς ἀναζητήσεις, καυχόμαστε γιὰ τὴν εἴμαστε ἕνας λαὸς πὸν γέννησε τὴ δημοκρατία, τὴ φιλοσοφία.

Οἱ ἐθνικὲς γιορτὲς εἶναι βέβαια γιορτὲς μνήσεως στὸ νόημα, ἀλλὰ εἶναι καί κρίση τῆς ἴδιας τῆς ζωῆς μας. Καί πρέπει νὰ ὑφιστάμεθα αὐτὴ τὴν κρίση γιὰ τὴν διαφορετικὰ θὰ μᾶς κρίνει ἡ ἱστορία ὡς ἀνθρώπους πὸν δὲν διδάχτηκαμε ποτὲ ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια τὴν ἱστορία καί τὴ πορεία μας.

Ἡ ἱστορία ὀφείλει νὰ μᾶς διδάξει καί ἐμεῖς ἂν εἴμαστε ἄξιοι τῶν προγόνων μας, πραγματικὰ παιδιά τους, τότε πρέπει νὰ μάθουμε νὰ διδασκόμαστε, γιὰ τὴν ἔχουμε τὴ βαρύτερη αὐτὴ κληρονομία νὰ εἴμαστε Ἕλληνες. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὅτι ἔχουμε μία ἱστορία ἔνδοξη σὲ πολέμους καί σὲ ἀγῶνες. Οἱ Ἕλληνες κρατοῦσαν τὴ σημαία τους, γιὰ νὰ δείξουν ὅτι ἀγωνίζονται ὅπως ἔλεγαν «ὑπὲρ βωμῶν καί ἐστιῶν», γιὰ νὰ δείξουν ὅτι ἀγωνίζονται γιὰ συγκεκριμένα ἰδανικά, ἦσαν ἰδεολόγοι, δὲν ἦσαν πολεμιστὲς μὲ τὴν πραγματικὴ σημασία τῆς λέξεως, ἀλλὰ γίνονταν πολεμιστὲς ὅταν ἡ ἀνάγκη τοὺς καλοῦσε καί ἦταν πράγματι αὐτὴ ἡ ἀνάγκη ἀδήριτη, γιὰ νὰ φυλάξουν τὴν πίστη τους καί τὴν πατρίδα τους.

Σήμερα, ἀδελφοί μου, καλοῦμαστε νὰ κρατήσουμε αὐτὴ τὴν πατρίδα μέσα στα περιθώρια πὸν οἱ ἥρωές μας τὴν παρέδωσαν καί ὅπως αὐτοὶ βάδισαν τὸ δρόμο τους μὲ σύνεση πολλή, μὲ σοφία πολλή, μὲ ὑπομονὴ πολλή.

Οἱ ἥρωές μας ἦταν παιδιά, ἦταν ἄνθρωποι τοῦ τόπου πὸν βγήκαν μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ καλύτερο λίκνο, τὸ λίκνο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καί πραγματικὰ στέκει κανεὶς μπροστά τους μὲ μεγάλο θαυμασμὸ καί μὲ μεγάλη συγκίνηση, γιὰ τὴν διαβάσει κανεὶς γιὰ τὴν ζωὴ τους, διαβάσει κανεὶς τὶς ἐπιστολές τους, διαβάσει αὐτὰ τὰ ὁποῖα ἔγραψαν καί ὄχι ἀπλῶς συγκινεῖται συναισθηματικὰ ἀλλὰ τὰ κείμενα αὐτῶν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, αὐτὲς οἱ ἐπιστολές τῶν ἡρώων τοῦ '55-'59 μᾶς θυμίζουν συναξάρια, μᾶς θυμίζουν λόγια νεομαρτύρων, μᾶς θυμίζουν τὶς

ἐπιστολές τῶν μαρτύρων τῆς πίστεως, τὶς ἐπιστολές καὶ τὰ γραπτὰ τῶν νεομαρτύρων τῆς τουρκικῆς κατοχῆς στὸν Ἑλληνικὸ ἠώρο. Δὲν διαφέρει καθόλου τὸ ἦθος τοὺς ἀπὸ τὸ ἦθος τῶν μαρτύρων τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῶν μαρτύρων τῆς πατρίδας. Διαβάξει κανεὶς τὶς ἐπιστολές ἐκεῖνες καὶ βλέπει ποὺ ἔστεκαν αὐτοὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ βλέπει τί ἤθελαν σὲ αὐτὸ τὸν τόπο. Δὲν βλέπεις ἴχνος μισαλλοδοξίας, δὲν βλέπεις ἴχνος τρομοκρατίας, κι ἂς τοὺς κατηγοροῦσαν τότε ὅτι ἦταν τρομοκράτες. Διαβάξει κανεὶς τὶς ἐπιστολές τοὺς καὶ βλέπει ἓνα ἰλαρὸ φῶς, τὸ φῶς τῆς πίστεως τὸ ὁποῖο τοὺς ὀδηγοῦσε στὴν ἀγάπη τῆς πατρίδας τοὺς, τοὺς ὀδηγοῦσε στὴν ἀγάπη τῆς ἐλευθερίας ἀλλὰ δὲν τοὺς ὀδηγοῦσε ποτὲ στὸ μῖσος ἀκόμα καὶ αὐτῶν ποὺ τοὺς εἶχαν κατακτήσει. Καὶ ἂν χρειάστηκε νὰ κάνουν πόλεμο καὶ νὰ κάνουν ἐπανάσταση, αὐτὸ ἦταν γιατί μὲ τὰ δεδομένα τῆς ἐποχῆς καὶ τῆς ὥρας ἐκείνης ἦταν μία ἀνάγκη καὶ δὲν μπορούσαν νὰ κάμουν διαφορετικά.

Μέσα στὶς ἐπιστολές τῶν μαρτύρων καὶ τῶν ἡρώων βλέπει κανεὶς τὸ Θεό, τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ νὰ βασιλεύει, ποὺ τοὺς ἔδωσε τὴ δυνατότητα νὰ νικήσουν τὸ θάνατο· νὰ ὑπερβοῦν τὸ θάνατο, ποὺ αἰσθάνονταν τὴ ψυχὴ τοὺς νὰ φτερουγίζει γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ θρόνο τοῦ Θεοῦ, τί ἄλλο εἶναι παρὰ τὰ ἴδια βιώματα τῶν μαρτύρων τῆς πίστεως; Δὲν εἶναι αὐτὰ οἱ ἐπισκέψεις τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ οἱ ὁποῖες παρηγοροῦσαν τὶς ψυχές τῶν ἀνθρώπων ποὺ βρισκόντουσαν μόνο λίγο πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου; Ταυτόχρονα, βλέπει κανεὶς τὴν πίστη τοὺς καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη τοὺς πρὸς τὴν Ἑλλάδα. Τὴν Ἑλλάδα ὄχι ὡς γεωγραφικὸ ἠώρο μόνο, ἀλλὰ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ὡς τὴν κοιτίδα τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ, τὴ μητέρα τῆς φιλοσοφίας, τὴ μητέρα τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης.

Ὁφείλουμε λοιπὸν νὰ μαθαίνουμε μέσα ἀπὸ τὴν ἱστορία μας, νὰ διδασκόμαστε. Ὁφείλουμε νὰ ὀδηγηθοῦμε προστὰ στὰ διάφορα γεγονότα τῆς ἱστορίας μας καὶ νὰ κρίνουμε τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας, σιωπώντας καὶ περιορίζοντας τὰ λόγια μας καὶ τὴν ἐξωστρέφειά μας καὶ νὰ ἀφήσουμε νὰ μᾶς δεῖξουν ὅλοι αὐτοὶ οἱ μάρτυρες τῆς πατρίδας τὸ δικὸ τους φρόνημα καὶ νὰ μᾶς μιλήσουν γιὰ τὴν ἱστορία μας, νὰ μᾶς μιλήσουν γιὰ τὴν πατρίδα μας, νὰ μᾶς μιλήσουν γιὰ τὴν παράδοσή μας, νὰ μᾶς δεῖξουν ἀπὸ ποῖο δέντρο καταγόμαστε κι ἀκόμα, νὰ ἔχουμε τὸ θάρρος νὰ δοῦμε ποῦ εἴμαστε ἡμεῖς σήμερα.

Πρέπει νὰ ἔχουμε τὸ θάρρος νὰ ἀνακαλύψουμε τὸν ἑαυτὸ μας καὶ νὰ ποῦμε τὴ μεγάλη ἀλήθεια, ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ τόπος, εἰάν θέλει νὰ ζήσει πρέπει νὰ γίνῃ Ἑλληνικὸς τόπος κατὰ κυριολεξία. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος πρέπει νὰ τύχει παιδείας, παιδείας φιλοσοφικῆς, παιδείας πνευματικῆς, παιδείας ρωμαϊκῆς, μὲ ρωμηοσύνη ποὺ σημαίνει ὅτι θὰ ἀπολαύσει ὅλη αὐτὴ τὴν ἱστορία τῆς παραδόσεώς μας. Οὔτε ἀρχαιολάτρες εἴμαστε ἀλλὰ οὔτε καὶ Βυζαντινόπληκτοι εἴμαστε. Ξέρουμε ὅτι ὁ

τόπος ζύμωσε τὴν ἀρχαία φιλοσοφία καὶ παράδοση μὲ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία. Καὶ Ὁρθόδοξος σημαίνει ἐλεύθερος. Ὁρθόδοξος καὶ Ρωμηὸς σημαίνει ἄνθρωπος χωρὶς παρωπίδες, σημαίνει ἄνθρωπος ὁ ὁποῖος ἀγαπᾷ τὸν ἄλλο καὶ δὲν φοβάται τὸν ἄλλο ἄνθρωπο, γιατί ἔχει ἀρχοντιά, γιατί δὲν εἶναι κομπλεξικός, γιατί δὲν αἰσθάνεται μειονεκτικὰ μπροστὰ σὲ κανένα, γιατί εἶναι περήφανος γι' αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶναι καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ περηφάνια δὲν εἶναι ἀλαζονεία ἀλλὰ εἶναι τὸ «γνώθι σαυτὸν» τῶν ἀρχαίων Ἑλλήνων· εἶναι αὐτὴ ἡ γνώση τῆς βαρύτατης κληρονομίας τὴν ὁποία κουβαλοῦμε πάνω μας. Αὐτὴ ἡ ρωμαϊκὴ ὑπερηφάνια μπορεῖ νὰ ὑπηρετήσει καὶ ὄχι νὰ ὑπηρετεῖται, μπορεῖ νὰ σταθεῖ καὶ νὰ ἀγκαλιάσει τὸν κόσμο ὅλο καὶ νὰ γίνῃ διάκονος τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος.

Ἐμεῖς σὰν Ρωμηοὶ πάντοτε εἶχαμε τὴ μεγάλη ὑπομονὴ ἢ ὁποία ἦταν γέννημα τῆς πίστεως. Καὶ ὁ πιστὸς ἄνθρωπος βλέπει πίσω ἀπὸ τὰ φαινόμενα, πέραν τῶν φαινομενικῶν πραγμάτων. Δὲν μᾶς ἐνδιαφέρει ἑμᾶς ἂν μᾶς μισοῦν ἢ ὄχι οἱ Τοῦρκοι. Ὁ Θεὸς τί θὰ πεῖ στὸ τέλος; Δὲν θὰ γίνῃ τίποτα περισσότερο καὶ τίποτα λιγότερο ἀπὸ ὅσα ὁ Θεὸς θὰ ἐπιτρέψει. Πρέπει νὰ μάθουμε νὰ ἔχουμε τελεία ἐμπιστοσύνη στὸ Θεό. Ἐὰν ἐλπίζεις στὸ Θεὸ καὶ πιστεύεις ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι Πατέρας σου, τότε λοιπὸν γιατί φοβάσαι;

Ἄς ἀνοίξουμε τὸ δρόμο στὴν ἀληθινὴ παιδεία· νὰ φτιάξουμε πρῶτα ἀνθρώπους ἐλεύθερους καὶ ἂν φτιάξεις ἀνθρώπους ἐλεύθερους, τότε θὰ ἀποκτήσεις καὶ πατρίδα ἐλεύθερη. Ἄν ἔχεις ἀνθρώπους δούλους, τότε καὶ ἡ ἐλεύθερη πατρίδα θὰ γίνῃ δούλη. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ ἐλευθερώνεται πρῶτα καὶ ὕστερα ἐλευθερώνει καὶ γεωγραφικὰ τὸ τόπο του. Ἄν ἐνδιατρίψουμε στὴν ἱστορία μας, ἂν γνωρίσουμε τὴν παράδοσή μας, ἂν ἀσκήσουμε καλόβουλη καὶ θετικὴ κριτικὴ στὶς παρελθούσες πράξεις καὶ ἐνέργειές μας, ἂν εἴμαστε ἔντιμοι, ἀνυστερόβουλοι καὶ εἰλικρινεῖς, τότε θὰ ἀνακαλύψουμε ὅτι ὁ τόπος γεννᾷ ἥρωες, ὁ τόπος γεννᾷ μάρτυρες, ὁ τόπος γεννᾷ ἡγέτες, ὅπως τοὺς ἡγέτες οἱ ὁποῖοι σήκωσαν τὸν τόπο αὐτὸ καὶ ἔδωσαν τὴν ἀνάσταση στὴ πατρίδα μας καὶ στὴ φυλὴ μας. Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ μήνυμα τῆς Ρωμηοσύνης, τοῦ πόνου καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης γιὰ τὴ πατρίδα μας.

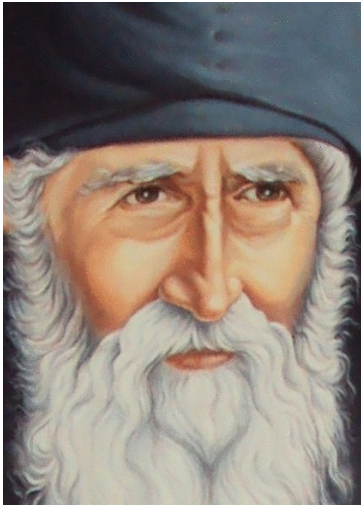
Τὸ νὰ εἶναι κανεὶς Ἑλληνας, τὸ νὰ εἶναι κανεὶς Ρωμηός, δὲν εἶναι ὑπερηφάνεια ἀλλὰ εἶναι σταυρὸς καὶ μόνο σὰν σταυρὸ καὶ σὰν διακόνημα μπορούμε νὰ τὸ κρατήσουμε!



Τὰ ἐλαττώματα μοιάζουν μὲ τοὺς προβολεῖς τῶν αὐτοκινήτων. Μόνο τῶν ἄλλων μᾶς ἐνοχλοῦν. Τὰ δικά μας μᾶς βολεῦουν...

JUSTICE AND INJUSTICE

By Elder Paisios the Athonite, from "With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man", Part 1, Chapter 4, p. 87-104, Holy Monastery "Evangelist John the Theologian" Souroti, Thessaloniki, Greece.



It is important for a man to have God's blessing. It is great wealth! What God blesses will stand firm; it will not crumble. Whatever is not blessed, will crumble. Injustice is a great sin. All sins have some "extenuating circumstances," but injustice has none. Injustice draws the wrath of God. It is a tremendous thing! Those who commit injustice set their heads on fire. You see them do all kinds

of injustices, and then their loved ones die and they seem not to care at all. How can people who are so unjust prosper? They do the things they do, they give the devil rights over them, and for this reason they suffer so much, they get sick and so on and then they come to you and say, "Pray that I get well!"

Most bad and harmful things happen when we wrong other people. For example, when a fortune is made unjustly, the owners may live a few years like royalty, but, in the end, they will spend all their money on doctors. Remember the saying: *What is gathered by the wind is also scattered by the wind.* Or remember what the Psalm says: *A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.* (Pss 37:16). What they collect is spent, blown away. Rarely will an illness, a bankruptcy and so on be sent as a trial from God. In such cases, one's reward will be great, and he will later become richer, as happened with Job. Some people are buried and their bodies do not decompose; it's usually because they have done some kind of injustice.

The Unjust Person Is Tormented

An unjust person and in general all those who commit injustice and do not ask for forgiveness, end up haunted by their conscience and the indignation of those they have treated unjustly. For if the wronged do not forgive and complain, then the unjust are tormented and suffer very much. They cannot sleep. They feel like they are at the mercy of crashing waves that twist them around from every side. It's a mystery how the perpetrator is informed of this! When we love somebody and think about him in a good way, he knows it. So too, in this case, the victim's pain tears the unjust into pieces! It does not matter where he may be, in Australia or in Johannesburg; as long as the person he has treated unfairly is indignant with him, he cannot find peace.

- And what happens if he is insensitive?

- Do you think that insensitive people do not suffer? The best they can do is resort to some sort of entertainment so that they get distracted. Then again, those wronged may have forgiven the offender but still harbour some resentment. In this case, the victim suffers to a degree, but the wrongdoer suffers to an even greater extent from his victim's indignation. But if the perpetrator seeks forgiveness and his victim refuses to forgive him, then it's the victim that suffers. There is no greater fire than the inner burning of the soul by the conscience. Unless one repents in this life for the injustices he has committed and makes reparation, his soul will be tortured and eaten away by wood worm and in the eternal life by the *sleepless worm*. Even if he has no other way of showing repentance, the least he can do is have the right intent.

I remember how this one lawyer, who committed many injustices, suffered at the end of his life. He practiced his profession in a province with many stock-breeders. Naturally, their herds would damage the fields, and many shepherds would hire him because he could convince the Justice of the Peace or the agronomist with his cunning arguments. The poor farmers could rarely find justice for damage done to their crops, and they even found themselves in trouble. Everyone knew this lawyer and no honest man went near him.

I should tell you about the advice that a Spiritual Father gave a sensitive shepherd. This shepherd had a small herd and a sheep dog. The dog had given birth to puppies and he gave them all away except one that he kept for the mother. It happened that one of the female sheep had gone missing leaving behind its little lamb that was still suckling. With its mother missing, the little lamb would run after the dog to find nourishment, something that relieved it as well. Thus, the two animals had got used to each other and one would find the other. As hard as the poor shepherd tried to separate them they would not part. Because the shepherd was a sensitive man, he thought of asking his Spiritual Father if the lamb's meat would be edible or not. Knowing how poor the shepherd was, the Father thought for a while and then said to him, "My son, this lamb is not edible because it fed on the dog's milk, but you know what you should do? Since all the other shepherds bring gifts of lambs and cheese to this certain lawyer, you should bring him this lamb to eat. He is the only one who has a blessing to eat it, since everyone knows what an unjust man he is."

When this unjust lawyer reached old age, he became bed-ridden and suffered from nightmares for years and could not sleep. He also suffered a stroke and could not even speak. The local priest urged him to at least write down his sins, but he had lost control of himself. The priest was thus forced to read him the blessing of the Seven Youths so that he could close his eyes and get some sleep. He even read exorcisms to give him a little peace, until finally the man passed away and was laid to rest. May God grant him the true rest.

- Geronda, many people believe that they are under a magical spell. Is it really possible to put a spell on someone?

- If a person repents and goes to confession, such spells are not effective. For witchcraft to stick, a person must be guilty of some injustice, such as harming someone or destroying a virtuous young girl. In this case, he must repent and ask for forgiveness, confess, settle spiritually and restore the wrong he has done. Otherwise, even if all the priests in this world would read an exorcism for him, the "spell" would still not go away. But even if no witchcraft is involved, the resentment borne by the soul he has treated unjustly is enough to torment him.

There are two forms of injustice: material and moral. Material is when we harm another person with regard to material things. Moral injustice is when the wrong is of a moral nature, such as when a man deceives a woman; and if she happens to be an orphan, the burden on his soul is five-fold. Do you know that bullets will go after wrongdoers in war? There you can clearly see the justice and protection of God. There's no room for dishonor in war. A bullet will find its way to an immoral person.

Once, my company was on its way to replace a battalion. On the way, we got hit and returned fire. I remember that one man from my company had actually committed a dishonorable act the day before.

He had raped a pregnant woman, poor woman. And guess what? He was the only one who got killed that day! Horrible, isn't it? Everybody was saying, "This beast deserved to die." In the end, the devious and cunning try to escape one way or another, but they are not spared. We know from experience that those who truly believe and, as a result, live an honest, Christian life, have their honest bodies protected from enemy fire; it's like they carry a relic of the Holy Cross and perhaps even more than that.

One's Descendants Are Also Tormented by Injustice

- Geronda, when I left to join the Monastery, my family was unjust to me. Should I ask for what legally belongs to me?

- No, that's not the proper thing to do.

- I fear that something bad may happen to them as a result of this injustice.

- Now, this is what I call pure *filotimo* (*love of honor*, Ed.) If I were you, I would tell them, "I want nothing for myself. But I would like you to give the share that is rightfully mine to the poor, with your own hands, starting with our poor relatives. I am asking for this because I don't want the wrath of God to fall on your children." You see, sometimes a father may give away his fortune for the good of his soul,

to create a charitable institution for example, and leave nothing to his own child.

The grandparents in a family may have done something wrong and still live a good life, without consequences. But their children or grandchildren may suffer. They become sick and are forced to give the money their ancestors made unjustly, to doctors, to pay back the injustices of their grandparents.

A family I once knew was going through many difficulties. The head of the family got very sick first, went through a lot, was bed-ridden for a few years, and then passed away. Then his wife died and later his children, one after the other. His fifth and last child passed away recently. Even though they were a very rich family, they lost everything and ended up poor, because they had to sell their property to pay the doctors and the various expenses. I used to wonder why all these horrible things, sickness and accidents, were happening to them. I happened to know some of the members of the



family and it did not seem to me to be the good kind of trial, the kind that God sends to those He favours. Rather, it seemed to me that God's spiritual laws were put into effect. I wanted to be certain, so I tried to find out more about the family from reliable sources, namely, some old folks who lived in the same town.

I learned that the man had inherited a certain fortune from his father which he increased by doing all sorts of wrong things. So, if a widow, say, were to ask him for a loan to pay for her daughter's wedding, and promised to return the money once she had harvested the crops, he would ask for a piece of land she owned. And, as she was in great need, she would have to sell him the land at any price he offered. Another man would ask him for a loan to pay the bank and promise to repay him after having harvested the cotton. He would demand the poor fellow's land and would get it for nothing, as the farmer was afraid the bank would come after him. When someone else asked him for a small loan to pay the doctors, he would seek to take his cow from him, for pennies. This is how he made his fortune. The pain he caused to all these poor people was returned not only to him and his wife but also to his children.

So, the spiritual laws came into effect and caused them to suffer the very same things that their actions had caused to others. In order to pay all their medical expenses, and so on, they sold their land for nothing and after becoming poor, they left this life for good one after the other. God, of course, with His love and sense of justice will judge them accordingly. The others who were harmed, all the poor folk who were forced to sell out their belongings to pay off the doctors, all these

people will be rewarded for the injustices they endured. And, of course, the unjust will also pay their due.

The One Who Wrongs Us Is Our Benefactor

- Geronda, how should we consider someone who treats us in an unfair way?

- How should we consider him? We must treat him like a great benefactor who makes deposits on our behalf in God's Savings Bank. He is making us eternally wealthy. This is not a matter of minor importance. Are we not supposed to love our benefactors? Shouldn't we express our gratitude to them? In the same way, we must love and feel grateful to the person who has treated us unjustly, because he benefits us eternally. The unjust receive eternal injury, whereas those who accept injustice with joy will be justified eternally.

A pious family man had suffered many injustices in his work. But he was full of kindness and endured it all without complaining. He came to my *Kalyvi* (*hut*, Ed.) once and told me all about it and then asked me,

"What do you advise me to do?"

"What you should do," I said, "is to expect the divine justice and the divine return and to be patient. Nothing is lost. In this way, you are putting 'money' in God's 'Savings Bank'. You will surely receive dividends in the next life, for all the trials you are going through now. You should know that the Good Lord rewards the unfairly treated person even in this life. And if He does not always reward him, He will surely do so with his children. God knows. He has providence for His creature. Where there is patience, things fall into place. God provides. We need patience, not logic. Since God is watching, He is observing us, we must surrender unconditionally to Him. You see, the Righteous Joseph did not say a thing when his brothers sold him into slavery. He could have said, 'I am their brother'. But he said nothing, until God spoke and made him king. (Gen 37:20). But when one has no patience, he suffers. From that point on he wants things to come his way, as it suits him, and as is comfortable for him. But, of course, he does not find comfort that way, and things don't come out the way he wants them to come."

When someone is wronged in this life either by men or by demons, God does not worry, because the soul benefits as a result. Many times, however, we say that we are wronged, while in reality we are the ones causing the harm. We must be careful to distinguish the two.

Render Therefore to All Their Due

- Geronda, when we purchase something for the Monastery, some people don't want to issue us a receipt. What must we do?

- They should always issue you an invoice and you should limit your needs and demands. This is what I would do. God will provide for what you need. If we monks ask people not to issue invoices, we make others sin. They think to themselves, "Since the Monasteries are doing it..." When we, who are supposed to obey the commandments of God, operate in this fashion, what will people think? Won't they be scandalized?

The Holy Scripture reads, *Render therefore to all their due.* (Rom 13:7). Even when I send a letter with a person and not through the post office, I still put a stamp on it. Lay people may justify their actions, but if the Monasteries act like them, there will be little honesty left and the Gospel will be put aside. When we do not give from our possessions—and if anyone would sue you and take thy coat, let him have thy cloak as well (Mt 5:40)—we are giving a negative sermon, a negative example, that allows the secular people to find an excuse for

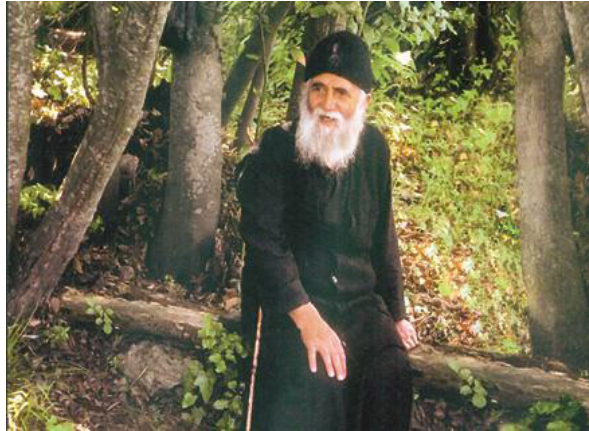
their faults. They are looking for a way to comfort their conscience. We must be careful because we will have no justification for our actions on the Day of Judgment. Our goal should be primarily to defend the spiritual principles and not only the material things. When, for some reason, they do not give you an invoice, you must consider this a spiritual loss.

- Geronda, a workman asked us to fire him so that he would collect unemployment benefits while still working for us.

- Oh no, that is not right. Even a person with only a bit of conscience left in him would not do such a thing. It does not become a Monastery to get involved in such matters. It is better that you pay the workman a double wage, even if you are in financial difficulty, in order to discourage him from such behavior. It's that serious. Blessed deeds bring more blessings, while injustice brings disaster. You should be very careful with these matters. Avoid bargaining with the workmen either. This is why we have fires and other catastrophes in Monasteries.

The world is full of lies. People now grow into liars. They have made up a new kind of conscience. I will not become a liar and turn into something I am not, because society demands it. I'd rather tell the truth and suffer. One must be careful not to enter in the orbit of secularism. Of course, our financial system today is of little help. People are forced to declare a smaller income.

Once, I scolded some income tax officials who happened to be believers. "What are you doing?" I asked them. "You must make sure to keep some of the yeast intact. I know of too many things that go wrong! Someone comes to the Tax Collection office and says, 'I have an income of one million



drachmas.' The official declares that the man has an income of three million drachmas. He assumes that he is revealing only a part of his income, as is common practice, and that this hike will make up the difference. If, however, he is dealing with a conscientious person, tripling his income in this manner will backfire; it will make the man cheat on his taxes the next year. In other words, instead of helping change the situation for the better, you are making things worse." "But we don't know when they are telling us the truth," the income tax person said. "When you start leading a spiritual life, you will know," I replied. "Then you will be able to understand and discern the difference. God will inform you, and you will know."

How the World Has Cheapened

People's malice has exceeded all bounds. They try to deceive one another and they consider it to be an achievement. Our world has become so cheap!.. Everything they make these days is fake. And imagine that today people make more money than their parents and grandparents who were poor and only made a little. The quality of most things is so cheap. One day someone brought me some tomato plants. Each plant was inside a very small bag containing coarse soil, and some coarse sand to keep the moisture. They didn't even bother to pour some water or manure; they had sprinkled some on the top like salt and pepper... When I took them out of the bag, I realized that their roots were rotten. I had to put a layer of soil on top, so that the plants could grow new roots.

They are so clever in tricking people! Listen to this. Someone had brought me a big box with pastries. "I will open it," I said to myself, "when I have a large company.

If I open it now, it will attract ants." So, one day, I had a large gathering and I figured that the box should be enough and I should even have some left-over. As soon as I opened it, I saw that it was full of wrappings ... and the actual container with the sweets was so tiny. The rest of the box was empty. Another time, they brought me a fancy box with pastries, all wrapped in ribbons. "I will keep it," I thought, "for the students of the Athonias Academy." Well, inside there were Turkish delights, stale and hard as a rock! I would never treat people with this kind of sweet!

- Geronda, don't they see that this is a type of injustice?

- No! They consider it to be an achievement. Sin has become fashionable nowadays and cheating someone is considered to be a sign of cleverness. Unfortunately, the secular spirit

sharpens the mind in deception and people consider it a clever achievement to wrong their fellow human beings. There's even an expression, "He's as smart as a devil; he gets things done." Inside, of course, the man suffers from the checks of his conscience, his little hell.

The Just Person Has God on His Side

Not all people fit well in the world today, especially those who want to lead spiritual and honest lives; they seem to have such a hard time.

- Geronda, why don't they fit?

- When someone is sensitive and finds himself in a harsh environment and people make his life hell, how can he put up with it? Either he has to begin cursing, or he must leave. But that's difficult because one needs to make a living. His boss tells him, "I trust you because you don't steal, but put

some rotten produce among the fresh. Take these fresh clover bales and stick some fermented ones in the package." He even makes him a manager, in order to keep him on the job, and the poor man has to do as told to stay employed. And of course, he cannot sleep at night and starts taking sleeping pills. Do you know how hard life is for honest people? They run into all kinds of difficulties and have to take all kinds of abuse from their employers. Life becomes hell for them. And they cannot quit because they have a family to feed. If they stay on, it's trouble everyday. They are between a rock and a hard place. Wherever they turn their eyes, they see a dead end. It makes one go crazy. So, they carry on and try to manage as best they can.

In another case, one employee did all the work while another colleague would only show up to collect his pay check. I know of someone who was department head somewhere. When the new government came to power, they removed him from the post and replaced him with a party member who had not even graduated from High School. They made him department head but he knew nothing about the work and so they could not really send the previous manager away to some other position. What did they do? They just added a second desk in the office. The old boss did the work and the new one was just sitting there smoking, chatting and drinking coffee ... and being completely shameless. And in addition to this, he would say whatever came to his mind while all responsibility fell on the other employee who was doing all the work, until he finally couldn't put up with the situation anymore and left the job, the poor soul. "Maybe I should go somewhere else, there's not enough space for two



desks,” he said one day and got up and left, because the new head was making his life hell. We are not talking about one or two days. It is unbearable to have someone like that over your head every day.

Another person may gain much profit by overpricing. At first, he makes a lot of money and becomes rich, but then people find out that he is dishonest, and his business goes stony broke. On the other hand, the honest merchant gains customers and hires more employees. So he is tested in the beginning, but wins in the end. The good person is tried and tested by evil and cunning people; he has to pass through this period of tribulation unscathed.

When someone follows the devil’s path, and comes up with tricks and all kinds of deceptive schemes, God will not bless his work. Schemes of deception don’t work; they appear to flourish, but they collapse in the end. It’s important that we start with God’s blessing in everything we do. A just man has God on his side. And if he has some boldness before God, then miracles happen. When someone lives according to the Gospel, he is entitled to divine help. He walks with Jesus Christ. What can we say? The man has earned His blessing. This is the foundation of it all. Once that is given, there is nothing to fear. The important thing is that Christ, Panaghia and the Saints should find rest in everything we do, and when that happens, we will have their blessing and the Holy Spirit will overshadow us. Honesty is the most precious Holy Cross. If someone is dishonest even if he has a piece of the Honourable Cross on him, it’s like he has nothing. But if one is honest, he has God’s help even though he doesn’t have a piece of the Honourable Cross. Now, if he has both, well, then he’s got everything!

The Just Person Is Rewarded in This Life

I have seen injured souls who have endured injustice with good thoughts, and have been showered with God’s Grace in this life. Many years ago a pious, simple and good-natured Christian man came to see me. He asked me to pray so that Christ may enlighten his children when they grow up, to endure without grudges a great injustice done against them by their relatives. He told me the affair. As far as I could see, he was really a man of God.

He was the oldest of five children. After the untimely death of his father, he stood by his younger siblings like a good father. He worked hard, increased the family fortune, bought more property, land and so on, and helped his two sisters get married. His younger brothers got married too and they took all the good fields, the olive groves and so on, leaving him with a few useless, barren and sandy fields. In the end he got married too, and had three children. By that time, he was older, and was worried about his children, that they may be bitter over the injustice when they would grow up. He used to say to me, “I am not concerned about it for myself, because I read the Psalter. I do one reading in the afternoon and two before dawn. I almost know it by heart. You don’t read any-

where in the Psalms that the unjust prosper. God looks after the just. You see, Father, I am not sad for the land I lost, but for my brothers who are losing their souls.” He went away at that time, and visited me again some ten years later.

He was very happy: “Remember me, Father?” He asked, “remember me?” “Of course,” I replied and asked how he is doing. “I am wealthy now,” he said. “And how did you get rich, my good brother?” I asked him. “Well, all that useless, sandy land of mine appreciated greatly because of its location on the beach. This time, I have come to ask your advice about how I should spend my money.” “You should make sure your children have a home to stay and put aside enough money for their education.” “I have enough for that,” he said, “and more.” “Well, then give some to your poor relatives and to other poor people that you know.” “I have done so, Father,” he said, “but it’s still a lot.” “Then, you should give some to repair the Church in your village and the Chapels in the countryside.” “I have done that too,” he said, “and I still have plenty.” “Then,” I told him, “I pray that Christ guides you to do good to those who really need it.”

I asked him about his brothers. He started weeping. “I don’t know, Father, I have lost track of them. They sold their land in the village, the olive groves and the fields, and I have no idea where they are now. They had gone to Germany first, then to Australia and that’s the last I’ve heard of them.” I was sorry I had asked about his brothers. I hadn’t realized how sad he would get. I tried to console him and he left at peace. I told him that we should both pray to get good news from them. Later I remembered the Psalm, *I have seen a wicked man overbearing, and towering like a cedar of Lebanon. Again I passed by, and, lo, he was no more; though I sought him, he could not be found.* (Pss 37:35-36). That’s exactly what happened to this man’s brothers.

There’s nothing worse than the injustice. Make sure you have God’s blessing in whatever you do.



Regarding your question, my brother in the Lord, if we should correct our fellow human being when he is ungrateful, unfair, etc., or if we should not in order to be rewarded for being patient, I shall answer: If you think that he will benefit through admonitions and advice, we should do so, choosing to benefit our brother rather than ourselves, thus performing the greatest virtue, love. If you think that no benefit will result from your admonitions, choose your own benefit by putting up with his ingratitude and injustice.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou
From “*Counsels from the Holy Mountain*”

THE VIRTUE AND VICE OF TOLERANCE

By Joseph Sobran, July 1999.

From the Editor: This article's content, albeit approximately 15 years old, certainly rings out timeliness in spite of the years since its authorship.

† † †

If gay marriage is legalized, does the bride's family pay for the wedding and reception? And how do you tell which one is the bride, anyway? Would there be a best man, or would that be the bride too? What about the maid of honor?

I know, I know: I'm intolerant. But why is tolerance such an unquestioned virtue? And by the way, why is it a virtue demanded only of conservatives?

You tolerate a thing when you put up with it despite your disapproval of it. But if you really disapprove of a thing, shouldn't you try to do away with it, or at least discourage it? That depends.

Today's idea of tolerance has its origins in the policy of religious toleration. For centuries England tolerated Roman Catholics, who were regarded as heretics owing their chief loyalty to a foreign power (the papacy). But Roman Catholics were also barred from public offices, universities, and other positions of influence. Toleration wasn't considered a virtue: it was only a policy, based on the assumption that ideally there should be no Roman Catholics in England. The policy was to allow Roman Catholicism to exist (in private), while discouraging people from embracing it.

By today's standards, such toleration was very intolerant. But by England's lights, it was a perfectly rational policy. And many governments have followed that model, putting up with vice without giving it a moral sanction. There was a time when laws against prostitution and pornography went unenforced in certain parts of town, but when they ventured out into the "respectable" neighborhoods, they were sternly prosecuted.

The principle was that vice, in order to be tolerable, must never pretend to be anything better than vice.

The whore plied her trade without exalting it as "sexual freedom." That, of course, was before Hugh Hefner, the pornophilosopher.

Today every vice is a "right" (smoking excepted, of course). In our day, liberals are forever demanding that conservatives be more tolerant of everything from abortion to Communism. But liberals don't merely tolerate such things; they approve and promote them—a very different matter. Liberals don't just put up with abortion and sodomy; they want full legal and moral acceptance for such things, and they call even moral disapproval "intolerance"

or "hate." To say they "tolerate" such things is like saying the Pope tolerates Roman Catholics, or that Israel tolerates Jews. In a word, nonsense. If you like something, you don't have to tolerate it.

When liberals celebrate old Reds like Lillian Hellman and her lover Dashiell Hammett as heroes and victims, they don't mention the monstrous evil of Communism or the moral responsibility of those who supported it. They don't think Hellman and Hammett need forgiveness; they think it was actually quite admirable of them to hold such "progressive" views against the "intolerant" society around them.

On the other hand, liberals aren't particularly tolerant of smokers, gun owners, pro-lifers, or conservatives. They hate them, and they want to cause them as much trouble as possible, even by circumscribing their legal rights. It was thanks to anti-abortion protesters that liberals finally discovered limits to the First Amendment.

Tolerance is a virtue when you put up with a lesser evil for the sake of a greater good, such as social peace.

It isn't a virtue at all—it becomes a vice—when it means abandoning your moral standards out of cowardice or pusillanimity. We tolerate a lot in our families for the sake of preserving love and kindness; we tolerate a certain amount of noise and bother from our neighbors for the sake of general harmony. But if you tolerate your son's heroin habit, you deserve to be called something harsher than "tolerant."

At its best, tolerance is charitable patience with human weakness, out of love for the person. It shows itself in the disposition to listen to others and to make an effort of imagination to understand their feelings and point of view. You may still disapprove of what they do, but you've given them a fair chance to explain themselves.

A lot of people who call for tolerance these days probably wouldn't recognize the real thing...



Let us contemplate the punishment of God upon Israel (Judges 10): The Israelites committed that which was evil before the Lord, worshipping the Syrian, Sidonian and Moabite idols and others; and the Lord handed them over in bondage to the Philistines who, for eighteen years, trampled upon them and crushed them. How dreadful is the Lord toward apostates from the true Faith...

St. Nikolai Velimirovic (+1956)

THE VIGIL LAMP OF THE IVERON MONASTERY

Source: "The Plow" Orthodox magazines, July 3rd, 2003, author unknown.

On February 22nd, 1981, a Sunday, I gave a homily during the Liturgy at the Sacred Monastery of Petraki (*near Athens, Greece*, Ed.). I described the lewdness and the immorality, the sinful dances and the sinful revelries which take place during this period of the Triodion. "God cannot put up with it anymore," I said. "I do not want you to think of me as a prophet. I am not a prophet. But I say that God's wrath is coming upon the sons of disobedience. From above from Heaven or from below from the earth."

Two days later, on February 24th, the dreadful earthquake took place, which shook up all of Greece. The damage was significant to many in Greece.

On the following Sunday, the Deacon told me: "The day before yesterday, Father, you prophesied."

"No," I told him. "It is a natural consequence of our sinfulness. Furthermore, God forewarned us, with the shaking of the vigil lamp of the Iveron Monastery. There also is the miraculous icon of *Panaghia Portaitissa* (*Panaghia, the Keeper of the Portal*)

The icon of *Panaghia Portaitissa* is an icon of the Mother of God, which is miracle working and is at Iveron Monastery on the Holy Mountain. It came at the time of iconoclasm to her monastery, by sea, from Asia Minor. When major disasters or wars are about to occur, she often forewarns the monks with the shaking of the vigil lamp of the monastery.

A Monk sent a related letter to the Greek Orthodox newspaper "Orthodox Press" (*Orthodoxos Typos*). This letter was published in that newspaper on February 20th, four days before the earthquake and it is included below.

† † †

Dear sir, your blessing.

The amazing miracle of the moving vigil lamp of the Sacred Monastery of the Holy Mountain Athos is quite staggering. Its occurrence drove shivers up our spine; full of surprise, the fathers of the Monastery, as well as the visiting pilgrims that were present during the Christmas celebrations, observing at awe this unexpected event (something unusual for most pilgrims), referred to the tradition associated with this unique miracle; this is a miracle that has spanned the ages and blesses us with its occurrence in our days as well.

As it is known, in the central Church of the Sacred Iveron Monastery, the Main Church, and precisely in front of the Royal Gate the ancient large and silver vigil lamp hangs, weighing two or more *okas* (about 3 lbs.). This vigil lamp always presented a strange and mysterious phenomenon, a very manifest miracle, because it refutes the law of gravity and at times moves rhythmically, by an invisible power and for many hours. This occurs on certain great feasts of our Holy Church—during the Services, as well as on other days, not associated with any specific celebration, in a quite extraordinary manner; the latter motions start unexpectedly and are unrelated to the services within our *Katholikon*.

The vigil lamp experiences three types of motions. 1) Horizontally, that is parallel to the iconostass of the Church, 2) vertically to it and 3) circularly. The most common motion is the horizontal one, which is distinguished by its frequency and harmony, thus exemplifying the presence of divine power.

According to a most ancient tradition, preserved by the Elders to this day, the automatic movement of the vigil lamp in the feast implies a joyous character. It is considered to manifest a sign that our *Panaghia* is present at that time in Her Church, co-celebrating with the monks, and the visiting pilgrims, as a Mother with her children, simultaneously blessing and counseling them. With regard to the vigil lamp's motion during daily celebrations, it prophesies that some impending misfortune will happen with more general consequences for the world, such as an earthquake, a war, a mortal plague, etc. This latter miracle is a clear sign of divine providence, through which the Most Holy Theotokos intercedes on our behalf in her customary compassionate manner. It is an opportune forewarning for us to face the upcoming evil with the greatest amount of repentance and prayer and through soliciting from God reconciliation for our many sinful behaviors.

Let me go back. This unique miracle was again observed, as we mentioned above, during and around the Christmas celebrations, nevertheless in a certain usual manner, which imposes worries upon us. Specifically, the movements of the vigil lamp were observed during the whole fifteen days of Christmas, with a vivacious mood, more than any other time. Furthermore, while this was occurring in its usual "celebratory" manner, that is horizontally (parallel to the iconostass), they would suddenly alter into circular movements, around the axis of its suspension.



According to the elderly fathers of the Monastery, the circular movements of the vigil lamp were observed, as they recall, during World War II (the Albanian war). I wish to re-emphasize that this recent movement is completely unrelated to the vigil lamp's motions during the feasts.

As you may gather, the subject event imposes upon us a certain amount of concern and fear as well as restraint. For this reason *as many as have been baptized in Christ, have put on Christ*, let us all cry out with true contrition, from the depths of our hearts, *Lord have mercy and Most Holy Theotokos save us* so that through repentance, we might avert a certain upcoming evil, like the ancient Ninevites...

With great love in the Lord,
Monk M.N.I.

† † †

This miracle of the moving vigil lamp of the Panaghia of Iveron is alive. It occurs fore-warningly, so that people can repent and avoid the wrath of God. This was also the case in the recent dreadful earthquake. The proof of its positive impact is that, although the earthquake's strength was unprecedented and impacted almost all of Greece, nevertheless we did not have any victims (aside from a few, who mistakenly jumped from their windows).

This earthquake (and the miracle of the vigil lamp) brought a good result. The 1981 Triodion period was one of the most sober and most reverent periods in Greece for some time. The masquerading, the improper revelries, the sinful dances, the debaucheries, and the immoralities which formerly occurred stopped. The people, as the newspapers write, are running to the churches.

Be careful, however, so we do not forget this and the people fall into materialism, easy living, sinful pleasures, etc. in which case the vigil lamp will not forewarn but the wrath of God will break out.

The movement of the icon, which was at the courthouse of Athens, also impressed everyone. Many people ran to see it, while the minister of Justice ordered that they transfer it to the sacred Church of St. Constantine at Omonoia. By the thousands the people gathered. The important thing is that they saw the chandelier, which was above the icon stand, moving.

God forewarns people with these things, so that they might repent and escape his wrath... *Let him who has ears hear His forewarning!*



Without devotion to God's Providence, you will not acquire peace. You do not humble yourself, and that is why you have no peace.

Saint Ambrose of Optina

THE ANNUNCIATION OF THE HOLY MOTHER

By the Russian Holy Hierarch Ilya Minyati (+1990).

And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest.

(Lk 1:31-32)

When the fullness of time had come, when God the Father deigned to send His Only-Begotten Son and Word that He might be incarnate and become man, Gabriel, the champion of angels, was sent to the Galilean city of Nazareth to the Virgin Mary who was betrothed to Joseph, in order to greet Her with the words, *Rejoice, thou who art full of grace.* (Lk. 1:28).

All circumstances completely corresponded to this divine Annunciation: first, the bearer of it, the Archangel Gabriel, corresponded to it, inasmuch as this mystery is nothing other than the supernatural union of two natures, the Divine and the human, in one hypostasis of the Divine Word—of perfect God and perfect Man; and the name Gabriel means power of God. The place also corresponded to the event—the city of Nazareth, for the consequence of this mystery was the consecration of the human race through the participation of Divine nature, and Nazareth means consecration.

The time also corresponded—the month of March; the world was created at that time, and in this event was the creation of the world perfected. Then, the unsown soil first brought forth flower, and now the unwedded Virgin first conceived.

All the events of the present mystery are miraculous, but the most exalted of all that is miraculous is the Virgin Herself who received the good news—the Virgin and Mother; and this especially corresponds to the mystery, for such should be the Mother of such a Son. The Divine Word became what it never before was, and remained what it was, becoming a man and remaining God; and Mary became what She had not been, and remained what She was, having become a Mother and remaining a Virgin as before. The Divine Word became a Son born without a Father, and Mary became a Mother without a husband, giving birth without a man.

How different is God from man! But God, becoming a man and in taking flesh, did not abandon the nature of the Divinity. And how different a Virgin is from a Mother! But the Virgin, becoming a Mother, in maternal child-bearing did not lose the glory of virginity. What a strange communion of two natures—the Godly and the human, united unmingled in one hypostasis! Divine nature assumed human traits, and God became perfect Man; the human became a participant in the Divine qualities, and the same Person became perfect God. In the same way, what extraordinary union of virginal purity and maternal

childbearing, which in a strange manner were contained in one Woman! Virginitly gave the Mother the purity that the Mother of God should have, *Who is all-pure all-undefiled, fair as the moon, choice as the sun*, as the Holy Spirit calls Her (Songs 6:9). Childbearing gave virginitly the blessing, which a Virgin should have had according to the Archangel's greeting: *Blessed art thou among women* (Lk 1:28). Born there was the miraculous union—the God-Man; here a different union takes place, just as miraculous—the Virgin Mother. *Strange and marvelous, and removed in many ways from ordinary nature: one and the same Virgin and Mother, remaining in the sanctity of virginitly and inheriting the blessing of childbirth*, proclaims the heavenly Basil (the Great). Such a Son, I repeat, should have such a Mother; the Son Who was born a man and did not cease to be God, to the Mother Who gave birth to a Son and did not cease to be a Virgin.

This mystery could not have occurred in any other way; the very God-Man, the very Son, Who is eternally born of the everlasting Father, and is born in time from a woman. One Son, Who knows both a Father in Heaven and a Mother on earth, but in heaven, where He has His Father, there is no place for a mother; while on earth, where He has His Mother, there is no place for a father. There is no place for a mother in heaven—and the Son is born without passion; there is no place for a father on earth—and the Son is born without seed; thus, the relationship of Persons is maintained perfect. He is the Only Son, and the Only Son has One Father, one Mother, who is by nature an unwedded Virgin.

Now, O Christian, I say to you what the Lord said to King Achaz: *Ask for thyself a sign of . . . in the depth or in the height* (Isa 7:11); look down upon the earth, gaze upwards to heaven, search the present and past ages, and you will not find another sign like unto this one, which God revealed many centuries before through the lips of the prophet Isaiah: *behold, a virgin shall conceive in the womb, and shall bring forth a son* (Is. 7:14), and which was fore-written in many fore-types: in the burning bush, in the sprouting rod (of Aaron), in the uncut mountain, and in the closed gates that faced the east, through which the Lord alone entered and left. How could Solomon say that there is nothing new under the sun? Here is a new wonder that was never matched. A Virgin and Mother, but the Mother of God. And there can never be anything like this new wonder.



O Mother of God! I confess a truth that I cannot comprehend, nor can I explain the heights of this dignity. I turn to the holy fathers to at least in some way understand, but I find that the holy fathers are also perplexed and pass over it in silence. The angels themselves remain speechless, even if they should have wanted to explain it to us. Even the Virgin, Whose mind was illumined for contemplation incomparably more than the minds of all the angels, the Virgin, filled with the Holy Spirit, bearing the Divine Word, explains it to us in Divine words: *For he that is mighty hath done to me great things* (Lk 1:49), and says nothing more.

If She were the Mother of the Messiah (as the Hebrews believed in Him), that is, of only a man, and not God; and if She had given birth to the yearning of ages, the Son of blessing, the Redeemer of Israel, then as the mother of such a glorious king she would as a result of this honor and happiness have surpassed all the mothers of the world, and for this alone all generations should have called Her blessed. But to be the Mother of God, to give birth to the Savior of the whole world, to give birth in time to the very Only-Begotten Son, Whom God the Father begot outside of time—this is an honor that makes Her godlike. At the beginning of the ages, when to the angels was revealed the great mystery of the economy of the incarnation, and Lucifer saw this honor, he was immediately stricken with envy, he thought a vain thing, departed from God, and fell like lightning from the heavens. Thus is the opinion of St. Maximos the Confessor, based upon the Apostle Paul's famous words: *And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him* (Heb 1:6; question and answer 42 on the Epistle to the Hebrews).

The Mother of God! The more I think upon it, the more I am convinced that this cannot be understood, that this is a limitless splendor, which raises Her to the highest throne of the Thrice-radiant Divinity and brings Her nearer to God the Father. Rise up and behold the heights, O Christian, and contemplate on one side the eternal Father, and on the other, Mary, full of grace, and in the center, the Only-Begotten Son, the incarnate God-Man. He has two natures: the Divine and the human; the Divine is the offspring of the Father, the human is the offspring of Mary; the Son of God, as God, the Son of Mary, as the child both God and Man. But this Son has only one hypostasis, which contains two unmingled natures.

The hypostasis is undivided, and therefore there are not two Sons—one, the Son of God the Father and the other, the Son of the Virgin Mary. This is one Person, in which, because it is not mingled, the particular qualities of two natures differ; nevertheless in this difference is preserved their undividedness, and in their duality—unity; there is only one Jesus Christ: God and man. The Father is the Father of Christ and the Father of God and man; Mary is the Mother of Christ and Mother of man and God. Thus, the relationship that God the Father has to the Only-Begotten Son is the same relationship that the Virgin Mary has to the same Son, and therefore She has in her birth of the God-Man Son the same glory, like unto the glory of the Father. Gabriel wants to express this in words: *And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest* (Lk 1:31–32); *He shall save his people from their sins.* (Mt 1:21).

Could the mind conceive of a more exalted splendor?! Now transfer your gaze from such a height to the world below, to all other rational creatures, as far from Her as the earth is from heaven, and look at how small and insignificant is all the grace and glory of the prophets, apostles, and martyrs compared to the grace and glory of the Mother of God. What does King Solomon say? That there is nothing new under the sun? But here is a new miracle—the Virgin and Mother. This is a new miracle, the likes of which there never was. A Virgin—the Mother of God—a miracle, which is for a Virgin exceeding grace. The Mother of God—a miracle, which is for a Mother a most exalted honor.

This is a miracle of miracles, and one that no other faith can boast—only the Christian Faith, in which this mystery is the beginning and end of all mysteries.



We ask those of our readers who wish to receive our publication via e-mail (in the form of a pdf file, of approximately 1.5-2.0 Mb size) to let us know. It allows us to make available printed issues of “Orthodox Heritage” to more of our fellow Orthodox who are unable to financially support our effort.



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.

ON THE DAYS OF THE GREAT FAST

By St. Theodore the Studite.

Brethren 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 the faithful 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 as much as our outer nature is perishing,” it says, “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.

So that looking at the recompense, 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 communicate 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,

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, blessed 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.

THE ICON OF THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT

From various Orthodox pamphlets.

Among the important icons depicted on the walls of our churches is the icon of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. This icon is given great prominence, usually in the narthex of some of the churches or *trapezas* of Mount Athos, as well as in some parish churches throughout the world.

The icon is a depiction of the famous spiritual classic entitled *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* written by St. John Climacos (of the Ladder), who lived during the 17th century and whose memory is celebrated on March 30th as well as the Fourth Sunday of Great Lent. In this book, St. John describes thirty stages of spiritual development, which he likens to thirty steps upward on a ladder. The steps lead the struggler to *theosis*, divinization, and salvation—the ultimate goal of *askesis* or spiritual struggle.

St. John's Ladder expresses the Orthodox understanding that *theosis* and ultimately salvation is not something attained all at once, as by a leap, but comes after a long and arduous process of spiritual striving or asceticism. In this process, with sustained effort one rises gradually from lower to higher and higher levels of spiritual development. As St. John writes, *no one can climb a ladder in one stride*. Just as St. John's book, the icon stands as a witness to the violent effort needed for entrance into God's Kingdom. The spiritual struggle of Christian life is a real one, *not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of the present darkness, the hosts of wickedness in heavenly places*. (Eph 6:12).

In the icon, a ladder stands on the earth and reaches to Heaven. St. John describes thirty stages of spiritual development in his book and he likens the stages to thirty steps upward on a ladder. At the right side of the scene is shown a monastery building. Standing outside its door is St. John Climacos. His right hand points at the ladder and watching monks stand behind him. In his left hand he holds a scroll on which is written: *Ascend, ascend, Brethren*.

Some of the Icon's Details

Ladder: St. John Climacos was inspired by the Ladder which the righteous Jacob saw in a dream. Jacob saw a ladder which rose from earth to Heaven, on which some angels were ascending and others were descending. His vision is described in the book of Genesis: *And Jacob dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God*

of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac; the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed. ... And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. (Gen 28:12-13, 15). The ladder in this icon is sometimes depicted in such a way to express the idea that more effort is required for rising to the highest levels of spiritual development.

Christ from Heaven: With His right hand Christ blesses the monk who has climbed to the top of the ladder. The scroll in His left hand is symbolic of His Gospel. Reaching this heaven is a heaven of the mind within the heart. Its effect is to sanctify the mind and to detach it from material things, and it does so in such a way, that after entering this heavenly harbor, a man, for most of his earthly life, is enraptured, like someone already in heaven, and he is lifted up to the contemplation of God.



Climbing Monks: Below the victorious monk, there are other monks at various stages of ascent. Some stand on the ladder firmly, and are about to rise to the next rung. Others, however, are barely retaining their hold, as they are drawn by demons. One of the monks has fallen off the ladder and is being swallowed by a dragon with wide open jaws.

Demons: The demons are flying at the ladder. The demons are depicted in order to remind the observer that they exist. Such evil spiritual beings act upon us through mental suggestion and assaults. Their tails symbolize their fallen state, their animalistic state. The demons also symbolize various sins. Saint John's book minutely analyzes the nature of the pas-

sions of pride, gluttony, lust, anger, despondency, malice, and so on.

Dragon: The dark dragon is used as a symbol of Hell.

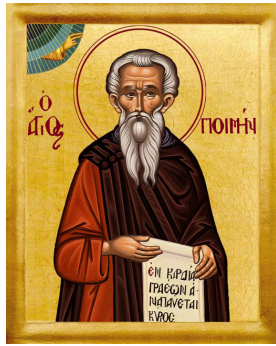
Angels: Angels are viewed as real beings. The angels also symbolize positive qualities, virtues, the opposites of the "passions," humility, temperance, chastity, gentleness, hope, love, etc.



Do not listen to other people's wicked words; for in your desire to do so, the wicked words are engraved in your soul. When you hear evil words, be angry with yourself—not with the man who spoke them; for he who repeats wicked tidings is also wicked.

Abba Mark

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MARCH 25TH TO THE GREEK ORTHODOX NATION

Source: Holy Monastery of "Axion Estin," Melbourne, Australia.

Of all the solemn days in Orthodoxy the day of March 25th is one not only of religious significance but of political significance as well, allowing the Greek Orthodox to commemorate God's message to Mary and the independence of Greece on the same day. The expression *For God and Country* has real meaning for the Greek Orthodox on the 25th day of March, a day on which he can celebrate two events without diminishing either one for the obvious reason that devotion and patriotism have the same emotional root—love. If Christianity could be compressed into a single word, that word would be love. The same holds true for patriotism.

Uppermost in the true Greek's mind on March 25th, however, is the Holy Theotokos, chosen from all the women in the world to be our Lord's mother. When Gabriel brought the momentous message from God, the gentle Mary must have felt a disquieting apprehension at the prospect of this awesome responsibility. Assured by the Archangel, her answer was a simple: *Let it be according to the will of God*, and the rest is glorious history.

The world of Mary of two thousand years ago is envisioned as one in which life was simple and free of the complexities that plague the modern world, but in that age of self-sufficiency there were problems which would be insurmountable today. The mother of that day was all things to her family, and it can safely be said that when the Archangel Gabriel departed, the prospective Mother of

God must have for several moments felt terribly alone. Everyone knows about the nativity and the mission of our Lord, but the details of the days, months and years in between are known but to Mary and to God.

The political importance of March 25th is fully realized only when the suffering of four centuries is called to mind. In 1458 the Ottoman hordes overran all of Greece and most of the Balkans and held hostage a people whose culture dated back more than two thousand years, and who gave more to the world than it could ever receive in return. It seems that the world just stood by while the cradle of democracy and Christianity was being defiled by a scourge that would have undone a less hardy breed.

Hopelessly outnumbered, Greece endured nearly four hundred years of brutal oppression, but the spirit of its people knew not a single moment's weakness. The fires of rebellion that the Turks thought they had snuffed out, but which had smoldered in Hellenic hearts for almost 400 years, were kindled into a conflagration on March 25th 1821, not by a bemedalled general but by a man of the cloth, Bishop Germanos of Patras, Greece, who chose the day of the Annunciation knowing God would be on the side of the Greeks.

The good bishop held the Cross of Jesus Christ aloft on the 25th day of March, 1821, and proclaimed freedom for all Greek Orthodox Christians. It was a motion seconded by every Greek in the country. In addition to engaging in a war for independence, the Greeks were actually waging a holy war because it was not only Greek against Turk but Christian against Muslim; the subsequent Greek victory was a true triumph of Christianity.

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)

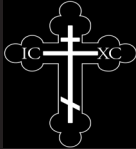
Ἄρα οὖν, ἀδελφοί, στήκετε, καὶ κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε, εἴτε διὰ λόγου εἴτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἡμῶν [Θεσσ. Β' 2:15]

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CHRIST IS RISEN!

An Anonymous Paschal Exhortation by an Orthodox priest.

In greeting my true friends with these joyful tidings, there are so many bright and kindly wishes that my heart desires to convey. But of all these wishes there is one which I have especially chosen to communicate here, for I consider its fulfillment your most important concern.

On this chosen and holy day, I want your hearts to affirm that which once the blessed Psalmist voiced. Loving the Lord with all his mind and with all his soul, he said: *With my whole heart have I sought after Thee, cast me not away from Thy commandments.* (Pss 118:10). In celebrating the Light-bearing Resurrection of Christ, it is my earnest desire that you surrender yourselves entirely to our Saviour—giving to Him your whole heart, all your love and your soul's principal endeavor. This is my fervent wish for you, my friends, because *the love of Christ constraineth us ... for Christ died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again.* (2 Cor 5:14-15).

I once visited a spiritual man especially dear to me and found him wiping tears from his eyes. When asked the cause of his weeping he burst into fresh tears, and it was a few minutes before he could answer. "I am crying on account of a growing awareness of Christ's grief over the increasing coldness manifest towards

Him in the hearts of men. I see believers who come to pray a little, to repent a little, to bring a meager offering. But I rarely see any souls truly dedicated to Him; I don't see any believers who have wholly given themselves over to Him. If it grieves me to see how many—who consider themselves believers—abbreviate their responsibilities towards Him and hurry away from His Liturgy to the marketplace of earthly life, how then must He look upon such Christians?"

There is no doubt that we live in times of spiritual impoverishment and



disregard for truth. People feel no regret in abandoning their *first love* (Rev 2:4). Not so very long ago one could meet everywhere Christians of burning faith. Today's believers prefer to hide their little faith and to conceal it from the eyes of strangers. Inexplicable, unconquerable fears have seized the hearts of the Orthodox faithful. Obsessed by such fears, people are afraid to wear crosses, afraid to make the sign of the cross in front of others. And when the godless ones begin to utter profanities in the company of such Christians, there is no longer anyone who will stand up to them.

Surrounding us today is a sea of the most shameless vulgarity directed against that which we hold most precious, and this vulgarity not only meets with no rebuff from us, but even receives indirect support: not only do we keep silent in the face of such abuse, but we adopt an air of casual indifference which only encourages the impious.

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And how little there is among contemporary believers in the way of deeds of love and Christian compassion. There is a sad story. A poor man prayed that the Lord might help him. As he was praying the Lord appeared to him and gave him a small silver coin, saying, "Do not be offended at My giving you so little. I Myself receive even less from people nowadays."

When we hear words of admonition, we usually respond by excusing ourselves: "Forgive me, but that's just the way I am." But is this really the way you should be, my friend? Think, were you always like this? If you changed from better to worse, is there any reason why you cannot change from worse to better? If you have changed for the worse through the power of sin, why can't you change for the better through the invincible power of Christ's Resurrection? Has your heart shrunk in its capacity to love God? Does not the life-creating, almighty power of the Resurrected Christ rest upon you? Is it not through His power that you live and have your being to this very day? Change yourself, my dear friend—you who have been signed by the unapproachable light of His Resurrection, and place your whole heart at the feet of your Lord. If you neglect to do this, what kind of Pascha can you expect? You will only grieve Him with your celebration.

Through many profound and sorrowful reflections we are given to know the circumstances of our Saviour's burial. How few were those servants of His who gathered to take Him down from the Cross, to wrap Him in the shroud, to prepare His tomb and to give Him the last kiss. Where were all those to whom He gave sight, those whom He cleansed of leprosy, whom he fed, whose lips He made to speak? Where was Jairus' daughter? Where was the paralytic from the sheep's pool, and the blind Bartimeus? Where was the one blind from birth whom the

Lord healed? The man with the withered arm, the deaf and dumb man, the possessed Gadarene, and the many others who believed on Him? The news of what had happened to their Benefactor had at that time spread throughout all Judea. Why didn't all these believers hasten to give witness of their love for the Crucified One? Was it not because they were afraid, because they preferred their own concerns, because they shunned such a difficult exploit, because, although they believed in Him, they had not yet given Him their hearts?

Then there came into the world the power of His Resurrection, His victory which conquered the world. And just see, my friend, what this victory has accomplished. How many people have loved Him with their whole heart, their whole soul, and have given their whole life to Him. Just look at the multitude of His saints. Can you even begin to number all His martyrs, all His righteous ones, all those shining lamps which burned with love for Him in all nations and all ages? Can you recount all their ascetic labors, their deeds of spiritual valor and Christian charity which they performed by means of His power working through them?

And you, my friend, unite yourself to this glorious and immense company of Christ's true followers and slaves. Celebrate the day of His bright Resurrection as it was celebrated by those who pleased Him. Remember that you will truly experience the New Passover of Christ only then when your whole heart is full of love for Him. *If a man love Me, He says, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.* (Jn 14:23).

In your celebration of Pascha, may His blessed name be preserved in your hearts. May your lips sing His praises unceasingly, and may your eyes behold continually His Most Pure Face and His heavenly glory. Amen.

WEALTH AND POVERTY

By Fr. Gregory Naumenko.



Whatever we may hear about the federal deficit or gloomy economic predictions, such talk is dispelled by the general picture of affluence which our society presents. By any measure the United States enjoys a high standard of living, and even if none of us is anywhere near the financial upper crust, we are all affected to some degree by the glittering image of “the

American way of life,” in which the pursuit of happiness and success is invariably associated with the accumulation of wealth and possessions—today’s definition of “good fortune.” Even for the “have nots” it is very difficult not to succumb to this mentality.

As Christians we should be especially concerned to develop a correct attitude towards wealth, for, as we know from the Gospel, it can greatly affect our salvation. Our Lord said, *And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.* (Mt 19:24). But, you may say, I am not rich. Is there anyone among us who can say that he possesses nothing in excess? We all face the question which so perplexed the disciples: *When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?* (Mt 19:24).

The question of material wealth and its effects on salvation is dealt with very directly in the familiar parable about the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31). The rich man enjoyed a life of ease; he ate fine foods every day and walked about attired in expensive clothes. By contrast, just outside his gates lay the sick beggar Lazarus who kept himself alive by eating crumbs from the rich man’s waste. Neither the rich man nor anyone in his household paid any attention to Lazarus whose only relief came from the dogs which licked his sores. Then death came, and their fortunes were reversed: the parable tells us that in the afterlife the rich man went to Hades to suffer unending torments, while Lazarus was received into the bosom of Abraham to enjoy an eternal state of blessedness.

This parable illustrates for us the proper understanding of wealth and poverty—of who is rich and who is poor. Lazarus—old, decrepit, covered with sores, hungry, lonely—endured his condition with patience, without grumbling, and at the end of his life he reaped the spiritual benefit of his earthly struggle. The rich man—fat with temporal goods—showed no concern whatever for Lazarus, and did

not even think to send one of his servants to allay the poor one’s misery; he was starved of virtue, a spiritual pauper. St. Paul writes that those who live in pleasure are dead while they live: *But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.* (1 Tim 5:6). The parable opens our eyes to see that it is the rich man who, in the final analysis, is poor and covered with sores.

The story, may have been very different if only the rich man had extended a helping hand to the unfortunate Lazarus. Such an action would have improved the lot of both men, Both would have lived comfortably in this temporal life, both would have received their reward after death—the first for his charity (*above all things have fervent charity among yourselves; for charity shall cover the multitude of sins* [1 Pet 4:8]), the second for his ungrumbling patience and acceptance of God’s will. Neither would have suffered torment—not in this life, nor in the life to come.

The parable does not teach that we must renounce all possessions in order to achieve salvation. Both those who have been granted earthly riches and those who have not can lead a life pleasing to God—provided that the matter of wealth is put in its proper perspective. It is not money that is the root of all evil, but the love of money. St. John Chrysostom writes: *I do not blame the owners of houses, of fields, of money, of slaves, but I want them to possess these things in a proper way. What does “in a proper way” mean? It means mastering them in good order and not becoming their slaves; it means to use them but not to take profit from them.* Those who “have” are in no way hindered from attaining the Kingdom if they do not put their riches above their love for God and for their fellowman. Likewise, those who “have not” can be close to God if they do not grumble at their lot or become possessed by the desire “to have.”

A proper perspective on earthly possessions is fundamental to a correct Orthodox understanding of life. If we recall the Ten Commandments, we find two basic rules concerning this: *Thou shalt not steal*, and *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.* (Exod 20:15, 17). This tells us that we are not to obtain possessions at the expense of our fellow men.

At this point one may ask: “But, is it not permitted to obtain wealth by honest means?” Yes, this is permitted, but we cannot allow our quest for wealth to interfere in any way with our serving God, for the first commandment requires that *Thou shalt have no other gods before Me* (Exod 20:3). Unfortunately, it is nearly always the case that in search of wealth and profit one becomes obsessed by the whole process and all but forgets God; material wealth becomes a antagonist in the process of salvation. Why? Because, as the Gospel explains to all: *No man can serve two masters: for*

either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon (i.e., riches). (Mt 6:24, Lk 16:13).

We are all subject to physical death. Every one of us will pass on to the life beyond this world, leaving behind all of our temporal possessions, all that those “of the world” so earnestly covet—glory, wealth, power, beauty. None of this will help us when we stand before the Just Judge and have to give an account of ourselves; *for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.* (1 Tim. 6:7). And we shall be found truly naked if we do not begin now to adorn ourselves with virtues and good works, and to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

Rich or poor, may we learn to use our circumstances for our spiritual benefit: material abundance gives us the opportunity to share with others, to practice temperance and self-discipline; times of hardship give us the opportunity to grow in patience and trust in God. Through God’s Providence and love for men, each of us is given the means to become rich in spiritual goods. Let us not spend time accumulating empty wealth, but rather pursue after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness, that we may lay hold of eternal life with Jesus Christ, to Whom is due all honor and glory, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and ever. Amen.



It often happens that a person, either young or old, falls in love with another person, or even an object. Some people fall in love with gold, and cannot be separated from it—or from their wealth, house and possessions—and they become enslaved. ... Many times, the powers of evil bring such people to the brink of self destruction. ... That kind of love [corrupted by evil spirits] is without discernment. But the love of God is boundless.

Our Lord is pleased with the good deeds we perform. Works of mercy and everything else we do for our salvation and the benefit of our neighbor and the Holy Church, all this is pleasing to God. However, what pleases Him most is simple, innocent and child-like love, which cleaves to His heart. This is what is most pleasing to Him and what he wants from us. This is what every person can give Him—rich or poor, young or old.

The fear of God is when you love Him, when you truly love him with all your heart and strive never to offend or sadden Him, not only with your deeds, actions and words, but also with your thoughts. You try to please Him in everything you do or say. That is the fear of God: the fear of doing anything that might sadden or offend our Parent.

Holy Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (+2002)

“LICENSED” THEOLOGIANs

By Fr. John Romanides (+2001).

Some fifty years ago, when I was a student at the theological academy, our professor of Dogmatics, Father John Romanides, told us a story about his student days at the Theological School of the University of Athens. In order to obtain his doctorate from the University, Father John, a newly ordained priest at that time [the 1950’s], had to defend his dissertation before a panel of theological professors. The subject of his dissertation was “The Ancestral Sin” [meaning the sin of our ancestors, Adam and Eve; this is sometimes mistranslated into English as “the Original Sin”]. As various questions about his dissertation were being fired at him from the professors [all of whom had received their credentials at Roman Catholic or Protestant universities in Europe], Father John answered to the best of his considerable ability. Finally, the head of the theological department, the big gun himself, Dr. Panagiotis Trembelas, took aim at Father John, who, as is customary in these interrogations, was standing before the panel of seated professors.

“You have many citations in your dissertation from the writings of Symeon the New Theologian,” said Dr. Trembelas.

“That is correct, Sir Professor,” answered Father John, with the proper deference.

“You must delete them,” continued Dr. Trembelas. “Symeon cannot be cited as a source in your work, because he never received a theological degree.”

[Yes, you just read the foregoing sentence correctly—Dr. Trembelas was truly challenging the young priest...]

Without batting an eyelash at Trembelas’ unbelievable remark, Father John answered calmly, “Very well, as you say, Sir Professor. Would you want me to delete also all my references to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John the Evangelists, since they, too, never received a theological degree? They, too, were not licensed theologians.”

Stifled laughter could be heard coming from the panel of distinguished professors.



Locusts, wars, drought, disease—they are all scourges. They’re not God’s way of educating human beings, but the result of our moving away from God. They happen because we stray from Him. God’s wrath comes to make us remember Him and ask for help. It’s not that He arranges and orders, so to speak, these calamities to happen. Rather, God allows them to happen because He sees how far human evil can go and how unwilling we are to change our ways. and so He tries to bring us to our senses. But they are not of His own making.

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI

By St. John Chrysostom, from his 88th homily on the Gospel of St. Matthew (Mt 27:45-48), edited for length.

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, and said, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, my God my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that said, this man calleth for Elias. And straight way one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink.

† † †

There is a sign which He had promised to give them when they asked for it, saying to them, *An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas* (Mt 12:39); that sign is encompassed in His cross and His death, His burial and His resurrection. And again, declaring in another way the virtue of the cross, He said, *When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am He.* (Jn 8:28). And what He said is to imply: *When ye have crucified me, and think ye have overcome me, then, above all, shall ye know my might.*

After the crucifixion, the city was destroyed, and the Jewish state came to an end; and the gospel flourished and His word was spread abroad to the ends of the world. Both sea and land, both the inhabited earth and the desert perpetually proclaim His power. Indeed, it was much more marvellous that these things should be prophesied by Him when He was nailed to the cross, than when He was walking on earth.

And observe when it took place. At midday, that all that dwell on the earth may know it, when it was day all over the world. After all their insulting, and their lawlessness, this is done, soon after they had let go their anger, when they had ceased mocking; it is then that He shows the deep darkness, in order that at least so (having vented their anger) they may profit by the miracle.

This miracle was more marvellous than for Him to come down from the cross; for He worked these things while being on the cross! For whether they thought He Himself had done it, they ought to have believed and to have feared; and if not Him but the Father, they ought to have been moved to compunction, for that darkness was a token of His anger at their crime.

And what they saw was not just an eclipse, but both wrath and indignation; and it continued for three hours. We are aware that an eclipse takes place in one moment of time, and those who observed the miracle know this.

How is it then that all did not marvel and account Him to be God? Because the race of man was then held in a state of great carelessness and vice. And this miracle was but one, and when it had taken place, immediately passed away; and no one was concerned to inquire into the cause of it, for great was their prejudice and their habit of ungodliness.

He Himself worked this miracle. And he did so that they might learn that He was still alive, and that they might become by this also more gentle. And he exclaimed *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?* (Mt 27:46) so that unto His last breath they might see that He honors His Father, and is no adversary of God. And His cry is from the prophet, (*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* [Pss 22:1]), thus bearing witness

to the Old Testament in His last hour, and in Hebrew, so as to be plain and intelligible to them. By all things, He shows how He is of one mind with Him that begat Him.

Now observe here their maliciousness, ignorance, indulgence and foolishness. They thought (it is said) that it was Elias whom He called, and straightway they *gave Him vinegar to drink.* (Mt 27:48). But another came unto Him, and *pierced His side with a*

spear. (Jn 19:34). What could be more lawless and brutal than these men carrying their madness to such great of a length, offering insult at last even to a dead body? Observe, however, how He made use of their wickednesses for our salvation. For after the blow the fountains of our salvation gushed forth from thence: *and forthwith came there out blood and water...*

And Jesus, when He had cried with a loud voice, yielded up the Ghost. (Mt 27:50). This is what He had said, *I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again, and, I lay it down of myself.* (Jn 10:18). So for this cause He cried with a loud voice, that it might be shown that the act of His death is done by power. Mark the Evangelist informs us that "*Pilate marvelled if He were already dead* (Mk 25:44). And above all, this is the reason that the centurion believed; because He died with power: *And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.* (Mk 15:39).

This cry rent the veil and opened the tombs and made the house desolate. And He did this, not as to offer insult to the temple (how could He, when he said *Make not my*



Father's house a house of merchandise [Jn 2:16]) but declaring them to be unworthy even of His steadfastness; and this was also a prophecy of the coming desolation, and a declaration of the change into the greater and higher state and a clear sign of His might.

And He also showed Himself by what followed after these things, the raising of the dead. Elisha, on touching a dead body rose again (2Kings 13:21); but now by a voice He raised the dead, His body continuing up there, on the cross! And they are not merely raised, but the rocks are also rent, and the earth shaken, so that they might learn, that He was able to strike themselves blind, and to rend them in pieces. For He that cleft rocks asunder and darkened the world, could have easily done these things to them, had it been His will. But He would not, but having discharged His wrath upon the elements, His will was to save them by clemency. But they did not abate their madness. Such was their envy. So even after placing a seal upon His tomb, and soldiers watching Him, He rose again, and they heard these things from the very guards; they even gave money, in order both to corrupt others, and to steal away the history of the resurrection.

Observe the great signs He had wrought, some from Heaven, some on earth, some in the very temple, at once marking His indignation, and at the same time showing that what were unapproachable are now to be entered, and that Heaven shall be opened. And they indeed said, *If He be the King of Israel, let Him come down now from the cross*, (Mt 27:42) but He shows them that He is King of all the world. And whereas those men said, *Thou that destroyest this temple, and buildest it in three days*, (Mt 27:40) He shows that it shall be made forever desolate.

Again they said, *He saved others, Himself He cannot save* (Mt 27:42), but He, while abiding on the cross, proved this most abundantly for so many of his deceased servants. If one considers Lazarus' rise on the fourth day as a great and miraculous event, how much more for all those who had long ago fallen asleep, and at once appeared alive; and this was a sign of the future resurrection to come. For, *many bodies of the saints which slept, arose, it is said, and went into the holy city, and appeared to many*. (Mt 27:52-53). And the Centurion too then glorified God, saying, *Truly this was a righteous man. And the multitudes that came together to that sight, returned beating their breasts*. (Lk 23:47-48).

The power of the Crucified was indeed so great that after so many mockings, and scoffs, and jeers, both the centurion was moved to compunction, and many people. And some say of this centurion that he became a martyr in His name, after he grew in the faith.

And many women were there beholding afar off, which had followed Him, ministering unto Him, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons." (Mt 27:52-53). All these events are closely observed

by the women, for they were most inclined to feel for Him, who were most of all bewailing Him. Observe their diligence and attentiveness. They had followed Him ministering to Him, and were present even during the most dangerous moments and they saw it all; how He cried, how He gave up the ghost, how the rocks were rent, and all the rest.

And these women are the blessed ones that also first see the resurrected Jesus; the sex that was most condemned shows its courage and first enjoys the sight of the blessings. When the disciples had fled, they were present. But who were these? His mother, for she is called mother of James, and the rest. But another evangelist (Lk 22:48) informs us that many women also lamented over the things that were done, and smote their breasts. This, above all, shows the cruelty of the Jews, who gloried in things for which the women were lamenting; the former were neither moved by pity, nor checked by fear.

But Joseph went, and begged the body. (Mt 27:57-58). This was Joseph, who was concealing his discipleship; now, however, he had become very bold after Christ's death. For neither was he an obscure person, nor unnoticed; he is one of the council, highly distinguished and extremely courageous. By his affection to Jesus, he exposed himself to death, taking upon him the hostility and animosity of many; he dared to beg the body of Christ and did not cease his efforts until he obtained it. He showed his love and his courage not only by taking Christ's body and burying it in a costly manner, but also by laying it in his own new tomb. And this was not coincidental; in this manner, there could not be any bare suspicion that one had risen instead of another.

And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre. (Mt 27:61). For what purpose do they await by the tomb? They had brought ointments, and were waiting at the tomb, so that if the madness of the Jews should relax, they might go and embrace the body. Do you see the women's courage, their affection, their noble spirit in money and their noble spirit even unto death? Let us men imitate the women; let us not forsake Jesus in temptations. Even though He was dead, they exposed their lives, but we (for again I say the same things) neither feed Him when hungry, nor clothe Him when naked, but seeing Him begging, we pass Him by.

We say that Christ has done great things, having made angels of men; then, when we are called upon to give account, and required to furnish a proof out of this flock, our mouths will be shut and we will be absent of furnishing deeds in His name.

And let us do at any rate what each of us can accomplish, and from the present time purify our lives and attain the promised blessings, by the grace and love towards man of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory world without end. Amen.

NEW HERESIES

By Metropolitan Augoustinos (Kantiotis) of Florina (+2010); this article may be found under the title, "Νέα Αίρεσις" in the book, "Πνευματικά Σαλπίσματα Ὁρθοδόξου Ζωῆς καὶ Ὁμολογίας," pp. 109-114.

"We will not deny you, Beloved Orthodoxy"

Joseph Vryennios



Of late, certain theologians, under the influence of contemporary, world-wide currents, have begun to savor the words "ecumenicity," "ecumenical spirit," and "ecumenical movement," as if they were hard-candy. Ecumenicity; what a beautiful word! And yet, behind these words, lay hidden a most fearful danger for Orthodoxy. What is this danger? We will show you by means of an example.

Imagine a woman, a woman faithful to her husband, a woman who will allow no third party to enter into their relationship, ever mindful of the promises which she had made before God and before men. She is a woman of exceptional beauty, drawing the eye of many a man. On account of her uprightness, however, anyone who dares to touch, or to proposition her, immediately meets with her anger. Should such a one persist, this honourable woman will deliver a strong slap to his face in order bring him to his senses.

Those men who are learned in this vile business, however, will try another method. These will try to uncover what it is that this woman likes; does she perhaps love poetry, or philosophy, or art? By means of these things the secret admirer will trap her. With great deftness he will begin having innocent conversations with her on those subjects that are beloved to her. "What a wonderful poem!"; "What a beautiful painting!"; "What a wonderful play!"; "How sweet a piece of music!" And thus begins the dialogue.

Gradually the unsuspecting woman is lured into longer conversations with the deceiver who, while his tongue speaks of philosophy and art, his heart leaps at the hope of taking the woman for himself. Finally, after an air of great familiarity and mutual understanding has been achieved through these conversations, the door is opened to the foul deed, the shameful union. Just as the most-evil serpent succeeded in beguiling Eve by means of a simple conversation, in like manner the seed of shameful union was sown.

Did you catch what we are trying to say, beloved? We have spoken in a parable.

The woman concerning which we have spoken is our Orthodox Church. She is this beauty. She is the woman who, according to the Book of Revelation is *clothed in the Sun*, who wears *upon her head a crown of twelve stars*, and who has *the moon under her feet*. (Rev 12:1-2). It is the Orthodox Church which has remained faithful to the Lord, to the eternal bridegroom. It is she who has kept pure the tradition of the Lord and of the Apostles—both written and unwritten—in accordance with the God-inspired call to, *stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle*. (2 Thess 2:15).

It is she, the Orthodox Church, which for nineteen centuries has fought the hard and bloody battle against various deceptions, against the various heresies which have sought to pollute and corrupt her holiness. One of the worst of these heresies is Papism, which, on account of its delusions, its authoritarian spirit, and its atrocities, caused the rise of Protestantism and the fracturing of all of Christendom. Yes, the Papists are heretics. The enemies of the Orthodox Church, including Papism to be sure, know well that she has persevered in the faith of her Fathers. Yet, having been persuaded through many examples that they cannot conquer that fortress which is Orthodoxy by means of a frontal attack, these enemies have recently begun trying by other means. They have begun a new war, a war of peace, a war worse than the Crusades. Do you not hear the voice of the serpent, seeking to corrupt the minds of Orthodoxy, leading us away from our simplicity? *But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ*. (2 Cor 11:3).

Here is what the serpent says: O, Orthodox Church! Why do you keep your distance? Why are you afraid of me? I am no dragon; I am a sweet angel bearing the message of love. I am not going to hurt you. Keep your dogmas and your traditions. Leave these things to the theologians... I invite you into my room to discuss other matters. Let us make a common stand against hunger, against poverty, against atheism, against communism, against war. Do these matters not move you? Does this proposition not excite you? Come then, let us begin our conversation on high, on the level of ecumenicity, on the level of mutual understanding. You will see just how beautiful our coming together can be!

O, Orthodox Church! Our suffering mother! Will you accept this proposition? Will you enter into dialogue with Papism? Can you not see the danger inherent in this proposition? That those who ineptly and unworthily represent you are creating conditions favorable to your enemies to such a fearful degree that you, without even taking notice, will fall into the arms of Papism. And what will follow then? A union, a pseudo-union, spiritual adultery, a most vile act; something which ought never to have occurred, and which

will require centuries of repentance from those Orthodox who played the role of pimp for the Orthodox Church. The hour will come when these will sigh and say: “Let the language which we spouted concerning ‘ecumenicity’ and ‘mutual understanding’ cease; let these feet which ran to bring together Orthodoxy and wolves in sheep’s clothing become leprous; let these hands which signed ecumenical epistles and documents fall off!”

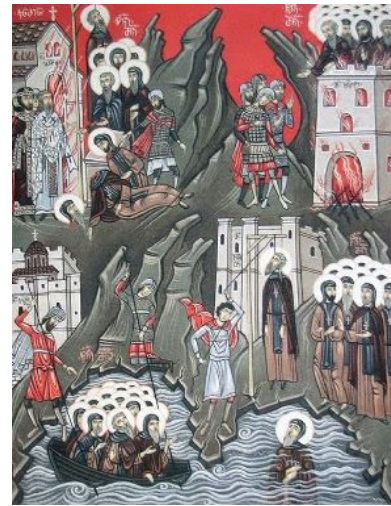
This, my beloved, is the famous ‘theory of ecumenicity’ which our leaders savour!

We repeat: the Ecumenical Movement, under whose umbrella gather all manner of heresies, represents a danger to the Orthodox Church. It deprecates the importance of the dogmas which, having been miraculously articulated in the brief definitions of the Ecumenical Councils, and which are the skeleton, the backbone without which the body becomes a limp and formless lump. It deprecates the Holy Canons, which the ecumenists call obsolete, rusty weapons. To put it concisely, the ecumenists deprecate the Orthodox Church as a whole, saying that it is self-centered, that it is a blasphemy for us to consider her to be the one true Church, possessing the genuine truth of Divine Revelation. Within this context the dogmas and the moral life, inseparably joined in the Orthodox Church, tend to evaporate, leaving behind nothing but a fraudulent version of love. The theory of ecumenicity, the theory which calls all different peoples to live together in the name of some tenuous peace, a theory supported within worldly and political circles in our century and which has already been applied to the spiritual sphere where compromise is unacceptable, will ultimately lead to conflict and turmoil, truly, to Babel.

Leaven, if it becomes contaminated, loses its ability to make things rise; Orthodoxy, the most excellent leaven, the leaven of truth, is capable of leavening the whole lump, but only so long as it remains unpolluted by foreign ingredients, so long as it remains pure. For this reason the followers of this theory of ecumenicity are the enemies of Orthodoxy. For this reason we do not hesitate to call this movement—the Ecumenical movement—a new heresy, from which the Orthodox Church must be protected.

In conclusion, during these critical moments when the Orthodox Church stands in danger, we call out to the faithful from our own watchtower: “Orthodox faithful! Remember that Church, of which you are children. Remember the rivers of blood our Fathers spilled to keep our Faith unadulterated; not one iota did they permit to be subtracted or added to our Faith. Remember the rallying cry of the heroes of the Revolution of 1821. These men—may their memory be eternal—struggled first for the faith, and then for their homeland. All of these heroes and martyrs, known and unknown, call to us from their graves: “Stand firm upon the bulwark of Orthodoxy!”

THE HOLY MARTYRS MASSACRED BY LATINS AT IVERON MONASTERY



Georgian monks began to settle on Mt. Athos in the middle of the 10th century, and a Georgian monastery, Iveron, was founded there not long after.

At that time foreign armies were constantly invading Mt. Athos. In the 13th century the Crusaders stormed through the region, and between 1259 and 1306 the pope’s private army devastated

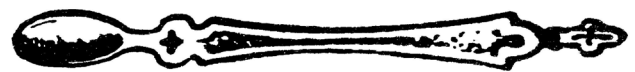
Mt. Athos several times. Monks of Zographou and Vatopedi monasteries and the Protaton were martyred for the Orthodox Faith, and the monks of the Iveron Monastery eventually met the same fate.

During this period Georgian and Greek ascetics labored together at the Iveron Monastery, and many young ascetics of the new generation began to arrive from Georgia.

The Crusaders demanded that the Iveron monks convert to Catholicism and acknowledge the primacy of the Roman pope. But the monks condemned their fallacies and anathematized the doctrine of the Catholics.

According to the Patericon of Athos, the Iveron monks were forcibly expelled from their monastery. Nearly two hundred elderly monks were goaded like animals onto a ship that was subsequently sunk in the depths of the sea. The younger, healthier monks were deported to Italy and sold as slaves to the Jews.

Some sources claim this tragedy took place in the year 1259, while others record that the Georgian monks of the Holy Mountain were subject to the Latin persecutions over the course of four years, from 1276 to 1280.



A man should have zeal and should work, not be idle. Idleness brings many evils upon a man. The indolent man is a thief; he steals from the labor of others. He who works, benefits both the soul and the body. All kinds of work are good, provided that a man wants to work. Iron, if you leave it, rusts; when you use it, it shines. Likewise with man, when he does not work the commandments of God, he rusts. He who is lazy in physical labors, will be slothful in spiritual ones also.

Elder Ieronymos of Aigina (+1966)

PASCHA & THE FAMILY BASKET

By Fr. Gregory Wigenbach (first published in *The Orthodox Observer*, April 8, 1987. At that time Fr. Gregory was the national director of the Greek Archdiocese Department of Church and Family Life).

Do not turn aside too readily from the ancient traditions you have received from the elders, which they in turn learned at their forefathers' feet, for they may still prove profitable to you and yours in your times of need.

[Wisdom of Sirach]

† † †



If you adopt a new homeland and assimilate its ways and culture into your own, it can certainly be a positive religious and cultural experience. St. Paul's apostolate among the Greeks, as well as the Byzantine-Greek Christians' mission among the Slavic people amply illustrates this. An even richer synthesis of cultures can result, helping the Church to witness to the Word of God among the native people. However, there is also a "negative assimilation," which tends to throw aside elements of prime value from the original heritage. Major historical catastrophes in history can do this. The fall of Byzantium to the conquering Moslem Turks was one such catastrophe whose crippling effects are still with us. Many significant religious traditions have also been lost or their meanings distorted by folk stories or tales.

One of the many ancient customs which "fell by the wayside" among the Greeks (as a likely result of the 400 years of Turkish rule), was the custom of "blessing the family baskets" of food at Pascha. It is still widespread among the Slavic nations who inherited the Orthodox Christian faith and culture from the Greeks. Though during my graduate pastoral internship over a dozen years ago, in northern Greece and in the Peloponnesos region, I did come across the custom in two Greek village communities. I also heard mention of it from a few of my fellow priest-classmates at the University of Thessaloniki.

The custom has its Christian origins from the early Church's Apostolic and sub-apostolic communities. In those days the faithful, as a matter of course, gathered together as an interdependent "family of families," sharing all the fruits of their labor as gifts of God, to be offered and blessed on major feast days. The blessing of the grapes and fruits on the Feast of the Transfiguration still survives among some Greek communities.

The early Christians—whatever their ethnic identity—received the tradition from their Jewish spiritual ancestors. Even the ancient name of "Pascha" was translated directly from the Hebrew "Pesach," meaning "to pass-over." Hence, the

English name among both Jews and Christians of traditional observance is "The Pasch," or "The Passover," not Easter.

According to the ancient tradition the mother and father of the family would carefully set aside the best of certain basic foods and drink, or symbolic portions thereof, during Holy Week. These were foods which the family would deny themselves during the whole of the Great Paschal fast. In certain communities, the local basket-maker would make a large, new basket for each of the parish families, as new an offering as the foods and the "spring cleaning" that took place amidst hymn-singing.

The contents of the new basket were assembled on Holy Saturday (after the morning Liturgy—Vesperal-Liturgy of St. Basil), and normally included the following: (1) The Pascha, loaf of bread; (2) A bottle of red wine; (3) Meats and meat products, including lamb, sausages, and ham; (4) dairy products, such as butter, cheese, and eggs; (5) oil and seasonings; and (6) salt, to represent Christians as Christ Himself described them—the salt that gives the earth its savor. Depending on the particular region, the eggs would be prepared and dyed "Resurrection red," and even perhaps marked with a cross, either on Holy Thursday or Holy Saturday morning.

When all was ready, while all of the family was gathered in front of the "home altar" and its icons, the mother—her head covered by a seamless or embroidered white, tasseled veil—would reverently place all of the food into the basket. Her husband, the father of the household, led all in the chanting of hymns and the Lord's Prayer. An embroidered, or specially dyed, cloth emblazoned with the Cross of Christ and the symbol ICXC ~ NIKA was then placed over the whole basket. Just before leaving for the Church, the oldest child would place a newly-made candle in the basket to be the family's own Resurrection "lampada" (candle) in readiness for the triumphal *Passing of the Light of Life* at the Midnight Services in the village church.

Arriving at the Church, the family took the basket to the foot of the Iconostasis. After the Liturgy and after all had received Holy Communion, the priest or bishop blessed the many baskets as well as the Paschal eggs. Leaving the Church, the whole of the parish or groups of families would gather to share the Paschal eggs, soup, breads, meats and cheese. The remainder of the Paschal basket foodstuffs were eaten by the family, usually together with a whole roasted lamb, after Agape Vespers and during the "Bright Week" that follows.

We can easily see that the blessing of the Paschal food baskets has a deep liturgical, spiritual and familial meaning. It is indeed a pity that such a profound tradition as this has largely "fallen by the wayside" among many segments of Orthodox Christians. Perhaps the time has come, during this period of time dedicated to the Christian Family, for us to begin reclaiming this and other wonderful traditions that are, after all, our very own!

ENDURING WITH PATIENCE

By Fr. David Lesko.

On the fifth Sunday of Great Lent, our Church praises the memory of St. Mary of Egypt, celebrating her desert life of penitential endurance, while recommending the patience of her struggle as an example of self-gathering sobriety to all. Without endurance, there is no Christian life; there is fluctuation and tossing, and the too real danger of self-scattered frenzy. *In your patience possess ye your souls*, Jesus promises (Lk 21:19), and to those who question how long struggling might continue, He answers that, *he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved*. (Mt 24:13). Nothing is clearer: patience must be actively patient ... to the end.

Discussing the Christian need for endurance, Fr. Alexander Elchaninov (+1934) noted that, "People keep saying, 'Life is hard!' And if you cite the example of the saints, the usual reply is: 'Well, they are not saints for nothing, it is easy for them!'"

This is a common error. It is the saints in particular who found it hard. They overcame not only worldly difficulties but the very essence of their humanity. The usual path of the saint—from the abyss of sin to the summit of holiness—is narrow and arduous. Whereas our course is always an easy one, along the line of least resistance; but the fruits of our course are bitter and burdensome, whereas the hard way yields the reward of true beatitude."

Thus, as the Church praises the memory of St. Mary of Egypt, it is good to recall again—for every day thereafter—that the path of holiness is hard, that blessedness is not to be attained by the "line of least resistance." It is good, in other words, to recall St. Mary's struggles, and the struggles of others who, like her, for salvation's sake, endured.

The Life of St. Mary of Egypt, who reposed in the year 521, was compiled by the Holy Patriarch and Hymnographer Sophronius of Jerusalem (+638) on the basis of the testimony of the Elder Zosimas, the priest-monk whom God had directed to her in the desert beyond the Jordan River. Much of it is written in the form of a dialogue.

"Zosimas asked her: 'How many years have gone by since you began to live in the this desert?'"

"She replied: 'Forty-seven years have already gone by, I think, since I left the holy city...'"

"Zosimas asked: 'Can it be that without getting ill you have lived so many years thus, without suffering in any way from such a complete change?'"

"The woman answered: 'You remind me, Zosimas, of what I dare not speak of. For when I recall all the dangers which I overcame, and all the violent thoughts which confused me, I am again afraid that they will take possession of me.'"

"Zosimas said: 'Do not hide from me anything; speak to me without concealing anything.'"

"And she said to him: 'Believe me, Abba, seventeen years I passed in this desert fighting wild beasts—mad desires and passions. When I was about to partake of food, I used to begin to regret the meat and fish of which I had so much in Egypt. I regretted also not having wine which I loved so much. For I drank a lot of wine when I lived in the world, while here I had not even water. I used to burn and succumb with thirst. The mad desire for profligate songs also entered me and confused me greatly, edging me on to sing satanic songs which I had learned once. But when such desires entered me, I struck myself on the breast and reminded myself of the vow which I had made, when

going into the desert. In my thoughts I returned to the icon of the Mother of God which I had received, and to her I cried in prayer. I implored her to chase away the thoughts to which my miserable soul was succumbing. And after weeping for long and beating my breast, I used to see light at last which seemed to shine on me from everywhere. And after the violent storm, lasting calm descended.'"

'And how can I tell you about the thoughts which urged me on to fornication, how can I express them to you, Abba? A fire was kindled in my miserable heart which seemed to burn me up completely and to awake in me a thirst for embraces. As soon as this craving came to me, I flung myself on the earth and watered it with my tears, as if I saw before me my witness, who had appeared to me in my disobedience and



who seemed to threaten punishment for the crime. And I did not rise from the ground (sometimes I lay thus prostrate for a day and a night) until a calm and sweet light descended and enlightened me and chased away the thoughts that possessed me. But always I turned the eyes of my mind to my Protectress, asking her to extend help to one who was sinking fast in the waves of the desert. And I always had her as my Helper and the Acceptor of my repentance. And thus I lived for seventeen years amid constant dangers. And since then even till now the Mother of God helps me in everything and leads me as it were by the hand...

“The clothes I had when I crossed the Jordan became torn and worn out. I suffered greatly from the cold and greatly from the extreme heat: at times the sun burned me up and at other times I shivered from the frost, and frequently falling to the ground I lay without breath and without motion. I struggled with many afflictions and with terrible temptations. But from that time till now the power of God in numerous ways has guarded my sinful soul and my humble body. When I only reflect on the evils from which Our Lord has delivered me, I have imperishable food for hope of salvation...”

For seventeen years, by her own admission, St. Mary of Egypt endured. And in the 54th of his towering Homilies, Saint Isaac the Syrian (700) remembered a similar struggler, the Persian Rabban Shabur, who died in the middle of the seventh century.

“One of the saints said: ‘There was an anchorite, a respected elder, and once I went out to him when I was in distress because of temptations. But he was lying ill, lying down; and when I embraced him, I sat with him and told him, ‘Pray for me, Father, for I am exceedingly harassed by the many temptations of the demons.’ But he opened his eyes, and regarding me attentively, he said, ‘Child, you are very young, and God will not loose temptations upon you.’ And I said to him, ‘Yes, I am very young, but I have the temptations of mighty men.’ And he said again, ‘Then it is God’s will to make you wise.’ And I said, ‘How can I become wise? For every day I taste death.’ And in reply he said, ‘God loves you; be still. God is about to give you His grace.’ And he said again, ‘Know, child, that for thirty years I have made war with the demons, and until the time when I completed the course of twenty years, I had not received any help whatsoever. But thereafter, when another five had also gone by I began to find rest. And as time continued slowly on its way, it increased. The seventh year slipped by, and after

that, when I was in the eighth, it was intensified to a much greater degree. And now that the thirtieth year is running past, and has already reached its end, rest has prevailed to such an extent that I do not even know to what measure it has advanced.’ And he added, ‘When I wish to get up for my office, I am permitted to say a single Glory be; but as for the rest, if I stand three days, I am in awestruck wonder with God, and feel no weariness at all.’” Behold, the labour of many years, and what limitless rest it bore”

Much less remotely, the Elder Gabriel of Pskov and Kazan (1915), one-time spiritual father and confessor to the Holy New Martyr, the Grand Duchess Elizabeth, wrote about the need for patient endurance—about his own experience of struggling—in the following way.

“I will begin with the Love of God. Perhaps through your knowledge or through your intellectual capabilities you know far more about the Love of God than my wretched self. Glory be to God! But if you have been smitten in your heart by the Love of God, and if it has illumined you within and without, consumed and transformed you, then, of course, no carnal thoughts nor any other such dark shadows would be in your heart, and nothing would be able to satisfy it except the love of God. Forgive me, my beloved, and don’t imagine that I want to hurt you in any way. No, absolutely not! I wish that I could explain to you, as to my closest friend and brother in Christ, the feeling of God’s love—that very feeling which I myself for so long and so strongly wanted to receive and did not. These desires were the pangs

of my spiritual birth, and these pangs lasted very long, for more than thirty years. I think that the warfare with sin out of the hope of the future joy of union with the Lord and our Creator was of two kinds. One, of my own war with my nature, and the other was God’s battle. But all this was so mysterious and hidden from me through Providence from on high that I could only begin to understand it afterwards. I was exhausted in the battle with myself, with the raging passions of my flesh, but in the face of this, there remained in me a higher and nobler desire than all my sinful impulses. It gave wings to my soul, and I felt that only this desire could satisfy me and nothing else in the whole world, this eternal, creating force given by the Creator: Love toward God.

“I thirsted to love God with all my heart. But how is one to love? If one is to love God, one has to be worthy of God. But on the contrary, I saw myself to be not only a sinner, but to be persisting in my sins...



“And so it was pleasing to my Lord that I should fall ill, and I became ill. But I had not yet tasted of this love. I fell ill and wept fervently during the time of my illness that I would triumph over my sins, but I did not yet have this love. I was quick to repent not just once or twice. I repented a great many times and received joy, for I saw that sin began to lose its hold over me, so that my soul no longer delighted in sin. Sinful thoughts did not arise in my heart, and my repentance was united with thanksgiving to God.

“The more I suffered, the better I would feel. I felt a powerful longing to receive Communion, and I was given Holy Communion often. After receiving the Holy Mysteries my spirit was winged with unutterable hope in God, and my heart overflowed with thanksgiving to our Lord Jesus Christ. In this immeasurable love of God towards the world in the redemption of the human race was revealed to my wretched self. This love, as it were, began to make itself known in me throughout my whole being with such yearning for the Lord that I did not feel my sufferings...

“I was deeply aware that I was a sinner, but at the same time a fiery hope in the saving love and mercy of the Lord truly uplifted my spirit. Tears of tender-feeling poured forth from my eyes. And what my heart experienced at such moments, I cannot describe. I felt no need of food. I was burdened when others visited me. I was blissful, struck with love for the Lord. I was willing to remain even eternally alone and suffer, if only I could be with the Lord and be filled with love toward Him.”

Finally, only yesterday so to speak, Tatiana Goricheva, who was born in the former Soviet Union in 1947 and who immigrated to France in 1980, published a spiritual diary in 1985 in which she recalled having met a nun Mother Onouphria, whose patient struggle, though different, was just as intense as that described by Saint Mary of Egypt nearly fifteen hundred years ago.

“Mother Onouphria told me that she woke up on the day after taking the habit as a nun, not only without any living sense of the presence of God, but also with a coldness in her soul which told her that her whole faith was only a deception, that there never had been a God and that there never would be one. After taking the habit, Mother Onouphria, formerly a woman with a strong and burning faith, felt that she was an atheist. And this state of feeling abandoned by God lasted for several years. God was absent and the whole world around her changed into a dark, gloomy cave. Mother Onouphria told the *starets* everything. He explained to her that God sends such testing only to particularly strong children, the most elect and those whom He loves best... God wants us to love Him freely and not for any reason, just as He loves us. God as it were raises up those whom He has chosen into His ‘solitude’... This sharing in the suffering of being abandoned

by God was experienced most powerfully by Jesus Christ Himself on Golgotha.”

“But I see,” wrote St. Anatoly of Optina (1894) to another nun, “that you wish to throw off your fashionable shoes with ornaments and your ballroom dress, and this very minute become holy, righteous, to shine right away. No, Matushka, it does not happen that way with spiritual things. Here, patience comes first and foremost; after that comes more patience; and finally all this is crowned by patience once more.”

The Holy New Martyr, Archimandrite Simeon (Kholmogorov), author of the Life of the Elder Gabriel, remembered that the latter used to say: “For a long time, I attempted to break myself, and I couldn’t succeed. Then finally I broke.” But, he added, it unfortunately “remained indefinite what exactly he ‘broke’ within his heart...” If a consensus can be discerned though, among all the strugglers whose testimonies constitute the ascetical literature of the Church, can it not be maintained that what “broke,” for the Elder Gabriel and for all, was the seal of the stone closing tight the tomb of their hearts? Saint John of the Ladder (603) affirmed nothing other than this:

“The man who has withdrawn from the world in order to shake off his own burden of sins should imitate those who sit outside the city among the tombs, and should not cease from his hot and fiery streams of tears and voiceless heartfelt groaning until he, too sees that Jesus has come to him and rolled away the stone of hardness from his heart, and loosed Lazarus, that is to say, our mind, from the bands of sin, and ordered His attendant angels: Loose him from passions, and let him go to blessed dispassion...”

In your patience, possess ye your souls, Jesus promises.



There is no greater evil than egotism. It gives birth to all temptations and troubles, and woe to whomever it entangles—it will deform him! Only the good disciple will make his soul with spiritual beauty. Do not let time pass unfruitfully, for the yarn is being wound, and suddenly we shall hear, *Put your house in order, for you will die; you will live no longer!* (Isa 38:1). Strike egotism with all your might; learn humility. Work with contrition, with mourning, with the fragrance of humility. Only deeds which have humility will be rewarded. The deeds poisoned by egotism and self-will will be taken by the four winds and scattered like rubbish, and we shall be left empty-handed.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou
From “*Counsels from the Holy Mountain*”

Ἀνέστη Χριστός, Ἡ Δοκιμασία τοῦ Λογικοῦ

Φώτης Κόντογλου.



Ἡ πίστη τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ δοκιμάζεται μὲ τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ σὰν τὸ χρυσάφι στὸ χωνευτήρι. Ἀπ' ὅλο τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο ἡ Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι τὸ πλεόν ἀπίστευτο πράγμα, ὁλότελα ἀπαράδεκτο ἀπὸ τὸ λογικὸ μας, ἀληθινὸ μαρτύριο γιὰ αὐτοῦ. Μὰ ἴσια-ἴσια, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι ἓνα πράγμα ὁλότελα ἀπίστευτο, γιὰ τοῦτο χρειάζεται ὁλόκληρη

ἡ πίστη μας γιὰ νὰ τὸ πιστέψουμε. Ἐμεῖς οἱ ἄνθρωποι λέμε συχνὰ πὼς ἔχουμε πίστη, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἔχουμε μονάχα γιὰ ὅσα εἶναι πιστευτὰ ἀπ' τὸ μυαλό μας. Ἀλλὰ τότε, δὲν χρειάζεται ἡ πίστη, ἀφοῦ φτάνει ἡ λογικὴ. Ἡ πίστη χρειάζεται γιὰ τὰ ἀπίστευτα.

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

Βλέπεις καταπάνω σὲ πόση ἀπιστία ἀγωνίσθηκε ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστός; Καὶ στοὺς ἴδιους τοὺς μαθητὰδες του! Εἶδες μὲ πόση μακροθυμία τὰ ὑπόμεινε ὅλα; Καὶ μ' ὅλα αὐτὰ, ἴσαμε σήμερα οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπὸ μᾶς εἴμαστε χωρισμένοι ἀπὸ τὸν Χριστὸ μ' ἓνα τοῖχο παγωμένον, τὸν τοῖχο τῆς ἀπιστίας. Ἐκεῖνος ἀνοίγει τὴν ἀγκάλη του καὶ μᾶς καλεῖ κ' ἐμεῖς τὸν ἀρνιόμαστε. Μᾶς δείχνει τὰ τρυπημένα χέρια Του καὶ τὰ πόδια Του, κ' ἐμεῖς λέμε πὼς δὲν τὰ βλέπουμε. Ἐμεῖς ψάχνουμε νὰ βροῦμε στηρίγματα στὴν ἀπιστία μας γιὰ νὰ ἱκανοποιήσουμε τὸν ἐγωϊσμό μας, ποὺ τὸν λέμε Φιλοσοφία καὶ Ἐπιστήμη. Ἡ λέξις Ἀνάσταση δὲν χωρᾶ μέσα στὰ βιβλία τῆς γνώσης μας... Γιατὶ ἡ γνώση τούτου τοῦ κόσμου, δὲ μπορεῖ νὰ γνωρίσει ἄλλο τίποτα, παρεκτὸς ἀπὸ ἓνα πλῆθος λογισμῶν, ὄχι ὅμως ἐκεῖνο ποὺ γνωρίζεται μὲ τὴν ἀπλότητα τῆς διάνοιας.

Ναί, ἐκεῖνους ποὺ ἔχουνε αὐτὴ τὴν εὐλογημένη ἀπλότητα τῆς διάνοιας, τοὺς μακάρισε ὁ Κύριος, λέγοντας: *«Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι, ὅτι*

αὐτῶν ἐστὶ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν. Μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν Θεὸν ὄψονται». Καὶ στὸν Θωμᾶ, ποὺ γύρευε νὰ τὸν ψηλαφήσῃ γιὰ νὰ πιστέψῃ, εἶπε: *«Γιατὶ μὲ εἶδες Θωμᾶ, γιὰ τοῦτο πιστέψες; Μακάριοι εἶναι ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ δὲν εἶδανε καὶ πιστέψανε».*

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

Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀνηξερῖα (ἡ ἄγνοια) εἶναι ἀνώτερη ἀπὸ τὴν γνώση: *«Αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἄγνοια ἡ ὑπερτέρα τῆς γνώσεως».* Καλότυχοι καὶ τρισκαλότυχοι ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ τὴν ἔχουνε.

Χριστὸς ἀνέστη!



Τὶς διαφορὲς θεωρίες τῶν θεολόγων νὰ τὶς περνᾶτε ἀπὸ τὸ «πατερικὸ κόσκινο». Πρέπει νὰ τὶς κοσκινίζετε μὲ βάση τοὺς Πατέρες καὶ ὅτι εἶναι σκουπίδια ἢ πίτουρα νὰ τὰ πετᾶτε. Να ψάχνετε μὲ βάση τοὺς Πατέρες. Προσεῖτε ἓνα παράδειγμα. Ὑπάρχει τὸ μπακίρι, ὁ μπροῦντζος καὶ ὁ χρυσός.

Ἀκόμη καὶ μπακίρι καλὸ καὶ ἄσχημο, μπροῦντζος καλὸς καὶ ἄσχημος, χρυσὸς 12 καρατίων καὶ χρυσὸς 24 καρατίων. Εσεῖς νὰ διαλέγετε τὸ χρυσὸ τῶν 24 καρατίων. Καὶ τὰ ἄλλα χρειάζονται, ἄλλα ὅλοι νὰ προτιμᾶτε τὸ χρυσό!

Οἱ ἄνθρωποι ποὺ ἔχουν δίκιο θέλουν καὶ καλὰ καὶ σώνει νὰ ἔχουν ὅλο το δίκιο μὲ τὸ μέρος τους. Κι ἂν δὲν τοὺς φτάνει, τότε δὲν γυρεύουν τὴ δικαιοσύνη τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ πηγαίνουν στὰ κοσμικὰ δικαστήρια νὰ τὴ βροῦν.

Ὅποιος δὲ μᾶς πειράξει, νὰ μὴ λέμε ποτέ, «ὁ Θεὸς νὰ τὸν πληρώσει», γιατί ὁ Θεὸς πληρώνει πολὺ ἀκριβὰ. Ἀπλῶς νὰ συγχωροῦμε καὶ νὰ μὴ μιλάμε πολὺ. Ὁ Θεός, σ' ἐκεῖνον ποὺ σιωπᾶ, μιλάει περισσότερο καὶ τὸν εὐεργετεῖ.

Πρὶν ἐπιτρέψῃ ὁ Θεὸς νὰ ἔρθῃ μία δοκιμασία, πὲργάστηκε μὲ καλὸ τρόπο, ἀλλὰ δὲν τὸν καταλάβαιναν, γι' αὐτὸ μετὰ ἐπέτρεψε τὴν δοκιμασία. Βλέπετε, καὶ ὅταν ἓνα παιδὶ εἶναι ἀνάποδο, στὴν ἀρχὴ ὁ πατέρας του τὸ παίρνει μὲ τὸ καλὸ, τοῦ κάνει τὰ χατίρια, ἀλλά, ὅταν ἐκεῖνο δὲν ἀλλάξῃ, τότε τοῦ φέρεται αὐστηρά, γιὰ νὰ διορθωθῇ. Ἔτσι καὶ ὁ Θεὸς μερικὲς φορές, ὅταν κάποιος δὲν καταλαβαίνει μὲ τὸ καλὸ, τοῦ δίνει μία δοκιμασία, γιὰ νὰ συνέλθῃ.

Γέροντας Παΐσιος Ἀθωνίτης

Για τους Ήσχατους Καιρούς

Γέροντας Στέφανος Σέρβος.



Ο Γέροντας Στέφανος Σέρβος (ή Στέφανος ο Καρουλίτης) ήταν μία πολύ σημαίνουσα προσωπικότητα της Ορθοδοξίας, πὸν ἔζησε ἐπὶ μισὸ αἰῶνα στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος. Στὴ διάρκεια αὐτῶν τῶν δεκαετιῶν, ὁ μοναχὸς αὐτὸς διακρίθηκε γιὰ τὶς διδακτικὲς του ἀρετές, τὴν ικανότητά του νὰ μεταδίδει τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Χριστιανικὴ πίστη, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἐνδιαφέρον του γιὰ διάφορα σημαντικὰ ζητήματα ποὺ ἀπασχολοῦν

τὸν σύγχρονο ἄνθρωπο. Γεννημένος τὸ 1922, κοιμήθηκε τὸν Δεκέμβριο τοῦ 2001 (μὲ τὸ παλαιὸ ἡμερολόγιο, στίς 21 Νοεμβρίου 2001) στὸ Βελιγράδι, σὲ ἡλικία 79 ἐτῶν. Στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος ἔζησε ἀπὸ τὸ 1950 ἕως τὸ 2000, ἕνα χρόνο πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸν θάνατό του.

Ἐνα θέμα γιὰ τὸ ὁποῖο μίλησε συχνὰ ὁ Γέροντας Στέφανος ὁ Καρουλίτης ἦταν αὐτὸ ποὺ ἀφοροῦσε τὸ τέλος τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὰ συμφοραζόμενα μὲ αὐτό: τὴν ἐμφάνιση τοῦ Ἀντίχριστου, τὸν ἀριθμὸ 666, κ.λπ. Δὲν ἦταν λίγοι ποὺ τὸν ρωτοῦσαν γιὰ νὰ μάθουν γύρω ἀπὸ τὰ πολὺπλοκα αὐτὰ ζητήματα. Ὁ καλόγερος ἦταν πάντα πρόθυμος νὰ μεταδώσει τὶς δικές του ἀπόψεις γιὰ τὰ θέματα αὐτά, οἱ ὁποῖες ἔχουν καταγραφεῖ.

Νά, λοιπόν, τί εἶχε πεῖ καὶ γράψει ἡ μεγάλη αὐτὴ μορφή τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας:

«Ὅταν δεῖτε νὰ κατασκευάζουν οἱ Ἑβραῖοι τὸν ναὸ τοῦ Σολομώντα, πρέπει νὰ ἐτοιμάσετε τροφίμα γιὰ 3-4 χρόνια, καὶ ἰδιαίτερος ἀλεῦρι... Προτοῦ ἀρχίσουν τὴν κατασκευὴ τοῦ ναοῦ, δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἐτοιμάσετε. Ὁ Κύριος θὰ ἐπιτρέψει νὰ κατασκευαστεῖ ὁ ναὸς μόνο πρὶν ἀπὸ τὸ βέβαιο τέλος τοῦ κόσμου. Πρὶν ἀπὸ αὐτό, εἶναι ἀδύνατο νὰ τὸ πραγματοποιήσουν, γιατί σ' αὐτὸν θὰ βασιλεύσει ἐκεῖνος ὁ δικός τους καταστροφικὸς κατ' ὄνομα βασιλεύς, τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ ὁποῖου ἔχουν ἀρχίσει ἤδη νὰ τοποθετοῦν ὑπὸ τὴ μορφή τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ 666 σὲ ὄλους ποὺ δὲν βλέπουν ὅτι ἐξαιτίας του τοὺς περιμένουν αἰῶνια βάσανα. Αὐτὸς ὁ καταστροφικὸς τους βασιλεύς θὰ καθίσει καὶ στὸ δικό τους τὸ κεφάλι καὶ δὲν θὰ μποροῦν νὰ τὸν διώξουν. Αὐτὸ θὰ τὸ πράξει ὁ Κύριος ὅταν θὰ ἔρθει γιὰ τὴν καθολικὴ Κρίση.

Προτοῦ τελειώσει ἡ ἱστορία τοῦ κόσμου, θὰ συμβεῖ καὶ ἕνα ἄλλο σημαντικὸ γεγονός, γιὰ τὸ ὁποῖο οἱ

σύγχρονοι θεολογικοὶ συγγραφεῖς λίγα ἢ σχεδὸν τίποτε δὲν γράφουν. Οἱ Ἑβραῖοι θὰ στραφοῦν στὸν Κύριο Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ καὶ θὰ περάσουν στὸν Χριστιανισμό. Φυσικά, ὄχι ὅλοι. Πότε θὰ συμβεῖ αὐτό; Ἡ κατὰ τὴν ἐποχὴ τοῦ ἴδιου τοῦ Ἀντίχριστου, ὅταν δοῦν στὴν πράξη ὅτι πλανήθηκαν μὲ τὸν Ἀντίχριστο, ἢ πρὶν. Αὐτὸ θὰ μᾶς τὸ δείξει ὁ καιρὸς. Ἐδῶ μπορῶ νὰ πῶ μὲ βεβαιότητα ὅτι αὐτὸ θὰ συμβεῖ καὶ τίποτε ἄλλο παραπέρα».

Σὲ ἐρώτηση διάφορων πιστῶν γιὰ τὸ ἂν ὑπάρχουν σημεῖα τῆς Δευτέρας Παρουσίας καὶ τοῦ τέλους αὐτοῦ τοῦ κόσμου, ὁ Γέροντας ἐξηγοῦσε:

«Σύμφωνα μὲ τὴ διδασκαλία τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς, αὐτὰ τὰ σημεῖα καὶ οἱ φοβεροὶ προάγγελοι τοῦ τέλους τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τῆς Δευτέρας Παρουσίας τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι:

- ὁ πολλαπλασιασμὸς τῆς ἀνομίας ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ἄνθρώπους,
- τὸ κήρυγμα τοῦ Ἁγίου Εὐαγγελίου σὲ ὅλο τὸν κόσμο, σὲ ὅλα τα ἔθνη,
- οἱ φοβερὲς φυσικὲς καταστροφές,
- ὁ ἐρχομὸς τοῦ Ἀντίχριστου καὶ
- ὁ ἀγῶνας μὲ τὴν Ἁγία Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ».

Συγκεκριμένα παραδείγματα ποὺ ἀνέφερε ὁ Γέροντας Στέφανος ἀπὸ τὰ σημεῖα ποὺ θὰ προηγηθοῦν τοῦ τέλους τοῦ ὑλικοῦ κόσμου:

«Κατὰ τὸ τέλος τοῦ κόσμου, οἱ ἀνομίες θὰ ἀναπτυχθοῦν στὰ ἀνώτατα ὄριά τους. Θὰ κυριαρχήσει τότε στὸν κόσμο ἡ κακία καὶ τὸ μῖσος. Τότε ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ἄνθρώπους δὲν θὰ ὑπάρχει ἀγάπη, οὔτε ἀλληλοσεβασμὸς. Φυσικά, δὲν θὰ ἐκλείψει τελείως, ἀλλὰ στὴν πλειοψηφία τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἡ ἀγάπη θὰ ψυχρανθεῖ. Οἱ ἄνθρωποι θὰ ἀλληλομισοῦνται, θὰ ἐνδιαφέρονται μόνο γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτό τους καὶ θὰ κοιτάζουν νὰ κάνουν ζημιὰ στὸν πλησίον τους.

Συχνῶς μὲ αὐτά, θὰ ταλαντεύεται ἡ πίστη τους καὶ θὰ πιστέψουν στοὺς ἀπατεῶνες καὶ τοὺς ψευδοπροφήτες. Ἡ ἀνομία στοὺς ἄνθρώπους θὰ κυριαρχήσει σὲ τέτοιο βαθμὸ ποὺ δὲν θὰ ἀντιληφθοῦν τὰ σημεῖα τοῦ τέλους τοῦ κόσμου, ποὺ ὁ Κύριος θὰ στείλει ὑπὸ μορφή διάφορων φυσικῶν κακῶν, καὶ στὸ τέλος, τοῦ Ἀντίχριστου.

Ὅπως ἔγινε στὸν καιρὸ τοῦ Νῶε, ἔτσι θὰ γίνεῖ καὶ μὲ τὸν ἐρχομὸ τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ Ἀνθρώπου. Στὸν κόσμο θὰ πληθυνθοῦν ὁ ἡδονισμὸς, ἡ γαστριμαργία καὶ ἡ μέθη, σὲ τόσο βαθμὸ μάλιστα ποὺ ὡς καὶ οἱ θλίψεις καὶ οἱ ἀτυχίες ποὺ θὰ στείλει ὁ Κύριος γιὰ νὰ τοὺς συντεῖσει —πεῖνα, σεισμούς, ἀσθένειες, καὶ τέλος τὸ φοβερὸ βασανιστήριον τοῦ Ἀντίχριστου στοὺς ἄνθρώπους ποὺ μέθυσαν ἀπὸ τὴν ἀκολασία—δὲν θὰ προκαλέσουν καμιά αἴσθησι φόβου καὶ ἀνάγκης γιὰ μετάνοια».

Οἱ ἐρμηνεῖες ποὺ ἔδωσε ὁ Γέροντας στὴν Ἀποκάλυψη, καὶ συγκεκριμένα στὴν προσωπικότητα τοῦ

Ἀντίχριστου καὶ τὸν «ἀριθμὸ τοῦ Θηρίου», δηλ. τὸ 666, ἔχουν συζητηθεῖ πολύ. Οἱ ἐριμνεῖες αὐτὲς βασιζονται ἀποκλειστικὰ στὴν Ἀποκάλυψη τοῦ Ἰωάννη καὶ εἶναι ἀπολύτως συμβατὲς μὲ τὴν Ἐκκλησία μας. Νὰ τί ἐπακριβῶς ἀνέφερε ὁ Γέροντας Στέφανος Σέρβος:

«Τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ κακοῦ κρύβεται μὲ μεγάλη μυστικότητα ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς. Αὐτοὶ ποὺ ἐργάζονται πάνω του—καὶ εἶναι γνωστὸ ποιοὶ εἶναι—κάνουν τὸ πᾶν γιὰ νὰ γεννηθεῖ καὶ νὰ μεγαλώσει αὐτὸ τὸ δημιουργημα τοῦ κακοῦ μέσα σὲ μεγάλη μυστικότητα, νὰ ἀνατραφεῖ μὲ τίς μεθόδους τοῦ Σατανᾶ, δηλαδή νὰ ἀναδειχθεῖ στὴν ἀρχὴ ὡς πολὺ καλός, κόλακας, εὐσεβής, μαθημένος στὴ νηστεία, νὰ προστατεύει τοὺς Χριστιανούς, δηλαδή νὰ παραλλαχθεῖ ὅσο τὸ δυνατὸν καλύτερα καὶ νὰ ντυθεῖ τὴν προβιὰ μέχρι νὰ κυριαρχήσῃ. Τότε θὰ πετάξῃ τὴν προσωπίδα καὶ θὰ δείξῃ τόση κακία ὅση δὲν εἶδε ποτὲ ἢ ἀνθρωπότητα.

Αὐτὴ τὴν κακία του θὰ τὴ δοκιμάσουν πρῶτα οἱ Ἑβραῖοι, ποὺ τὸν ἔφεραν στὴν ἐξουσία. Θὰ προσπαθήσουν νὰ τὸν ἀνατρέψουν ἀλλὰ δὲν θὰ μπορέσουν. Μόλις τότε θὰ ἀναγνωρίσουν οἱ Ἑβραῖοι τὸν Κύριο ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ καὶ μόλις τότε θὰ βγάλουν τὸ προσωπίδι ἢ τὸ βέλο ποὺ φοροῦσαν τόσες χιλιάδες χρόνια καὶ θὰ ἀπευθυνθοῦν στὸν Χριστὸ καὶ θὰ κλάψουν γι' αὐτὸν ὅπως κλαίει χήρα μητέρα ὅταν κηδεύει τὸν μοναχογιό της. Μόλις τότε θὰ δεχθοῦν οἱ Ἑβραῖοι τὸν Χριστιανισμὸ καὶ θὰ στραφοῦν στὸν Ἰησοῦ Χριστὸ».

Ο Γέροντας εἶπε ἐπίσης, σχετικὰ μὲ τὴν ἐμφάνιση τοῦ Ἀντιχρίστου:

«Μόλις ἀρχίσει τὸ χτίσιμο τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ Σολομώντα, τότε εἶναι ἤδη βέβαιο ὅτι ὁ Ἀντίχριστος βρῖσκεται ἐκεῖ καὶ ὅτι μᾶς ἔμειναν ἀκόμη μόνο μερικὰ χρόνια ζωῆς στὴ Γῆ. Τότε δὲν μᾶς μένει τίποτε ἄλλο παρὰ νὰ συγκεντρώσουμε τροφή, ἢ ὁποία κατόπιν θὰ λείψει τελείως, ἀκόμη καὶ γιὰ ἐκείνους ποὺ πῆραν τὴ σφραγίδα τοῦ Ἀντίχριστου καὶ τὸν ἀριθμὸ 666. Οἱ Ἅγιοι Πατέρες λένε ὅτι εἰδικὰ αὐτοὶ θὰ αἰσθανθοῦν μεγαλύτερη πείνα καὶ ὅτι ἐξαιτίας τῆς ἔλλειψης τροφῆς θὰ φᾶνε πτώματα ἀνθρώπων, ποὺ ἀπὸ τὴν πείνα θὰ πέφτουν σὲ ὄλες τίς μεριές. Ὅσοι δὲν δεχθοῦν τὴ σφραγίδα καὶ τὸν ἀριθμὸ, μὲ τὴ βοήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ θὰ κρατηθοῦν καὶ δὲν θὰ φᾶνε πτώματα».



Ὁ καθένας μας ἔχει τρεῖς χαρακτῆρες. Αὐτὸν ποὺ δείχνει, αὐτὸν ποὺ ἔχει, καὶ αὐτὸν ποὺ νομίζει ὅτι ἔχει...

Ἀνόνημος

Πρὶν τὴν Προδοσία ἢ Συκοφαντία—Μετὰ τὴν Προδοσία ἢ Παλιγγενεσία

Γράφει ὁ Δρ. Κωνσταντῖνος Βαρδάκας.

Ἦ Ἠλλάς, Ἠλλάς, Ἠλλάς χώρα τῶν μεγάλων Ἀνδρῶν καὶ τῶν μεγάλων προδοτῶν. Ποιὰ θεόσταλη μοῖρα σὲ ἔστησε πάνω σὲ αὐτὸ τὸν βράχο, μέσα στὴν θάλασσα, νὰ καμαρώνεις γιὰ ἀνδραγαθήματα καὶ νὰ κλαῖς γιὰ πικρὲς προδοσίες.

Ὁ λογισμὸς ἀρπάζεται μὲ γρηγοράδα μέσα στὸ παρελθὸν ἄθελά του, στέκεται καὶ σημαδεύει τὸν Ἐφιάλτη στὶς Θερμοπύλες, τὸν Πήλιο Γούση στὸ Σοῦλι, τὸν Νενέκο στὴν Πελοπόννησο καὶ ἀποτροπιάζει σὲ τόσα ἄλλα ἱστορικὰ βδελύγματα. Ἀγανακτεῖ καὶ μετὰ σπαράζει ὅταν ἀντικρίζει τὰ κομματιασμένα Σπαρτιάτικα κορμιά, ὅταν βλέπει τίς τιμημένες Σουλιώτισσες πεσμένες κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ Ζάλογγο, τὴν φυλακὴ τοῦ Κολοκοτρώνη, τὴν ἐπαιτεία τοῦ Νικηταρά, τὴν δολοφονία τοῦ Καποδίστρια, τὸ ξεπάστρεμα τοῦ Καραϊσκάκη, τὴν πονεμένη Βόρεια Ἡπειρο, τὴν προδομένη Κύπρο μὲ τὴν καθαγιασμένη μορφὴ τοῦ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπου Κύπρου Κυπριανοῦ, τὴν τετραετὴ πάλη τῶν Ἑλλήνων τῆς Κύπρου ἐναντία στοὺς Βρετανούς καὶ τοὺς ἐγγχώριους συνεργάτες τους, ποὺ ἀνέδειξε πληθώρα ἡρωικῶν καὶ μαρτυρικῶν μορφῶν ὅπως ἦταν ὁ ἔφηβος Εὐαγόρας Παλληκαρίδης, ὁ Μιχαλάκης Καραολῆς, ὁ Ἄνδρέας Δημητρίου, ὁ Μάρκος Δράκος, ὁ Γρηγόρης Αὐξεντίου, ὁ Στυλιανὸς Λένας καὶ... πολλοὺς ἄλλους ἀκόμη.

Στοὺς χρόνους ποὺ ἄνοιξα τὰ μάτια μου στὴν ζωὴ μαρτύρησαν τὰ παλληκάρια αὐτὰ καὶ περιμένουμε σήμερα ὅλοι ζωντανοὶ καὶ νεκροὶ νὰ ἀνοίξῃ ὁ φάκελος τῆς προδοσίας τοῦ '74, ὄχι μόνο γιὰ νὰ συναπαντήσουμε τοὺς προδότες ἀλλὰ γιὰ νὰ ὑποδεχθοῦμε τοὺς νέους Ἐθνομάρτυρες ποὺ προσμένουν τὴν ἀνθρώπινη δικαίωση γιατί τὴν Θεϊκὴ τὴν ἔλαβαν πρὸ πολλοῦ. Μετὰ ἀπὸ ὅλα αὐτὰ καὶ γιὰ λίγο σταματᾶ νὰ λειτουργεῖ τὸ μυαλὸ μὴ ἀντέχοντας τέτοιους πόνους ἐθνικῶν θυμῆσεων. Μὲ τὴν παύση αὐτὴ παίρνει χρόνον καὶ προσπαθεῖ νὰ κατανοήσῃ τὰ ἀναπάντεχα δράματα τοῦ Γένους τῶν Ἑλλήνων. Ἀλλὰ στὶς σκέψεις δὲν ὑπάρχει χωροχρόνος καὶ τότε ὁ λογισμὸς ἐκτοξεύεται πάλι μὲ ταχύτητα φωτὸς καὶ προσγειώνεται στὴν κοιλάδα τοῦ κλαυθμοῦ καὶ τοῦ ὄδυρμου τῆς καθημερινῆς Ἑλληνικῆς πραγματικότητας. Εἶναι ἐκείνη ἡ καθοριστικὴ στιγμή ποὺ δὲν ἀναρωτᾶτε μόνο ὁ λογισμὸς, ἀλλὰ βοᾶ σύγκορμα ἢ ψυχὴ—γιατί Θεέ μου τέτοια διαχρονικὴ προδοσία στὸ γένος τῶν Ἑλλήνων;

Ὅμως ἡ ἀπάντηση ἔχει ἤδη δοθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἅγιο Θεό: «Οἱ ἀληθινοὶ ἥρωες σφυρηλατοῦνται σὰν τὸ καθαρὸ χρυσάφι μόνο μέσα στὸ καμίνι τῶν πειρασμῶν τῆς συκοφαντίας καὶ τῆς προδοσίας».

Τὰ χρόνια πού πέρασαν ἐπάχυναν ὄχι μόνο τὰ κορμιά τῶν Νεοελλήνων, ἀλλά ἐμαλάκωσαν σφόδρα καί τὴν διάνοιά τους. Τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα ἀπέβη τραγικὸ γιατί στερήθηκε ἡ ράτσα μας ἀπὸ ἥρωικὸ φρόνημα καὶ ἀνώτερα ἰδανικά, ἐνῶ τὴν ἴδια στιγμή γέμισε μὲ ἀποψυχωμένες καὶ καταφρονημένες φιγούρες, ἔρμαια σὲ χέρια προδοτῶν καὶ συκοφαντῶν.

Ἔτσι τοὺς τελευταίους τρεῖς χρόνους ζήσαμε γιὰ τὰ καλὰ στὸ πετσί πρωτόγνωρη καὶ γενικευμένη συκοφαντία ἀπὸ κύκλους μέσα καὶ ἔξω ἀπὸ τὴν πατρίδα μας. Δὲν πέρασε πολὺς καιρὸς καὶ ἔπεσε ἐπὶ τῶν κεφαλῶν μας καὶ τὸ πνευματικὸ παιδί τῆς συκοφαντίας δηλ. ἡ ἐπαίσχυντη Προδοσία. Τώρα κλαίμε, πονᾶμε καὶ θὰ πεινᾶμε, μετὰ ἀπὸ λίγο ὅμως πλησιάζει ἡ ἱστορικὴ συγκυρία πού θὰ γίνουμε Κύριοι τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῆς Πατρίδας μας, μὲ τὴν πλήρη κατανόηση τῶν ὄσων θὰ συμβοῦν ἱστορικά. Σήμερα εἴμασθε πνευματικὰ κληήρεις καὶ γευόμασθε Θεία Χάριτι τὸ καλύτερο φάρμακο ἴασης καὶ αὐτογνωσίας πού δὲν εἶναι τίποτε ἄλλο παρὰ ἡ ἐπίγνωση τῶν συνεπειῶν τῆς ἀτομικῆς, οἰκογενειακῆς καὶ κοινωνικῆς προδοσίας τῶν ζωῶν μας ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπους καὶ συστήματα πού ἐμπιστευθήκαμε.

Εἶναι λοιπὸν χρήσιμοι οἱ συκοφάντες καὶ οἱ προδότες ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ καταδικαστέοι; Μήπως λειτουργοῦν καὶ σὰν ἱστορικοὶ καταλύτες σὲ γεγονότα Ἐθνικῆς Παλιγγενεσίας; Τὸ σίγουρο εἶναι ὅτι ὁ πόνος καὶ ἡ καταστροφή πού ἐπιφέρουν ξυπνάει τὸν λαὸ ἀπὸ τὴν λήθη καὶ τὴν ἀποβλακωμάρα του.

Αὐτὸς λοιπὸν ὁ ἀγουροξυπνημένος λαὸς σήμερα ἐκφράζεται μὲ ἓνα κοινὸ ἐρώτημα. (Μὰ δὲν θὰ βρεθεῖ κάποιος Ἄνδρας, κάποιος μπροστάρης γιὰ νὰ σταματήσει αὐτὴν τὴν πορεία πρὸς τὸν κατήφορο;). Καὶ φυσικὰ ὁ ἓνας ὑποδεικνύει τὸν ἄλλον ἀναπαυόμενοι ὅτι δῆθεν κάναμε τὸ καθῆκον μας. Ἐνῶ γνωρίζουμε ὅτι ὅλοι σὰν Ἔθνος Ἑλλήνων βρεθήκαμε ἀναπάντεχα μέσα στὸ σκοτάδι τοῦ Νοητοῦ σπηλαίου τοῦ Πλάτωνος, παρόλο αὐτὰ ἀποφεύγουμε νὰ βάλουμε πλάτες ἀντιστήριξης ὁ ἓνας μὲ τὸν ἄλλον γιὰ νὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ βγοῦμε στὸ ξέφωτο τῆς Λευτεριάς.

Ὅπως ζητᾶμε αἷμα ἐπειγόντως, ἔτσι καὶ αὐτὲς τὶς στιγμὲς τῆς ἀνείπωτης θλίψης ἀπαιτεῖται κοινὸ ἥρωικὸ φρόνημα, ἀρχοντικὴ λεβεντιά καὶ ἀνθρώπινη ἀλληλεγγύη γιὰ νὰ πυροδοτήσουν τὸ καλὸ τμήμα τοῦ γενετικοῦ ὕλικου μας σὲ πράξεις ἀνδραγαθίας καὶ πνευματικῆς ἀνάτασης.

Ἐνα καλὸ μάτι μέσα ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνάγνωση τῆς Παγκόσμιας Ἱστορίας βλέπει ὅτι ὁ Ἅγιος Θεὸς δὲν εὐλογεῖ τὸ ἄδικο καὶ τὴν συκοφαντία πόσο μᾶλλον δὲ τὴν προδοσία πού τὴν γεύθηκε ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεάνθρωπος, Ὁ Κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. Ἄρα οἱ προδότες εἶναι ἀπὸ τώρα ἤδη τελειωμένοι πνευματικά. Καὶ φυσικὰ μὲ τὰ ἀργύρια τῆς προδοσίας ἀγοράζονται μόνο νεκροταφεῖα, ὅπως ὁ ἀγρὸς τοῦ Κεραμῆως στὰ Εὐαγγέλια τῆς Μεγάλης Ἑβδομάδας.

Οἱ σημερινοὶ ἐξουσιαστὲς μιλάνε γιὰ ἀνάπτυξη καὶ πρόοδο, δὲν γνωρίζουν ὅμως ἓνα βασικὸ σημεῖο, ὅτι γιὰ νὰ λειτουργήσει ὁ Ρωμηὸς χρειάζεται πρῶτα νὰ γλυκάνει τὸ μέσα του καὶ νὰ ἀποτινάξει τὸν ἱστὸ τῆς πνευματικῆς καὶ οἰκονομικῆς σκλαβιάς.

Δὲν θὰ κρατήσει πολὺ αὐτὴ ἡ περίοδος τῆς θλίψης

γιατί ὁ Ἕλληνας βιώνει μὲ φιλότιμο τὴν ἀνάγκη τῆς Λευτεριάς καὶ ἀποτροπιάζει στὸ βίωμα τῆς προδοσίας. Τὰ ψέματα τελείωσαν καὶ τώρα ἀρχίζουν οἱ ἀλήθειες.

Αὐτὴ ἡ προδοσία εἶναι πού θὰ ὀδηγήσει τὸν κατατρεγμένο Ρωμηὸ στὴν δευτέρη καὶ τελικὴ πνευματικὴ ἔξοδο τοῦ Μεσολογγίου, ἀλλὰ τώρα τέτοια θὰ εἶναι ἡ ὁρμή του

πού θὰ τὸν ὀδηγήσει πολὺ μακριὰ καὶ ἀλώβητο νὰ χορεῦει Ζεῖμπέκικο Κύπρου, Κυπριακὴ σούστα, χορὸ τοῦ δρεπανιοῦ, Τάτσια ἢ Σίτα, Μασιέρι (Μαχαίρι ἢ Τσιάκκιν), Καντήλα (Ποτήρι), Καρσιλαμὰ Κύπρου, Καλαματιανό, Ἡπειρώτικο, Κρητικὸ, Ποντιακὸ, Μακεδονικὸ καὶ Μπάλο σὲ σχηματισμοὺς τεράστιων ἀνθρώπινων κύκλων μπροστὰ στὶς ὑψηλὲς θύρες τῆς Τρόφου καὶ Μάνας Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Τοῦ Θεοῦ Σοφίας, στὸ μεγαλύτερο πανηγύρι Παλιγγενεσίας τοῦ Ἐθνους καὶ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας μας.

Πάντα τὰ κλοπιμαῖα γυρίζουν πίσω στοὺς φυσικοὺς ἰδιοκτῆτες τους καὶ τότε αὐτοὶ χαίρονται γιατί θὰ τὰ ἀποδώσουν στὰ παιδιά τους καὶ στὴν προκειμένη περίπτωση θὰ εἶναι ἡ καλύτερη πνευματικὴ κληρονομία πρὸς αὐτά.



Προτιμῶ ἄνθρωπο ἁμαρτωλό, πού ἀναγνωρίζει τὸ σφάλμα του καὶ ταπεινώνεται, παρὰ ἐνάρετο μὲ αὐταρέσκεια.

Ἀββᾶς Σαοματίας

Ἡ Πόλις Ἐάλω: Γιατί Ἄραγε;

Πρωτ. π. Γεωργίου Δορμπαράκη.



Ἡ 29^η Μαΐου εἶναι ἡ ἐπέτειος τῆς τραγικῆς ἡμέρας γιὰ τὸν Οἰκουμενικὸ Ἑλληνισμό, τῆς ἀλώσεως τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ἀπὸ τοὺς Τούρκους τὸ 1453. Ἡ χιλιόχρονη

αὐτοκρατορία ἔπεσε τότε καὶ παραδόθηκε βορὰ στὰ βάρβαρα στίφη τῶν Ὄθωμανῶν, ποὺ γέμισαν μὲ τὰ πτώματα τῶν Χριστιανῶν τὰ περισσότερα σημεῖα τῆς μεγάλης Πόλεως.

«Καὶ ἡ γῆ σὲ μερικὰ μέρη δὲν φαινόταν ἀπὸ τοὺς πολλοὺς νεκρούς», μὰς λέει ὁ γνωστὸς ἱστορικὸς τῆς ἀλώσεως Γεώργιος Φραντζῆς στὸ «Χρονικόν» του. Γιὰ νὰ συνεχίσει: «Ἦταν φοβερὸ θέαμα καὶ ἄκουγες θρήνους πολλοὺς, ποικίλους καὶ ἔβλεπες ἀμέτρητους ἑξανδραποδισμοὺς εὐγενῶν, ἀρχοντισσῶν καὶ παρθένων καὶ μοναχῶν, ποὺ τὶς ἔσερναν ἀλύπητα οἱ Τούρκοι ἀπὸ τὰ ροῦχα καὶ τὰ μαλλιά καὶ τὶς κοσιίδες ἔξω ἀπὸ τὶς ἐκκλησίες, ἐνῶ ἔκλαιαν καὶ ὀδύρονταν... Ἔβλεπες τὸ θεῖο αἷμα καὶ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ νὰ χύνεται στὴ γῆ καὶ νὰ πετιέται...».

Τὸ ἴδιο καὶ περισσότερο τραγικὸς στὴν περιγραφή του γιὰ τὴν ἄλωση εἶναι καὶ ὁ πρῶτος μετὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὴν Πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως Γεννάδιος Σχολάριος. Σὲ θρηνητικὴ του ἀναφορὰ γιὰ τὴν ἡμέρα ἐκείνη γράφει: «Θυμηθεῖτε πόσο μεγάλο καὶ πόσο ἐκλεκτὸ ὑπῆρξε τὸ γένος μας. Γιατί ἦταν σοφὸ, ἔνδοξο, γενναῖο, φρόνιμο, ἡρωϊκό. Ὑπέταξε ὀλόκληρη τὴν οἰκουμένη σ' ἓνα βασιλεῖο καὶ μὲ τὸν ἐνάρετο μάλιστα ζῆλο του ἀπορρόφησε ὀλόκληρη γενικὰ τὴν ἀρετὴ, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς τὸ σφουγγάρι τὰ νερά. Ἀλλὰ τώρα, ἀλλοίμονο γιὰ τὰ κακά! Χάθηκε τὸ πᾶν, ἀφοῦ ἔπεσε στὰ χέρια τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἡ Κωνσταντινούπολη, ποὺ ἡ ἀνάμνησή της καὶ μόνον μπορεῖ νὰ μᾶς κάνει νὰ ξεσπάσουμε σὲ κραυγὲς πόνου καὶ γοερὰ κλάματα καὶ νὰ ψυχορραγήσουμε.

Πράγματι, ὅταν κυριεύτηκε ἡ Πόλη, βεβηλώθηκαν τὰ θυσιαστήρια, καταπατήθηκαν τὰ ἱερὰ σκεύη καὶ ἀντικείμενα, χύθηκε πολὺ αἷμα, ἀτιμάσθηκαν μοναχές, βιάσθηκαν παρθένες, ἀποκεφαλίστηκαν βρέφη, φονεύτηκαν μὲ τὰ μαχαίρια τῶν ἀσεβῶν ἄρχοντες, ἱερεῖς, ἄντρες, γυναῖκες, ἄνθρωποι κάθε ἡλικίας. Ἀλλοίμονο σ' ἐμένα τὸν ταλαίπωρο καὶ ἄθλιο! Ποιοὺς εἶναι ἰκανὸς νὰ ἐξιστορήσει κατὰ τρόπο δραματικὸ τὸ μεγάλο αὐτὸ πάθημα καὶ νὰ ἀναγγεῖλει στοὺς μεταγενέστερους τὴ συμφορὰ; Ἀλλοίμονο! Ποῦ εἶναι ἡ βασιλικὴ πομπὴ καὶ παρόταξη; Ποῦ εἶναι ἡ στρατιωτικὴ παρόταξη

τῶν ἀνακτόρων; Ποῦ εἶναι τὸ τόσο μεγάλο πλῆθος τῶν ἀρχόντων; Ποῦ εἶναι τὰ διδακτήρια τῆς σοφίας; Ἀλλοίμονο σ' ἐμένα τὸν δυστυχημένο! Ποῦ εἶναι ἡ πατριαρχικὴ διοίκηση; Ποῦ εἶναι ἡ ὁμορφιὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ; Ποῦ εἶναι ὁ τόσο πολυπληθὴς καὶ τόσο ἐκλεκτὸς χορὸς τῆς ἀρχιερατικῆς καὶ μοναχικῆς τάξεως; Ὁ Μωάμεθ ἔξαφάνισε τὰ πάντα. Καὶ τὰ κακὰ δὲν ὑπάρχουν μόνον στὴ Βασιλεύουσα, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὶς μικρότερες πόλεις. Καὶ σ' αὐτὲς μάλιστα περισσότερα καὶ πάρα πολὺ φοβερά».

Πέρα ὅμως ἀπὸ τὶς τραγικὲς περιγραφές τῆς ἀποφράδος ἐκείνης ἡμέρας, ἐκεῖνο ποὺ ἰδιαίτερος προξενεῖ ἐντύπωση σὲ ὅλα τὰ κείμενα τῆς ἐποχῆς, εἶναι ἡ ἐριμνεῖα τὴν ὁποία δίνουν ὅλοι οἱ συγγραφεῖς τους γιὰ τὸ γεγονὸς τῆς πτώσεως. Οὔτε λίγο οὔτε πολὺ ὡς αἴτιο στὸ νὰ χαθεῖ ἡ Βασιλεύουσα θεωροῦνται κυρίως οἱ ἁμαρτίες τῶν Χριστιανῶν. Λέει πάλι ὁ ἅγιος Γεννάδιος στὸν ἴδιο θρήνο ποὺ ἀναφέραμε: «Καὶ ταῦτα πάντα διὰ τὰ ἁμαρτίας ἡμῶν! Καὶ ὅλα τοῦτα ἔγιναν ἕξαιτίας τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν μας. Ὅταν δὲ στρέψω τὴν προσοχή μου σ' αὐτά, γίνομαι ἔξαλλος, ἡ ψυχὴ μου ταράζεται καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα μου παθαίνει ἵλιγγο».

Καὶ ὁ προαναφερθεὶς Γεώργιος Φραντζῆς περιγράφοντας τὶς τελευταῖες στιγμὲς τῆς Πόλης πρὶν τὴν τελικὴ πτῶση, σημειώνει: «Διέταξε λοιπὸν ὁ βασιλεὺς, μαζί μὲ τὶς ἅγιες καὶ σεπτές εἰκόνες καὶ τὰ ἅγια λείψανα, ἱερεῖς, ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ μοναχοί, γυναῖκες καὶ παιδιὰ, νὰ περιφέρονται μὲ δάκρυα στὰ τείχη τῆς πόλεως καὶ νὰ ψάλλουν τὸ Κύριε ἐλέησον καὶ νὰ ἱκετεύουν τὸν Θεὸ νὰ μὴ μᾶς παραδώσει γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες μας στὰ χέρια ἐχθρῶν ἀνόμων καὶ ἀποστατῶν καὶ πονηροτάτων σὲ ὅλη τὴν οἰκουμένη, ἀλλὰ νὰ μᾶς λυπηθεῖ σάν κληρονόμους τοῦ ἀληθινοῦ Θεοῦ».

Ἡ Πόλη λοιπὸν ἔπεσε, κατὰ παραχώρηση Θεοῦ, λόγω τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν τῶν Χριστιανῶν. Αὐτὴ ἦταν ἡ ἐκτίμηση καὶ ἀξιολόγηση ποὺ ἔκαναν οἱ ἴδιοι οἱ Βυζαντινοὶ καὶ οἱ κοντινοὶ στὰ γεγονότα ἱστορικοί. Κι εἶναι τοῦτο ἓνα ἀξιοθαύμαστο γιὰ μᾶς τοὺς νεώτερους γεγονός, γιατί δείχνει μὲ πολλὴ καθαρότητα ὅτι ἡ πίστη γιὰ τοὺς Βυζαντινοὺς δὲν ἦταν κάτι τὸ θεωρητικὸ οὔτε κάτι τὸ ξεπερασμένο. Ἀποτελοῦσε τὸν ἄξονα τῆς ζωῆς τους, ἀφοῦ πάνω σ' αὐτὸ ἔκριναν τὴν ὁποιαδήποτε σκέψη καὶ ἐνέργειά τους.

Μὲ ἄλλα λόγια μιὰ χιλιόχρονη αὐτοκρατορία ἔκανε μιὰ μεγαλειώδη πορεία πάνω στὴ γῆ—καὶ μὲ τὶς μελανὲς βεβαίως σελίδες της—καθὼς τρεφόταν καθημερινὰ ἀπὸ τὸν Οὐρανό. Κι ὅταν ἄρχισε ἡ παρέκκλιση ἀπὸ τὸ νόμο τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἦλθε τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα: ἡ ὑποταγὴ στὸν ἐχθρό. Μὲ σκοπὸ βεβαίως τὴ δημιουργία συνθηκῶν μετανοίας καὶ ἐπανόδου στὸν ὀρθὸ δρόμο.

Δὲν πρέπει νὰ σπεύσουμε νὰ εἰρωνευθοῦμε τὴ σκέψη καὶ τὴν αἴσθηση τῶν προγόνων μας αὐτῶν

ἔμεῖς οἱ νεώτεροι, ποὺ ἔχουμε συνηθίσει νὰ βλέπουμε τὴν ἱστορία μόνο ὀριζόντια καὶ ἄσχετα ἀπὸ τὴν ἐνέργεια τοῦ Θεοῦ. Καὶ τοῦτο γιατί ἡ δική μας θεώρηση εἶναι θεώρηση μυωπική, ποὺ προϋποθέτει ἀπιστία ἢ τὸ καλύτερο ὀλιγοπιστία στὸν Θεό. Ἄν δηλαδὴ πιστεύσουμε ὅτι ἡ ἱστορία γράφεται μόνον ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους κάτω ἀπὸ τυχαῖες συνθήκες, χωρὶς νὰ ὑπάρχει ἡ παρέμβαση τοῦ Θεοῦ, τότε ἀπλῶς ἐπιβεβαιώνουμε ὅτι ζοῦμε καὶ ἔμεῖς «ὡς ἄθεοι ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ». Καὶ ὁπωσδήποτε δὲν ἔχουμε τὴν ὄραση τῶν πραγμάτων ποὺ διδαχθήκαμε νὰ ἔχουμε ἀπὸ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Χριστό.

Μέσα στὰ πλαίσια λοιπὸν τῆς Χριστιανικῆς πίστεως ἡ ἐκτίμηση τῶν Βυζαντινῶν ὅτι ἡ Πόλη ἔπεσε ἐξαιτίας τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν τους ἡχεῖ... πολὺ Χριστιανικά. Θὰ ἔλεγε μάλιστα κανεὶς ὅτι ἡ κρίση τους αὐτὴ ἀποτελεῖ κρίση προφητική, ἀφοῦ παρόμοια ἀξιολογοῦσαν τὰ πράγματα γιὰ τὸν Ἰσραηλιτικὸ βεβαίως λαό, τὸν ἐκλεκτὸ θεωρούμενο τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ οἱ σταλμένοι ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ προφήτες. Ὅλοι ἀσφαλῶς γνωρίζουμε ὅτι κάθε ἀπομάκρυνση τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ ἀπὸ τὸ νόμο τοῦ Θεοῦ ὀδηγοῦσε στὴν ὑποταγὴ του σὲ ξένους ἐχθρικοὺς λαοὺς, μὲ ἀναρίθμητες συμφορὲς καὶ καταστροφές. Κι ὁ σταλμένος ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ προφήτης ποὺ παρουσιαζόταν σὲ κάθε τέτοια κρίσιμη γιὰ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ στιγμή, ἐρμηνεύε τα πράγματα ἀκριβῶς ἔτσι: ὅτι ἡ καταστροφὴ ὀφείλετο στὶς ἁμαρτίες τοῦ λαοῦ, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἡ διέξοδος ἦταν ἡ μετάνοια καὶ ἡ ἐπιστροφή στὸν Θεό.

Ἡ τραγικὴ ἐπέτειος τῆς 29^{ης} Μαΐου δὲν πρέπει νὰ εἶναι μόνον ἀφορμὴ γιὰ ὄξυνση τῆς ἱστορικῆς μας μνήμης, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ παραδειγματισμὸ καὶ διδασχὴ. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὅτι ἂν καὶ ἔμεῖς παρουσιάζουμε στὴ ζωὴ μας φαινόμενα ἀπομάκρυνσης ἀπὸ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ—καὶ δυστυχῶς σὲ ἓνα μεγάλο ποσοστὸ δὲν τὰ παρουσιάζουμε σὲ πολλὰ ἐπίπεδα;—τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα θὰ εἶναι τὸ ἴδιο μὲ τὶς προγενέστερες ἐποχές: ὁ Θεὸς θὰ παραχωρήσει, ὡς συνέπεια τῆς ἀνορθόδοξης ζωῆς μας, νὰ ὑποστοῦμε καταστροφές. Ἴσως θὰ πρέπει νὰ δοῦμε καὶ τὴν κρίση ποὺ περνᾶμε σήμερα ὡς κοινωνία, ὡς κράτος, ὡς ἄτομα κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν παραπάνω ὀπτική. **Ὅποτε καὶ ἡ διέξοδος ἀποτελεῖ μονόδρομο: ἡ γνήσια μετάνοια καὶ ἐπιστροφή μας στὸν Θεό.**



Πρὶν ἀπ' ὅλες τὶς ἀρετές, ὁ ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Θεοῦ πρέπει ν' ἀποκτήσῃ ταπεινοφροσύνη. Αὐτὴν ὑπέδειξε πρῶτα ἀπ' ὅλα ὁ Θεὸς Διδάσκαλος. «*Μακάριοι οἱ πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι—μᾶς εἶπε—ὅτι αὐτῶν ἐστὶν ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν*». Ποιοὺς ὀνομάζει πτωχοὺς τῷ πνεύματι; Τοὺς ταπεινόφρονες βεβαίως...

Ἀββᾶς Ἰωάννης ὁ Θηβαῖος

Ἡ Κασσιανή

Κωστῆς Παλαμᾶς (1859-1943), ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Ἡ Κασσιανὴ καὶ τὸ Ἔργο της», τοῦ Παναγιώτη Θ. Παπαθεοδώρου, Θεολόγου –Λυκειάρχῃ.

Ἡ ἑρμηνεία τοῦ τροπαρίου τῆς Κασσιανῆς ἀπὸ τὸν Κ. Παλαμᾶ εἶναι ἡ πλέον λογοτεχνική. Συνδυάζει μεγάλη ποιητικότητα καὶ προσήλωση στὸ πρωτότυπο. Τὸ ποίημα ἀπὸ αἰσθητικὴ ἄποψη εἶναι ἄψογο. Ὁ Παλαμᾶς πρόσεξε ὅλα τα συναισθηματικὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κειμένου καὶ τὰ ἀπέδωσε μὲ τὸν καλύτερο τρόπο. Μετέφρασε τὸ ἰδιόμελο σὲ 8 τετραστίχες στροφές μὲ ἱαμβικὸ μέτρο καὶ πλεκτὴ ὁμοιοκαταληξία.

Κύριε, γυναίκα ἁμαρτωλή, πολλά,
πολλά, θολά, βαριά τὰ κριματά μου.
Μά, ὦ Κύριε, πῶς ἡ θεότης Σου μιᾶ
μέσ' στὴν καρδιά μου!

Κύριε, προτοῦ Σὲ κρῦψ' ἡ ἐντάφια γῆ
ἀπὸ τὴ δροσανγὴ λουλούδια πῆρα
κι ἀπ' τῆς λατρείας τὴν τρισβαθὴ πηγὴ
Σοῦ φέρνω μύρα.

Οἴστρος μὲ σέρνει ἀκολασίας... Νυχτιά,
σκοτάδι ἀφέγγαρο, ἄναστρο μὲ ζώνει,
τὸ σκοτάδι τῆς ἁμαρτίας φωτιά
μὲ καίει, μὲ λιώνει.

Ἐσὺ ποὺ ἀπὸ τὰ πέλαα τὰ νερὰ
τὰ ὑψώνεις νέφη, πάρε τα, Ἐρωτά μου,
κυλᾶνε, εἶναι ποτάμια φλογερὰ
τὰ δάκρυά μου.

Γύρε σ' ἐμέ. Ἡ ψυχὴ πῶς πονεῖ!
Δέξου με Ἐσὺ ποὺ δέχτηκες καὶ γείραν
ἄφραστα ὡς ἐδῶ κάτω οἱ οὐρανοί.
καὶ σάρκα ἐπῆραν.

Στ' ἄχραντά Σου τὰ πόδια, βασιλιᾶ
μου Ἐσὺ θὰ πέσω καὶ θὰ στὰ φιλήσω,
καὶ μὲ τῆς κεφαλῆς μου τὰ μαλλιά
θὰ στὰ σφουγγίσω.

Γ' ἄκουσεν ἡ Εὐᾶ μέσ' στὸ ἀποσπερνὸ
τῆς παράδεισος φῶς ν' ἀντιχτυπᾶνε,
κι ἀλαφιασμένη κρῦφτηκε... Πονῶ,
σῶσε, ἔλεος κάνε.

Ψυχοσῶστ', οἱ ἁμαρτίες μου λαός,
Τὰ ἀξεδιάλυτα ποιὸς θὰ ξεδιάλυσῃ;
Ἀμέτρητό Σου τὸ ἔλεος, ὁ Θεός!
Ἄβυσσο ἡ κρίση.

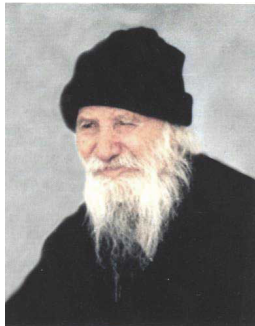


Δὲν θέλω μὲ τὸ φόβο τοῦ θανάτου νὰ πλησιάσεις τὸ Θεό. Θέλω μὲ τὴν πολλὴ ἀγάπη πρὸς Αὐτὸν νὰ τὸ κάνεις. Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ ἀνώτερο, παιδί μου.

Γέροντας Πόρφυριος Κουσοκαλύβιτης

«Παχεία Γαστήρ Λεπτὸν Οὐ Τίκει Νόον»

Τοῦ Γέροντος Πορφυρίου Κανσοκαλυβίτου (+1991), ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο «Βίος καὶ Λόγος», ἐκδ. Τερᾶς Μόνης Χρυσοπηγῆς, Χανιά 2003.



Δὲν γίνεστε ἅγιοι κυνηγώντας τὸ κακό. Ἄστε τὸ κακό. Νὰ κοιτάξετε 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, 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 ἄγιασε 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 σωματική. Ὅμως οἱ πνευματικοὶ ἄνθρωποι τὸ κάνουνε γιὰ ψυχική 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 ψυχή. 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 φαγητὰ μας. Νὰ μὴν ἀσχολούμαστε τόσο πολὺ μ' αὐτά.

Δὲν εἶναι τὸ φαγητό, δὲν εἶναι οἱ καλὲς συνθηκὲς διαβίωσης, ποὺ ἐξασφαλίζουν τὴν καλὴ ὑγεία. Εἶναι ἡ ἀγία ζωὴ, ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ξέρω γιὰ ἀσκητῆς ποὺ νηστεύανε πολὺ καὶ δὲν εἶχανε καμιά 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 αὐτὰ καὶ

γάλατα, παρὰ ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ εἶναι λιτοδαίτοι. Εἶναι παρατηρημένο αὐτό. Νὰ τὸ πάρουμε καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἱατρικὴ ἐπιστήμη· τώρα τὸ συνιστᾷ αὐτὸ τὸ πράγμα. Οἱ νηστευτὲς νηστεύουν καὶ δὲν παθαίνουν τίποτε· ὄχι ἀπλῶς δὲν παθαίνουν, ἀλλὰ θεραπεύονται ἀπὸ ἀρρώστιας.

Γιὰ νὰ τὰ κάνετε ὅμως 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 Χριστό καὶ μὲ θερμὴ ἀγάπη ἔλεξαν τὴν εὐχή, 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 τρώεις κρέας. Ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος βέβαια εἶναι ἀσθενής, δὲν εἶναι ἁμαρτία νὰ φάει πρὸς στήριξι τοῦ ὀργανισμοῦ καὶ φαγητὰ μὴ νηστήσιμα.

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...



Οποιος θέλει ν' ἀκούσει τὴν προσευχὴ του ὁ Θεὸς γρήγορα, μόλις σηκωθεῖ καὶ ὑψώσει τὰ χέρια του σ' Αὐτόν, ἄς προσευχηθεῖ ὀλόψυχα γιὰ τοὺς ἐχθρούς του. Καὶ τότε, γιὰ ὅ,τι κι ἂν παρακαλέσει καὶ ὁ ἴδιος τὸ Θεό, θὰ εἰσακουστεῖ.

Ἀββᾶς Ζήνων

Ἡ Θυσία τῆς Μάνας

ΠΗΓΗ: Από τις ιστοσελίδες τοῦ <http://elas-lyste.blogspot.com/>.



Εἶναι ἀληθινὴ ἱστορία ἢ ὁποῖα διαδραματίστηκε λίγες ὥρες μετὰ ἀπὸ σεισμό στὴν Ἰαπωνία, πρὶν ἀρκετοὺς μῆνες. Θὰ μπορούσε νὰ εἶναι καὶ αὐτὴ ἓνα παραμῦθι, ὅμως, δὲν εἶναι. Εἶναι ἡ πραγματικότητα ποὺ μᾶς θυμίζει πὼς τὰ παραμῦθια δὲν εἶναι πάντα μῦθος.

Ἐχοντας πλέον ὁ σεισμὸς ὑποχωρήσει, διασωστές φτάνουν στὰ ἐρείπια τοῦ σπιτιοῦ μίας νεαρῆς γυναίκα καὶ ἀντικρύζουν τὸ πτώμα τῆς μέσα στὰ χαλάσματα. Ἡ στάση τοῦ σώματός τῆς ὅμως ἦταν σχετικὰ περιέργη, θυμίζοντας κατὰ πολὺ τὴν στάση ποὺ παίρνει πιστὸς ἔχοντας λυγίσει στὰ γόνατά του γιὰ νὰ λατρέψει καὶ νὰ προσευχηθεῖ τὸν Θεό του. Τὰ συντρίμια τοῦ σπιτιοῦ, εἶχαν καταπλακώσει τὴν πλάτη καὶ τὸ κεφάλι τῆς.

Ἀντιμετωπίζοντας ὅλες αὐτὲς τὶς δυσκολίες, ὁ ἀρχηγὸς τῆς ομάδας διάσωσης, ἀποφασίζει νὰ βάλει τὸ χέρι του μέσα ἀπὸ ἓνα στενὸ ἄνοιγμα στὸν τοῖχο γιὰ νὰ φτάσει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἀτυχῆς γυναίκα. Εἶχε ἀκόμη μέσα του τὴν ἐλπίδα ὅτι αὐτὴ ἢ ἡ γυναῖκα θὰ μπορούσε νὰ εἶναι ζωντανή. Ὡστόσο, τόσο τὸ κρῦο δέγμα ὅσο καὶ ἡ ἀκαμψία τοῦ σώματος, μαρτυροῦσαν πὼς ἡ γυναῖκα εἶχε σίγουρα πεθάνει. Ὁ ἴδιος μαζὶ μὲ τὴν ὑπόλοιπη ομάδα ἄφησαν αὐτὸ τὸ σπῆτι καὶ κατευθύνθηκαν στὰ ὑπόλοιπα, ἀναζητώντας τὰ ἐπόμενα ὑπὸ κατάρρευση κτίρια.

Κάποιοι ἀνεξήγητοι ὅμως λόγοι, παρακινούσαν τὸν ἀρχηγὸ τῆς ομάδας νὰ ἐπιστρέψει στὸ κατεστραμμένο σπῆτι τῆς νεκρῆς γυναίκα, καθὼς μία ἐντυπωσιακὴ δύναμη τὸν καλοῦσε πίσω. Ἔτσι κι ἔγινε. Πλησίασε, γονάτισε καὶ ἔβαλε ξανά τὸ χέρι τοῦ ἀνάμεσα στὸ ἄνοιγμα ποὺ εἶχε ἐντοπίσει πρὶν, ἀναζητώντας ἓνα μικρὸ κενὸ κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ νεκρὸ σῶμα.

Ξαφνικά, ἄρχισε νὰ φωνάζει μὲ ἐνθουσιασμό! «Εἶναι ἓνα παιδί! Ἐπάρχει ἓνα παιδί!»

Ὅλη ἡ ομάδα συγκεντρώθηκε γύρω του καὶ προσεκτικὰ ἀφαίρεσε τὶς σωρούς των γκρεμισμένων τμημάτων τοῦ σπιτιοῦ, γύρω ἀπὸ τὴν ἀτυχή γυναῖκα. Πράγματι, μπροστὰ τους πλέον, ὑπῆρχε ἓνα τριῶν μηνῶν ἀγοράκι, τυλιγμένο σὲ μία κουβέρτα μὲ μοτίβα ἀνθεῶν, κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ νεκρὸ σῶμα τῆς μητέρας του. Προφανῶς, ἡ γυναῖκα εἶχε πραγματοποιήσει μία ὑπεράνθρωπη θυσία γιὰ τὴν διάσωση τοῦ γιοῦ τῆς. Ὅταν ὅμως ἀντιλήφθηκε πὼς τὸ σπῆτι κατέρρευε, χρησιμοποίησε τὸ σῶμα τῆς γιὰ νὰ δημιουργήσει ἓνα αὐτοσχέδιο κάλυμμα προστασίας γιὰ

τὸν γιό τῆς. Τὸ μικρὸ ἀγοράκι, κοιμόταν ἀκόμα ἤρεμο καὶ γαλήνιο, ἐνῶ ὁ ἐπικεφαλῆς τῆς ομάδας διάσωσης τὸν εἶχε πλέον στὰ χέρια του καὶ τὸν ἀπομάκρυνε ἀπὸ τὰ χαλάσματα.

Ὁ γιατρός, κατέφθασε γρήγορα γιὰ νὰ ἐξετάσει τὸ μικρὸ ἀγόρι. Ἀφοῦ ἄνοιξε τὴν κουβέρτα, ἐντόπισε ἓνα κινητὸ τηλέφωνο. Ἐπῆρχε ἓνα μήνυμα κεμμένου στὴν ὀθόνη ποὺ ἔγραφε: «Ἐὰν καταφέρεις νὰ ἐπιζήσεις, νὰ θυμᾶσαι μόνο ὅτι σ' ἀγαπῶ»



Ῥωμιοσύνη καὶ Ὁρθοδοξία

Τοῦ Φώτη Κόντογλου.

Ἡ Ῥωμιοσύνη καὶ Ὁρθοδοξία εἶναι ἓνα πρᾶγμα. Ἐπειὶ νὰ μὴν πάρω τοὺς πολὺ παλιούς, παίρνω δυὸ τρεῖς ἀπὸ ἐκείνους ποὺ ἀγωνισθήκανε γιὰ τὴν ἐλευθερία τῆς Ἑλλάδας, ποὺ ὅποτε μιᾶνε γιὰ τὴ λευτεριά, μιᾶνε καὶ γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία. Ὁ Ρήγας Φεραῖος λέγει: «νὰ κάνουμε τὸν ὄρκο, ἀπάνω στὸ Σταυρό». Ἐνας ἄλλος ποιητὴς γράφει:

*«Γιὰ τῆς πατρίδας τὴν ἐλευθερία
γιὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴν πίστη τὴν ἀγία
γι' αὐτὰ τὰ δυὸ πολέμῳ,
μ' αὐτὰ νὰ ζήσω ἐπιθυμῶ.
Κι ἂν δὲν τὰ ἀποχτήσω
τί μ' ὀφελεῖ νὰ ζήσω;»...*

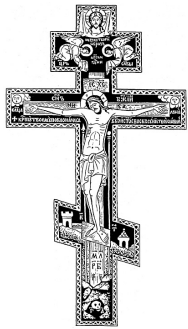
Οἱ ἀγράμματοι ποιητὲς τῶν βουνῶν, μέσα στὰ τραγούδια ποὺ κάνανε, καὶ ποὺ δὲ θὰ τὰ φτάξει ποτὲ κανένας γραμματιζούμενος, μιᾶνε κάθε τόσο γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία μας, γιὰ τὸ Χριστό, γιὰ τὴν Παναγιά, γιὰ τοὺς δώδεκα Ἀποστόλους, γιὰ τοὺς ἁγίους. Πολλὲς παροιμίες καὶ ρητὰ καὶ λόγια ποὺ λέγει ὁ λαὸς μας, εἶναι παρμένα ἀπὸ τὰ γράμματα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ἡ Ῥωμιοσύνη εἶναι ζυμωμένη μὲ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, γι' αὐτὸ Χριστιανὸς καὶ Ἑλληνας ἦταν τὸ ἴδιο.

Ἀπὸ τότε ποὺ γινήκανε Χριστιανοὶ οἱ Ἕλληνες, πήρανε στὰ χέρια τους τὴ σημαία τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τὴν κάνανε σημαία δική τους: Πίστις καὶ Πατρίς! Ποτάμια Ἑλληνικὸ αἷμα χυθήκανε γιὰ τὴν πίστη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἀπὸ τα χρόνια τοῦ Διοκλητιανοῦ, ἕως τὰ 1838, ποὺ μαρτύρησε ὁ ἅγιος Γεώργιος ὁ ἐξ Ἰωαννίνων. Ποιὰ ἄλλη φυλὴ ὑπόφερε τόσα μαρτύρια γιὰ τὸ Χριστό; Αὐτὸ τὸ ἀκατάλυτο ἔθνος ποὺ ἔπρεπε νὰ... πληθύνει καὶ νὰ καπλαντίσει τὸν κόσμον, ἀπόμεινε ὀλιγάνθρωπο γιὰ τὸ ἀποδεκατίσθηκε ἐπὶ χίλια ὀχτακόσια χρόνια ἀπὸ φυλὲς Χριστιανομάχες.

Ἁγιασμένη Ἑλλάδα! Εἶσαι ἁγιασμένη, γιὰ τὴν εἶσαι βασανισμένη. Κι ἡ κάθε γιορτὴ σου μνημονεύει κ' ἓνα μαρτύριό σου. Τὰ πάθη τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὰ ἔκανες δικὰ σου πάθη, τὰ μαρτύρια τῶν ἁγίων εἶναι τὰ δικὰ σου μαρτύρια.

ON CONVERSION

By Dr. Eugene Zavarin (from a lecture delivered at the St. Herman Winter Pilgrimage, Feb. 1984).



A modern Russian novel may seem to be a rather strange choice as a topic for a lecture to a group of English-speaking Orthodox—especially on the eve of Great Lent. This particular book, however, an unquestionable masterpiece of Orthodox literature, perhaps the most “Orthodox” novel written in the last two centuries, even more Orthodox than the novels of Dostoevsky. And it is precisely for its spiritual value that I have chosen to speak about it today.

Translated into English, the title of the book is “Open to Me the Doors.” This does not make much sense. The original title, however, is not in Russian but in Church Slavonic, and here—to those familiar with the life and language of the Orthodox Church—it is immediately recognizable as the first words of the pre-Lenten prayer: *Open to me the doors of repentance, O Giver of life...* The whole theme of the book is linked with repentance and takes place in the space of some two weeks, just prior and into the period of Great Lent. It is the story of the conversion of a Jew to Orthodoxy—not from Judaism, but from a religion of nothingness, from that phony plasticity which characterizes much of the world today.

The book was smuggled out to the West some years ago where it was published in 1973 in Paris. The author, Felix Svetov and his wife are Russian-born ethnic Jews who converted to Orthodoxy under the difficult conditions of Soviet life. The book “Open to Me the Doors” is written with such penetrating psychological and spiritual perception that, even without knowing the background of the author, one cannot but assume that it must be at least partially autobiographical. The step by step analysis of the hero’s conversion reveals a discernment which could only have come through experience. The author conveys a spiritual reality which pulls at the heart of the Orthodox reader who, if he immerses himself in the novel, experiences together with the hero the wondrous rebirth of his soul.

For the Orthodox Christian the book is of unique educational value. Fully impregnated by the Orthodox mentality, it forces the reader to adopt this same point of view, without which he is easily lost. The setting of the story is utterly contemporary; there are scenes full of worldly conversation; the protagonist himself is a product of the contemporary non-religious Soviet Jewish society. The reader must, therefore, be careful to follow the action of the story where it takes place—in the internal workings of the hero’s mind and heart.

It is impossible to adequately examine a book of such length and depth in such a short space of time. I have, therefore,

selected certain passages to illustrate the more salient points, hoping they will convey at least a small part of the novel’s deeply Orthodox sentiment.

For ease of discussion, I have put events in chronological order. Approaching the narrative in this way, we come upon a dialogue which occurs in a dream of our protagonist Lev Ilyich. The dialogue takes place between God and Satan in which the latter is charged with an assignment to try and tempt Lev Ilyich who had been chosen for Holy Baptism.

Satan is scornful of such a task: “Me, worry over that Jew? He’s always been in my hands; why bother tempting someone who is running directly towards you? Some time ago You sent me to a Jew by the name of Job—he was pure, God-fearing, avoided evil; now that was work, pure tragedy I call it. Forgive me, Lord, but in this case I see only a joke...” Here we see that God does not call a soul on the basis of any rational justice or external moral worth, but from sheer love for His creation, and the desire that all men be saved.

The reader meets the protagonist as he is returning home to Moscow from a business trip. Lev Ilyich is a typical product of our century. His ideas are those of having fun; he likes parties, women; he likes to drink, to be merry. But underneath is a void, an abyss which he himself does not recognize. He had been out of town on business many times and always looked forward to his return home to the city, to his friends and family. But this time, something happens. He feels a certain indifference—quite unlike the elation which usually accompanies his return. He brushes this aside as a fleeting mood, perhaps the result of an oncoming cold. The real cause of the indifference never crosses his mind. How could he understand that a spark of God had fallen into his heart? From that moment he no longer belongs to the world; what he senses as indifference is nothing but that estrangement from the things of the earth, that otherworldliness which is the essential nature of Christianity. God had chosen him, had placed him in a different world. This vague feeling of indifference signaled a profound internal change which only much later he recognizes as the beginning for him of a new life. A ray of light has fallen into his heart which was gradually to illumine his darkened mind to the knowledge of the true light of Christ.

What happens next in this internal chain of events is that he becomes, as though suddenly, convinced that chance no longer exists in his life. The people he meets, where he goes, what happens to him... in all of this he feels he is somehow being guided. He has no understanding, no particular thought of where and by whom and why. Nevertheless, this feeling overwhelms him and persists. Again this is the result of the mysterious spark of God descending into the human soul.

A Spiritual Odyssey

Propelled by these feelings ordinarily so alien to him, Lev Ilyich begins his spiritual odyssey. It is a dangerous and dif-

ficult journey, full of many discouraging obstacles and times of intense struggle. God's grace, however, helps him to endure these trials and to get up after he falls. The further he progresses, the more clearly he understands the impossibility of turning back. The eyes of the blind were opened.

In terms of the external action of the novel, Lev Ilyich meets various people—both old friends and new acquaintances—with whom he invariably ends up discussing religion. The author skillfully introduces an assortment of characters representing different points of view widely held in contemporary society: we meet the convinced Marxist, the humanist, the Slavophile, the Zionist, the atheist-intellectual, and the small group of believers—the priest Fr. Kyrill in particular—who are a lifeline keeping Lev Ilyich from losing himself in the abyss of worldly arguments and rational reasonings with which Satan has baited his traps.

The women in the novel are generally sympathetic, though not very strong characters. Lev Ilyich is placed in the midst of three of these women: Vera, Nadia and Liuba—Faith, Hope, and Love. Obviously the choice of names is not fortuitous. The author, however, is not Dostoevsky, and the women do not exactly reflect the virtues which their names express. This may disappoint some who might expect the women to act as vehicles of salvation. As if deliberately refusing to conform to such an expectation, the author has created a much more realistic situation. It is in the midst of the characters' weaknesses that the reader recognizes himself. Furthermore, the weight of Lay's conversion is thus placed not on any rational process or human initiative, but on the mysterious spark of God's grace.

The most bitter antagonist in the novella an old friend of Lev Ilyich by the name of Kostya, who may claim a certain kinship to the character of Stavrogin in Dostoevsky's "The Possessed." He is flamboyant, strong-willed and has brilliant ideas which can easily influence others. But like Stavrogin, his outward beauty and charm are only "the frozen tragic mask, under which hides a terrible spiritual wasteland, a loss of all norms and ethical principles" (G.M. Friedlaender). His ideas are contradictory, lacking direction. Satan enters this inner void and Kostya becomes a tempter, trying to seduce Lev Ilyich away from Christianity with his eloquence and scholarly knowledge. Fr. Kyril, however, whose authority Kostya tries to undermine, is planted firmly upon the unshakable foundation of Christianity, and helps Lev to see the emptiness of his friend's arguments. The clarity and absolute simplicity of his explanations contrast sharply with Kostya's delusion.

Among the positive group of characters are Lev's friend Masha, Fr. Kyril and his matushka Dusta. They meet "as if"

by accident. Taken to Fr. Kyrill's house, Lev is at once struck by the amount of greenery; there is even a tame pink parrot. This obviously symbolizes a sort of paradise which is set in clear juxtaposition to the cold, lifeless asphalt of the city streets. Although Lev Ilyich is rather perplexed at being found in the house of a young Orthodox priest, whose religion he had once so readily mocked, he feels a strong attraction to that genuine warmth, that knowledge of truth which emanates from Fr. Kyril, and thus his brief visit opens the door to his entry into the Church,

Returning to his own apartment, he finds a party in progress. This world, so familiar to him, now brings him into a state of depression. The mysterious spark of God which previously was so incomprehensible, so illogical, is now so powerful so as to cause him to feel an aversion to his old life, to see the emptiness of the party chatter; the scales have fallen from his eyes; he feels so estranged, as if he belongs to another world, not quite understanding what this "other world" is all about.

After a time he cannot bear it any longer and runs out into the streets. Wandering as if aimlessly, he comes again to the house of Fr. Kyril. He surprises himself as much as anyone when he suddenly asks Fr. Kyril "Can you baptize me?" Such an unpremeditated approach to this solemn Sacrament may appear to some as a dramatic device. It is, however, not so unusual in the context of the Soviet experience, as we see

in the writings of Fr. Dimitri Dudko and others. One might be tempted to see here a lack of seriousness, the whim of a passing moment. Lev Ilyich himself is almost embarrassed by such an illogical, impulsive decision; his mind argues against the promptings of his spirit. Fortunately, however, his genuine thirst for an entry into that "other world," this mysterious, almost magnetic attraction (which he still cannot fully articulate) overpowers his doubts with the help of Fr. Kyril's immediate consent and the joyful reaction of the women present: Matushka Dusia, Vera and Masha.

The scene at the Baptism is very touching; it is viewed through the eyes of Lev Ilyich who is initially plagued by various confusing and very secondary thoughts: he imagines his friends sitting around mocking as he stands there in a pair of shorts—black, too long and two sizes too large. "If he had known, he would have put on some nice ones, swim-shorts... Hm, he stopped himself, 'Where do you think you are, at a beach on the Black Sea?'"

He is puzzled by the bustling about of the three women and Fr. Kyril as they make the necessary preparations, although he accepts readily, like a child, whatever he is told to do or



say. Out of the fullness of his tradition, the Orthodox reader is able to fill in the gaps left by Lev Ilyich's bewilderment.

"Like thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions of times before and many times in the future, the Sacrament, inexpressible and touching, was taking place. A small church composed of three women stood at his back, and he felt himself not as a spectator, but as a member of this church. And He was among them, Lev Ilyich knew this; he felt His breath ... 'Kiss the cross'—the priest put the chain on Lev Ilyich. 'Make the sign of the Cross.' He anointed his forehead, chest, hands, feet. 'The seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit.' They lit candles. He walked behind the priest, leaving wet marks on the floor; behind him were three women with candles, singing softly, with Lev Ilyich mumbling, repeating after them, guessing the words: 'As many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ, Alleluia.'"

While sealing him as a member of the Church, his Baptism does not provide any kind of automatic protection from temptations which continue to assail him. He is tempted by old habits and falls into sin; he gets into arguments with his friends and becomes depressed. Outwardly there does not seem to be any manifest transformation of life. But a definite change has taken place. Sin, once a matter of indifference, now evokes a flood of repentance; he is keenly aware of having sinned, and desires to sin no more. He has become consumed with a purpose; his life has assumed a definite direction.

Distressed by his failure to keep spotless his baptismal robe, Lev Ilyich comes to Fr. Kyril who counsels him to prepare for Confession and Communion. Here we should say a few words about Fr. Kyril, a simple, young married priest of no particular outward charisma, but possessed of a strong faith and deep Orthodox consciousness which give him the key to unlock the mysteries of the human soul. He is, as it were, the voice of the Church, often quoting the Holy Fathers, and giving practical insightful advice which helps Lev Ilyich to keep afloat in the stormy waters of life.

There follows what is perhaps the most moving incident in the entire novel—Lev Ilyich's first Confession and Communion. And once more, it can be fully appreciated only in the context of life in the Orthodox Church. Lev Ilyich becomes totally absorbed in the service: the priest's every word penetrates his heart as if it were meant for him alone. He is overwhelmed by a sense of unworthiness: "How can one forgive a man who has spent his entire life walking along that 'other' road, laughing at all of this, or rather, indifferently and rudely despising all of this, preoccupied with himself, his own nonsense, endlessly sinning? How is it that instead of being thrown out of the church he was allowed to partake in the communion of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ... Only if one denied all logic. 'I have no right, O Lord; I have only hope; anyway, let it be Thy will!' The Royal Doors opened again and the deacon proclaimed, 'With fear of God and faith draw near...'"

Lev Ilyich learns to set aside that logic, that reason to which he had always tried to be so faithful, and to accept God's forgiveness as a gift of His mercy, of His love which embraces even the most wretched sinner, here indeed is a great Mystery of the Christian faith.

Lev Ilyich continues to be plagued by temptations which center in his conversations with others: One after another, Lev Ilyich tries to convert his friends, to share the light of understanding which God's grace has shed upon his soul. While he is disappointed by his failure to do so, his faith is strengthened as he begins to see more and more clearly the fallacy of their arguments.

As a Jewish convert to Christianity, Lev Ilyich becomes preoccupied with the question of "chosenness." His conversion opens up to him an entirely new understanding of the Old Testament and its meaning for the Jews. His religious—and even more, Christian—perspective is entirely rejected by his Jewish acquaintances who accuse him of being a traitor to the Jewish tradition: "You don't hear the call of your Jewish blood!" Lev Ilyich is disgusted by the hollowness of contemporary Soviet Jewish society whose Jewishness consists only in some kind of ethnic snobbishness and a worldly attachment to a political state. The accusation makes him explode:

"It is not the call of blood that you are hearing, it is only petty bourgeois conceit that is shouting in you ... Yes, I am hearing the call of my blood and because of that I am an Orthodox Christian. Moreover, I am an Orthodox Christian because I hear the call of my Jewish blood ... To hear the call of his blood for a Jew born in Russia is to become an Orthodox Christian, because only then does one obtain the opportunity to repent."

Lev Ilyich continues in this way, becoming increasingly estranged from his former way of life, his old self. Outwardly he becomes a rather pitiable figure: he loses his job, his wife is thinking of leaving him; in the final scene he sits on a bench outside the church, his mouth still bloody from a beating—and a passing stranger throws him a coin.

What, asks the reader, can this be the picture of a hero? From a logical worldly perspective the conclusion is indeed very disappointing. But the reader who is careful to keep himself within an Orthodox Christian perspective sees very clearly that the novel has a very happy ending. Lev Ilyich himself, in spite of his outwardly miserable condition, is extremely happy: he has entered that "other world" and is finally welded to the Church—symbolized by an old woman who, in that last scene, gives him a piece of prosphora.

What hope is contained here, what joy in witnessing the resurrection of a soul from the abyss of nothingness, to a life full of machine and purpose. Truly, our God is a God of the living, trampling down death and "upon those in the tombs bestowing life."

RELIGION IS A NEURO-BIOLOGICAL SICKNESS, BUT ORTHODOXY IS ITS CURE

By Protopresbyter John Romanides (+2001), from "Orthodoxy and Religion."

The Sickness of Religion

The Patriarchs and the Prophets of the Old Testament, the Apostles and Prophets of the New Testament, as well as their successors, are perfectly cognizant of the *sickness of religion* and of the Physician Who treats it; that is, the Lord (Yahweh) of Glory. He is the Physician of our souls and bodies. He cured this *sickness* in His friends and faithful ones before His Incarnation and continues, as God-Man, to cure it.

The *sickness* in question consists of a short circuit between the spirit in man's *heart* (that is, according to the Fathers, his *noetic energy*) and his brain.

In its normal state, *noetic energy* moves cyclically, like a crank, praying within the *heart*.

In its diseased state, *noetic energy* does not "crank" cyclically. Instead, unfurled and rooted in the *heart*, it gets stuck in the brain and causes a *short circuit* between the brain and the *heart*. Thus, the concepts of the brain, which all derive from the environment, become concepts of *noetic energy*, which is at all times rooted in the heart.

In this way, the sufferer becomes a slave of his surroundings. As such, he confuses certain concepts that come from his surroundings with his God or gods.

By the term *religion*, we mean every "equation" of the Uncreated with the created, and especially every "equation of representations" of the Uncreated with concepts and words of human thought, which is the basis for idol worship.

These concepts and words may be simple concepts and words, or they may also include representations with statues and images, within and without a putative Divinely-inspired text.

In other words, the equating of concepts of God and words of Holy Scripture with the Uncreated also belongs to the world of idolatry, and is the foundation of all heresies to date.

In the **Therapeutic Tradition** of the Old and New Testament, appropriate concepts and words are used as means during the *purification* and *illumination* of our hearts; these are dispensed with during *glorification*, when the indescribable, incomprehensible, and uncreated Glory of God, which fills all created things, is revealed in the Body of Christ.

Following *glorification*, the concepts and words of noetic prayer in the heart return. From his *glorification*, the person ascertains that there is no similitude between the created and the Uncreated, and that it is *impossible to express God and even more impossible to comprehend Him*.

The foundation of the heresies of the Vatican and of the Protestants is that they follow [St.] Augustine, who took the revealed Glory of God in the Old and New Testament for something that is "created," which comes and goes, at that.

Not only that, but, what is worse, he also took, among other things, the Angel of Great Counsel and His Glory for creations *that have a beginning and an end*, which God brought from nothing into existence, so as to be seen and heard, and which will return again to non-existence when their missions have been accomplished.

But for a person to have correct direction in the *treatment of noetic energy*, he must have as his guide the experience of one who has been deified, who testifies to certain *axioms*: that between the Uncreated God and His Uncreated Energies, on the one hand, and His creation, on the other hand, there is no similitude, and that "it is impossible to express God and even more impossible to comprehend Him." (St. Gregory the Theologian).

Only on the basis of these *tenets* can one escape the plight of acquiring the Devil as a guide, by means of self-styled theologians who speculate about God and Divine things.

In its natural state, *noetic energy* regulates the passions—that is, of hunger, thirst, sleep, the instinct of self-preservation (i.e., the fear of death)—so that they are irreplaceable.

In an unhealthy state of *noetic energy*, the passions become reprehensible. These, in combination with an unbridled *imagination*, create a magical religion for the bridling of the elements of nature or for the additional salvation of the soul from matter in a state of happiness and bliss of body and soul.

Faith, according to Holy Scripture, is cooperation with the Holy Spirit, Who initiates the *treatment* of the sickness of selfish love in the heart and its transformation into love that "seeketh not its own."

This *treatment* culminates in *glorification (deification)* and constitutes the quintessence of the Orthodox Catholic Church, which thereby replaced idolatry as the nucleus of the Hellenic civilization of the Roman Empire.

We ought to have a clear picture of the context within which both Church and State saw the contribution of those who have been deified to the *cure of the sickness of religion*—which destroys human personality through the quest for bliss here and beyond the grave—in order to understand the reason why the Roman Empire incorporated the Orthodox Church into its code of law.

Neither the Church nor the State saw the Church's mission as a mere *remission of the sins* of the faithful for their entry into Paradise after death. This would be equivalent to doctors forgiving sick people for being ill so that they might be cured after death.

Both Church and State knew well that *remission of sins* was only the beginning of the treatment of the sickness of humankind: the pursuit of happiness.

This *treatment* began with *purification of the heart*, and arrived at the restoration of the *heart* to its natural state of *illumination*; and the entire person was brought to perfection in the preternatural state of *glorification*; that is, *deification*.

The result of this *treatment* and perfection was not only suitable preparation for life after bodily death, but also the transformation of society, *here and now*, from a group of egotistical and egocentric individuals into a community of people with selfless love, "which seeketh not its own."



BOUNDLESS IS THE WILL OF GOD

From the Greek Orthodox magazine "Theodromia" (Θεοδρομία).

A certain Abba who practiced asceticism with candor to God, begged Him with tears to reveal to him the way He judges and decides in certain cases where people do not understand Him, but believe they concern strange things. God however, for a long time did not wish to reveal anything to him because man can never know and understand the mysteries of God. The ascetic never ceased asking, night and day, for that particular revelation. One day therefore, God, wishing to inform him, set in his heart the thought to go and meet an elder ascetic, who was at another location that required a few days walk to reach him.

When the ascetic started his walk, God sent him an angel in the form of a young monk, who greeted him by saying "Father bless." The elder ascetic responded "God forgive you, my son." The angel then asked the elder, "where are you going abba?" and the elder replied, "I am going to so and so ascetic to meet him." And the angel then said, "I too am going there, so let us walk together."

Having walked together the first day, they arrived in the evening at a village and were put up at the house of a pious and hospitable man, who looked after them. In fact he brought a silver platter in the dining room. When it was time for them to leave, the angel took the platter secretly, and tossed it up in the air and the platter disappeared. The elder when he saw this was saddened but said nothing.

The second day they reached another village, where they were looked after by a hospitable pious Christian. He had a single son and he brought him to be blessed and receive their blessing. The angel though, when he was about to leave with the ascetic, grabbed the child by the neck and choked him to death. Witnessing such a view, the elder suffered a great surprise and fear but again said nothing.

Having walked the third day, they reached another place, but because they could not find anybody to receive them, they sat in a courtyard that had an unstable wall that was close to collapsing. The angel stood up, rolled up his sleeves, brought down the wall and immediately rebuilt it from the foundations up.

Witnessing this last event, the elder could no more keep quiet, and said, "I invoke the name of God, the Most High, for you to tell me the truth. What were these things you did? Are you an angel or a demon? What you did are not human deeds." When the angel asked "what did I do?" the elder replied, "yesterday and before yesterday when we were received by those Christian men who looked after us, you took from the former the silver platter and you tossed it in the air and it disappeared, while you choked to death the son of the latter. And here where we came, they did not offer us hospitality, yet you toiled in building and you were beneficial to them."

The angel then responded, "Listen Abba, I will reveal to you the truth of these situations. The first one who received us was a God loving and just man, and deals with his subordinates according to God's commandments. That silver platter though came from an unjust inheritance, so that he may not lose his reward for his good deeds, due to the platter, God ordered me to make it disappear, so that his hospitality be pure and free from injustice. The latter who gave us hospitality is a pious and virtuous man and if his son continued living he would have become the devil's tool, and would have done many evils, rendering the good deeds of the father to be forgiven."

The elder then said, "OK you have done well, but what do you have to tell me about the last case?" The angel then answered him: "learn father this too, that the owner of the courtyard is an evil and unjust man and wishes to hurt many but is unable because of his poverty. His grandfather when he was building the wall, he hid in it a great sum of money and if I let it collapse, the evil owner needing to rebuild it, would have discovered the money in the ruins and would have used it to do the evil deeds he wished. That is why God ordered me to stabilize it, so that the evil man may not find the money he intended to use for his evil wishes to hurt people. And God knows when to reveal it to a worthy person who will use it for good deeds. Have you seen therefore how God judges in certain cases you asked to learn? Go to your cell therefore and don't let the things of this world bother you, asking why and how they are done. For the judgments of God are an immeasurable abyss as the prophet said and His energies are unfathomable and incomprehensible and man cannot know everything accurately. Believe therefore, father, God is just and He commits no injustice. Whatever is needed to be done, it is done justly. When the ascetic heard these things from the angel, he glorified God, retiring to his cell and never again questioned anything.

THE GREAT MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

By Elder Aimilianos of the Holy Monastery of Simonopetra, Holy Mountain; this is a Sermon delivered in the Church of St. Nicholas, Trikala, Greece, January 17, 1971.

Nobody would dispute that the most important day in a person's life, after his birth and baptism, is that of his marriage. It is no surprise, then, that the aim of contemporary worldly and institutional upheavals is precisely to crush the most honorable and sacred mystery of marriage. For many people, marriage is an opportunity for pleasures and amusements. Life, however, is a serious affair. It is a spiritual struggle, a progression toward a goal—heaven. The most crucial juncture, and the most important means, of this progression is marriage. It is not permissible for anyone to avoid the bonds of marriage, whether he concludes a mystical marriage by devoting himself to God, or whether he concludes a sacramental one with a spouse.

Today we will concern ourselves primarily with sacramental marriage. We will consider how marriage can contribute to our spiritual life. We know that marriage is an institution established by God. It is *honorable* (Heb 13:4). It is a *great mystery* (Eph 5:32). An unmarried person passes through life and leaves it; but a married person lives and experiences life to the full.

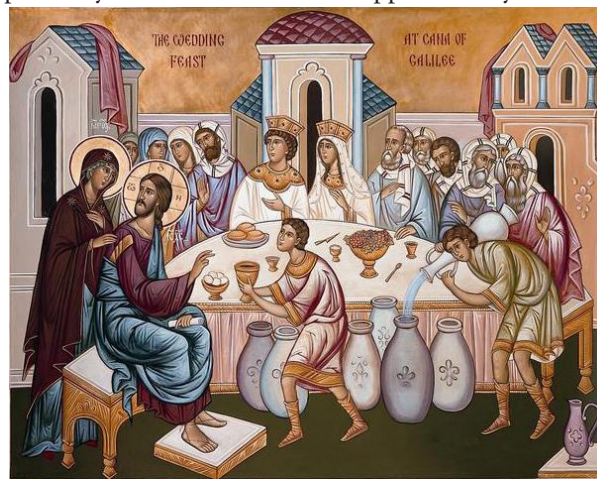
One wonders what people today think about the sacred institution of marriage, this *great mystery*, blessed by our Church. They marry, and it's as if two checking accounts or two business interests were being merged. Two people are united without ideals, two zeros, you could say. Because people without ideals, without quests, are nothing more than zeros. "I married in order to live my life," you hear people say, "and not to be shut inside four walls." "I married to enjoy my life," they say, and then they hand over their children—if they have children—to some strange woman so they can run off to the theater, the movies, or to some other worldly gathering. And so their houses become hotels to which they return in the evening, or, rather, after midnight, after they've had their fun and need to rest. Such people are empty inside, and so in their homes they feel a real void. They find no gratification there, and thus they rush and slide from here to there, in order to find their happiness.

They marry without knowledge, without a sense of responsibility, or simply because they wish to get married, or because they think they must in order to be good members of society. But what is the result? We see it every day. The shipwrecks

of marriage are familiar to all of us. A worldly marriage, as it is understood today, can only have one characteristic—the murder of a person's spiritual life. Thus we must feel that, if we fail in our marriage, we have more or less failed in our spiritual life. If we succeed in our marriage, we have also succeeded in our spiritual life. **Success or failure, progress or ruin, in our spiritual life, begins with our marriage.** Because this is such a serious matter, let us consider some of the conditions necessary for a happy, truly Christian marriage.

In order to have a successful marriage, one must have the appropriate upbringing from an early age. A child must be prepared in order to be able to have a successful marriage. But in the age in which we live, no one is interested in preparing their children for this great mystery that will play the foremost role in their lives.

The child, from an early age, must learn to love, to give, to suffer deprivation, to obey. He must learn to feel that the purity of his soul and body is a valuable treasure to be cherished as the apple of his eye. The character of the child must be shaped



properly, so that he becomes an honest, brave, decisive, sincere, cheerful person, and not a half, self-pitying creature, who constantly bemoans his fate, a weak-willed thing without any power of thought or strength. From an early age, the child should learn to take an interest in a particular subject or occupation, so that tomorrow he will be in a position to support his family, or, in the case of a girl, also to help, if this is necessary. A woman must learn to be a house-

wife, even if she has an education. She should learn to cook, to sew, to embroider. Ask married couples, however, and you'll see how many women who are about to marry know nothing about running a household.

Once we reach a certain age, moreover, the choice of one's life partner is a matter which should not be put off. Neither should one be in a hurry, because, as the saying goes, "quick to marry, quick to despair." But one should also not delay, because delay is a mortal danger to the soul. As a rule, the normal rhythm of the spiritual life begins with marriage. An unmarried person is like someone trying to live permanently in a hallway: he doesn't seem to know what the rooms are for. Parents should take an interest in the child's social life, but also in his prayer life, so that the blessed hour will come as a gift sent by God.

Naturally, when he comes to choose a partner, he will take to account his parents' opinion. How often have parents felt knives piercing their hearts when their children don't ask them about the person who will be their companion in life?

A mother's heart is sensitive, and can't endure such a blow. The child should discuss matters with his parents, because they have a special intuition enabling them to be aware of the things which concern them. But this doesn't mean that the father and mother should pressure the child. Ultimately he should be free to make his own decision.

If you pressure your child to marry, he will consider you responsible if things don't go well. Nothing good comes from pressure. You must help him, but you must also allow him to choose the person he prefers or loves—but not someone he pities or feels sorry for. If your child, after getting to know someone, tells you, "I feel sorry for the poor soul, I'll marry him," then you know that you're on the threshold of a failed marriage. Only a person whom he or she prefers or loves can stand by the side of your child. Both the man and the woman should be attracted to each other, and they should truly want to live together, in an inward way, unhurriedly. On this matter, however, it is not possible to pressure our children. Sometimes, out of our love, we feel that they are our possessions, that they are our property, and that we can do what we want with them. And thus our child becomes a creature incapable of living life either married or unmarried.

Of course, the process of getting acquainted, which is such a delicate issue—but of which we are often heedless—should take place before marriage. We should never be complacent about getting to know each other, especially if we're not sure of our feelings. Love shouldn't blind us. It should open our eyes, to see the other person as he is, with his faults. "Better to take a shoe from your own house, even if it's cobbled," says the folk proverb. That is, it's better to take someone you've gotten to know. And acquaintanceship must always be linked with engagement, which is an equally difficult matter.

When I suggested to a young woman that she should think seriously about whether she should continue her engagement she replied: "If I break it off, my mother will kill me." But what sort of engagement is it, if there's no possibility of breaking it off? To get engaged doesn't mean that I'll necessarily get married. It means that I'm testing to see whether I should marry the person I'm engaged to. If a woman isn't in a position to break off her engagement, she shouldn't get engaged, or, rather, she shouldn't go ahead with the marriage. During the engagement, we must be especially careful. If we are, we will have fewer problems and fewer disappointments after the wedding. Someone once said that, during the period of getting to know one another, you should hold on to your heart firmly with both hands, as if it were a wild animal. You know how dangerous the heart is: instead of leading you to marriage, it can lead you into sin. There is the possibility that the person you've chosen sees you as a mere toy, or a toothbrush to be tried out. Afterwards you'll be depressed and shed many tears. But then it will be too late, because your angel will have turned out to be made of clay.

Don't choose a person who wastes his time at clubs, having good time, and throwing away his money on traveling and luxuries. Neither should you choose someone who, as you'll find out, conceals his self-centeredness beneath words of love. Don't choose a woman as your wife who is like gun powder, so that as soon as you say something to her, she bursts to flames. She's no good as a wife.

Moreover, if you want to have a truly successful marriage, don't approach that young woman or man who is unable to leave his or her parents. The commandment of Christ is clear: *Man leaves his father and mother, and is united to his wife.* (Mk 10:7). But when you see the other person tied to his mother or father, when you see that he obeys them with his mouth hanging open, and is prepared to do whatever they tell him, keep far away. He is emotionally sick, a psychologically immature person, and you won't be able to create a family with him.

The man you will make your husband should be spirited. But how can he be spirited when he hasn't realized, hasn't understood, hasn't digested the fact that his parents' house is simply a flower-pot in which he was put, to be taken out later, and transplanted somewhere else?

Also, when you're going to choose a husband, make sure that he's not an uncommunicative type—in which case he'll have no friends. And if today he has no friends, tomorrow he'll find it difficult to have you as a friend and partner. Be on your guard against grumblers, moaners, and gloomy people who are like dejected birds. Be on your guard against those who complain all the time: "You don't love me, you don't understand me," and all that sort of thing. Something about these creatures of God isn't right. Also, be on your guard against religious fanatics and the overly pious. Those, that is, who get upset over trivial things, who are critical of everything and hypersensitive. How are you going to live with such a person? It will be like sitting on thorns. And look out for those who regard marriage as something bad, as a form of imprisonment; those who say "I've never in my whole life thought about getting married."

Watch out for certain pseudo-Christians, who see marriage as something sordid, as a sin, who immediately cast their eyes down when they hear anything said about it. If you marry someone like this, he will be a thorn in your flesh, and a burden for his monastery if he becomes a monk. Watch out for those who think that they're perfect, and find no defect in themselves, while constantly finding faults in others. Watch out for those who think they've been chosen by God to correct everyone else.

There is another serious matter to which you should also pay attention: heredity. Get to know well the father, the mother, the grandfather, the grandmother, the uncle. Also, the basic material prerequisites should be there. Above all, pay attention to the person's faith. Does he or she have faith? Has the person whom you're thinking of making the companion of

your life have ideals? If Christ means nothing to him, how are you going to be able to enter his heart? If he has not been able to value Christ, do you think he will value you? Holy Scripture says to the husband that the wife should be *of your testament* (Mal 2:14), that is, of your faith, your religion, so that she can join you to God. It is only then that you can have, as the Church Fathers say, a marriage *with the consent of the bishop*, that is, with the approval of the Church, and not simply a formal license.

Discuss things in advance with your spiritual father. Examine every detail with him, and he will stand by your side as a true friend, and, when you reach the desired goal and your marriage will be a gift from God. God gives his own gift to each one of us. He leads one person to marriage and another to virginity. Not that God makes the choice by saying “you go here,” and “you go there,” but He gives us the nerve to choose what our heart desires, and the courage and the strength to carry it out.

If you choose your spouse in this way, then thank God. Bring him into touch with your spiritual father. If you don't have one, the two of you should **choose a spiritual father together**, who will be your Elder, your father, the one who will remind you of, and show you God.

You will have many difficulties in life. There will be a storm of issues. Worries will surround you, and maintaining your Christian life will not be easy. But don't worry. God will help you. Do what is within your power. Can you read a spiritual book for five minutes a day? Then read. Can you pray for five minutes a day? Pray. And if you can't manage five minutes, pray for two. The rest is God's affair.

When you see difficulties in your marriage, when you see that you're making no progress in your spiritual life, don't despair. But neither should you be content with whatever progress you may have already made. Lift up your heart to God. Imitate those who have given everything to God, and do what you can to be like them, even if all you can do is to desire in your heart to be like them. Leave the action to Christ. And when you advance in this way, you will truly sense what is the purpose of marriage. Otherwise, as a blind person wanders about, so too will you wander in life.

What then is the purpose of marriage? I will tell you its three main aims. First of all, marriage is a path of pain. The companionship of man and wife is called a “yoking together,” that is, the two of them labor under a shared burden. Marriage is a journeying together, a shared portion of pain, and, of course, shared joy. But usually it comprise of “six chords” of our life

that sound a sorrowful note, and only one which is joyous. Man and wife will drink from the same cup of upheaval, sadness, and failure. During the marriage ceremony, the priest gives the newly-weds to drink from the same cup, called the *common cup*, because together they will bear the burdens of marriage. The cup is also called *union*, because they are joined together to share life's joys and sorrows.

When two people get married, it's as if they're saying: “Together we will go forward, hand in hand, through good times and bad. We will have dark hours, hours of sorrow filled with burdens, monotonous hours. But in the depths of the night, we continue to believe in the sun and the light.” Oh, my dear friends, who can say that his life has not been marked by difficult moments? But it is no small thing to know that, in your difficult moments, in your worries, in your temptations, you will be holding in your hand the hand of your beloved. The New Testament says that every man will have pain, especially

those who enter into marriage.

Are you free from a wife?— which means, are you unmarried?—asks St. Paul. *Then do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you are not doing anything wrong, it is not a sin. And if a girl marries, she does not sin, but those who marry will have hardships to endure, and my aim is to spare you.* (1 Cor 7:27-28). Remember: from the moment you marry, he says, you will have much pain, you will suffer, and your life will



be a cross, but a cross blossoming with flowers. Your marriage will have its joys, its smiles, and its beautiful things. But during the days of sunshine, remember that all the lovely flowers conceal a cross, which can emerge into your sunshine at any moment.

Life is not a party, as some people think, and after they get married take a fall from heaven to earth. Marriage is a vast ocean, and you don't know where it will wash you up. You take the person whom you've chosen with fear and trembling, and with great care, and after a year, two years, five years, you discover that he's fooled you.

It is an adulteration of marriage for us to think that it is a road to happiness, as if it were a denial of the cross. The joy of marriage is for husband and wife to put their shoulders to the wheel and together go forward on the uphill road of life. “You haven't suffered? Then you haven't loved,” says a certain poet. Only those who suffer can really love. And that's why sadness is a necessary feature of marriage. “Marriage,” in the words of an ancient philosopher, “is a world made beautiful by hope, and strengthened by misfortune.” Just as steel is formed to shape in a furnace, just so is a person proved in marriage, in the fire

of difficulties. When you see your marriage from a distance, everything seems wonderful. But when you get closer, you'll see just how many difficult moments it has.

God says that *it is not good for the man to be alone* (Gen 2:18), and so he placed a companion at his side, someone to help him throughout his life, especially in his struggles of faith, because in order to keep your faith, you must suffer and endure much pain. God sends his grace to all of us. He sends it, however, when he sees that we are willing to suffer. Some people, as soon as they see obstacles, run away. They forget God and the Church. But faith, God, and the Church, are not a shirt that you take off as soon as you start to sweat.

Marriage, then, is a journey through sorrows and joys. When the sorrows seem overwhelming, then you should remember that God is with you. He will take up your cross. It was he who placed the crown of marriage on your head. But when we ask God about something, he doesn't always supply the solution right away. He leads us forward very slowly. Sometimes he takes years. We have to experience pain, otherwise life would have no meaning. But be of good cheer, for Christ is suffering with you, and the Holy Spirit, *through your groanings is pleading on your behalf*. (Rom 8:26).

Second, marriage is a journey of love. It is the creation of a new human being, a new person, for, as the Gospel says, *the two will be as one flesh*. (Mt 19:5; Mk 10:7). God unites two people, and makes them one. From this union of two people, who agree to synchronize their footsteps and harmonize the beating of their hearts, a new human being emerges. Through such profound and spontaneous love, the one becomes a presence, a living reality, in the heart of the other. "I am married" means that I cannot live a single day, even a few moments, without the companion of my life. My husband, my wife, is a part of my being, of my flesh, of my soul. He or she complements me. He or she is the thought of my mind. He or she is the reason for which my heart beats.

The couple exchanges rings to show that, in life's changes, they will remain united. Each wears a ring with the name of the other written on it, which is placed on the finger from which a vein runs directly to the heart. That is, the name of the other is written on his own heart. The one, we could say, gives the blood of his heart to the other. He or she encloses the other within the core of his being.

"What do you do?" a novelist was once asked. He was taken aback. "What do I do? What a strange question! I love Olga, my wife." The husband lives to love his wife, and the wife lives to love her husband.

The most fundamental thing in marriage is love, and love is about uniting two into one. God abhors separation and divorce. He wants unbroken unity. The priest takes the rings off the left finger, puts them on the right, and then again on the left, and finally he puts them back on the right hand. He begins and ends with the right hand, because this is the hand

with which we chiefly act. It also means that the other now has my hand. I don't do anything that my spouse doesn't want. I am bound up with the other. I live for the other, and for that reason I tolerate his faults. A person who can't put up with another can't marry.

What does my partner want? What interests him? What gives him pleasure? That should also interest and please me as well. I also look for opportunities to give him little delights. How will I please my husband today? How will I please my wife today? This is the question which a married person must ask every day. She is concerned about his worries, his interests, his job, his friends, so that they can have everything in common. He gladly gives way to her. Because he loves her, he goes to bed last and gets up first in the morning. He regards her parents as his own, and loves them and is devoted to them, because he knows that marriage is difficult for parents. It always makes them cry, because it separates them from their child.

The wife expresses love for her husband through obedience. She is *obedient to him exactly as the Church is to Christ*. (Eph 5:22-24). It is her happiness to do the will of her husband. Attitude, obstinacy, and complaining are the axes which chop down the tree of conjugal happiness. The woman is the heart. The man is the head. The woman is the heart that loves. In her husband's moments of difficulty, she stands at his side, as the empress Theodora stood by the emperor Justinian. In his moments of joy, she tries to raise him up to even higher heights and ideals. In times of sorrow, she stands by him like a sublime and peaceful world offering him tranquility.

The husband should remember that his wife has been entrusted to him by God. His wife is a soul which God has given to him, and one day he must return it. He *loves his wife as Christ loves the Church*. (Eph 5:25). He protects her, takes care of her, gives her security, particularly when she is distressed, or when she is ill. We know how sensitive a woman's soul can be, which is why the Apostle Peter urges *husbands to honor their wives* (1 Pet 3:7). A woman's soul gets wounded, changeable, and can suddenly fall into despair. Thus the husband should be full of love and tenderness, and make himself her greatest treasure. Marriage, my dear friends, is a little boat which sails through waves and among rocks. If you lose your attention even for a moment, it will be wrecked.

As we have seen, marriage is first of all a journey of pain; second a journey of love; and, third, a journey to heaven, a call from God. It is, as Holy Scripture says, a *great mystery*. We often speak of seven "mysteries," or sacraments. In this regard, a "mystery" is the sign of the mystical presence of some true person or event.

An icon, for instance, is a mystery. When we venerate it, we are not venerating wood or paint, but Christ, or the Theotokos, or the saint who is mystically depicted. The Holy Cross is a symbol of Christ, containing his mystical presence. Marriage, too, is a mystery, a mystical presence, not unlike these.

Christ says, *wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am among them.* (Mt 18:20). And whenever two people are married in the name of Christ, they become the sign which contains and expresses Christ himself. When you see a couple who are conscious of this, it is as if you are seeing Christ. Together they are a “theophany.”

This is also why crowns are placed on their heads during the wedding ceremony, because the bride and groom are an image of Christ and the Church. And not just this, but everything in marriage is symbolic. The lit candles symbolize the wise virgins. When the priest places these candles into the hands of the newly-weds, it is as if he is saying to them: Wait for Christ like the wise virgins. Or they symbolize the tongues of fire which descended at Pentecost, and which were in essence the presence of the Holy Spirit. The wedding rings are kept on the altar, until they are taken from there by the priest, which shows that marriage has its beginning in Christ, and will end in Christ. The priest also joins their hands, in order to show that it is Christ himself who unites them. It is Christ who is at the heart of the mystery and at the center of their lives.

All the elements of the marriage ceremony are shadows and symbols which indicate the presence of Christ. When you're sitting somewhere and suddenly you see a shadow, you know that someone's coming. You don't see him, but you know he's there.

You get up early in the morning, and you see the red horizon in the east. You know that, in a little while, the sun will come up. And indeed, there behind the mountain, the sun starts to appear.

When you see your marriage, your husband, your wife, your partner's physical presence, when you see your troubles, everything in your home, know that they are all signs of Christ's presence. It is as if you're hearing Christ's footsteps, as if He was coming, as if you are now about to hear His voice. All these things are the shadows of Christ, revealing that He is together with us. It is true, though, that, because of our cares and worries, we feel that He is absent. But we can see Him in the shadows, and we are sure that He is with us. This is why there was no separate marriage service in the early Church. The man and woman simply went to church and received Communion together. What does this mean? That henceforth their life is one life in Christ.

The wreaths, or wedding crowns, are also symbols of Christ's presence. More specifically, they are symbols of martyrdom. Husband and wife wear crowns to show that they are ready to become martyrs for Christ. To say that “I am married” means that I live and die for Christ. “I am married” means that I desire and thirst for Christ. Crowns are also signs of royalty,

and thus husband and wife are king and queen, and their home is a kingdom, a kingdom of the Church, an extension of the Church.

When did marriage begin? When man sinned. Before that, there was no marriage, not in the present-day sense. It was only after the Fall, after Adam and Eve had been expelled from paradise, that Adam *knew* Eve (Gen 4:1) and thus marriage began. Why then? So that they might remember their fall and expulsion from paradise, and seek to return there. Marriage is thus a return to the spiritual paradise, the Church of Christ. “I am married” means, then, that I am a king, a true and faithful member of the Church.

The wreaths also symbolize the final victory which will be attained in the kingdom of heaven. When the priest takes the wreaths, he says to Christ: *Take their crowns to Your kingdom; take them and keep them there, until the final victory.* And so marriage is a road: its starts out from the earth and ends in heaven. It is a joining together, a bond with Christ, who assures us that He will lead us to heaven,

In our living together we are one another's hands, ears, and feet. Marriage redoubles our strength, rejoices our friends, causes grief to our enemies. A common concern makes trials bearable. Common joys are all the happier, and accord makes riches more pleasant; it is even more delightful than riches for those without wealth. Marriage is the key of moderation and the harmony of the desires, the seal of a deep friendship.

St. Gregory the Theologian

to be with Him always.

Marriage is a bridge leading us from earth to heaven. It is as if the sacrament is saying: Above and beyond love, above and beyond your husband, your wife, above the everyday events, remember that you are destined for heaven, that you have set out on a road which will take you there

without fail. The bride and the bridegroom give their hands to one another, and the priest takes hold of them both, and leads them round the table dancing and singing. Marriage is a movement, a progression, a journey which will end in heaven, in eternity.

In marriage, it seems that two people come together. However it's not two but three. The man marries the woman, and the woman marries the man, but the two together also marry Christ. So three take part in the mystery, and three remain together in life.

In the dance around the table, the couple are led by the priest, who is a type of Christ. This means that Christ has seized us, rescued us, redeemed us, and made us His. And this is the *great mystery* of marriage (Gal 3:13).

In Latin, the word “mystery” was rendered by the word “sacramentum,” which means an oath. And marriage is an oath, a pact, a joining together, a bond, as we have said. It is a permanent bond with Christ. “I am married,” then, means that I enslave my heart to Christ. If you wish, you can get married. If you wish, don't get married. But if you marry, this is the meaning that marriage has in the Orthodox Church, which brought you into being. “I am married” means I am the slave of Christ.

WORLDLY LIFE

A letter by St. Theophan the Recluse, from "The Spiritual Life and How to Be Attuned to It."



I got all caught up in speculating as to what could have happened, and it turns out that your grandmother was a little sick. Grandmother... There is a victorious and wonderful word. For grandchildren, there is no warmer place than at grandmother's, and for grandmother, there is no one dearer than good grandchildren. For this we must thank God.

You should comfort your grandmother more often and listen attentively to what she says. Old women have a wisdom acquired through life's experiences and labors. Often they unknowingly express in simple words such wise lessons as you could never find in books, even if you searched entire libraries.

Although you have given a very satisfactory explanation as to why you have not written for so long, it would be all the same proper to impose upon you with a minor correction. I think, however, that you would perhaps be better disposed to such a correction if I thanked you for writing to me in the first place, as well as the content of your letter. And so I thank you.

You promise to be open. Good! Openness is the most important thing in correspondence; otherwise there would be no reason to even begin it. Always write straight from the heart. Write what is on your mind, and take care to state fully the questions which are stirring in your head and beg for an answer. Only then will solutions be determined, just as the dried out ground receives water. This is the simplest method by which we not only acquire but also resolve various concepts in our mind, clarifying subjects and matters that are considered essential in establishing a clear vision for our soul. What would be the use if I were to write you about one thing, and your mind was occupied with something else? It would be empty words, as if two people were having a conversation with their backs turned to each other, and each person was simply discussing what was in front of his own eyes. It seems that we have already established that we will not concern ourselves with absent-minded matters, or simply draw up plans and theories; instead, our conversation will be on life's everyday occurrences. And so we will proceed step by step.

You write that you are "dazzled." You say, "For about two days I have been making the usual social rounds. First I went to the theater, then I went merry-making, then I went to a

party. What kind of crowd is this, with the kinds of things they talk about, the kinds of abstruse opinions they have about everything, the kinds of manners they have? All this is barbarous to me, and I will never be able to collect my thoughts in this mob."

This is the first time you have been exposed to this; you will get used to it. The impression you have received, after your quiet and simple family life in the village, is entirely in the order of things. That is where your judgment was formed as to what is true and false in life, although I am not exactly sure just what it is that has lodged itself in your mind from the past. It is also possible that, while on the surface there seems to be disapproval of such things, deeper down there is sympathy for them and a desire to repeat them. The life of which you have seen a small part has astonishing characteristics. Those who participate in it also see that everything is not what it seems, but all the same they are drawn to it, like an opium addict, who knows what is in store for him: He is like a madman, who, in spite of everything, takes his drug, or perhaps for that very reason he takes it.

How are you doing? Are you still attracted to that place? Would you find it desirable to live your life in this way? I ask you to sketch me a little picture... and be truthful.



What can I say to those people who, in the Church, neither stand in silence, nor join in the singing, but instead meet one another and mix our reasonable worship of God with worldly chatter? They do not listen themselves to the divinely inspired words and prevent others who want to listen from doing so. And as Elijah the Tishbite would say *How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him.* (1 Kgs 18:21). You want simultaneously to come together for prayer and for worldly, ill-timed words. Of course you succeed in neither purpose, because you destroy the one with the other, or rather, they destroy each other. How long before you stop talking idly in this place? You make this house of prayer into a place of business or impassioned speech (*My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves—Lk 19:46*). In this house the words of eternal life are both spoken and heard, on the one hand by us, as we beseech God for eternal life with unashamed hope, and on the other hand by God, as He gives eternal life to those who ask with their whole heart and mind. But He will not give it to those who do not even apply their whole tongue, as it were, to asking.

St. Gregory Palamas

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CHRIST IS RISEN!

The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor or the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN

PASCHAL GREETINGS

By Metropolitan Laurus (+2008).

In these Paschal days of spring, when nature is awakening from the snows of winter, these words of the Paschal canon become particularly meaningful. *Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord*, God says through the mouth of King David. (Pss 150:6). And, *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork*. (Pss 18:1).

During these days, we sense with new strength that even inanimate, unconscious creation unceasingly offers up praise to its Creator.

But what of man, the reason-endowed crown of creation? The overwhelming majority of men have rejected their Creator, have perverted the divine gift of reason, turning it into something to advance their own glorification, and not the name of God.

We have been created to love and glorify the Lord willingly and consciously, as the Apostle Paul says: *Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.* (1 Thess 5:17-18). Extending His great love toward us, to set aright what had been trampled underfoot, the Lord sent His only-begotten Son, Who has shown us that

only through the voluntary bearing of our cross are we able to restore within ourselves the fallen image of man.

He came to adopt us, that we might become Christians, people of Christ, not only in name, but in deed, in our manner of life.

Water mingles with water, and oil with oil; and for us to become one with Christ we must become like unto Him.



And for this it is essential that we constantly uplift ourselves to Him in spirit, that we pray to Him, that we always remember Him, not only during Great Lent and Pascha, but continually.

And for this we must, from one year to the next, connect this Paschal joy to the next Paschal joy, until, by the mercy of God, we reach the eternal Pascha and enter into the never-ending joy of our Lord.

One may reduce the meaning of any given prayer of ours to the words of the Paschal canon: *Grant that we may truly partake of Thee in the never-waning day of Thy kingdom.*

It is my earnest desire that the risen Lord grant this to all of us and to our whole God-loving flock on these great and saving days of the radiant Resurrection of Christ.

Truly Christ is risen!

+Metropolitan Laurus

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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THE DORMITION OF OUR MOST HOLY LADY, THE THEOTOKOS AND EVER-VIRGIN MARY

Source: 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 Dormition 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 occur the Incarnation of God the Word, 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 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 as his own mother, 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. The faithful became quite distraught 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.



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Orthodox Heritage may, at times, bring up issues or present articles that some consider controversial. Such material is presented so that a distinction is made between salvation and the 20th century heresy of ecumenism. These are confusing times for the Orthodox faithful, and political correctness must be sacrificed so that His truth be brought forth.

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Our most Pure Lady arranged for her sole possessions, her two garments, to be given to two poor widows who had faithfully served her throughout the years that followed our Lord's Crucifixion and Resurrection. 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 15th, 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 whatsoever, 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, St. 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 extend farewell to the Immaculate Mother. Taking pity upon him, the Apostles decided to open the Holy Mother's 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 the Immaculate Mother of God, standing in the air and surrounded by a multitude of angels; and gazing upon them, she said: *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.

† † †

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.

[Exaposteilarion chanted during the Dormition Fast]

ST. JOHN THE WONDERWORKER, BISHOP OF SHANGHAI AND SAN FRANCISCO [FEASTDAY JULY 1ST]

By Archimandrite Demetrios (Carrelas). A Sermon delivered during the Divine Liturgy at Holy Virgin Cathedral in San Francisco, on the Feast of St. John (Maximovitch), June 30, 2012. Archimandrite Demetrios (Carrelas) is chaplain of the Holy Monastery of the Nativity of the Theotokos (Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Pittsburgh).

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!

I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. (Jn 10:11) In his teaching on these words from today's Gospel lesson, St. Gregory the Dialogist reminds us that our Lord came into the world and died for us, *in order to change His Body and Blood into a Sacrament for us, and to satisfy the sheep He has redeemed with His own body as food.* And having risen from the dead, ascended to the right hand of the Father, and sent the All-Holy and Life-giving Spirit upon His Apostles at Pentecost, our Most-sweet Lord Jesus then permeated the living presence of His Body and Blood by the *laying on of hands*—through which He anointed pious men to become good Shepherds to His sheep, until His awesome and fearful return to judge the earth.

What a sacred honor it is for this sinful and unworthy priest to be in the presence of the living holy relics of one of our Lord's true Shepherds of souls: our holy Father among the Saints, John of Shanghai and San Francisco! Some of you present today were blessed to have worshipped with St. John, and directly received his Spirit-filled teachings and guidance, before God called him into His Heavenly Kingdom. And yet, far from leaving you few eyewitnesses as orphans, our All-Compassionate Saviour has made St. John accessible to everyone here and to the entire world. What overflowing Grace has God poured out upon our humble Shepherd! Who can number the countless thousands of souls who—through prayers, letters and/or kneeling before his sacred, incorrupt body—have received soul and body healings for themselves and for others?

Indeed, as these words—taken from his Akathist—exclaim, St. John is: *a helper of all who call upon [him] with faith; an infirmary where every ailment is healed; refreshing water for those perishing in the heat of sorrows; one who works wonders for those who come to [his] relics with faith and love; one whose*

love knows no bounds of country and race; a fountain of miracles poured out by God.

In addition to his miracle-working powers, we are also blessed to have his Spirit-filled teachings for the nourishment and healing of our wounded souls. And how desperately we need those teachings today, my beloved sojourners on the sea of life! They are words of one who has become the Gospel of Jesus Christ in his thoughts, words and actions. They are words of a true Shepherd, and not those of a hireling, who—as the Lord says—*sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf seizes them and scatters the sheep*—that noetic wolf, the evil one, who comes *to steal, and slay, and destroy* as many souls as possible.

While he walked amongst us, St. John was God's instrument to protect a large number of souls from the devil's efforts to destroy them. Today, he continues to be God's

instrument—on an even greater scale—to transform those who seek his divine intercession: so that the various afflictions and injustices one encounters in life become sources of joy and hope, rather than sorrow and despair; so that the loss of such temporal things as material wealth and physical well-being, give birth to spiritual treasures and soul-healings that are eternal; so that one's superficial self-centered existence, becomes a profound Christ-centered life!

Permit me to share a few *spiritual morsels* from the great banquet of his teachings. St. John reminds us that “God's grace always assists the struggler ... What is important is not victory, or the position of a victor, but rather the labor of striving towards God and devotion to Him.” The Saint refers to these words of St. Paul: that God's *power is made perfect in weakness*

(2 Cor 12:9); and he adds that “the power of God is effective when a person asks for the help of God, acknowledging the weakness and sinfulness of his nature.” This is why St. John believes that “humility and striving towards God are the fundamental virtues of a Christian.” Are these primary virtues alive in the trenches of our daily lives? An old priest once told me: “This temporal life will be either one of agony or struggle: with Christ it is a struggle, without Him, it is agony.” Today, do our lives personify someone who is struggling with Christ, or in agony without Him?

In a sermon he gave over 50 year ago, St. John lamented that “public life had departed from Christian paths.” O my dear brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus, what would our



St. John the Wonderworker, serving in Tunis 1952—surrounded by the Uncreated Light

holy Hierarch say about the condition of society today? In the last 39 years we have “legally” slaughtered 56 million pre-born babies upon the ungodly altar of privacy, convenience and profit. Euthanasia is now legal in at least two states, and strong efforts are in place to make this a national pastime in a few years. Many high-level politicians and judges are now assaulting the institution of marriage. Last year, the President declared that the entire month of June is now to be celebrated as National LGBT Month, so as to seemingly bestow our Nation’s approval on these soul-destroying lifestyles. And the organization of Planned Parenthood, in addition to killing over 300,000 babies a year for profit, is seeking to brainwash even our grade school children with their sex education literature, which destroys the Christian virtues of purity and modesty, and glorifies all sins of the flesh! Our Nation has replaced God’s Truth with man’s fallen reasoning. Do not these words of the holy Prophet Isaiah succinctly describe the condition of our society today? “*Woe to them that call evil good and good evil; who make darkness light and light darkness. . . . Woe to them who are wise in their own conceit . . . who justify the ungodly for rewards, and take away the righteousness of the righteous*” (Isa 5:20-23)!

Only God’s Truth, as preserved in our Holy Orthodox Faith, can save our society from its rapid descent into irreversible perdition. Our beloved holy Hierarch, Fr. John, devoted every fiber of his being to upholding the true doctrine and moral integrity of our Holy Orthodox Faith. He daily entreated our Lord to both help and strengthen him to actively “labor unto death” for that Truth. And, through the grace of God, he continues that active labor! By his example, we see that Holy Orthodoxy cannot simply be a part of our lives. It cannot be something that we turn on and off, like the appliances we use. Our Holy Faith must be present in all aspects of our lives: from the way we worship God in the Divine Liturgy, to the way we drive our cars; from the manner in which we make the sign of the Cross, to the manner in which we prepare a meal, raise our children, or perform our secular work. Only by striving with all of our strength to live the Faith in this manner can we come to truly know Christ—to truly know ourselves.

Because he incarnated God’s Truth in all of his words and actions, St. John received a number of heavenly crowns; which include: Confessor, Defender of the Faith and—in a spiritual sense—Martyr. Today in the United States, where are the defenders of the Faith? Where are the confessors? Where are the martyrs? Where are those, both clergy and laity, who—like St. John—are being “reproached, persecuted, and having every evil word being said falsely against them on account of Christ and His One True Church?” Is it possible that we have allowed both the demands and sensual pleasures of our society to put us in a state of spiritual lethargy and indifference—as individuals, as parishes, as jurisdictions? Is it possible that we

have lost touch with the true *fronema* (mindset) of our Faith, and replaced it with the politically correct, compromising and secular humanistic mindset of our society?

Beloved Orthodox Christians, is it not the time for all of us to beg our Saviour’s forgiveness for the occasions in which we ourselves have compromised, watered-down—even denied—the sacred Truths of our Faith, in our thoughts, our words, our actions? Is it not the time to bend the knees of our hearts to the Lord—entreating Him to raise up martyrs, confessors, and defenders of the Faith, who—like our St. John—will be His instruments to proclaim and uphold the true doctrine of Holy Orthodoxy—some of whom may be standing amongst us at this very moment?

It is the eleventh hour! Two generations ago, St. John called upon the Orthodox faithful to become God’s instruments to manifest “the spiritual and moral rebirth of our society.” Today, his call is directed to each one of us; and it is even more profound than it was 60 years ago. Our holy Hierarch, Fr. John, awaits our answer. What will it be?

He who has ears to hear, let him hear!



Notice how all creation praises the Virgin Mother, not just in past times but *forever, even ever and ever*. From this we can see that she will never cease doing good, not just to the human race but also to the immaterial, supernatural host of angels. The fact that they, like us, partake of and touch the intangible divine nature only through her, is clearly shown by the holy prophet Isaiah. For he did not see the Seraphim taking the live coal directly off the altar, but picking it up with tongs, which he also used to touch his prophetic lips to purify them: *Then flew one of the Seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.* (Isa 6:6-7). The vision of the tongs is the same as that great vision, which Moses saw, of the *bush burning with fire but not consumed.* (Exo 3:2).

Is there anyone who is unaware that the Virgin Mother is both that bush and those tongs, which held the divine fire without being burned? For was it not to this very mystery that the Archangel ministered at her conception, which united through her the One Who takes away the sin of the world from the race of men? And which, through this indescribable union, has thoroughly cleansed us? She alone stands at the border between the created and uncreated nature, and no one can come to God unless he is truly illumined by her—the true lamp of divine radiance. *For God is in the midst of her, says the Scripture, she shall not be moved.* (Pss 46:5).

St. Gregory Palamas

ON CONSERVATIVES AND LIBERALS

By Fr. John Romanides (+2001), from "Patristic Theology," ch. 29.



In their mudslinging campaign, the opponents of the hesychast revival have now called the supporters of this tradition "conservative." But what does the word "conservative" mean in the West? In the West, a conservative is someone who still identifies the Bible with God's revelation to

mankind and the world, because in the old days, Protestants and Roman Catholics believed in the literal inspiration of Holy Scripture. In other words, they believed that Christ dictated the Bible word for word to the prophets and writers of the Gospels by means of the Holy Spirit, so that the writers of the Bible were like scribes who wrote down whatever they heard the Holy Spirit say.

But now Biblical criticism has come along and discredited this line of thought, dividing those in the Protestant world into conservative and liberal camps. For example, the Lutherans are divided into conservative and liberal factions. In America, there are separate Lutheran churches—one church for liberals, and the church of the Missouri synod for conservatives. One faction does not accept the Bible as revelation on absolute terms, while the other faction does. One can also observe the same phenomenon with the Baptists. The liberal Baptists do not accept the Holy Scripture as literally inspired revelation, while the others embrace it as revelation that is inspired word for word. You can also find the same division among the Methodists. In fact, this split between liberals and conservatives over the issue of Holy Scripture can be seen in all the Protestant denominations in America.

Now, ask yourself whether this division can be applied to Orthodox tradition. Are there conservative Fathers and liberal Fathers with respect to the Bible? Is there a single Church Father who teaches the literal inspiration of Holy Scripture? Is there a single Church Father who identifies the Holy Scripture with the experience of *theosis* itself? No, there is not one, because God's revelation to mankind is the experience of *theosis*. In fact, since revelation is the experience of *theosis*, an experience that transcends all expressions and concepts, the identification of Holy Scripture with revelation is, in terms of dogmatic theology, pure heresy.

Can someone who accepts this Patristic teaching on *theosis* be characterized as conservative, based on the split over Scripture in the Protestant world? When liberal Protestants hear about this Patristic principle, they say, "Oh yes, that's liberalism," while conservative Protestants say, "No, it's heresy!" In other words, when we follow the Fathers, we Orthodox are heretics as far as conservative Protestants are concerned.

You may well ask, "who are the Orthodox liberals and the Orthodox conservatives?" They are those who do theology in a way that corresponds to the theology of Protestant liberals and conservatives. This is the reason why certain theologians in Greece have been divided into liberal and conservatives camps. The liberals follow liberal Protestants on these subjects while the conservatives follow their conservative counterparts.

But can we classify Patristic tradition using such characterizations and buzzwords? Of course not. Nevertheless, a *hesychast* theologian of the Eastern Church will be viewed as a liberal in the West, because he refuses to identify the written text of Holy Scripture, including its sayings and concepts, with revelation.

Since revelation is the experience of *theosis*, it is beyond comprehension, expression, and conceptualization. This means that the labels "conservative" or "liberal" should not be applied to those who adhere to the Orthodox tradition. Based on what is meant by revelation, the Fathers are neither liberals nor conservatives. Simply put, there are Church Fathers who are saints of the Church who have only reached *illumination* and there are saints of the Church who have also reached *theosis* and are more glorious than the former class of saints.

This is the Patristic tradition—either you attain to *illumination* or you attain to *theosis* (once you have already passed through *illumination*). Orthodox tradition is nothing other than this curative course of treatment through which the *nous* is purified, illumined, and eventually glorified together with the entire man, if God so wills. Therefore, is there such a thing as an illumined liberal or an illumined conservative in this context? Of course not.

You are either illumined or you are not. You have either reached *theosis* or you have not. You have either undergone this treatment, or you have not. Apart from these distinctions, there are no others.



Christ does not need us, for He has thousands of angels who serve Him impeccably. In addition, by a word He is able to create thousands more of these holy beings. But His infinite love constrains Him to be concerned about us, without being disgusted by our stench and our festering wounds. So let us remember this love of God at every moment of our life, so that we shall do our worthless deeds solely for the love of God.

Just think—we were not crucified for our Christ, our Savior, whereas on behalf of us monstrosities, He endured death on a cross for the sake of obedience!

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou
From "Counsels for the Holy Mountain"

THE PASSION OF HOMOSEXUALITY ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

By Archimandrite Sarantis Sarantou, parish priest of the Dormition of the Theotokos Greek Orthodox Church in Marousi, Greece; published on the official website of the Holy Metropolis of Kifisia, Amoros and Oropos on June 16th, 2013.

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature. And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

[Rom 1:26-27]

† † †



Our holy Apostle Paul, according to the Holy Fathers, is the voice of Christ, and divine Chrysostom is the mouth of Apostle Paul. Commenting on the very important epistle to the Romans, St. John Chrysostom gives a divinely inspired analysis of homosexuality, among other issues.

All passions degrade humanity, but especially the mania of men for men. He summarily characterizes homosexuality as an unforgivable passion; this is not just because it really is, but also because the entire male personality becomes so distorted that a chronic allegiance to this abomination sets in; it thus becomes an immensely difficult passion to restrain by the fallen.

The golden words of Chrysostom are remarkably balanced. His unshakable logic, which he uses to spiritually support his flock, is universally acknowledged to be inspired by the Holy Spirit. Not even foreign rationalist Protestant researchers challenge him. It is precisely his rock of faith and deep love in Christ that are needed for all of us, in these difficult days that we are going through; thus, it is vital that we very carefully listen to him. Here is the order he chose for his compelling argument:

1. The holy Apostle first places the entire problem of homosexuality on a spiritual basis. In the twenty-fifth verse of the Epistle to the Romans of chapter one, he writes: *They changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever...* The divine Chrysostom points out that there was a distortion in the creation of God. God did not prevent the natural relationship between the sexes, so they “justifiably” fall into the strange madness of *males having left the natural use of the female.*

In the deep psyche of the homosexual world there is an autonomy of individual and selfish choice against the truth of God, a deep preference towards falsehood. It is for this reason that the way homosexuals display and advertise their “diversity” is very provocative. Arrogant attitudes and cocky appearances are displayed on television, and inaccuracies and falsehoods are spread about their demonic way of life. This is exactly why St. John Chrysostom boldly states: “Their ideology is satanic, and their life demonic.” Thus, God abandons these people, who twist the truth concerning the creation of man and present falsehood with offensive boldness, namely that their perversion is an issue of genes or free sexual choice. And, “when God abandons, everything is turned upside down.” A person’s entire mental state is flipped, his entire psychology and bodily existence transgress towards a psychopathological state. And it is exactly for all these reasons that the problem of homosexuality is primarily of a spiritual nature.

2. Moreover, says St. John Chrysostom, God put before them, the homosexuals, the “world” and “the mind of man.” The vast majority of people accept, admit and deterministically are given over to the physical attraction between sexes and enjoy a lawful and proper relationship. This is what is meant by the “world.” The prototype of the “mind of man,” from his initial creation (and as implanted by his Creator), can distinguish the natural relationship of man and woman and takes rest in it. The other mental choice is one characterized by a voluntarily intentional misunderstanding of what is natural; its resulting impact is quite tragic. Man is dragged into the most dishonorable of passions, rejecting natural relations with a woman and frantically seeking to be satisfied through another man, autonomously, selfishly, without any preconditions, and entirely unblessed. This is why according to the holy Father this passion is unforgivable, because homosexuals do not engage in the natural human experience and the God-given inclination of the mind.

It is very sad today that young boys and girls are lured into silly and provocative so-called “homosexual programs” on television that selfishly allege to want to “break away,” as they say, from their traditional parents, some of whom cannot hide the panic before such havoc “choices” of their sons or daughters. No news channel lately mentions, however, the ever lurking dangers of the AIDS disease. As a matter of fact, what were frequently reported news stories have nowadays completely disappeared.

3. What is even more dishonorable and disgraceful for mankind is that this degrading passion has infected women in equally frightening proportions. Even though they should be ashamed, today under the propaganda of the New Age, women find themselves more empowered than men, becoming more confused and callous than ever, while concurrently insisting upon their God-creating power of motherhood.

The divine Father relies on the archetypal creation of the couple, as is divinely inspired and emphatically recorded in the Old Testament book of Genesis. God's intent has been defiled; man, as the wise head, first and foremost ought to help woman think wisely and act correctly. Instead, he drags her to the godless and inhuman passion of sodomy. From the outset in Paradise, he degenerates this blessed relationship with abominable hostility. Though man was appointed a teacher of woman, and woman a helpmate of man, in the end they ended up outside the Church and outside the blessing of God, hostile on many levels and partaking in the shameful works of darkness.

4. The divine Chrysostom claims that prudence according to Christ dictated that the holy Apostle Paul was to speak humbly, candidly and chastely, but his words must also sting the ears of his audience. The divine Father says: "He does not say that they were enamored of, and lusted after one another, but, 'they burned in their lust one toward another.'" The verb "burned" does not denote a strong erotic desire, but indicates an unrestrained and unsatisfied burning. This vague verb is passively used to signify the constant unsatisfied erotic homosexual desire among women. Later he uses it towards men to complete the word "unseemly," thus indicating the violation of God's law and the insult done to the male sex as well as the opposite sex. Homosexual acts by both sexes demean, for these relationships are completely perverted. They transgress God's elect laws for natural eroticism, bringing shame to their own and to the opposite sex which they despise. It is for this reason that they are completely abandoned by God, reaching the worst, the most unheard of and lamentable, supposedly erotic sexual behaviors.

According to St. John Chrysostom, not even wild animals go beyond their heterosexual boundaries. They live according to their erotic nature and compulsion which was granted to them by the Creator, for the purpose of perpetuating their species. A relative reduction in their ferocity is achieved during commingling, a certain intimacy, tameness and relief.

5. According to the *in the image and likeness* creation of the first couple by the personal will of God, they should have lived in perfect marital unity. This most philanthropic will of the Triadic God was envied by the devil and, when presented with the opportunity (and ever since the time of the fall of man) he has zealously pursued unforeseen obstacles in every

married couple, for the sole purpose of overwhelming this blessed union. As an extreme consequence of this deep hatred towards mankind, there has appeared among men and women this disgraceful and ingrained passion of homosexuality; consequently, those men and women who are subdued to this evil passion do not come forward to the blessed sacrament of Marriage and thus exclude themselves from the divine plan of creation, which is fulfilled in the birth of children. (*Ed.*, with the recent legalization of "marriage" among homosexuals, the plans of the evil one are reaching new levels of "legalized immorality.")

6. According to St. John Chrysostom, homosexuals should be the most unhappy and pitiable of people even if they were successful in all other levels of life. But their self-awareness is so deficient and their conceit so inflated, that they consider themselves and put themselves forward as the happiest of all, while others, those who live normally, are according to them ill and oppressed. St. John Chrysostom unequivocally argues that they already live in hell existentially and certainly the fire of Gehenna awaits them. He has the deep and broad experience of the sacred confessional, in which, no matter how much they want to pretend, eventually they cannot hide their deep pain and blood which drips from every section of their heart. And when sincerity finds them during their confessions, they easily and willingly admit that this deceptive homosexual companionship has proven to be impossible and unrealizable.

So that the Saint becomes more believable, he describes two examples of two very strange people. Suppose I saw, he says, a young man running around naked besmeared with mire and exulting that he is clean and well washed. He also spoke of a young virgin, if she was enclosed in a house and condemned to have intercourse with an animal, and afterwards rejoiced in it. The one who compelled her, argued the Saint, is worse than a murderer because he ruined her soul and her body. How truly twisted man becomes when he distances himself from the true Triadic God and His saving Church!

Young people today (as well men and women of older age groups) are trapped in mindless ways, in the nets of charming people, who sneakily lead them into sodomy. There is no more terrible thing than such an attack, says the Saint. "And that you may learn what the real force of this is, if any one were to come and assure you that he would make you



a dog instead of being a man, would you not flee from him as a plague? But, lo! You have not made yourself a dog, but an animal more disgraceful than this. For a dog is useful for service, but he that has thus given himself up is serviceable for nothing.” If somebody threatened men that he could make them able to conceive, to become pregnant, to give birth, to go through the time of postpartum, what would you do, how would you react? Would you turn yourself upside down with your screams due to the strangeness of it, or would you bask passively, with fears and complexes? What is then your reaction my man, to all that you observe the homosexuals enable within your society?

7. In the inspired Old Testament, the terrible situation that was created in the society of Sodom and Gomorrah is described articulately and vividly, just before the pouring out of the just wrath of God and the complete destruction of these ancient cities that once flourished. Below we will provide excerpts that exemplify the level of alienation for any homosexual, as well as their erotic companions, and the entire social environment which tolerates, accepts or admits with every readily available communication means with them and cooperates accordingly at all levels of life. The defilement of it is contagious, if it is accepted for reasons of “politeness” so that we are not considered bigots. The “immune system” in Christ is sickened, the psychology of our youth is affected, and the demonic convention finds grounding to corrupt places, souls, mentalities, and easy companions.



Genesis 19:1-11

And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground. And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night. And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat.

But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter. And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? Bring them out unto us, that we may know them.

And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, and said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly. Behold

now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof.

And they said, Stand back. And they said again, This one fellow came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now will we deal worse with thee, than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, even Lot, and came near to break the door. But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door.

And they smote the men that were at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door.

Saint John Chrysostom persistently stands before the exemplary catastrophe of Sodom and Gomorrah and guides his flock through education to strengthen their moral immune system in Christ; he aims to accomplish this in a timely manner

so that his spiritual children escape this defilement before it takes on epidemic proportions. The fiery rain of Sodom and Gomorrah was so catastrophic that it made their land barren and unable to produce anything that could contribute to new life flourishing, a new human society, a new civilization.

8. For educative purposes we should distinguish homosexuals who have not fallen into carnal sin, and those men or women who have “freed themselves from the taboos of the past” and are having carnal relations and perhaps have even entered into a modern homosexual cohabitation.

The first group struggle very hard to get rid of the demon of homosexuality. The demon engages into a fierce battle with the struggling homosexual, and his efforts are focused upon strong thoughts in the mind of the struggling man or woman, to blacken his or her soul and thus tear down his “competitor.” The second, who have entangled themselves by consent in carnal homosexual sin, should ask with inner pain for the mercy of God, should go to confession frequently and with honesty, and eventually they will benefit from Divine mercy. They will accomplish, together with the Lord, in disbanding the “machinations of the enemy” and shake off the abominable carnal homosexual sin and thus annul the wiles of the devil. The support of a spiritual father beside them is needed, guiding them in Christ until they are able to understand that correction and the straight path is not impossible, for *what is impossible with man, is possible with God.*

I humbly agree that in this contemporary “sinful and adulterous” generation, in which homosexuality seems to be cel-

ebated, spiritual fathers are the only ones who show true understanding to those who sin heavily, and they help them come to the knowledge of their situation, to repent, and to become living members of the Church and be saved.

9. It is understood that, in the circle of priests, homosexuality is unthinkable. Even the simplest carnal sins are obstacles to priesthood. The saints of our Church believe that even the smallest hair in the eye of a person causes tingling and pain and it takes many tears to remove it from the eye. It is likewise for any clergy candidate, and much more for the active clergyman; if there is the slightest carnal sin, he cannot rest in his priestly ministry, but is tormented and suffers.

Homosexuality is the greatest of sins, which irrevocably prevents one from entering priesthood (and of course the Church does not allow any homosexual to be elevated to priesthood, even if he has stopped the sin for years). St. Basil the Great considers homosexuality or lesbianism a beastly sin: "Abusers of themselves with mankind and with beasts, just as is the case with murderers, wizards, adulterers, and idolaters, are deserving of the same punishment" (Canon 7 of St. Basil the Great). Saint Gregory of Nyssa characterizes homosexuality as "unnatural" in his 4th Canon. Saint John the Faster observes in his 19th Canon, according to the compilation of *The Rudder* by St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, the following: "A boy who has been ruined by any man cannot come into the holy priesthood. For although on account of his immature age he did not sin himself, yet the vessel of his body was rent and became useless in connection with the sacred priesthood."

10. Unfortunately there exists within our Holy Orthodox Church an organized group of homosexual clergy. These men, by their provocative behavior and by their obscene insistence on mortally sinning, take others by the neck and drag them to hell from this life, preparing them, alas, for eternal hell, even though they ought to grab them from the abyss of destruction and reconcile them once again with Christ.

The psychology of clergy possessed by the deadly passion of homosexuality mutates essentially into having a persecution mentality by the Church. The residual, ingrained faint voice of their conscience cries out for them being on the wrong course and for their daily exemplification of a loud but degraded persona. Incredible nervousness bifurcates their personality, and there is obsessive antipathy towards specific individuals, terrible negligence in their liturgical and pastoral duties, disregard for their family (if by chance they are married), and a substantial annihilation of their angelic schema (if they are unmarried). Manic behaviors, with various sophistries regarding the sacred Canons and with hypocritical and pious excuses, they endlessly try to modernize the Church.

Unfortunately within such a group of homosexual clergymen there has developed an illusory and deceptive climate of supposed love and support for one another. Young inexperienced candidate clergy, if not guided by an experienced spiri-

tual and pious Orthodox mindset, are likely to be ensnared by the exaggerated zealous protectionism indicated above. They are bound emotionally, and through a "friendship" with these patrons of theirs (and if there is some tendency towards homosexuality) they basically become victims of this homosexual network with devastating consequences, ultimately for the former and the latter. The evil of these organized groups, or the ones that are less methodical (i.e., more individualized), continues with scenarios and pitfalls set up across the world by the wicked and cunning serpent, the devil. If the candidate or young clergyman joins and stays within the circles of homosexuals, he will certainly suffer the consequences of the corresponding associative uniqueness of the homosexual circle as well as the terrible alienation against the measures and molds which experienced and knowledgeable homosexual patrons are imposing.

There are also rare exceptions of repentant or remorseful homosexual clergymen, who are suffering spiritually, psychologically, existentially and perhaps physically; nothing can grant them rest and quiet from the relentless torture of their conscience. **If they do not deeply repent and give up their high pastoral office, they will never rest and acquire the inner experience of complete forgiveness by God.**

11. The holy elder Paisios often spoke of the power of spiritual laws. Because homosexuality is an abominable sin before the Triune God and offends His all-wise and personal creative care for people, the counsel of God allows, in the operation of spiritual laws, to deregulate the immune system of the human body, resulting in dire health consequences, which in time often leads to death. Why does the media minimize the high risk of AIDS and over-advertise homosexuality? Or do they not know the exponential increase of bearers and patients of AIDS across the world?

Disappointing are the descriptions made to us in Holy Confession by homosexual patients with AIDS. Dissolved personalities, sad ruins struggling to survive, alternating heavy treatments, remorseful for reckless impassioned homosexual intercourse that have brought them down to pathetic skeletons. Avid seekers of perversion, they lured into demonic pleasure others as their supposed erotic partners, whom they initially completely trusted and in the end were left miserably cheated, all alone, in their existential loneliness.

For all of the above corruption to not occur, with its terrible pathogenesis and unimaginably tragic side-effects, St. John Chrysostom suggests active use of spiritual drugs in Christ. His primary therapeutic guideline is awareness of the omnipresence of God. Nothing destroys people more than unawareness and the criminal forgetfulness of God. But nothing saves him more than seeing the All-good Lord noetically, Who was crucified for us and rose from the dead, and to call upon His All-holy Name. Only in this way will the corruption of homosexuality be forgiven...

THE MYSTERIES OF AGHIA SOPHIA FRIGHTEN THE MUSLIM TURKS

By Nikos Hilodakou, journalist, author and Turkish historian.



From the moment that Constantinople fell to the Ottomans and Mohammad Fattish entered the great Church of Saint Sophia on his white stallion, he remained transfixed for a long time by the icon of Christ in the dome. This is according to Turkish sources. This immense Church of Orthodoxy became the epicenter of different myths and legends, which circulate amongst the conquerors eliciting an intense sense of awe for this great accomplishment of Orthodoxy (and which now is surrounded by four Ottoman minarets).

But during the last few years, certain events centered around Saint Sophia and, specifically with the unexpected discovery of an Angel in the summer of 2008 in the dome, has elicited, amongst the Turks, an intense sense of suspense and fear about the future. In connection with this, all those legends have re-surfaced recently and at times have shocked and brought to the Muslims a sense of fear. This fear is that the Orthodox Christian identity will once again rise up in spite of the fact that up until 1934 the Church was used as a Muslim mosque.

In this context of events, on January 20th, 2012, the Turkish newspaper Sampach with a large circulation, presented a rather astonishing article about “The Mysteries of Saint Sophia.” It portrayed in a graceful way this climate of fear which has lately gripped the Turks in reference to the hidden things in the Holy Church and about all the things that will happen in the future.

The first significant element taken from that article is the indescribable fear which is revealed by the Turks concerning the hidden crosses, both symbolical and not, which are found on the interior of the Church and are also seen by the ground plan of the Church from above. As such, the Turks express great awe for the so-called “Cross of the Apostle Saint Andrew.” As is well known, St. Andrew is the founder of the Church of Constantinople. According to the newspaper Sampach, a Cross of Saint Andrew is found on

the roof of the Church etched in a diagonal form. It is a significant symbol which not only was not lost throughout the ages of the Ottoman occupation but also dominates the area with its symbolic meaning. In addition to this, “The Cross of Justinian” terrifies the Turks. Their legend refers to a very ancient jewel which is found mystically in Saint Sophia and in fact comes from Egypt and has great power. Generally speaking, the construction of this great Orthodox architectural masterpiece, according to the same Turkish sources, is based on the Christian symbol of the Cross and this reality generates a sense of awe and fear about the future return of Saint Sophia to its traditional occupants, in other words, to Hellenic Orthodox worship.

But in addition to the crosses, the Turks refer to other mysterious and fearful things that are found in the interior of the Church. As is referred to in the legend, it is known that after the Church was turned into a Muslim mosque,



the well-known Muslim Mihramp was built. It is the Muslim place of prayer, and is found on the eastern side of the Church in the direction of Mecca. But great interest exists, according to the Turkish legends, to that which is in front of the Mihramp. A casket is buried there constructed of bronze and gilded with gold. In this casket lays the body of Queen Sophia. Most likely her name is in reference to Saint Sophia. This Queen Sophia and her casket are connected, according to Turkish legend, with a commandment that has existed for centuries up to the present day. This commandment directs that no one should ever disturb the casket, not even to touch it. If something like that should happen, then according

to the legend it will initiate the rising of Queen Sophia. If this should happen then a frightful noise shall shake the whole structure of the Church initiating eschatological seismic events that will be deleterious to the Turks.

This legend of Queen Sophia continues as follows. According to Turkish references, the casket is protected by four Archangels who are found on the dome of the Church. These Archangels, who the Turks believe exist, are: Tzemprael, Michael, Israfel and Azarael. The Turks say that Tzemprael protects the Byzantine Emperors, Michael protects the Church from hostile attacks, while Tzemprael and Israfel were those who proclaimed the events leading to hostile attacks. Tzemprael and Israfel were the angels that proclaimed the events of the warring efforts of the Byzantine Emperors. And these four

Archangels have been assigned after the Fall of Constantinople to protect the casket of Queen Sophia from the danger of someone profane who might try to open it and bring about the Second Coming of Christ.

Another important legend which is referred to by the Muslims is the legend "Of the Hidden Patriarch" which is similar to the Greek legend about the "hidden priest." As it is referred in Turkish tradition, on the south side of the Church is a narrow passage way. The passage way leads to a very old web covered mysterious door which is referred to in the legend as "The Closed Door." According to Turkish references, when Mohammed Fattish entered Constantinople, the last Greek Orthodox Patriarch and his whole escort entered through that door which closed behind them. From that moment these people disappeared while the door remained hermetically sealed and no one ever dares to open it. Every year during the Resurrection Service of the Orthodox Christians, according to the Turkish newspaper Sampach, red eggs appear in front of this door. The legend is completed in prophecy, which frightens the Turks, that when the door is opened, Orthodox Christian chanting will be heard in the Church again. This is why the Turks are frightened simply by thinking about opening this mysterious door.

The Turkish newspaper also reports about a mysterious underground tunnel that exists in a central location in the interior of the Church. As is reported, there is a double door which leads to a big tunnel. This tunnel leads to Prinkoniso, and potentially as far as the island Proti. The mystery for the Turks is how this tunnel was constructed and what role it played (or will play) in the long history of the Church.

Another mystery for the Turks is the imprint of the sole of a large animal, maybe an elephant, which is found on the southwestern section of the dome. And here it is reported that this is in reference to some eschatological stories. According to the Turks, this imprint is from the horse of Mohammed the Conqueror. But the question is how the horse was able to step upon a place that is so high on the dome.

The newspaper Sampach also reports that great awe is elicited among the Turks by the various mosaics within the Church of Saint Sophia, which have been uncovered with all their glory during the last ten years. This is in spite of the fact that the Muslim faith considers it a sin to create images of people who are related to religious events. They feel special awe about the mosaic which depicts Jesus with the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist on the right and left of Him. The Turks have named them "The Mosaic of the Apocalypse." And its symbolism opens up to us its eschatological meaning (which is very intense with the Muslim Turks).

Specific mention is made about the mosaic which depicts known Byzantine Emperors such as John Komnenos with Jesus Christ and the Emperor Constantine Monomachos

with the Empress Zoe. All of these depictions elicit intense admiration about this Greek Orthodox Christian majesty and the inner strength which emerge from these mosaics. They have also generated different legends about their eschatological symbolism, which vary amongst the Turks.

It can be surmised that all of these symbolisms are related to Turkish phobias that span many generations about the eventual re-establishment and authority of the Holy Eastern Roman Empire, with the blessing of Jesus Christ.



The contentious man, in whom there is no end of strife, is he who is not content with an initial disturbance, but goads himself to get angry for a second time. Obviously, if one gets angry and immediately comes to his senses, recognizes his mistake, and makes a prostration before the brother at whom he was angry, such a person is not called contentious. In the soul of this man, all strife is at rest, and for the present, by making a prostration to his brother, he has prevented the friendship from being destroyed, while in the future, by practicing repentance, he will come into a state of calm and tranquility.

However, one who gets angry and does not recognize his fault, but becomes still angrier, because he regrets that he did not say more than he did when he was upset, is called contentious. In his soul, strife never abates, and at the moment of strife, the agitation of his heart gives way to remembrance of wrongs, distress, and wickedness; and after this, the strife and the agitation caused by anger increase and multiply within him. That is, strife is aroused and it continues spreading until it completely dominates the hapless man and demonizes him. But may Jesus Christ, our good Master and Lord, deliver us from the lot of such people.

From the Gerontikon



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.

IS YOGA EXERCISE?

An encyclical (no. 14) issued on June 4, 2013 by Metropolitan Markos of Chios on Christians who practice Yoga and whether or not it is merely a physical exercise. He basically explains that the Hindu religious practice of yoga was established for the sole purpose of entering into a spiritual state, and never had anything to do with exercise until a few decades ago when Hindu yogis explained it this way when they were trying to win converts in the West.



To the sacred clergy and pious people of our sacred Metropolis.

My brethren,

A key feature of our time is the confusion observed in various aspects of human life. A characteristic example of this spiritual and existential confusion is the fact that yoga is fundamentally a religious technique of Hinduism, advertised in our country, in Europe and in the United States as an exercise-fitness solution which is offered to release us from the numerous problems stemming from a stressful lifestyle.

But what is yoga? The word yoga comes from the Sanskrit word *yuj* which means “to unite,” meaning the union of the individual soul with the impersonal Absolute One of Hinduism (see P. Schreiner, *Yoga: Wörterbuch des Christentums*, 1995, p. 1376). This union is considered a liberation and redemption of mankind from karma, that is, from the consequences that result from our choices and actions in supposedly previous lives. Moreover, concerning the term yoga, we must stress that it is used as a qualifying term of one of the six classical Orthodox schools of Hindu philosophy (see H. Baer, “Yoga,” in the *Lexikon der Sekten, Sohdergruppen und Weltanschauungen*, 7th Ed, 2001, pp. 1166-1174).

But is yoga exercise? Can one isolate the practical exercise from its religious content and background? Can one ignore the purpose for which it is used? Unquestionably no. And what about the claim of various centers, institutes, schools, groups, journals and gyms, that present it as lacking a religious nature, alleging it to be a “scientific” psychosomatic practice, or a practice for a simple existence and spiritual self-knowledge? Without doubt these assertions are inaccurate. They oftentimes misinform and confuse using an extremely attractive vocabulary (see R. Hauth, (Hrsg), *Kompaktlexikon Religionen*, 1998, p. 366).

On the contrary, yoga is a religious systematic theory, technique and method that evolves in stages and practices, one of which is meditation, which leads those who use it, with the guidance of a teacher (guru), to a singular life joined to the impersonal Absolute of Hinduism. In this way a person is redeemed and atones for the errors and mistakes made during the source of all supposedly previous incarnations.

From the above, therefore, we observe that the view of yoga simply as an exercise is incorrect. And this 1) because it is a fundamental feature of the Hindu system, 2) it cannot be stripped of its religious character according to the conditions of the content and purpose of exercise, 3) it is intrinsically linked to the anti-Christian concept of reincarnation, and 4) because it constitutes a humanistic effort towards redemption through techniques and exercises.

Why are the various techniques of yoga dangerous? The answer is given to us in an article on yoga from an authoritative encyclopedia *Δομή*. It says there: “It is known that the practice of yoga creates for the individual not entirely physiological properties—and parapsychological—because it reverses certain physical and mental functioning.” (*Δομή*, vol. 4, p. 199).

To conclude this brief offering of ours on whether or not yoga is exercise, we must again remind all of the obvious. The value of our identity as Orthodox Christians is incompatible with the use of Hindu religious practices in any aspect of our lives.

The salvation of man which is freely housed within the Church, is the work and offering of the love and grace of our Christ. For us does Paul say with all gravity: *For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.* (Gal 3:26-27), and: *Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?* (2 Cor 6:14-15).

With warm fatherly prayers,

+Bp. Markos

The Metropolitan of Chios, Psara and Oinousses



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Ἡ Κοίμησις τῆς Θεοτόκου

Τοῦ κ. Στεργίου Σάκκου, Ὁμοτ. Καθηγητοῦ Α.Π.Θ.

Κανένα ἄλλο πρόσωπο στὴν ἱστορία μας, τὴν ἀνθρώπινη, δὲν παρουσιάζει τόσο ἐπιτυχημένα τὸ ἀπολυτρωτικὸ καὶ ἐξαγιαστικὸ ἀποτέλεσμα, ποὺ εἶχε τὸ ἔργο τοῦ Χριστοῦ γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο, ὅσο ἡ Παναγία μας. Στὴ μορφὴ τῆς βλέπουμε ἀνάγλυφα πῶς ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐνώνεται μὲ τὸν Θεάνθρωπο καὶ γίνεται ἀνθρωπόθεος. Ἀναγνωρίζουμε τὸ ἀρχαῖο κάλλος, στὸ ὁποῖο μᾶς ἐπαναφέρει ἡ θυσία τοῦ Σταυροῦ, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν καινὴ κτίση, τὴν ὁποία κατεργάζεται ἡ δόξα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως. Διότι ἡ Παναγία δὲν ἔγινε μόνον Θεοτόκος, ἀλλὰ ὑπῆρξε καὶ ἡ Κεχαριτωμένη· οὔτε ἔμεινε ἀπλῶς Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀλλὰ παρέμεινε μαθήτρια τοῦ Υἱοῦ τῆς.

Δίκαια, λοιπόν, ἡ Παρθένος Μαρία θεωρεῖται σύμβολο καὶ ἀπαρχὴ τῆς νέας δημιουργίας, τῆς ἀναγεννημένης ἀνθρωπότητος, ἀντιπρόσωπος τοῦ θεωμένου ἀνθρώπου καὶ ἐκπρόσωπος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Πολλὰ χωρία τῆς Ἁγίας Γραφῆς προφητικὰ ἐφαρμόζονται ἀπὸ τοὺς πατέρες καὶ ἐρμηνευτὲς ὅμοια στὴν Παναγία, ὅσο καὶ στὴν Ἐκκλησία ἢ στὴν κάθε πιστὴ ψυχὴ. Μὲ αὐτὲς τὶς ἔννοιες κατανοοῦν στὸν ψαλμὸ 44 τὴν Βασίλισσα ποὺ στέκεται στὰ δεξιὰ τοῦ Κυρίου «ἐν ἱματισμῷ διαχρύσω περιβεβλημένη, πεποικιλιμένη» (στίχ. 10), ὅπως καὶ τὴν Σουλαμίτιδα στὸ Ἄσμα τῶν Ἀσμάτων. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ γυναίκα τῆς Ἀποκαλύψεως, ποὺ φόρεμα ἔχει τὸν ἥλιο καὶ ὑποπόδιο τὴν σελήνη καὶ διάδημα στὸ κεφάλι τῆς μία σειρὰ ἀπὸ δώδεκα ἀστέρια, ποὺ κυφορεῖ καὶ γεννᾷ τὸν Χριστὸ (12:1, 5)· εἶναι ἡ ψυχὴ τοῦ κάθε πιστοῦ, ποὺ συλλαμβάνει μὲ τὴν πίστη καὶ φέρει στὸν κόσμον ἕναν Χριστό—τὸν ἀναγεννημένο ἑαυτὸ του—εἶναι ἡ Ἐκκλησία στολισμένη μὲ τὴν δόξα τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ ἁγίων, ποὺ χαρίζει στὴν ἀνθρωπότητα τὸν Λυτρωτὴ, καὶ εἶναι πολὺ συγκεκριμένα ἡ Παναγία Μητέρα τοῦ Κυρίου μας.

Γι' αὐτὸν τὸν ἰδιαίτερα ἀντιπροσωπευτικὸ ρόλο τῆς Παναγίας, καὶ ὁ θάνατός τῆς, ἡ κοίμησὴ τῆς ποὺ γιορτάζουμε τὸν Δεκαπενταύγουστο, δὲν ἀποτελεῖ γιὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησία μία ἀπλὴ γιορτὴ τιμῆς, ἀλλὰ ἀποτελεῖ μία γιορτὴ ἢ ὁποία τηρουμένων τῶν ἀναλογιῶν παραβάλλεται μὲ τὸν θάνατο καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασι τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ λαμπρύνεται μὲ παρόμοια δόξα καὶ χάρι. Ὅπωςδήποτε, ὁ θάνατος κάθε ἁγίου—Χριστιανοῦ

ποῦ ἄθλησε γιὰ τὴν πίστη—καταγγέλλει τὸν θάνατο τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ ὁμολογεῖ τὴν Ἀνάστασή Του, διότι στὸ ὄνομα αὐτῆς τῆς θυσίας καὶ αὐτῆς τῆς ἐλπίδας συντελεῖται. Ὁ θάνατος ὁμοίως τῆς Θεοτόκου—ἐκείνης ποὺ γέννησε τὴν Ζωὴ καὶ τὴν Ἀνάστασι—λαμβάνεται ἐπιπλέον ὡς ὁ τύπος τῆς ἀναστάσεως ὅλων τῶν Χριστιανῶν καὶ δίδεται ὡς τὸ παράδειγμα γιὰ τὴν νίκη κατὰ τοῦ θανάτου, ποὺ ἐπιτέλεσε ἡ ἀνάστασι τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἔτσι τὴν προσφωνεῖ ὁ ὑμνωδός: «Χαῖρε ἀναστάσεως τύπον ἐκλάμπουσα!».

Τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα τῆς Ἀναστάσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ δὲν φαίνεται ἄμεσα, ἀλλὰ οὐσιαστικὰ ὁ θάνατος καταργήθηκε πράγματι. Δὲν ὀνομάζεται κἂν θάνατος, ἀλλὰ κοίμησις, καὶ τὸ ὄνομα αὐτὸ τὸ καθιέρωσε ἀνάμεσα στὸν εὐσεβῆ λαὸ τὸ γεγονός τῆς κοιμήσεως τῆς Θεοτόκου.



Τὸ σῶμα τῆς Παναγίας μας κοιμήθηκε στὴν ἀγκαλιὰ τοῦ Υἱοῦ τῆς καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ τῆς πρεσβεύει γιὰ ὅλους μας μπροστὰ στὸν θρόνο Του. Ἡ μετάστασις τῆς ἀπ' αὐτὴ τὴν ζωὴ στὴν ἄλλη, τὴν ἀληθινή, δὲν εἶναι πρόξενος πένθους ἀλλὰ αἰτία χαρᾶς καὶ πανηγύρεως. Πανηγυρίζει ὁ λαὸς μας στὴν γιορτὴ τῆς καὶ ζῆ μιὰ μικρὴ Λαμπρὴ, χορεύει καὶ ἀγάλλεται ὅπως στὴν γιορτὴ τῆς

Ἀναστάσεως. Διότι στὸ πρόσωπο τῆς Παναγίας βλέπει ὁ κάθε πιστὸς τὸν ἑαυτὸ του ὡς μέλος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ στὴν κοίμησὴ τῆς βλέπει τὸν δικὸ του θάνατο ὡς μιὰ κοίμησις ἕναν ὕπνο μέσα στὰ χέρια τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἀπὸ τὸν ὁποῖο θὰ σηκωθεῖ σὰν θὰ σημάνει ἡ σάλπιγγα τῆς ἀναστάσεως καὶ θὰ εἶναι αἰώνια μὲ τὸν Θεό.

Ἀπ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἄποψη ἡ γιορτὴ τῆς κοιμήσεως τῆς Θεοτόκου εἶναι μία ὁμολογία πίστεως τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὅτι «προσδοκεῖ ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν», ἀλλὰ καὶ ἕνα κήρυγμα καὶ μία διδαχὴ παρηγορίας καὶ ἐλπίδας στοὺς χαροκαμένους ἀνθρώπους, ποὺ πενθοῦν γιὰ τὸν θάνατο τῶν ἀγαπητῶν τους, καὶ στοὺς ἀπεγνωσμένους, ποὺ δὲν ἐλπίζουν σὲ κανένα παρὸν οὔτε μέλλον. Ἡ κοίμησις τῆς Θεοτόκου μᾶς βεβαιώνει ὅτι ὁ θάνατος εἶναι μιὰ ἀνάπαυλα πρὶν τὴν ἀνάστασι καὶ ἕνα προοίμιό τῆς αἰώνιας δόξας, γιὰ τὸν ἄνθρωπο βέβαια ποὺ πεθαίνει ἐν Χριστῷ. καὶ γιορτάζοντας «τῆς Παναγιᾶς», βιώνουμε μὲ ἕναν τρόπο ποὺ πολὺ μᾶς ἐγγίζει, τὴν Ἀνάστασι τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐφαρμοσμένη στὴν ζωὴ καὶ στὸν θάνατο τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ποὺ πολὺ Τὸν ἀγάπησε καὶ βαθεῖα Τὸν κατάλαβε καὶ ἀσύλληπτα ταπεινὰ Τὸν ὑπηρετήσε· **τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Ἐνδόξου Δεσποίνης μας Θεοτόκου καὶ ἀειπαρθένου Μαρίας.**

Ὁ Ἅγιος Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλὸς

Τοῦ Πρωτοπρ. Γεωργίου Χρ. Εὐθυμίου, Ἐπικούρου, Καθηγητοῦ τῆς Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς τοῦ Ε.Κ.Π.Α.

Στις 24 Αὐγούστου ἡ ἀγία μας Ἐκκλησία τιμᾷ τὴν μνήμη τοῦ ἁγίου ἱερομάρτυρος καὶ ἰσαποστόλου Κοσμά τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ.

Ὁ Κώνστας, ὅπως ἦταν τὸ βαπτιστικὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Ἁγίου, γεννήθηκε τὸ 1714 στὸ Μέγα Δένδρο, πλησίον τοῦ Θέρμου τῆς ὄρεινῆς Αἰτωλίας. Οἱ γονεῖς του ἦταν Ἡπειρωτικῆς καταγωγῆς εὐσεβεῖς Ὁρθόδοξοι Χριστιανοὶ καὶ ἀνέθρεψαν τὸν υἱὸν τους «ἐν παιδείᾳ καὶ νοουθεσίᾳ Κυρίου» (Ἐφεσ. 6:4).

Τὰ παιδικὰ του χρόνια διήλθε κατὰ τοὺς δίσεκτους ἐκεῖνους καιροὺς στὰ δύσβατα καὶ ἄγωνα ἐκεῖνα μέρη, ὅπως καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ συνομηλικοὶ του. Τὴν ἀκόρεστη δίψα γιὰ μάθηση ἱκανοποίησε μὲ τὴν μακροχρόνια μαθητεία κοντὰ σὲ κληρικούς-διδασκάλους τῆς περιοχῆς (τὸν Γεράσιμο Λύτσικα, τὸν Ἀνανία Δερβισάνο, κ.ἄ.) καὶ ἐν συνεχείᾳ μὲ τὴν δεκαετῆ φοίτησή του στὴν περίφημη Ἀθωνιάδα Σχολὴ τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους. Ἐκεῖ, μεταξὺ τῶν ἐτῶν 1749-1759, ἐπραγματοποίησε ἀνωτέρας σπουδὰς ὑπὸ τοὺς ἀρίστους διδασκάλους τῆς ἐποχῆς, Εὐγένιον Βούλγαριν, Παναγιώτην Παλαμᾶν, Νεόφυτον Καυσοκαλυβίτην, κ.ἄ.

Κατὰ τὴν μακροχρόνια παραμονή του στὸ Ἅγιον Ὅρος διήρχετο τὸν βίον μελετῶν τὴν Ἁγίαν Γραφήν, τὰ ἔργα τῶν ἁγίων Πατέρων καὶ τὰ κείμενα τῶν ἱερῶν Κανόνων, μετέχων τῶν ἱερῶν ἀκολουθιῶν καὶ ἀσκούμενος ὑπὸ τὴν καθοδήγησιν ἐμπείρων πνευματικῶν πατέρων. Καὶ ὅλα αὐτὰ γιὰ νὰ νικήσῃ, μὲ τὴν Χάριν τοῦ Θεοῦ, «τοὺς τρεῖς ἐχθρούς, τὸν κόσμον, τὴν σάρκα καὶ τὸν Διάβολον» καὶ νὰ καταντήσῃ «εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον, εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ» (Ἐφεσ. 4:13). Μάλιστα, τὸ 1759 ἐκάρῃ μοναχὸς καὶ ἔλαβε τὸ ὄνομα Κοσμάς. Ἐν συνεχείᾳ ἐχειροτονήθη διάκονος καὶ πρεσβύτερος εἰς τὴν Ἱ. Μονὴν Φιλοθέου τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους, διετέλεσε δὲ καὶ ἐφημέριος αὐτῆς γιὰ μικρὸ χρονικὸ διάστημα.

Κατ' αὐτὴν τὴν περίοδο τῆς πνευματικῆς ἐγρηγόρσεως καὶ τῆς κοπιώδους κατ' ἄμφω καταρτίσεως ἐδέχθη τὴν κλήση τοῦ Χριστοῦ νὰ ἐξέλθῃ ἀπὸ τὸν τόπο τῆς ἡσυχίας καὶ τῆς ἀσκήσεως, τὸν ὁποῖον εἶχε συνειδητᾶ

ἐπιλέξει καὶ ἀπὸ καρδίας ἀγαπήσει, καὶ νὰ ἀναλάβῃ ἔργον ἱεραποστολικὸν ἐν μέσῳ τῶν χειμαζομένων καὶ κινδυνευόντων Χριστιανῶν ἀδελφῶν του. Νὰ πῶς περιγράφει ὅλα αὐτὰ μὲ τὸν χαριτωμένον λόγον του: «Διαβάζοντας τὸ ἅγιον καὶ ἱερὸν Εὐαγγέλιον... ἠύρηκα καὶ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον, ὅπου λέγει ὁ Χριστὸς μας πῶς δὲν πρέπει κανένας Χριστιανός, ἄνδρας ἢ γυναῖκα, νὰ φροντίζῃ διὰ τοῦ λόγου του μόνον πῶς νὰ σωθῇ, ἀλλὰ νὰ φροντίζῃ καὶ διὰ τοὺς ἀδελφούς του» (πρβλ. Α΄ Κορ. 10:24). καὶ ἔτσι, «ἄφησα τὴν ἐδικὴν μου προκοπὴν, τὸ ἐδικὸν μου καλὸ καὶ ἐβγήκα νὰ περιπατῶ ἀπὸ τόπον εἰς τόπον καὶ διδάσκω τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου».

Μετὰ μακρὰν καὶ ἐπίπονον προσευχὴν καὶ τῆ προτροπῆ τῶν πνευματικῶν του πατέρων ἐξήλθε τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους τὸ 1759, «παραδοθεὶς τῇ χάριτι τοῦ Θεοῦ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀδελφῶν» (Πράξ. 15:40). Μετέβη εἰς



Κωνσταντινούπολιν, ἔλαβε «ἔγγραφο ἀδειαν» (Νέον Μαρτυρολόγιον, σ. 202)—κατὰ τοὺς ἱεροὺς Κανόνας ΛΓ΄ Ἀποστολικόν, ΜΑ΄ τῆς Λαοδικείας κ.ἄ.—ἀπὸ τὸν Πατριάρχῃ Σεραφεῖμ Β΄ τὸν ἐκ Δελβίνου (1757-1761), καὶ ἄρχισε τὶς ἱεραποστολικές του περιοδεῖες, οἱ ὁποῖες ἀριθμοῦνται ὑπὸ τῶν ἐρευνητῶν εἰς τρεῖς ἢ τέσσαρες.

Περιώδευσε, ἐπὶ μίαν εἰκοσαετίαν περίπου, ἐν μέσῳ μυρίων πειρασμῶν καὶ κινδύνων, ὅπως μαρτυρεῖ ὁ ἴδιος λέγοντας: «Ἐδῶ ποὺ περιπατῶ ἔχω τὸ κεφάλι μου μέσα εἰς τὸν τροβᾶ». Περιήλθε «τριάκοντα ἐπαρχίας» τοῦ ἱστορικοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ χώρου (περιοχὴ Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, Θράκη, Μακεδονία, Ἡπειρο, Θεσσαλία, Στερεὰ Ἑλλάδα, Κυκλάδες καὶ Ἰονίους νήσους). Στις περιοδεῖες αὐτές, «πλήρης πίστεως καὶ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου» (Πράξ. 6:5), ἐδίδασκε μὲ ἀπλότητα καὶ δύναμιν τὴν ἄπαξ παραδοθεῖσαν ὑπὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ διαφυλαχθεῖσαν ὑπὸ τῶν Ἀποστόλων καὶ τῶν ἁγίων Πατέρων ἀλήθειαν, ἀνόθευτον καὶ ἀκαινοτόμητον, ἐπιτυχῶν, μὲ τὴν χάριν τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἰς ἐξαιρετικὸν βαθμὸν τὴν ἀναχαίτισιν τῶν ἐξισλαμισμῶν καὶ τὴν «καλὴν ἀλλοίωσιν» στίς καρδιὰς τῶν Χριστιανῶν, ποὺ προσέτρεχαν, σὰν διψασμένα ἐλάφια, κατὰ χιλιάδες νὰ τὸν ἀκούσουν ὅπου ἐκήρυττε.

Γιὰ νὰ συνεχισθῇ τὸ ἔργο τῆς καλλιεργείας τοῦ σκλαβωμένου λαοῦ, ποὺ ἐβασανίζετο ἀπὸ τὴν ἀμάθεια, τὴν ἀμαρτία καὶ τὸν ἀλλόθρησκο

δυναστή, «ἐκατάστησε σχολεῖα πανταχοῦ διὰ μέσου τῆς διδασκαλίας του, τόσον Ἑλληνικά, ὅσον καὶ κοινά, τόσον εἰς τὰς χώρας, ὅσον καὶ εἰς τὰ χωρία, διὰ νὰ πηγαίνουν εἰς αὐτὰ τὰ παιδιά, καὶ νὰ μανθάνουν δωρεὰν τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα, καὶ ἐκ τούτων νὰ στερεώνωνται μὲν, εἰς τὴν ζωὴν, καὶ πολιτείαν» (Νέον Μαρτυρολόγιον, σ. 203). Ὅπως ἀναφέρει καὶ ὁ ἴδιος εἰς τὴν ἐπιστολὴν πρὸς τὸν ἀδελφὸν του Χρυσάνθον «δέκα σχολεῖα Ἑλληνικὰ ἐποίησα, διακόσια διὰ κοινὰ γράμματα». Σ' αὐτὰ φλογεροὶ διδάσκαλοι, ἐπόμενοι «τοῖς ἴχνεσιν αὐτοῦ» (Α΄ Πέτρ. 2:21), ἐδίδασκαν «*ῥήματα ζωῆς αἰωνίου*» (Ἰω. 6:68), συνέδεαν τὰ σκλαβόπουλα μὲ τὶς «*ῥίζες*» τους καὶ τὰ ἐβοήθουν νὰ ἀποκτήσουν συνειδησὴν τῆς Ἑλληνορθοδόξου ταυτότητός των. Δηλαδή ἀπὸ τὰ σχολεῖα αὐτὰ ἐξήρχοντο ἄρτιοι ἄνθρωποι, ἔτοιμοι νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσουν τὶς περιστάσεις τοῦ παρόντος καὶ τὶς προκλήσεις τοῦ μέλλοντος, ἐπομένως οἱ πρόμαχοι τῆς ἐθνεγερείας τοῦ 1821.

Τὸ ἱεραποστολικὸν ἔργον τοῦ Ἁγ. Κοσμᾶ διεκόπη βιαίως τὸ Σάββατο 24 Αὐγούστου τοῦ ἔτους 1779 στὸ Κολικόντασι τῆς Βορείου Ἡπείρου μὲ τὴν συμβολὴν τῶν Ἑβραίων, οἱ ὅποιοι «ἐπῆγαν εἰς τὸν Κούρτ Πασσιάν, καὶ τοῦ ἔδωκαν πουργία πολλά, διὰ νὰ τὸν ἐβγάλη ἀπὸ τὴν ζωὴν» (Νέον Μαρτυρολόγιον, σ. 206). Ἐκεῖ Ἀλβανοί, ἄνθρωποι εἰς τὴν ὑπηρεσίαν αὐτοῦ, τὸν ἀπηγχόνισαν παρὰ τὸν Ἄσφον ποταμόν, ἐπειδὴ ἦταν πιστὸς στὸν Χριστὸ καὶ ὑπηρετοῦσε μὲ ἀφοσίωση τὸν λαὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ. καὶ ἔτσι ἐκπληρώθηκε ὁ πόθος, πὺν εἶχε ἐκφράσει ὁ Ἅγιος μ' αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια: «Τὸν Χριστὸν μου παρακαλῶ νὰ μὲ ἀξιώσει νὰ χύσω καὶ τὸ αἷμα μου διὰ τὴν ἀγάπην του, καθὼς τὸ ἔχυσε καὶ Ἐκεῖνος διὰ τὴν ἀγάπην μου».

Ὁ λόγος τοῦ Ἁγ. Κοσμᾶ εἶναι ἐκκλησιαστικός, δηλαδή παγκόσμιος καὶ διαχρονικός. Γι' αὐτὸ ἤθελα νὰ κατακλείσω τὸ ἄρθρο μὲ λίγες λέξεις τοῦ Ἁγίου, πὺν ἀποτελοῦν σύννοψιν τῆς διδασκαλίας του καὶ ἐπίκαιρο ἐλπιδοφόρο μήνυμα πρὸς τὸν σύγχρονον ἄνθρωπο, δεσμώτη τῆς «Παγκοσμιοποίησης», τῆς «Νέας Ἐποχῆς», τῶν «μνημονίων» καὶ τῶν «δανειακῶν συμβάσεων»: «**Ἀδελφοί μου, ψυχὴ καὶ Χριστὸς σᾶς χρειάζεται. Ἐτοῦτα τὰ δύο ὅλος ὁ κόσμος νὰ πέσῃ δὲν ἔμπορεῖ νὰ σᾶς τὰ πάρῃ, ἔξω ἂν τύχῃ καὶ τὰ δώσετε μὲ τὸ θέλημά σας. Αὐτὰ τὰ δύο νὰ τὰ φυλάγετε, νὰ μὴ τύχῃ καὶ τὰ χάσετε.**

**Ἀπολυτίκιον τοῦ Ἁγίου
Ἦχος γ΄**

Θείας πίστεως διδασκαλία κατεκόσμησας τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, ζηλωτὴς τῶν ἀποστόλων γενόμενος σὺ γὰρ τῇ θεῖᾳ ἀγάπῃ πτερούμενος, Εὐαγγελίου τὸν λόγον διέσπειρας. Κοσμᾶ ἔνδοξε, Χριστὸν τὸν Θεὸν ἱκέτευε, δωρίσασθαι ἡμῖν τὸ μέγα ἔλεος.

Περὶ τοῦ Πνεύματος τῆς Πορνείας καὶ τῆς Σαρκικῆς Ἐπιθυμίας

ΠΗΓΗ: ΦΙΛΟΚΑΛΙΑ τόμος Α΄ Ἅγιος Κασσιανὸς ὁ Ρωμαῖος, περὶ τῶν ὀκτῶ λογισμῶν τῆς κακίας.



Δεύτερος ἀγώνας πὺν ἔχομε νὰ κάνομε εἶναι ἐναντίον τοῦ πνεύματος τῆς πορνείας καὶ τῆς σαρκικῆς ἐπιθυμίας, ἡ ὁποία ἐπιθυμία ἀρχίζει ἀπὸ τὴ μικρὴ ἡλικία νὰ ἐνοχλεῖ τὸν ἄνθρωπο. Ὁ ἀγώνας αὐτὸς εἶναι μεγάλος καὶ δύσκολος καὶ ἔχει δύο μέτωπα. Γιατὶ ἐνῶ τὰ ἄλλα ἐλαττώματα κάνουν τὴ μάχη μόνον μέσα στὴν ψυχῇ, ὁ σαρκικὸς πόλεμος εἶναι διπλός, καὶ στὴν ψυχῇ καὶ στὸ σῶμα. Καὶ γι' αὐτὸ πρέπει νὰ ἀναλάβομε διπλὸ πόλεμο.

Γιατὶ δὲν εἶναι ἀρκετὴ ἡ σωματικὴ νηστεία γιὰ νὰ ἀποκτήσομε τὴν τέλεια σωφροσύνη καὶ ἀληθινὴ ἀγνεῖα, ἂν δὲν ἀκολουθεῖ καὶ συντριβὴ καρδιάς καὶ πυκνὴ προσευχὴ πρὸς τὸν Θεὸ καὶ συχνὴ μελέτη τῶν Γραφῶν καὶ κόπος καὶ ἐργασία τῶν χειρῶν, τὰ ὁποία μποροῦν νὰ ἀναστέλλουν τὶς ἀκατάστατες ὁρμὲς τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ νὰ ἀνακαλοῦν τὴν ψυχὴ ἀπὸ τὶς αἰσχροὺς φαντασίες. Προπάντων βοηθᾷ ἡ ταπεινὴ τῆς ψυχῆς, χωρὶς τὴν ὁποία οὔτε τὴν πορνεία, οὔτε ἄλλο πάθος μπορεῖ κανεὶς νὰ νικήσει. Πρῶτα-πρῶτα λοιπὸν πρέπει μὲ κάθε προσοχὴ νὰ φυλάγει κανεὶς τὴν καρδιά του ἀπὸ ρυπαροὺς λογισμοὺς.

Γιατὶ ἀπὸ τὴν καρδιὰ βγαίνουν—ὅπως εἶπε ὁ Κύριος— διαλογισμοὶ πονηροὶ, φόνοι, μοιχεῖες, πορνείες καὶ τὰ λοιπά. Καὶ ἡ νηστεία δὲν ἔχει διαταχθεῖ μόνον γιὰ κακοπάθεια τοῦ σώματος, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ τὴν προσοχὴ καὶ νηφαλιότητα τοῦ νοῦ, γιὰ νὰ μὴ σκοτιστεῖ ὁ νοῦς ἀπὸ τὴν πολυφαγία καὶ γίνῃ ἀδύνατος στὴν ἐπιτήρηση τῶν λογισμῶν. Πρέπει λοιπὸν ὄχι μόνον στὴ σωματικὴ νηστεία νὰ βάζομε ὅλη τὴν ἐπιμελεία μας, ἀλλὰ καὶ στὴν προσοχὴ τῶν λογισμῶν καὶ στὴν πνευματικὴ μελέτη, χωρὶς τὰ ὁποία εἶναι ἀδύνατο νὰ ἀνέβομε στὸ ὕψος τῆς ἀληθινῆς... ἀγνεῖας καὶ καθαρότητας. Πρέπει λοιπὸν νὰ καθαρίζομε πρῶτα, σύμφωνα μὲ τὴν ἐντολὴ τοῦ Κυρίου, τὸ ἐσωτερικὸ τοῦ πιάτου καὶ τοῦ ποτηριοῦ, γιὰ νὰ γίνῃ καὶ τὸ ἐξωτερικὸ τους καθαρὸ.

Γι' αὐτὸ ἀκριβῶς, ἂν ὑπάρχει μέσα μας ἡ φροντίδα νὰ πολεμήσομε νόμιμα καὶ νὰ στεφανωθοῦμε, ἀφοῦ νικήσομε τὸ ἀκάθαρτο πνεῦμα τῆς πορνείας, νὰ μὴν ἔχομε θάρρος στὴ δική μας δύναμη καὶ ἄσκησι, ἀλλὰ στὴ βοήθεια τοῦ Κυρίου μας καὶ Θεοῦ. Γιατὶ δὲν παύει ὁ ἄνθρωπος νὰ πολεμεῖται ἀπὸ αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα, μέχρις ὅτου πιστέψει ἀληθινὰ ὅτι ὄχι μὲ τὴ δική του ἐπιμέλεια καὶ τὸ δικό του κόπο, ἀλλὰ μὲ τὴ βοήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ

ἐλευθερώνεται ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τὴν ἀρρώστια καὶ ἀνεβαίνει στὸ ὕψος τῆς ἀγνείας. Καὶ αὐτὸ εἶναι ὑπόθεση πάνω ἀπὸ τὴ φύση κατὰ κάποιον τρόπο ὑπερβαίνει τὸ σῶμα ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἔχει ὑποτάξει τοὺς ἐρεθισμοὺς τῆς σάρκας καὶ τὶς ἡδονές της.

Καὶ γι' αὐτὸ εἶναι ἀδύνατον ὁ ἄνθρωπος (γιὰ νὰ τὸ πῶ ἔτσι) μὲ τὰ δικά του φτερὰ νὰ πετάξει πρὸς τὸ ὑψηλὸ καὶ οὐράνιο βραβεῖο τῆς ἀγιοσύνης καὶ νὰ γίνῃ μιμητὴς τῶν Ἀγγέλων, ἂν δὲν τὸν σηκώσει ἡ χάρις τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ καὶ τὴ λάσπη. Γιατί μὲ καμιά ἄλλη ἀρετὴ οἱ ἄνθρωποι μὲ τὴ σάρκα ποὺ φέρουν δὲν ἐξομοιώνονται περισσότερο μὲ τοὺς ἀγγέλους, ὅσο μὲ τὴν ἀρετὴ τῆς σωφροσύνης. Μὲ τὴν ἀρετὴ αὐτὴ, ἐνῶ βρίσκονται ἀκόμη στὴ γῆ, ἔχουν τὸ πολίτευμα στοὺς οὐρανοὺς, κατὰ τὸν Ἀπόστολο.

Δείγμα τοῦ ὅτι ἀποκτήσαμε τελείως αὐτὴ τὴν ἀρετὴ εἶναι νὰ μὴ προσηλώνεται ἡ ψυχὴ κατὰ τὸν ὕπνο σὲ καμιά εἰκόνα αἰσχροῦς φαντασίας. Γιατί ἂν καὶ δὲν λογαριάζεται ὡς ἁμαρτία αὕτη ἡ κίνηση στὸν ὕπνο, εἶναι ὅμως γνώρισμα ὅτι ἡ ψυχὴ εἶναι ἄρρωστη καὶ δὲν ἔχει ἐλευθερωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ σαρκικὸ πάθος. Γι' αὐτὸ τὶς αἰσχροὺς φαντασίες ποὺ μᾶς ἔρχονται στὸν ὕπνο, πρέπει νὰ πιστεύομε ὅτι εἶναι ἔλεγχος τῆς προηγούμενης ἀμέλειας καὶ τῆς ἀσθενείας μας, ἀφοῦ τὴν κρυμμένη μέσα στὰ ἀπόκρυφα τῆς ψυχῆς μας νόσο τὴν κάνει φανερὴ ἢ ρεύση κατὰ τὴν ἀνάπαυση τοῦ ὕπνου. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ Ἰατρὸς τῶν ψυχῶν μας, στὰ ἀπόκρυφα τῆς ψυχῆς ἔβαλε τὸ φάρμακο, ὅπου γνώριζε ὅτι βρίσκονται καὶ οἱ αἰτίες τῆς ἀσθενείας, λέγοντας: «*Καθένας ποὺ βλέπει γυναίκα μὲ σκοπὸ νὰ τὴν ἐπιθυμήσει, ἔκανε κιόλας μοιχεία μαζί της μέσα στὴν καρδιά του*». Δὲ διορθώνει τόσο τοὺς περιέργους καὶ πορνικοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς, ὅσο τὴν ψυχὴ ποὺ ἔχει τὴν κατοικία της μέσα μας, ἢ ὁποῖα κακῶς μεταχειρίζεται τὰ μάτια τὰ ὁποῖα ἔδωσε ὁ Θεὸς γιὰ τὸ καλὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ἡ σοφὴ Παροιμία δὲ λέει: «*Μὲ κάθε τρόπο νὰ προσέχεις τὰ μάτια σου*», ἀλλὰ «*μὲ κάθε τρόπο νὰ προσέχεις τὴν καρδιά σου*». Ἔβαλε δηλαδὴ τὸ φάρμακο τῆς προσοχῆς στὴν καρδιά ποὺ μεταχειρίζεται τὰ μάτια γιὰ ὅ,τι θέλει.

Λοιπὸν αὐτὴ ἄς εἶναι ἡ φρουρὰ καὶ προφύλαξη τῆς καρδιάς μας· ὅταν ἔρθει στὸ νοῦ μας ἐνθύμηση γυναίκας ποὺ ξεφύτρωσε ἀπὸ διαβολικὴ δολιότητα, εἴτε μητέρας ἢ ἀδελφῆς ἢ ἄλλων εὐλαβῶν γυναικῶν, ἀμέσως νὰ τὴν διώξομε ἀπὸ τὴν καρδιά μας, μὴπως ἐπιμένοντας πολὺ σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἐνθύμηση, μᾶς κυλήσει ἐκεῖνος ποὺ μᾶς ἔξαπατᾷ στὸ κακό, ὁ διάβολος, καὶ μᾶς ρίξει μέσα στὸν γκρεμὸ τῶν αἰσχροῦν καὶ βλαβερῶν σκέψεων. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ ἐντολὴ ποὺ δόθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ Θεὸ στὸν πρωτόπλαστο διατάζει, νὰ συντριβομε τὸ κεφάλι τοῦ φιδιοῦ, δηλαδὴ τὴν ἀρχὴ τῶν βλαβερῶν λογισμῶν, μέσω τῶν ὁποίων ἐπιχειρεῖ αὐτὸ νὰ συρθεῖ μέσα στὶς ψυχές μας. Ἀλλιῶς μὲ τὸ νὰ παραδεχοῦμε τὸ κεφάλι,

ποῦ εἶναι ἡ ἀρχὴ τοῦ λογισμοῦ, θὰ παραδεχοῦμε καὶ τὸ ὑπόλοιπο σῶμα τοῦ φιδιοῦ, ποῦ εἶναι ἡ συγκατάθεση στὴν ἡδονή, καὶ αὐτὸ θὰ κατακηρηνύσει τὴ διάνοιά μας στὴν παράνομη πράξη. Ἀλλὰ πρέπει κατὰ τὴν Γραφή, κάθε πρῶτὸ νὰ ἐξολοθρευομε ὅλους τοὺς ἁμαρτωλοὺς τῆς γῆς, δηλαδὴ μὲ τὸ φῶς τῆς γνώσεως νὰ διακρίνομε καὶ νὰ ἐξολοθρευομε τοὺς ἁμαρτωλοὺς λογισμοὺς ἀπὸ τὴ γῆ, ἢ ὁποῖα εἶναι ἡ καρδιά μας, σύμφωνα μὲ τὴ διδασκαλία τοῦ Κυρίου. Καὶ ὅσο εἶναι ἀκόμη νήπια οἱ γιοὶ τῆς Βαβυλώνας, δηλαδὴ οἱ πονηροὶ λογισμοί, νὰ τοὺς χτυπάμε στὸ ἔδαφος καὶ νὰ τοὺς τσακίζομε πάνω στὴν πέτρα, ἢ ὁποῖα πέτρα εἶναι ὁ Χριστός. Γιατί ἂν οἱ νήπιοι λογισμοὶ μεγαλώσουν καὶ γίνουν ἄνδρες λόγω τῆς συγκαταθέσεώς μας σ' αὐτούς, τότε δὲν θὰ νικηθοῦν χωρὶς μεγάλο στεναγμὸ καὶ κόπο.

Μετὰ τὰ ὅσα εἶπαμε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἁγία Γραφή, καλὸ εἶναι νὰ θυμηθοῦμε καὶ λόγους ἁγίων Πατέρων. Εἶπε λοιπὸν ὁ ἅγιος Βασίλειος, ἐπίσκοπος Καισαρείας τῆς Καππαδοκίας: «*Καὶ γυναίκα δὲ γνωρίζω καὶ παρθένος δὲ εἶμαι*». Τόσο πολὺ γνώριζε ὅτι τὸ δῶρο τῆς παρθενίας δὲν κατορθώνεται μόνο μὲ ἀποχὴ ἀπὸ γυναίκα, ὅσο μὲ τὴν ἀγιοσύνη τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τὴν καθαρότητα, ἢ ὁποῖα κατορθώνεται μὲ τὸ φόβο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Λένε ἐπίσης καὶ τοῦτο οἱ Πατέρες, ὅτι δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ ἀποκτήσομε τελείως τὴν ἀρετὴ τῆς ἀγνείας, ἂν δὲν ἀποκτήσομε πρωτύτερα τὴν ἀληθινὴ ταπεινοφροσύνη μέσα στὴν καρδιά μας. Οὔτε μποροῦμε νὰ κριθοῦμε ἄξιοι ν' ἀποκτήσομε τὴν ἀληθινὴ θεία γνώση, ἂν μέσα στὰ ἀπόκρυφα τῆς ψυχῆς ἔχει θρονιαστεῖ τὸ πάθος τῆς πορνείας. Θὰ δεῖξομε καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἀπόστολο πόσο μεγάλο εἶναι τὸ κατόρθωμα τῆς σωφροσύνης, καὶ ἀφοῦ ἀναφέρομε μία φράση του μόνο, θὰ τελειώσομε: «*Ἐπιδιώκετε νὰ ἔχετε εἰρήνη μὲ ὅλους καὶ τὸν ἁγιασμό, ποὺ χωρὶς αὐτὸν κανένας δὲν θὰ δεῖ τὸν Κύριον*». Ὅτι ἀναφέρεται στὸ θέμα μας, εἶναι φανερὸ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνο ποὺ λέει ἀμέσως παρακάτω: «*Κανένας πόρνος καὶ βέβηλος ὅπως ὁ Ἡσαύ*».

Ὅσο λοιπὸν οὐράνιο καὶ ἀγγελικὸ εἶναι τὸ κατόρθωμα τῆς ἀγιοσύνης, τόσο μὲ βαρύτερες συνωμοσίες καὶ δόλους πολεμεῖται ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς δαίμονες. Καὶ γι' αὐτὸ ὀφείλομε νὰ φροντίζομε νὰ ἔχομε ὄχι μόνον ἐγκράτεια σώματος, ἀλλὰ καὶ συντριβὴ καρδιάς καὶ πυκνὲς προσευχῆς μὲ στεναγμοὺς, ὥστε τὸ καμίνι τῆς σάρκας μας, τὸ ὁποῖο ὁ βασιλιάς τῆς Βαβυλώνας ἀνάβει καθημερινὰ μὲ τοὺς ἐρεθισμοὺς τῆς ἐπιθυμίας, νὰ τὸ σβήσομε μὲ τὴ δρόσο τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος. Ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ αὐτὰ, μέγιστο ὄπλο γιὰ τὸν πόλεμο αὐτὸ εἶναι ἡ κατὰ Θεὸν ἀγρυπνία. Γιατί ὅπως ἡ προσοχὴ καὶ ἡ προφύλαξη τῆς ἡμέρας ἐτοιμάζει τὴ νυχτερινὴ ἀγιοσύνη, ἔτσι ἡ νυχτερινὴ κατὰ Θεὸν ἀγρυπνία ἐτοιμάζει καὶ διευκολύνει τὴν ψυχὴ στὴν καθαρότητα τῆς ἡμέρας. Ἀμήν.

Ἡ Μαρτυρική Θυσία τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Σμύρνης Χρυσόστομου

Αγιορείτικο Βῆμα, 27 Αὐγούστου, 2012.



Τὸ ἀπόγευμα τῆς 27ης Αὐγούστου τοῦ 1922, ἐνῶ ὁ Τουρκικὸς Στρατὸς ἤλεγχε πλεόν πλήρως τὴν Σμύρνη, ἕνας Ἴταλὸς καθολικὸς ἱερέας ἐνημέρωσε τοὺς Γάλλους σχετικὰ μὲ τὸν θανάσιμὸ κίνδυνον ποὺ διέτρεχε ὁ Χρυσόστομος.

Πολὺ σύντομα μία Γαλλικὴ περίπολος, ἀποτελούμενη ἀπὸ 20 ναῦτες, κατέφθασε στὴν Μητρόπολη, τὴν Ἁγία Φωτεινή, μὲ σκοπὸ νὰ φυγαδεύσει τὸν Χρυσόστομο. Οἱ Γάλλοι ζήτησαν ἀπὸ τὸν Μητροπολίτη νὰ τοὺς ἀκολουθήσει εἴτε στὸ προξενεῖο τοὺς εἴτε στὴν καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία τῆς Sacre Coeur (Καρδιά τοῦ Ἰησοῦ). Ἐκεῖνος ὅμως ἀρνήθηκε τονίζοντάς τους ὅτι τὸ καθῆκον τοῦ ὑπαγόρευε νὰ παραμείνει μὲ τὸ ποίμνιό του, «ὡς καλὸς ποιμένας», ὅπως χαρακτηριστικὰ δήλωσε.

Λίγο ἀργότερα, κατὰ τὶς 19:30, κατέφθασε ἕνας Τοῦρκος ἀξιωματικὸς, ὁ ὁποῖος συνοδευόταν ἀπὸ δύο στρατιῶτες. Ὁδήγησαν τὸν Χρυσόστομο στὴν πλατεῖα Διοικητηρίου, μαζὶ μὲ δύο ἀπὸ τὰ πλεόν ἐξέχοντα πρόσωπα τῆς Σμύρνης: τὸν δημογέροντα Γεώργιο Κλιμάνογλου καὶ τὸν νομικὸ Νικόλαο Τσουρουκτσόγλου, ἐκδότης τῆς Γαλλόφωνης ἐφημερίδας «La Reforme».

Ἡ Γαλλικὴ περίπολος ἀκολούθησε τὸν μητροπολίτη, ὁ ὁποῖος βρισκόταν ἤδη ἐνώπιόν του Νουρεντὶν πασᾶ. Ὁ τελευταῖος ἔδωσε ἐντολὴ νὰ ἐκτελεστοῦν οἱ δύο δημογέροντες. Ἀκολούθως ἀπευθύνθηκε στὸν Χρυσόστομο λέγοντάς του: «Ἐμεῖς, θὰ τὰ βροῦμε μαζὶ». Καὶ συνέχισε, ἐξυβρίζοντάς τον χυδαῖα καὶ κατηγορώντας τον γιὰ τὴν φιλελληνικὴ του στάση καὶ τὶς ἐνέργειές του ἐναντίον τοῦ Τουρκικοῦ ἔθνους. Κατόπιν τοῦ ἀνακοίνωσε ὅτι τὸ «ἐπαναστατικὸ δικαστήριον τῆς ἀνεξαρτησίας», στὴν Ἄγκυρα, εἶχε ἤδη ἀποφασίσει τὴν καταδίκη του σὲ θάνατον.

Ἐπειτα, ὁ Τοῦρκος ἀξιωματοῦχος κατευθύνθηκε πρὸς τὸ μπαλκόνι τοῦ κτηρίου, ἀπ' ὅπου ἀντίκρισε, στὴν πλατεῖα Διοικητηρίου, τὴ θεὰ μαινόμενου πλήθους, 1.500 περίπου Τούρκων, στοὺς ὁποίους ἀπηύθυνε τὰ παρακάτω λόγια, δείχνοντας συγχρόνως τὸν Χρυσόστομο: «Ἄν καλὸ σᾶς ἔκανε τοῦτος νὰ τοῦ τὸ ἀνταποδώσετε. Ἄν κακὸ σᾶς ἔκανε, κάντε του καὶ ἐσεῖς κακό! Ἐγὼ σᾶς παραδίδω τὸν «χιρσίξ ντομούξ» (κλεφτο-γούρουνο). Τὸ μαρτύριον τοῦ σεπτοῦ ἱεράρχη εἶχε μόλις ἀρχίσει.

Ὁ Τουρκικὸς ὄχλος, τελώντας σὲ ἑξαλλή κατάσταση, παρέλαβε τὸν Χρυσόστομο. Ἐπιτέθηκε ἐναντίον του κτυπώντας τον μὲ γροθιές, λοστοὺς καὶ ξύλα καὶ τὸν ὀδήγησαν σὲ ἕνα κουρεῖο, ὅπου τὸν ἀνάγκασαν νὰ φορέσει μία λευκὴ μπλουζά.

Στὴν συνέχεια, τοῦ ξερίζωσαν τὴ γενειάδα καὶ τὸν ἔσυραν στὴν τουρκικὴ συνοικία, προπηλακίζοντας καὶ πτύνοντάς τον. Ἐκεῖ τοῦ ἐπεφύλαξαν ἕναν ἀργὸ καὶ βασανιστικὸ θάνατον: τὸν μαχαίρωσαν σὲ πολλὰ σημεῖα τοῦ σώματός του, ἐξόρυξαν τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς του καὶ τοῦ ἔκοψαν τὰ αὐτιά καὶ τὴν μύτη.

Στὸ μαρτύριον τοῦ Μητροπολίτη παρευρέθησαν καὶ οἱ 20 Γάλλοι ναῦτες, τὴν ἀντίδραση τῶν ὁποίων περιέγραψε ὁ Γάλλος συγγραφέας Ρενὲ Πουώ: «Ἡ Γαλλικὴ περίπολος παρακολουθοῦσε... Οἱ Γάλλοι ναῦτες «εἶχαν βγεῖ ἀπὸ τὰ ρούχα τους». Χωρὶς ὑπερβολή, ἔτρεμαν ἀπὸ ἀγανάκτηση καὶ ἀποφάσισαν νὰ ἐπέμβουν. Ὁ ἐπικεφαλῆς ἀξιωματικὸς τους, ὅμως, ἀκολουθώντας τὶς διαταγὰς ποὺ εἶχε, μὲ τὸ περιστροφὸ στὸ χέρι, τοὺς ἐμπόδισε νὰ κάνουν ὁποιαδήποτε κίνηση... «Δὲν ξαναεἶδαμε τὸν Χρυσόστομο, ποὺ τὸν ἀποτελείωσαν σὲ μικρὴ ἀπόσταση».

Σύμφωνα μὲ μία ἐκδοχή, ἕνας Τοῦρκος πυροβόλησε τὸν Μητροπολίτη δύο φορὲς στὸ κεφάλι, δίνοντας τέλος στὸ μαρτύριό του. Κανεὶς δὲν κατόρθωσε νὰ πληροφορηθεῖ τι ἀπέγινε—ὅτι ἀπέμεινε—ἀπὸ τὸ κατακρεουργημένο σῶμα τοῦ Χρυσόστομου. Φημολογεῖται, ὡστόσο, ὅτι κατέστη δυνατὸ νὰ ἐνταφιαστεῖ στὸ γήπεδο τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνα.

Τραγικὸ ὑπῆρξε καὶ τὸ τέλος τῶν δυὸ δημογερόντων ποὺ τὸν συνόδευαν. Ὁ Γεώργιος Κλιμάνογλου ἀπαγχονίσθηκε. Τὸν Νικόλαο Τσουρουκτσόγλου, ἀφοῦ τὸν ἔδεσαν ἀπὸ τὰ πόδια σὲ ἕνα αὐτοκίνητο, τὸν περιέφεραν στὸ κέντρο τῆς Σμύρνης, ἐνῶ τὸ κεφάλι τοῦ συρόταν στὰ λιθόστρωτα καλντερίμια.

Τὸ 1992, ἡ Διαρκὴς Ἱερὰ Σύνοδος τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τῆς Ἑλλάδας ἀνακήρυξε τὸν Χρυσόστομο Ἅγιο, ὕστερα ἀπὸ πρωτοβουλίες ποὺ ἀναλήφθηκαν ἀπὸ τὴν «Ἐνώση Σμυρναίων» τῆς Ἀθήνας. Ἡ μνήμη του ἐορτάζεται καὶ τιμᾶται ἀπὸ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία στὶς 27 Αὐγούστου.



Καθὼς ἡ ὑπερηφάνεια εἶναι τὸ πιὸ μεγάλο ἀπὸ ὅλα τὰ κακά, ἀφοῦ κατώρθωσε νὰ ρίξει τοὺς Ἄγγελους ἀπὸ τὸν Οὐρανὸ στὴν ἄβυσσο, εἶται καὶ ἡ ταπεινοφροσύνη εἶναι ἡ πιὸ μεγάλη ἀπ' ὅλες τὶς ἀρετές. Αὐτὴ ἔχει τὴ δύναμι καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἄβυσσο ἀκόμη ν' ἀνεβάσει στὸν Οὐρανὸ τὸν ἁμαρτωλό. Γιὰ τὸ λόγο αὐτὸ ὁ Κύριος μακαρίζει πρὶν ἀπ' ὅλους τοὺς πτωχοὺς τῷ πνεύματι.

Ἀββᾶς Λογγίνος

Ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς ἔχει πιά Ξοφλήσει;

Γράφει ὁ Νίκος Χειλαδάκης, Δημοσιογράφος-Συγγραφέας-Τουρκολόγος.



Θὰ θυμούνται οἱ παλαιότεροι τὴν δεκαετία τοῦ πενήντα, τότε πὸν ἡ Κύπρος ἀγωνίζονταν γιὰ νὰ ἀπελευθερωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν Βρετανικὴ κατοχὴ, τὶς μεγαλειώδεις δια-

δηλώσεις πὸν γίνονταν σχεδὸν κάθε μέρα στὴν Ἀθήνα ἀπὸ τοὺς φοιτητὲς γιὰ νὰ ὑποστηρίξουν τὴν Κυπριακὴ ἐξέγερση καὶ νὰ καταδικάσουν τὸν Βρετανικὴ ἀποικιοκρατία. Τὸ ξύλο ἔπεφτε καθημερινά, ἀλλὰ ὁ κόσμος δὲν πτοεῖτο, καὶ οἱ διαδηλώσεις διακρίνονταν ἀπὸ τὴν ἔντονη μαχητικὴ καὶ ἀγωνιστικὴ κατὰ τῶν Βρετανῶν καὶ τῶν ἐντόπιων δοσίλογῶν τους.

Τὶ θλιβερὴ σύγκριση μὲ τὴν σημερινὴ ἐποχὴ, τώρα πὸν ἡ Κύπρος ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ Ἑλλάδα γίνονται θύματα τῆς Εὐρωγερμανικῆς ἀποικιοκρατίας, καὶ ὁ κόσμος κοιμάται τὸν ὕπνο τοῦ δικαίου. Ἡ καταστροφὴ τῆς Κύπρου, πὸν μπορεῖ νὰ παρομοιαστῆ μὲ τὴν λυπηρὴ Μικρασιατικὴ καταστροφὴ, θὰ ἔχει σοβαρότατες συνέπειες γιὰ τὴν γενικότερη ἐπιβίωση τοῦ ὅλου Ἑλληνισμοῦ ὁ ὁποῖος πλέον μετατρέπεται σὲ ἓνα ἀσήμαντο ἀποικιοκρατικὸ κομμάτι τῆς Εὐρωγερμανικῆς ὀλιγαρχίας, τῆς ὁποίας τὸ κύριο χαρακτηριστικὸ τῆς εἶναι ἓνα ἀδίστακτο πνεῦμα χωρὶς νὰ λογαριάζει τὰ ὅποια θύματα θὰ συσσωρεύσει στὸν δρόμο του.

Ὅσοι γνωρίζουν τὴν Γερμανικὴ ψυχολογία ἀντιλαμβάνονται καλὰ τί ἐννοῶ. Ὅταν κάποτε εἶχα βρεθεῖ περαστικὸς στὴν Γερμανία, εἶχα τύχει νὰ βρεθῶ μάρτυρας σὲ ἓνα τροχαῖο δυστύχημα σὲ ἓνα ἀπὸ τοὺς πιὸ πολυσύχναστους δρόμους τῆς Φρανκφούρτης. Μοῦ ἔκανε φοβερὴ δυσάρεστη ἐντύπωση ὅτι οἱ περαστικοὶ ὄχι μόνον δὲν ἐνδιαφέρονταν νὰ δώσουν κάποια βοήθεια, ἀλλὰ ἀναρωτιόνταν ἄν... τὸ θῦμα εἶναι ἀσφαλισμένο. Ἄλλωστε ἡ ἱστορία ἔχει καταγράψει μὲ ὅλες τὶς λεπτομέρειες τὴν Γερμανικὴ μεγαλομανία τοῦ εἰκοστοῦ αἰῶνα πὸν ἐπέφερε ἑκατομμύρια θύματα στὸν βωμὸ τῆς κυριαρχίας τους, τὴν ὁποία τελικὰ πλήρωσαν πολὺ ἀκριβὰ ἀλλὰ φαίνεται πὸς δὲν ἔβαλαν μυαλό.

Ἀλλὰ τὸ θέμα μας δὲν εἶναι οἱ Γερμανοί. Αὐτοὶ κάνουν ὅτι κάνουν σύμφωνα μὲ τὰ συμφέροντά τους, τὴν ψυχολογία τους καὶ τὴν παιδεία τους. Τὸ θλιβερὸ στὴν περίπτωση αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ γιὰ ἄλλη μία φορὰ Ἑλληνικὴ προδοσία πὸν παραδίδει ἓνα ἀπὸ τὰ πιὸ

καταπονημένα καὶ ἡρωικὰ κομμάτια τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ στὴν καταστροφὴ. Ἡ Ἑλλάδα μετὰ καὶ ἀπὸ αὐτὴ τὴν καταστροφὴ, θὰ ἔχει ἀκόμα ἓνα προηγούμενο ὅτι πλέον δὲν ὑπάρχει καμία ἐλπίδα ἀντίστασης καὶ ὅτι μόνον τὸ σκύψιμο τῆς κεφαλῆς καὶ τὸ «σφάξε με ἀγὰ νὰ ἀγιάσω» θὰ εἶναι τὸ ἐθνικὸ μας μέλλον. Ὅσον ἀφορᾷ τὴν Ἐκκλησία, ἐνῶ κάποτε ἦταν πρώτη στὶς ἐπάλξεις τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ, σήμερα ἔχει μετατραπῆ σὲ ἓνα δημοσιοσχετιστικὸ μὀρφωμα πὸν τρέμει μὴν τυχὸν καὶ χαλάσει τὶς σχέσεις του μὲ τοὺς δοσίλογους πὸν ἔχουν παραδώσει τὴν χώρα ἔρμαιο στὴν Εὐρωγερμανικὴ βουλμία.

Ἀπὸ ἐδῶ καὶ πέρα τὸ μέλλον θὰ εἶναι ἡ σταδιακὴ ἐκκένωση τῆς Ἑλλάδας ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς Κύπρου, ἀπὸ ὅσους θὰ μποροῦσαν νὰ συμβάλλουν στὴν ἀνόρθωση, δηλαδὴ ἐπιστήμονες, διανοούμενοι, εἰδικευμένο ἐργατικὸ δυναμικὸ, καθὼς δὲν θὰ ὑπάρχει κανένα φῶς ἀπὸ πουθενὰ καὶ ἡ Ἑλλάδα, ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς, θὰ κατατῆσῃ μία γραφικὴ ἀνάμνηση στὰ χρονοντούλαπα τῆς ἱστορίας. Οἱ δοσίλογοι θὰ χαίρονται ἐνῶ καὶ οἱ κάθε λογῆς πολιτικοὶ ἀπατεῶνες, πὸν θησαύρισαν τόσα χρόνια, θὰ αἰσθάνονται δικαιωμένοι καθὼς δὲν ἔχουν ἀντιμετωπίσει καμία οὐσιαστικὴ ἀντίσταση στὸ ξεπούλημα τῆς χώρας.

Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ Ἑλλάδα τοῦ εἰκοστοῦ πρώτου αἰῶνα;

† † †

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία τῆς Κύπρου Κόλαφος γιὰ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ Ἱεραρχία

Μόνον θλίψη προκαλεῖ ἡ ὅποια σύγκριση μπορεῖ νὰ γίνῃ μετὰ τῆς Κυπριακῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τῆς ὑπερήφανης καὶ ἐθναρχικῆς στάσης τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου τῆς Κύπρου, μὲ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱεραρχία, πὸν τὰ τελευταία χρόνια εἶναι παντελῶς ἀλλὰ καὶ σκανδαλωδῶς ἀποῦσα σὲ ὅλες τὶς τραγικὲς ἐξελίξεις καὶ συμφορὲς πὸν πλήττουν τὸν Ἑλληνικὸ λαό.

Ἡ κεφαλὴ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Ἐκκλησίας ἔχει βαριὰ εὐθύνη γιὰ τὴν ὅλη στάση τῆς τὰ τελευταία χρόνια καθὼς, ὅπως ἔδειξε, τὸ μόνον πὸν τὴν ἐνδιαφέρει εἶναι νὰ ἔχει καλὲς σχέσεις μὲ τὴν προδοτικὴ κλίκα πὸν κατέστρεψε τὴν χώρα, νὰ συνάπτει δεσμοὺς καὶ μάλιστα νὰ βραβεύει ἐπιχειρηματίες ἀπατεῶνες πὸν κατάκλεψαν τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ κράτος καὶ νὰ ζητᾷ, (ἀκοῦστε τὸ ἔξωφρενικὸ), οἰκονομικὴ βοήθεια ἀπὸ... τοὺς μουσουλμάνους σείχηδες τοῦ περσικοῦ κόλπου!

Ποῦ εἶναι ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱεραρχία σὲ ὅλα τὰ καυτὰ προβλήματα πὸν ἔχουν ἀνακύψει ὄχι μόνον ἐξ αἰτίας τῆς οἰκονομικῆς κρίσης ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς λυσσαλέος ἐπίθεσης πὸν δέχεται τὸ Ἑλληνορθόδοξο φρόνημα τῶν Ἑλλήνων, αὐτὸ τὸ φρόνημα πὸν ἐπέζησε ἐπὶ τόσους αἰῶνες ὡς ὅτι πιὸ πολῦτιμο ἔχει νὰ ἐπιδείξει ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς; Ἡ μήπως νομίζουν ὅτι μὲ λίγα πιάτα φαγητὸ ἔχουν ἐκπληρώσει τὸ καθήκον τους;

Ἀπατώνται οἰκτρὰ καὶ ἐνῶ οἱ εὐθύνες τοὺς εἶναι πολὺν μεγάλες καθὼς ὑποτίθεται ὅτι ἡγοῦνται ἐνὸς μεγάλου ποιμνίου, ποιοῦν τὴν νύσσα.

Τὸ παράδειγμα τῆς Κύπρου εἶναι πραγματικὰ κόλαφος γιὰ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱεραρχία ποὺ μόνον ὑποκρισία καὶ ὑπεκφυγὴ ἔχει νὰ ἐπιδείξει σὲ ὅλη αὐτὴ τὴν ἐθνικὴ συμφορὰ ποὺ ἔχει ἐνσκήψει πάνω ἀπὸ τὸν Ἑλληνισμό. Ἡ στάση τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου τῆς Κύπρου, τὸ κύρος τοῦ ὁποίου εἶναι σεβαστὸ ἀπὸ ὅλες τὶς πολιτικὲς μερίδες τῆς Κύπρου, ὄχι γιατί ξέρεي νὰ κάνει γλοιώδεις δημόσιες σχέσεις μὲ πολιτικούς ἀπατεῶνες καὶ νὰ εὐλογεῖ ἄθεους πολιτικούς, ἀλλὰ γιατί ἔχει φωνὴ ἄτεγκτη καὶ σθεναρὰ ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐθνικῶν συμφερόντων τῆς νήσου καὶ τοῦ Κυπριακοῦ λαοῦ. Ἀντίθετα ἡ κεφαλὴ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας τὸ μόνον ποὺ ἔχει νὰ ἐπιδείξει τὰ τρία τελευταῖα χρόνια ποὺ ἡ χώρα βυθίστηκε στὸ χάος καὶ ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ κοινωνία καταστρέφεται ἀνεπανόρθωτα, εἶναι μερικὰ πιάτα φαγητὸ καὶ λίγα σέντς ἐλεημοσύνη γιὰ τοὺς φτωχοὺς. Οὔτε καν μία πανελλαδικὴ δέηση δὲν εἶναι ἱκανὴ νὰ συγκαλέσει γιὰ νὰ προσευχηθεῖ τὸ ποίμνιο γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία τῆς χώρας.

Πρόσφατα ἕνας γνωστὸς πνευματικὸς τῆς Βόρειας Ἑλλάδας καὶ καθηγούμενος μίας ἀπὸ τὶς πιὸ γνωστὲς μονές, στὴν ἐρώτημά μου γιατί ἡ Ἱεραρχία δὲν κάνει τίποτα γιὰ νὰ ἀντιδράσει στὴν ἐθνοκτόνο πολιτικὴ ποὺ ἀκολουθεῖται, μοῦ ἀπάντησε ὅτι δυστυχῶς ἡ κεφαλὴ τῆς Ἱεραρχίας δὲν εἶναι ἐκλεγμένη ἀλλὰ διορισμένη ἀπὸ ἕνα παρασκήνιο, ποὺ οὔτε λίγο οὔτε πολὺ δὲν τὸ συνέφερε νὰ ὑπάρχει στὴν Ἀρχιεπισκοπὴ ἕνας Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος ποὺ θὰ ἀντιδρούσε στὴν καταστροφὴ τῆς χώρας. Τραγικὴ ἀντίθεση μὲ τὴν Κύπρο ὅπου στὴν κεφαλὴ τῆς Ἱεραρχίας τῆς βρίσκεται ἕνας Ἱεράρχης ποὺ ἀποτελεῖ φωτεινὸ παράδειγμα ἀλλὰ καὶ κόλαφος γιὰ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἱεραρχία.



Ἐλπίζω ὅτι ὅσοι ἐξ ὑμῶν συμμετάσχουν εἰς τὴν Κυβέρνησιν θέλουν γνωρίσει μετ' ἐμοῦ ὅτι εἰς τὰς παρούσας περιστάσεις, ὅσοι εὐρίσκονται εἰς δημόσια ὑπουργήματα δὲν εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ λαμβάνουν μισθοὺς ἀναλόγως μὲ τὸν βαθμὸν τοῦ ὑψηλοῦ ὑπουργήματός των καὶ μὲ τὰς ἐκδουλεύσεις των, ἀλλ' ὅτι οἱ μισθοὶ οὗτοι πρέπει νὰ ἀναλογοῦν ἀκριβῶς μὲ τὰ χρηματικὰ μέσα, τὰ ὁποῖα ἔχει ἡ Κυβέρνησις εἰς τὴν ἐξουσίαν της...

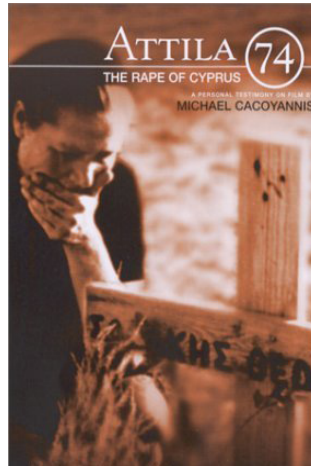
Ἐφ' ὅσον τὰ ἰδιαίτερα εἰσοδήματά μου ἀρκοῦν διὰ νὰ ζήσω, ἀρνοῦμαι νὰ ἐγγίσω μέχρι καὶ τοῦ ὀβολοῦ τὰ δημόσια χρήματα, ἐνῶ εὐρισκόμεθα εἰς τὸ μέσον ἐρειπίων καὶ ἀνθρώπων βυθισμένων εἰς ἐσχάτην πενίαν.

Ἰωάννης Καποδίστριας

*Πρῶτος Κυβερνήτης Ἑλλάδος, πρὸς τὴν Ἀ' Ἐθνοσυνέλευση
Φυσικά, δολοφονήθηκε!...*

Ὁ Ἀπίλας εἰς τὴν Κύπρον

Τοῦ κ. Μιχαὴλ Ε. Μιχαηλίδη, Θεολόγου.



Ὅπου Τουρκία καὶ αἷμα! 20 Ἰουλίου 1974. Μέρα πικρὴ. Μέρα ἀναπάντευχη. Μέρα ἀγωνίας. Οἱ σειρῆνες ἤχουν. Συναγερμὸς πολεμικός. Ὁ ἐχθρὸς εἰσβάλλει μὲ ὅλα τὰ στρατιωτικὰ μέσα. Ὁ ἐκφωνητὴς τοῦ ΡΙΚ μᾶς θυμίζει τὸν ἐκφωνητὴ τοῦ Ρ. Σ. Ἀθηνῶν τὰ ξημερώματα τῆς 28ης Ὀκτωβρίου...

Ἄλλ' ἐδῶ δὲν ἔχουμε Ἴταλό, ἀλλὰ Τοῦρκο. Κι ὁ Τοῦρκος εἶναι γνωστὸς στὴν ἱστορία ἀπ' ὅπου πέρασε μέχρι σήμερα. Ὅπου Τοῦρκος καὶ αἷμα καὶ ὅπου αἷμα, ἐκεῖ καὶ Τοῦρκος. Κι αὐτὸ δὲν τὸ λέω ἐγώ. Τὸ ἔχει πεῖ καὶ τὸ ἔχει γράψει ὁ μεγάλος Ἀγγλος πολιτικὸς Gladstone (Γλάδστον), ὅπως τὸ διασώζει σὲ βιβλίο του ὁ Γενικὸς πρόξενος τῶν Η.Π.Α. George Horton.

Ἴδου ἕνα μικρὸ κείμενο τοῦ Γλάδστον: «Ἦσαν στὸ σύνολό τους, ἀπ' τὴν πρώτη μαύρη μέρα, ποὺ μπῆκαν στὴν Εὐρώπη, τὸ μόνον δείγμα τῆς ἀνθρωπότητας, ποὺ ἔδειξε τὴ μεγαλύτερη ἔλλειψη ἀνθρωπισμοῦ. Ὅπουδήποτε καὶ ἂν πῆγαν, μιὰ πλατεῖα κηλίδα αἵματος ἔδειχνε τὰ ἴχνη τῆς διαβάσεώς τους καὶ σ' ὅλη τὴν ἔκταση τῆς κυριαρχίας τους ὁ πολιτισμὸς ἐξαφανιζόταν... Δέν ὑπάρχει ἐγκληματίας σὲ φυλακὴ τῆς Εὐρώπης, δὲν ὑπάρχει κακοῦργος στὰ νησιά τῆς νότιας θάλασσας, ποὺ δὲ θὰ ξεσηκωνόταν καὶ δὲ θὰ ξεχειλίζε ἀπὸ ἀγανάκτηση, ὅταν ἄκουγε αὐτὰ ποὺ διαπράχθηκαν, ποὺ θὰ μείνουν ὁμως ἀτιμώρητα καὶ θ' ἀφήσουν πίσω τους ὅλα τὰ χαμερπῆ καὶ θηριώδη πάθη, ποὺ τὰ προκάλεσαν». («Ἡ Δραῖσις μας», 1987, σελ. 158).

Ὁ ἄλλοτε πρωθυπουργὸς τῆς Μ. Βρετανίας Λόυδ Τζώρτζ (Lloyd George), κατὰ τὰ ἔτη 1916 - 1922 εἶπε: «Δυστυχῶς παραδώσαμε μὲ τὴ συμφωνία τῆς Λωζάνης τὰ ἅγια στοὺς σκύλους καὶ τοὺς μαργαρίτες, στὰ γουροῦνια».

Κι αὐτὰ δὲ γράφονται ἀπὸ λόγους ἐθνικῆς ὑπεροψίας ἢ σωβινιστικῆς διάθεσης, γιατί οἱ Ἕλληνες ἔχουν προσωπικὴ καὶ ἱστορικὴ πείρα μὲ τοὺς γείτονές τους, γιὰ ἐξακόσια τόσα χρόνια, ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλωση τῆς Πόλης μέχρι σήμερα. Ἰδιαίτερα στὸν εἰκοστὸ αἰῶνα, ἡ ἴδια ἢ Τουρκία πρόδωσε τὸν ἑαυτὸ της σ' ὅλο τὸν κόσμο, μὲ τὶς ἀλλεπάλληλες γενοκτονίες, ποὺ ὡς τὰ σήμερα συζητοῦνται στὰ διάφορα κοινοβούλια, καὶ τὶς διάφορες ἄλλες ἐθνοκαθάρσεις: Γενοκτονία Ποντίων,

Μικρασιατική καταστροφή, Σεπτέμβριος 1955, εισβολή του Άττίλα στην Κύπρο... και τὸ βλέμμα στραμμένο στὴ Θράκη, τὸ Αἰγαῖο, τὰ Ἑλληνικά μας νησιά καὶ τὴν κατάκτηση ὅλης τῆς Κύπρου!

Ἐπειδὴ οἱ καιροὶ εἶναι παράλληλοι στὰ θέματα ἄμυνας καὶ ἐξοπλισμῶν, εἶχε δίκιο ὁ Σατωμπριάν ἀπ' τὴν ἐποχὴ του, νὰ ὑποστηρίζῃ ὅτι, «τὸ νὰ θέλεις νὰ ἐκπολιτίσεις τὴν Τουρκία, δίνοντας πλοῖα καὶ σιδηροδρόμους, δὲν σημαίνει ὅτι ἐπεκτείνεις τὸν πολιτισμὸ στὴν Ἀνατολή, ἀλλ' ὅτι εἰσάγεις τὴν βαρβαρότητα στὴ Δύση».

Ἔοια τὰ παραπάνω ἐπαληθεύονται μὲ μιὰ μονάχα ματιὰ στὴν εισβολὴ τοῦ Ἄττίλα στὴν Κύπρο. Θέλησαν νὰ ἐπιδείξουν τὴ «γενναιότητά» τους, ἑκατομμύρια αὐτοί, μὲ λίγες χιλιάδες Κυπρίους. Ἴδου τὰ ἡρωϊκά τους «κατορθώματα», ὅπως μερικὰ ἀπὸ αὐτά, ἀναφέρονται στὸ ἀποκαλυπτικὸ βιβλίο «Αἱματηρὴ Ἀλήθεια» (Bloody Truth), τῆς «Κίνησης γιὰ Ἐλευθερία καὶ Δικαιοσύνη στὴν Κύπρο». Σημειῶνω, μὲ ἄκρα συντομία, τέσσερα ἀπὸ τὰ γεγονότα αὐτά:

Α΄ ΦΟΝΟΙ: 22 Ἰουλίου 1974, συλλαμβάνονται 12 ἄνδρες καὶ πυροβολοῦνται μπροστὰ στὰ μάτια τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ τῶν παιδιῶν. Ὅμαδικές ἐκτελέσεις ἔγιναν στὸ χωριὸ Παλαίκυθρο. 30 – 40 αἰχμάλωτοι στρατιῶτες μας πυροβολήθηκαν καὶ σκοτώθηκαν. Γιατρὸς ἀνάφερε ὅτι 17 μέλη δύο οἰκογενειῶν καὶ πέντε παιδιὰ 2 ἕως 9 ἐτῶν ἐκτελέστηκαν ἐν ψυχρῶ. Στὸ Πραστειὸ ἐκτελοῦνται 6 αἰχμάλωτοι πολῖτες. Ἐπίσης πυροβολοῦνται πέντε γυναῖκες καὶ σκοτώνονται ἐκτὸς μιᾶς, ἡ ὁποία προσποιήθηκε τὴ νεκρὴ. Καταθέσεις, πάντα ἐπὶ πόνου, περιγράφουν ἐκτελέσεις πολιτῶν σὲ σπίτια, δρόμους ἢ χωράφια, καὶ ἐκτελέσεις κρατουμένων. Ἀναφέρονται καὶ ὁμαδικοὶ τάφοι.

Β΄ ΒΙΑΣΜΟΙ: Τὰ Τουρκικὰ στρατεύματα εὐθύνονται γιὰ μαζικοὺς καὶ κατ' ἐπανάληψη βιασμοὺς γυναικῶν κάθε ἡλικίας ἀπὸ 12 μέχρι 71 ἐτῶν. Σὲ πολλές περιπτώσεις οἱ βιασμοὶ συνοδεύονταν ἀπὸ κτηνώδη συμπεριφορὰ. Σὲ ἄλλες περιπτώσεις, τὶς ἀπόπειρες βιασμοῦ ἀκολουθοῦσε μαχαίρωμα ἢ ἐκτέλεση τῶν θυμάτων, μεταξὺ τῶν ὁποίων συμπεριλαμβάνονταν ἔγκυες καὶ διανοητικὰ καθυστερημένες.

Ὁ γιατρὸς Χ. εἶπε ὅτι, ἐπιβεβαίωσε βιασμὸ σὲ 70 περιπτώσεις... Ἔχομε καὶ κορίτσια, «μάρτυρες» τῆς ἀγνότητας. Τέτοια περίπτωσις ὑπῆρξε στὸ χωριὸ Ταύρου, ὅταν Τοῦρκοι στρατιῶτες προσπάθησαν νὰ βιάσουν μιὰ 17χρονη μαθήτρια. Ἀντιστάθηκε καὶ ἐκτελέστηκε. Ἄνδρας ὁμολόγησε ὅτι ἡ σύζυγός του βιάστηκε στὴν παρουσία τῶν παιδιῶν του. Ἄλλος μάρτυρας ἀνέφερε περίπτωσις 25 κοριτσιῶν, ποὺ εἶχαν βιαστῆ, ἐνῶ ἄλλος ἀνέφερε ὅτι ἡ σύζυγός του ἀντιστεκόμενη στὸ βιασμό, μαχαιρώθηκε στὸ λαϊμό, καθὼς καὶ ἡ 6 ἐτῶν ἐγγονὴ του, τὴν ὁποίαν προσπαθοῦσαν νὰ τὴν βιάσουν...

Γ΄ ΒΑΣΑΝΙΣΤΗΡΙΑ: Οἱ μαρτυρίες ἀναφέρουν ὅτι, «κατὰ τὴν διάρκειά της κράτησής τους ἀπὸ τὸν Τουρκικὸ στρατό, ἑκατοντάδες ἄνδρες, γυναῖκες, παιδιὰ καὶ συνταξιούχοι, ὑπῆρξαν θύματα συστηματικῶν βασανιστηρίων καὶ βαρβαρότητας».

Δ΄ ΛΕΗΛΑΣΙΕΣ: Ἀπερίγραπτες: 133 ἐκκλησίες ἔγιναν ἀποθήκες, στάβλοι, καὶ νυκτερινὰ κέντρα διασκέδασης. 78 ἐκκλησίες ἔγιναν τζαμιά. Κλάπηκαν 15.000 εἰκόνες... κ.λπ. κ.λπ.

Καὶ τὸ πιὸ ἐξωφρενικὸ: Ἡ προπαγάνδα τῆς Τουρκίας ὑποστηρίζῃ ὅτι, «δὲν πρόκειται γιὰ ἐπιδρομὴ, ἀλλὰ γιὰ εἰρηνικὴ ἐπέμβαση»!

Ἦστώσο, μήπως καὶ μεῖς εἴμαστε ἔνοχοι γιὰ τὶς ἁμαρτίες μας; Μιὰ αὐτοεξέταση, πολὺ θὰ μᾶς ὠφελήσει.



Ἐρχονται δύσκολοι καιροὶ ἐπειδὴ λιγότεψε ἢ 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 λαϊκοὶ θὰ γίνουν ἕνα 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 περιορισμούς.

Κανεὶς δὲν θὰ φροντίζει γιὰ τὶς ψυχὰς τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Ἔοια θὰ περιοριστοῦν σὲ μιὰ ἀπλή συναλλαγὴ. Ἔοιοι θὰ ἀδιαφοροῦν γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία τους, γιὰ τὴν πίστη, δὲν θὰ ἔχουν φόβο Θεοῦ, τὸ καθῆκον, ἢ ὑποχρέωση, ἢ εὐθύνη θὰ εἶναι ἄγνωστες ἔννοιες. Ἔοια θὰ περιστρέφονται γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ χρῆμα.

Ὁ ἕνας θὰ πουλάει τὸν ἄλλον, ἢ κακίᾳ στὸν κόσμῳ 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 παιδιὰ μας.

Τὰ παιδιὰ μας σὲ αὐτοὺς τοὺς δύσκολους καιροὺς θὰ εἶναι ἀνέτοιμα νὰ ἀντιμετωπίσουν τὶς καταστάσεις, ἐπειδὴ οἱ γονεῖς σήμερὰ δὲν διδάσκουν στὰ παιδιὰ τὸν φόβο τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν ντροπὴ πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Γι' αὐτὸν τὸν λόγο θὰ πέσουν θύματα πολλῶν κακῶν. Μητέρες μὴν ἀφήσετε τὰ παιδιὰ σας νὰ τὰ παρασύρει τὸ κῆμα αὐτοῦ τοῦ διεφθαρμένου αἰῶνα. Θὰ κλαῖτε αἰῶνια ποῦ δὲν σώσατε τὰ παιδιὰ σας καὶ θὰ τὰ κάνετε υἱοὺς τῆς γέεννας τοῦ πυρός. Ἐὰν σταματοῦσε ἡ ἁμαρτία στὸν κόσμῳ καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι μετανοοῦσαν δὲν θὰ ζούσαμε ἐμεῖς τοὺς ἔσχατους καιροὺς...

Γέροντας Ἰλαρίωνας Ἀργκάτου(+2006)

FROM RAGS TO RICHES

By Anthony of the Desert.

Editor's Note: The author of this article, Anthony, has been a regular reader of "Orthodox Heritage" and possesses a history which reveals the devastation flowing from interrelation with demonism as well as the expurgative power of Christ Jesus through the Church He established in the first century, the Holy Apostolic Orthodox Christian Church.

† † †

In January 1956 I was born into an upper-middle class neighborhood of West Los Angeles. My mother was a devout Catholic from Austria while my father graduated from West Point and retired as a general before entering civilian life and becoming the president of Los Angeles' major television cable company. I enjoyed a conservative upbringing, happily accompanying my parents to Episcopal church services at least weekly, participating in organized sports (baseball, ice hockey, and football), and experiencing close knit family relations; we delighted in frequent vacations, concerts, summer days on the beach, water and snow skiing... my dad even coached all of the teams I was on.

This propitious onset of life continued as I enrolled in military school; I was excited, having wanted to follow in my beloved dad's footsteps. The initial semester went well (this was the fall of 1969, I was thirteen years old), but in order to increase attendance the academy lowered entrance requirements and this led to the presence of numerous problem cadets. I was barely aware of drug use but, tragically, accepted some sleeping pills from another student—as will become apparent, even the slightest acquiescence to demonic provocation inflicts devastating outcomes.

The summer of 1970 found me having been suspended from military school. Involvement in substance abuse blossomed and I spent more and more time on the UCLA campus interacting with counterculture radicals. Gone was attendance at Episcopal church, participation in organized sports, positive relations with my parents, and, seemingly, everything else good in life; please note the path upon which I had embarked once I granted interior access to demons... I was never the same again. That summer, while seeking the purchase of marijuana, I accepted a ride from a man who then wasted no time taking me to his house to then sexually assault me. A series of private schools for disturbed children and continuing psychiatric care ensued, but these

secular interventions merely incited further departure from God; absent the Spiritual Hospital (the Orthodox Christian Church, of which at the time I had no knowledge) the demons accessed my heart. I became heavily involved in using and selling drugs, criminal activity was common, and there occurred sexually perverse behavior. Then, just prior to my eighteenth birthday, I was sent to prison—where I have spent approximately thirty-seven of the last thirty-nine years... mastery of my existence by demonic influence had become relatively complete.

As horrible as were the nine years in California prisons, between late 1973 to 1984, that was nothing compared to what I was about to endure when passing through Arizona in September of 1984. I was creating a multi-state methamphetamine ring, hence the California to Texas journey that found me stopping in Tucson for a weekend. On September 17th I committed a robbery and the voyage toward Texas proceeded; however, back in Tucson a child had gone missing and my record in California of sexual deviancy made me the prime suspect.



On September 20, 1984 the FBI arrested me for kidnapping! The charge centered upon their belief that I had taken the girl, and within weeks I was returned to and incarcerated in Tucson, where the community was in hysterics and national coverage had begun. Then partial remains were discovered... and I

was charged with capital murder.

The eventual trial, in January 1987, transpired in Phoenix and despite sketchy evidence, at best, I was convicted and sentenced to death. I have been on death row since May 1987.

While having been condemned by society, God did not abandon me, He sent me an angel. Several weeks after having arrived on "The Row" I received a letter from a Christian woman who had viewed the trial on television, my innocence was obvious to her but she wrote to ask where I would go when I die and why. This initiation into Christian dialogue led to a lasting friendship and she encouraged my attendance at college—the ensuing decade saw Sarah standing with me through two associate of arts degrees, a bachelors (as a pre-law English major), and a masters in literature. I also determined to rededicate my life to the pursuit of Christ in January 1988 and soon thereafter Sarah and I were engaged. She attended a non-denominational church and recorded 2-3 weekly services so I could listen and then discuss doctrines when we visited; at the time, fundamentalist Christianity was all we knew.

Amidst the docket of university courses and shared services on cassette, Sarah and I married in 1991. Life was unusual but aimed at God, however, the hole which dwells within all who have not entered Christ's Spiritual Hospital persisted as I sought to fill the interior void with both mystic eastern belief systems (my 1997 masters thesis compared Christianity and Taoism) and authoring/editing anarchist publications. Such was my state when I began writing a Cyprian bishop in 1998.

Bishop (now Metropolitan) Athanasios was the subject of a book I had run across that purported to be on "Christian mysticism" and God provided contact with this disciple of Elder Joseph of Vatopaidi (+2009). He sent me numerous books by Church Fathers and his letters were an entry into noetic Jerusalem; eventually Metropolitan Athanasios arranged to have Elder Paisios (Abbot of St. Anthony's Monastery in Florence, AZ) visit me. This was in 1999 and I was "home;" the journey from rags to riches was about to begin when Geronda Paisios baptized me in July 2000.

The nature of my conviction had generated intense hatred by both correctional officers and inmates, thus, there existed efforts to remain unharmed through my own actions and it was precisely this passion of pride that Geronda Paisios began to treat. Still, ensuant years were rife with behaviors intended to scare off prisoners, however, as I ever so slowly began to humble myself and cooperate with God's grace many external and interior transmutations followed. For instance, diminishing rampant anger and some erosion of a prisoner mentality influenced Sarah's precious heart toward Orthodoxy—in fact, in 2007 she was baptized by her Antiochian Orthodox Christian priest! The pattern of numerous annual disciplinary reports ceased (since 2002 only one minor infraction has issued), a three year theology degree from St. Stephen's was earned, books were authored and published [*Ed. note: for information on Anthony's books please visit www.churchfathertheology.com*] and evidence that law enforcement planted evidence emerged.

Of course, the slight purification of soul compelled demons to function more forcefully to stimulate falls into pride. I opposed this via more obedience to Elder Paisios—which manifested in a cessation of attempts to appear tough—but once prisoners noticed I had "put down my sword" they dramatically increased verbal attacks and as these failed to produce my prior outbursts then efforts to physically assault me ensued. This situation led to my having been stabbed twice in the summer of 2010, and I was assaulted again in December 2011; however, rather than to discipline the offender a unit administrator placed me in the gang member violent control section—obviously, their reaction to my presence in "their" locale was intense and only the grace of God allowed me to maintain obedience

to my elder until staff re-housed me. The prescription for patience and humility by Geronda Paisios had at long last begun to be followed.

Other demonic machinations have included Geronda Paisios' having been able to visit me for two hours as frequently as every week from 1999 until September 2012, when the prison decided to limit his provision of Confession and Holy Communion to an hour monthly; Satan's endeavors to obstruct Christ's purifying grace never cease, but cooperation with His energies crush the serpent. Admittedly, it was a terrible blow to lose so much time with my spiritual father, but by clinging to the Lord's grace I truly possess heavenly treasure... Sarah and I are so spiritually rich!



The kingdom of heaven is redemption from sin, and therefore we all, both bad and good, are mingled with the meal of the Church that we all may be a new lump. But that no one may be afraid that an admixture of evil leaven might injure the lump, the Apostle said: *That ye may be a new lump, even as ye are unleavened* (1 Cor 5:7); that is to say, this mixture will render you again such, as in the pure integrity of your innocence. If we thus have compassion, we are not stained with the sins of others, but we gain the restoration of another to the increase of our own grace, so that our integrity remains as it was. And therefore he adds: *For Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us* (1 Cor 5:7); that is, the Passion of the Lord profited all, and gave redemption to sinners who repented of the sins they had committed.

St. Ambrose of Milan

A single good word made the thief pure and holy, despite all his previous crimes, and brought him into Paradise (cf. Lk 23:42-43). A single ill-advised word prevented Moses from entering the promised land (cf. Num 20:12). We should not suppose, then, that garrulity (*Ed.*, excessive talkativeness) is only a minor disease. Lovers of slander and gossip shut themselves out of the kingdom of heaven.

St. John of Karpathos

The Gospel teaches us to cut off the roots of our sins and not merely their fruits. When we have dug the root of anger out of our heart, we will no longer act with hatred or envy. *Whoever hates his brother is a murderer* (1 Jn 3:15), for he kills him with the hatred in his mind. The blood of a man who has been slain by the sword can be seen by men, but blood shed by the hatred in the mind is seen by God, Who rewards each man with punishment or a crown not only for his acts but for his thoughts and intentions as well.

St. John Cassian

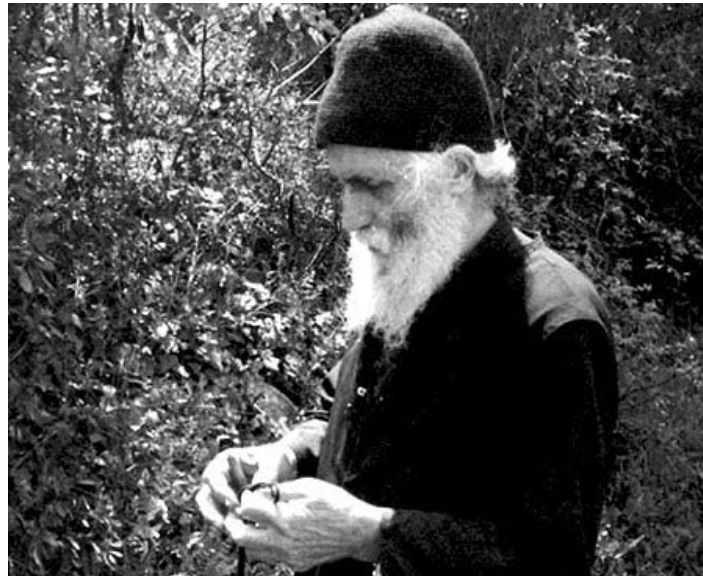
ON THE "OLD CALENDARISTS"

Source: "Life of the Elder Paisios the Athonite," (in Greek), by Hieromonk Father Isaac (pages 691-696).

Elder Paisios dealt with the Calendar issue too. He was really worried for the division the issue has caused and he was praying about it. He was really worried for the groups formed by Old Calendarists behaving independently having no communion with the Orthodox Patriarchates and the local Orthodox Churches. Some groups of those kinds were in Athens and Thessalonica, united under his instruction with the Church of Greece, keeping at the same time the old calendar.

The elder said: "It would have been good if this calendar difference did not exist, but it is not a matter of faith." In the objections that the New Calendar was done by a pope he would reply: "The new calendar was made by a pope and the old one by an idolater," meaning of course Julius Caesar. In order to understand the position of the Elder more clearly on the matter, the following incident is mentioned.

An Orthodox Christian who was Greek in origin had lived with his family in the USA for many years. He had a serious problem, though. He was himself a "zealot" (Old Calendarist) whereas his wife and children followed the New Calendar. "We could not celebrate a feast together like a family," he used to say. They would celebrate Christmas when for me was St. Spyridon's Feast. When I had Christmas, they



had St. John's. And that was the least of our problems. The worst thing was to know, as they had been teaching us, that the New Calendarists are heretics and will be damned.

It is no little thing to keep hearing that your wife and your children betrayed their faith, went with the Pope's side, their mysteries have no grace, etc. We would talk for hours on, but without coming to a conclusion. To say the truth, there was something I did not like with the Old Calendarists too, especially when some of our bishops would come to talk to us. They were not talking with love and pain in their heart for the deceived New Calendarists (as they considered them to be). But it was as if they had hatred and were happy when they would proclaim that the New Calendarists would go to hell. They were very fanatical. And when their speech would end, I would feel inside me an internal agitation. I was losing my peace.

But I would not even think of leaving our tradition. I was greatly distressed with the whole issue. Surely something would happen to me from the constant worry.

In one of my travels to Greece I mentioned my problem to my cousin Yianni (John). He told me about some elder Paisios. We decided to go to the Holy Mountain, in order for me to meet with him. We arrived at "Panagouda" (where the Elder was living). The Elder offered us something and with a smiling face made me sit next to him. I felt at a loss with his behavior. I felt that, as he was acting as if he had known me forever, he also knew all about me.

- How are things going there with the cars, in America? were his first words.

I was taken aback. I had forgotten to mention that my job was at parking lots, and of course I was dealing with cars all day long.

- I'm doing well, was the only thing I could falter, looking at the Elder with surprise in my eyes.

- How many churches do you have there where you live?

- Four, I replied; and a new wave of surprise came over me.

- With the old or with the new (calendar)?, came the third "thunderbolt" which, however, instead of increasing my surprise, somehow made me feel more at ease with the Elder's charisma.

- Two with the old and two with the new, I replied.

- Which one do you follow?

- I with the old, and my wife with the new, I replied.

- Look. You should go where your wife goes, he told

me with firmness, and was preparing to give me explanations.

But for me the matter was already closed. I did not need more explanations or arguments. Something unbelievable had happened inside me; something divine. What was torturing me had gone away. All the arguments and all the threats and anathemas against the New Calendarists that I would hear for years now had vanished. I felt the grace of God who through His Saint was acting on me and filling me with a peace that I had long longed for. My internal situation was evidently seen through my eyes. What I remember was that my situation may have made the Elder to stop for a while. But then he continued to give me some explanations. Perhaps for me to tell others, and also so that I could use them for myself in a time of temptation, when that divine situation would have passed.

- We too of course follow the old (calendar) on the Holy Mountain. But this is a different situation. We are united with the Church, with all the Patriarchates, both those that follow the new and the old calendar. We recognize their *mysteria* (*Ed.*, sacraments) as valid and they recognize ours. Their priests perform services with our priests. Whereas these poor folk (the Old Calendarists) were cut off. Most of them have piety, accuracy (in following the canons) and a fighting spirit and true zeal of God. But it only happens inexplicably and not because they have knowledge of what they do. Others due to simplicity, others due to lack of knowledge, and others due to selfishness, though, went astray. They considered the 13 days as a dogmatic issue and all of us deceived, and thus left the Church. They do not have communion with the Patriarchates and the Churches that follow both either the new or the old calendar because the latter ones supposedly became contaminated through their communion with the New Calendarists. And this is not the only thing. Even those few that have remained (as Old Calendarists in Greece), have become ... even I don't know how many pieces! And they keep being cut off into smaller pieces all the time and they keep anathematizing each other, excommunicating each other and defrocking each other. You do not know how much I have grieved and been saddened by this situation. I have prayed a lot. It is important that we show love towards them and feel for them and not to condemn them; and more importantly, for us to pray for them so that God illumines them, and, if once in a while one of them asks help from us in a good-natured manner, we could say a word or two, the Elder concluded.

Several years have passed since the repose of Elder Paisios. Mr. X. returned to "Panagouda" to thank the Elder, because after that time when he first met him, he found his spiritual but also familial happiness, and with tears in his eyes described the above events. With his love, prayer and discernment, the Elder knew when to speak, how to act, and how to help Mother Church quietly, avoiding extremisms and healing the wounds that torment the body of the Church and scandalize the faithful.



Now let me give you a "good curse" too! May God flood your heart with His kindness and His abundant love, until you go out of your mind! May your mind leave this earth, even while you are in this life, and stay close to Him! May you go mad with the divine madness of God's love! May God burn your hearts with His love! Don't ask me for a second curse; this "good curse" of mine works, because it comes straight from my heart...

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

MEANWHILE, IN ORTHODOX RUSSIA...

Source: RIA Novosti (<http://www.en.rian.ru/>), June 30th, 2013.

MOSCOW – President Vladimir Putin has signed into law a bill banning the promotion of "non-traditional sexual relations" toward minors, Russia's official website of legal information said on Sunday.

The law will levy fines for such offenses from 800,000 rubles (\$24,000) to 1 million rubles (\$30,500) for legal entities, from 4,000 rubles (\$120) to 5,000 rubles (\$150) for individuals and from 40,000 rubles (\$1,220) to 50,000 rubles (\$1,530) for officials. Legal entities may also be suspended for 90 days for the promotion of "non-traditional sexual relations" toward children.

Promotion of such relations with the use of mass media or Internet resources will see harsher penalties of 50,000-100,000 rubles (\$1,520-3,050) for individuals, 100,000-200,000 rubles (\$3,050-6,115) for officials and 1 million rubles or 90-day suspension for legal entities.

While the law's proponents argue it is aimed at protecting children from harmful influences, critics allege the move is part of a broader crackdown on Russia's gay community.

Russia has come under international criticism, including from the European Court of Human Rights, for its treatment of the gay community.

Putin reiterated on Tuesday that the rights of sexual minorities in Russia were not being violated in any way.

When asked about a recently passed bill that would impose fines of up to 1 million rubles for promoting homosexuality toward minors, Putin said that sexual minorities "are full-fledged members of our society and are not being discriminated against in any way."

"It's not about imposing some sort of sanctions on homosexuality. ... It's about protecting children from such information," Putin said.

"Certain countries ... think that there is no need to protect [children] from this. ... But we are going to provide such protection the way that State Duma [parliamentary] lawmakers have decided. We ask you not to interfere in our governance," he said.



Do not go to sleep without prayer. No matter how exhausted you are, pray—even if it is in bed—for at least half an hour. When you have your mind in God, then—wherever you find yourself, on the road, at home, in bed—you are able to pray. Whereas when your mind runs elsewhere, then—even if you are in church—compunction will not come; and your prayer will be formal and dry.

Elder Ieronymos of Aigina (+1966)

THE FALSEHOODS OF PAPISM

Source: From the Holy Monastery of Great Meteoron.

Editor's Note: With the continuing perseverance of the ecumenical dialogues and the expanding influence of ecumenism, the heresy of all heresies, the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen considers it prudent to continue presenting articles on the truth of our differences with the Latins, thus providing information to assist us in guarding against any false union with the papists. May our Lord and Savior protect us and His Bride, the Holy Orthodox Church, in these times of great uncertainty, confusion and apostasy.

† † †

The differences between Orthodoxy and papism are many and significant, old and recent, and concern as much the dogmatic matters as matters of ecclesiastical experience, worship, art and theories relative to life and death. We shall attempt here to provide a concise presentation derived from the texts of the Holy Fathers and contemporary theologians, Metropolitans and Elders of our Church, who with clarity and Orthodox prudence demonstrate the aberration from the true faith and the falsehoods of papism. For a better understanding of the differences between Orthodoxy and papism it is necessary to investigate the overall ecclesiastic, social and political conditions of the period. For this reason we provide very briefly some historical events that proved as waypoints in the birth of papism and the course towards its separation and schism.



Historic Description

The early Orthodox Latin church of the West in old Rome was always in communion with the Orthodox East and its Patriarchates. The event that interrupted this harmonious communion between East and West was the conquering of the western Roman Empire by the Franks during the 5th and 6th century, when western Europe suffered the storming of the barbarian hordes that radically changed her social and religious conditions.

The Franks, a primitive and uncultured people of that period, from the first moment of their Christianization received and assimilated incorrectly the Christian teaching. The Christology and Triology always proved to them problematic, and their understanding of the Holy Trinity was strongly influenced by Arianism. In the Frankish synod at Toledo in 589, despite the apparent condemnation of Arianism, they adopted a different and false form of Triology, the processing of the

Holy Spirit also from the Son, which they later included in their Creed of Faith.

In the 8th century, Charles the Great (Charlemagne) became king of the Franks, who went on to subdue other countries and leaders of Europe and formed the unified western Roman Empire. The social and religious orientation of this new western Empire had the major stigma of diversification and opposition towards the Eastern Byzantine Empire. This opposition by the Franks was displayed through ignoring and jeering the Byzantine Greeks, who already started to disparagingly refer to them as “heretics” and “Greeks” (i.e., thieves). It is characteristic that from the 9th to the 13th century we repeatedly read in the West articles with the title “Contres Errors Graecorum - Against the Falsehoods of the Greeks.” The society and the Orthodox faith of the Greeks for the uncultured Franks were an incomprehensible dimension and elusive but at the same time unapproachable and unattainable, and for this they preferred to present it as falsehood and heresy.

Since the 9th century the Franks, having expelled the Roman Orthodox bishops, declared themselves as bishops and abbots of France. They also took over by force the Orthodox Latin Patriarchate of Rome and from 1009 to 1046 they replaced the Orthodox Popes of Rome with Franco-Latins, thus setting up the present papism. “Therefore the so called Schism between the western and Eastern Churches was not between western Orthodox Romans (Patriarchate of Rome) and the Eastern Orthodox Romans (Patriarchate of Constantinople).” (Fr. John Romanidis, “The cause of Schism”).

With the Frankization of the Orthodox Patriarchate of Rome, falsehoods permeated into it and led to the anti-Hellenism of the Franks, elements that have not ceased since then to constitute the main distinguishing feature and quintessence of papism.

1. Filioque (and from the Son)

It regards the perception of the procession of the Holy Spirit “and from the Son” (filioque) and not only from the Father. This perception, that was introduced also into the Creed of Faith, goes in complete opposition to the words of our Lord Himself in the Bible that say: “*when therefore the paraklete will come ..., the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father...*” (Jn 15:26). It also completely contradicts the decisions of the Second Ecumenical Synod, which declared the specific article of the Creed of Faith, as well as of other Synods.

The addition of the filioque in the Creed of Faith, constitutes a substantial and obvious heresy, since it contravenes the Bible and the decisions of the Ecumenical Synods. And just because of this falsehood the papists are heretics and not schismatics (as some falsely maintain, that technically there was no Ecumenical Synod that condemned papism as heresy). Of course it is about a naive argument since it is known that the Ecumenical Synods dogmatized and stipulated the true faith and every departure from her, every opposing position to the decisions of the Ecumenical Synods obviously constitute heresy. In any case, there was no Ecumenical Synod that condemned for example the Protestants, the Pentecostals etc, as heretics, without this meaning that they are not.

St. Photios the Great, this luminary and great teacher of our Church condemns in a characteristic way the papist heresy of the filioque: "Who shouldn't seal his ears to the extent of such blasphemy? This goes against the gospels, opposes the Holy Synods and the blessed and holy Fathers, extinguishes the great Athanasius, the great theologian Gregory, the royal uniform of the Church, the Great Basil, the golden mouth of the world, the ocean of wisdom, the true Chrysostom. And what do I say, this certain person or that certain person? Against all the holy prophets, apostles, hierarchs, martyrs and the despotic voices, this blaspheming and God fighting voice becomes armed."

The addition of the filioque is one of the most basic and earlier dogmatic differences with papism. Since its enactment and for the rest of the course of the East and West, this falsehood constitutes and continues to constitute an unbridgeable chasm, having been one of the most important causes that led to the schism. As Gennadius Scholarius (+1473) informs us, "... the schism of course happened because of the inclusion in the Creed and it was thus proper to repulse the Latins, for it was proper in averting its inclusion."

The papists even dared to accuse the Orthodox that they removed from the Creed the filioque! This was the main accusation that was leveled against the Orthodox by the emissary of the pope, cardinal Umberto, when on July 15th, 1054 he placed the libel with anathemas on the Patriarch and all the Orthodox, on the Holy Altar of Saint Sophia, that ostensibly accusing the Orthodox "as spirit and god opposers" removed from the Symbol of the Holy Spirit, its procession "and from the Son."

The perseverance of the papists on the heretical position of the "filioque" holds them separated from the Church and the Truth, and comprises a significant obstacle on every attempt to return to the Orthodox faith, despite the well-meaning initiatives, even the lifting of the anathemas. Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos clarifies best the related confusion: "Some maintain that the anathemas have been lifted and therefore there is no more any problem. Of course there is a problem, because with a simple action they lifted the anathemas but did not lift the heresy of 'filioque' which in fact was even more strengthened."

emas but did not lift the heresy of 'filioque' which in fact was even more strengthened."

2. The Teaching on the Uncreated Essence and Uncreated Energy of God.

A very large and basic difference between Orthodoxy and papism is the topic of the essence and the energies of God. The correct teaching on this topic is that since the essence of God is uncreated, so are His energies. In contrast to Orthodox dogma, the westerners believe that the energies and grace of God are created.

The Abbot of the Holy Monastery of St. Gregory, Archimandrite George Kapsanis specifically writes: "Until today the westerners believe the Divine Grace, the energy of God, to be created. It is unfortunate that this dogmatic error, which is one of the many differences between us, is not given serious consideration in the theological dialogue with the Roman Catholics. It is not only the 'filioque,' the position of primacy, and the 'infallibility' of the pope that are pointed out as the basic differences between the Orthodox Church and the papists. If the Roman Catholics do not accept that the Grace of God is uncreated, we cannot unite with them, even if they accept everything else. For who would energize the *theosis*, if the Divine Grace is uncreated but not the uncreated energy of the Holy Spirit?"

3. The Primacy of the Pope

One of the basic heretical beliefs of papism constitutes the "primacy" of the pope. According to the decision of the 1st synod of the Vatican (1870), the pope is the lieutenant of Christ and His representative on earth. He is the leader and visible head of the church. In his person the whole church is summarized. This position, however, is purely heretical, since "the truth is that only Christ is the Head and Leader of the Church. This we also read in St. Paul's epistle (Eph 1:22-23): *And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.*" Archim. Gerv. Raptopoulos, "Heresies in Greece and the Falsehoods of Papism," pp. 153-154.

4. The Infallibility of the Pope

The first Vatican synod enacted the dogma of the infallibility of the pope. It concerns the arrogant perception of the "ex-cathedra" infallibility of the pope. According to this dogma, the pope is above even the Ecumenical Synods and claims the complete and highest jurisdiction to infallibly pronounce and his teaching must be accepted by all in the church. Whoever dares to "argue" and oppose this teaching, "let him be anathematized" (Ch. 4 of the 2nd Vat. synod). In fact, theologians of the Roman-Catholic "church" have gone as far as to declare that even if the pope said a lie, it must be accepted by the faithful as truth!"

The proclamation of one and only one man as infallible, no matter if he holds the highest office of the hierarchy, is a foreign action and against the Holy Bible and the Holy Tradition. According to the Russian Orthodox theologian Bulgakov

“the infallibility belongs to the Complete Church. That is why the May 6th 1848 encyclical of the Orthodox Patriarchates of the Eastern Orthodox Church stipulated that ‘the guardian of Orthodoxy, the body of the Church, is Her people.’ The Church on its totality, clergy and laity together is the ‘faithful guardian of the Apostolic Tradition, guarding it as entrusted heritage.’” (Archim. Gerv. Raptopoulos pp. 163-166).

Archimandrite George Kapsanis notes that “the infallibility has extended to every decision of the pope. In other words, while the 1st Vatican synod declared that only the ‘ex-cathedra’ decisions of the pope with the use of the term ‘definitum’ were infallible, the 2nd synod of the Vatican pronounced that the pope is infallible not only in his official pronouncements as pope but also in all his pronouncements. It becomes clear from the above that their ecumenical synod does not belong to the ecumenical synod but to the pope. Who, however, pronounced the pope infallible? The fallible synod?”

In this manner the synodic leadership, delivered by the holy Apostles, is replaced by the ‘papo-centric’ leadership. The ‘infallible’ pope contributes the centre and source of the Church’s union, which means that the Church needs a man to keep it united. In this way the position of Christ and the Holy Spirit is set aside and downgraded. Moreover, with the translation of the Holy Spirit to the person of the pope, the eschatological perspective of the Church is contained within history and thus rendered worldly.”

5. The Abolishment of the Holy Canons

The Vatican since long ago had already abolished most of the Holy Canons of the Ecumenical Synods and produced its own “Canon Law” to be free to proceed on the route that leads to all sorts of innovations. The uniate Fr. Gregory confesses it thus: “The East and West disagree about these, the sources of the Canon Law. The church of Rome officially having accepted in the beginning only the canons from the 1st Ecumenical Synod (325) at Nicea, and at Sardis (343), was indifferent to the legislation regarding the ecclesiological order and discipline of the remainder of the Eastern Synods, Ecumenical or local...”

Completely arbitrarily, the popes, due to their dominant overview over the whole church, abolished the Holy Canons of the six Ecumenical Synods and the canons of the local Synods and of the Fathers, which were bestowed ecumenical validity, having been validated under the 2nd canon of the 6th Ecumenical Synod; specifically the Vatican abolished the Canons of the 6th Ecumenical Synod, because some of them were directed against the innovations of the papist church (2nd, 13th, 55th, etc.).

6. The Papist Nation

The view that it is not possible for the “representative of God” on earth to be found under worldly authority(!), drove to the establishment in 1929 (after an agreement of the pope with the dictator Mussolini) of the present papal nation of the Vatican. This way papism became a worldly nation that

has an army, practices diplomacy, and influences the international economy with its participation in large companies and enterprises. It concerns, in other words, an anthropocentric organization for secularization, and in fact in institutionalized secularization. However the coexistence of the worldly authority with the hierarchal, episcopal authority is somewhat incompatible, something that is foreign to the spirit of the Bible, the Synodal Canons and to the traditions of the Church in general.

“It is a frightful sign of the worldliness of the Church, the confusion of the heavenly and the worldly, of the two kingdoms, the heavenly and the worldly. This way the Church succumbs to the second temptation of Christ by the devil who asked Him to worship him, that he may then give him all authority over all the kingdoms of the world. The Lord answered him: *Your Lord God you shall worship and Him only you shall worship.*” (Archim. George Kapsanis, *Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism - Main Differences*).

7. Purgatory - Supererogation of the Saints

Concerning the fall and salvation of man there are important differences. Adam, says the synod of Trent (1546), with his disobedience, brought about the “wrath and anger of God, and as a result, death.” It is expected therefore that the salvation of man requires the atonement of the wrath of God. The blood of Christ eliminates the eternal punishments of sinful man, which are due to the mortal sins. Apart from these sins there are heavy and light sins which require temporary penalties. Man must complete the penalties with works of repentance (penance) that are dictated by the Church. Many people die before completing the imposed penalties and go on to what is known as “purgatory” that exists between paradise and hell where they are called to pay their debts. From there, with the prayers of the pope and the living, the souls continue on to paradise. However, the “Church” can satisfy the incomplete penance based on the “treasury of the supererogation of the saints” (the extra good works of the saints not required for their salvation, which went to the treasury of the Church), which is disposed of by the pope. (A. Alivizopoulos, *Roman Catholicism, Protestantism and Orthodoxy*, p. 16). In other words, they believe the supererogation could save other people. This papist teaching concerns what is known as the absolution or abrogation by the Roman Catholic church.

Nowhere however does the Bible teach about such things, nor does it accept “surplus supererogation” of men, no matter how saintly they may have been during their life. Concerning the “purgatory,” St. Nektarios, in his book “Study on the Immortality of the Soul” p. 168-169, Athens 1901, specifically writes: “According to the Orthodox Church, after death there is absolutely no intermediate stage between those who ascend to Heavens and those who descend to Hell. There is no special place of in-between living where the souls of the repented are found and not having availed of the fruit of repentance.”

8. The Latin Mariology (Mary Worship)

The papist “church,” by deviating from the correct teaching of our Fathers, was driven to falsehoods, innovations and false dogmas in the person of the All-Holy Panaghia, the Theotokos. Thus, in 1854 the dogma of the immaculate conception of the Theotokos, namely, “that Virgin Mary from the first moment of her conception was kept clean from all ancestral pollution of sin.”

In 1950, pope Pius 12th declared as dogma the incorporation of the translation of the Theotokos according to which “the ever virgin Mother of God after her earthly life was translated body and soul to the heavenly glory.” In the last few years, a strong inclination is observed by the papists towards granting exaggerated honors to the Theotokos, that reach the limits of worship: “Co-redeemer,” “Mother of the Church,” “Intercessor for all the Graces.” These honorary titles granted to the All-Holy Mother, present an erroneous and problematic content.

According to the Orthodox teaching, the ancestral sin is passed on to all the people, even to those that comprise the elected implements, as was the Most Holy Theotokos. According to St. Nikodimos the Hagiorite, the Theotokos was “subject to the ancestral sin until the Annunciation. For then she was cleansed through the advent of the Holy Spirit.” What concerns the translation of the Theotokos, Orthodox teaching mentions the post repose translation, without however this becoming raised to dogma, as it not confessed in the Holy Bible or in the Apostolic Tradition.

In Orthodoxy, worship belongs totally and only to the Trinitarian God, whereas towards the saints and the Most Holy, it befits the veneration of honor and intercessory capacity to the only Saviour, our Lord, Jesus Christ. With great clarity, the 7th Ecumenical Council (787) declares: “Honoring and magnifying we learnt firstly, primarily and truthfully the bearer of God and the holy and angelic powers and the glorious Martyrs but also the holy men whose intercessions are requested.” (Archim. Sp. Bilali, “Orthodoxy and Papism,” pub. by Orthodox Print, Athens 1969, pp. 164-191).

9. Mysteries (Holy Sacraments)

A general difference that pours out of the primacy of the pope is the position of the priests in the citing of the mysteries, who seem to perform them in ... their name. “I baptize you, I forgive you etc.,” in contrast to the Orthodox Mysteries in which the priest is a plain servant: *The servant of God is baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, or The grace of the all Holy Spirit, through my insignificance, has loosed and forgiven you, etc.*

10. Baptism

The Orthodox Church performs the baptism by triple immersion in the water, which symbolizes the three day burial and resurrection of the Lord. In any case, it is clear the exhortation of the Lord to His disciples, to baptize (to immerse, *Gk.*) *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy*

Spirit. On the other side, the papist “church” innovates and introduces a baptism by the pouring or sprinkling.

11. Chrismation

The papist “church” innovated even the mystery of Chrismation. It recommends that the mystery of Chrismation on the baptized, be postponed until the 7th or according to others to the 14th year of age, before which they do not receive communion. The early Church chrismated the infants immediately after their baptism, so that they could be introduced as early as possible to the realm of the Grace of the Holy Spirit; it is clearly presumed that for the baptized to support himself in the spiritual life, he would always need the life-giving Divine Grace. This tradition is followed by the Orthodox Church to our days; Chrismation is performed with the holy myrrh, in contrast to the papists who perform it by the placing of the hand of the Bishop.

12. Repentance (Holy Confession)

On the mystery of repentance, the Holy Confession of the Roman Catholics is like a trial and the communication is impersonal. The repenter tells his sins, separated and unknown to the confessor (within wooden booths) and receives the penalties and absolution. There is no relationship with the shepherd, no ecclesiastical fellowship; the repenter experiences a legalistic and impersonal relationship. The primacy of the sacrament for the papists lies within the legalistic absolution of the sins and not the true forgiveness of the sinner, his return and restitution to the Father’s home (the Church) and to the Father’s bosom.

In contrast, in the Orthodox Church there is a personal interaction of the faithful with the priest. The forgiveness of sins finds its source in the sacrifice upon the Cross of our Lord and not through the intercessions of the saints and the other factors, as the papists preach.

13. Divine Eucharist

In this Mystery the papists have introduced many innovations:

a) They use factory produced unleavened bread, called “ostia,” and not leavened as is used in the Eastern Church. This however is not supported by the truth. The Last Supper was served with leavened and not unleavened bread. In reality, the use of unleavened bread does not constitute early practice but was instead brought about by heretics of earlier centuries.

b) The blessing of the bread-wine in the Body and Blood of Christ is performed in the Orthodox Church by the invocation of the Holy Spirit. In contrast, the papists perform it through the announcing of the words of the Lord, “Receive, eat,” etc.

c) The papists excluded the laity from receiving the Blood of the Lord, since only hierarchs thus commune, for they believe it is adequate for the salvation of the faithful by receiving only the Body. In contrast the Orthodox Church communes every faithful with the Body and Blood of Christ.

d) Toddlers and children until their 10th or 12th year, abstain from the Mystery of Divine Eucharist, for according to the

papist teaching, they are not capable of perceiving the Body and Blood of the Lord, in contrast to the Orthodox who allow the Divine Communion to baptized babies.

14. Marriage

The Lord underlined the insolubility of the mystery of marriage, “except on grounds of fornication.” The papists did not respect this exception and adopted the insolubility of marriage without exceptions.

15. Clergy

The papist “church” has arbitrarily instituted the general celibacy of the clergy, based on the Apostolic saying: *He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord.* (1 Cor 7:32). In essence though the celibacy is due to the position of the Roman Catholic “church” which wants to extol the clerics above the laity, separating them from every bond with the lay people and social life and especially to demonstrate the superiority of its own clergy against those of the Orthodox Church.

The 1st Ecumenical Synod follows the spirit of the Eastern Church, namely, the free selection of the clergy between married and unmarried. Celibacy is a grace, a special grace of God for specific people. But to the required celibacy that the papist church imposed on her clergy, the most ascetic, confessor and miracle worker, holy and bishop, Great Panphotios gives this answer: “Do not burden the yoke of the clergy.”

16. Holy Unction

In the Orthodox Church, the Mystery of Unction is performed for any occasion. The exhortation of Adelphotheos Jacob is explicit: *Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.* (Jas 5:14). In contrast, the papists again use the mystery of the holy Unction only once and only on the dying, as a last rite.

17. The Sign of the Cross

The Tradition of the Church is to cross over ourselves with the three fingers that symbolize the three personages of the Holy Trinity. In contrast, the papists make the sign of the Cross with four fingers, for close to the personages of the Holy Trinity, they added the person of the Most Holy Theotokos, corollary of the Marian worship. (*Ed.*, and, starting in the 13th and later the 15th century, the direction and fingers were altered, right-left to left-right, and to the three middle fingers, by popes who were “upset with the Orthodox,” see Orthodox Heritage, vol. 01, issue 04, p. 10).

18. Divine Liturgy

The early order of the Church is for the priest to perform the Divine Liturgy once a day and on the Holy Altar. The Divine Liturgy can only be performed once daily. The papist “church” however instituted that the priest can perform more than one Divine Liturgy, even on the same altar.

19. The Temple

The papist temples do not face the east like the Orthodox ones but to the west. This is shown most provocatively in

the large temple of Rome, St. Peter’s Basilica. St. Basil the Great specifically writes: “Everyone faces to the east during the prayers for we seek our original country, Paradise, which Adam planted in Eden, in the East.”

20. Ecclesiastical Art

The western art, music, architecture and hagiography, has clearly an anthropocentric character, in contrast to the Orthodox Church. In the western drawing depiction of Christ, He appears as a human and the Theotokos and the saints as common, non-transformed people. And their nature appears “naturalistically,” without participation in the uncreated light. In contrast, the Orthodox icon draws the God-Man Christ and the transformed faces of the Theotokos and of the saints in the also transformed, through the Uncreated Grace, created world.

In their temples the westerners have statues instead of icons and in their services they use musical instruments, something that is clearly not in agreement with the Tradition of the Orthodox Church.

21. Fasting

Lax perceptions have prevailed by the Roman Catholic church even on the holy institution of fasting. Spyridon Makris writes about the fasting of the Latins: “The fasting of the western church is lighter than that of the East, forbidding mainly meat only, while the bishops of various areas can set the frequency of fasting.” The Uniate bishop Jakinthos, referring to the rule of the Latin fasting writes: “The rule of fasting allows only one meal per day, during which one can eat as much and whatever he wishes. Only that the meal should be within two hours.” Fasting for the Roman Catholics has ceased to comprise a spiritual weapon for the cleansing of the iniquities of the flesh and a perfect means for general self-restraint. The intrinsic abolition of the sacred practice of fasting by the papist church constitutes a materialistic novelty. St. Basil the Great rebukes everything that undertakes the abolition of fasting. “Fasting is an ancient gift that does not become obsolete nor ages but always regenerates ... fasting was enacted in paradise. Adam received the first commandment, *From the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.* The *You shall not eat* constitutes a fasting and restraint enactment. (Archim. Sp. Bilali, “Orthodoxy and Papism,” pp. 250-251).

Conclusions

The consequence of all the above is that in papism we have a deep deviation from Orthodox Ecclesiology. In the Orthodox Church great importance is placed upon *theosis*, consistent and in communion with God, by the vision of the uncreated Light; those thus having attained *theosis*, join Ecumenical Synods and surely enact the revealed truth during periods of confusion. In papism, great importance is given to the institution of the pope, who prevails above even the Ecumenical Synods. According to the Latin theology, “the authenticity of the church exists only when supported and

harmonized by the will of the pope. In contrary situations it is nullified.”

There are great theological differences, which were condemned at the Synod by St. Photios the Great and at the Synod by St. Gregory Palamas, as is documented in the “Synodic of Orthodoxy.” Moreover, the Fathers of the Church and Local Synods until the 19th century also condemned all the deceits of papism. The situation did not get any better nor improved by the formal apology that the pope gave for some historic wrong doings, when his theological viewpoints are outside the revelation and their ecclesiology proceeds in the wrong direction. Concurrently, the pope appears as the leader of the Christian world, as if Christ passed on His authority over to the pope while He happily rests in Heaven” (Metropolitan of Nafpaktos and St. Vlasio Hierotheos, “Basic Points of Differences between the Orthodox Church and papism.”

From everything provided above, we observe that western Christianity (papism and protestantism) constitute a totally different world. Different theology, different anthropology, which all lead to a different theory of life, different culture, different civilization and eventually to a totally different mentality that results in a foreign spirituality and daily life to the Orthodox.

During the age where all tend to unions and much is said about the future of the European Union, the words of blessed Fr. Justin Popovich, reverberate in our ears as a prophetic invitation to vigilance: “ All the European humanisms from before, during and after the Renaissance, the protestants, philosophers, religious people, socialites, scientists and politicians, people in knowledge or ignorance, ceaselessly tried to achieve one thing: to replace the faith in the God-Man with the faith in man, to replace the Bible according to the God-Man with the bible according to man, the philosophy according to the God-Man, with the philosophy according to man, the culture according to God-Man, with the culture according to man. This was happening for centuries, until last century, in 1870, during the 1st synod of the Vatican when all these were brought together within the dogma by the infallible pope. Since then this dogma was raised to the “central dogma of papism.” For this, during our days in the 2nd synod of the Vatican, it tenaciously and skillfully discussed and supported the inviolability and unalteration of this dogma. This dogma has a socio-historical meaning for the fate of all Europe and especially for her apocalyptic times that she has already entered. Through this dogma, all European people have obtained their ideal and idol: Man was declared highest god, complete god. The European humanistic pantheon received its Zeus...” (J. Popovitz, “Man and God-Man,” pub. Astir, 5th issue 1987, pp. 149-150).

For all the above reasons, the union is not a matter of agreement over few dogmas but acceptance of the Orthodox, God-

Man centered, Christ centered, Trinity centered spirit on the dogmas, on piety, on ecclesiology, on social justice, on pastoral duties, on art, on asceticism. To achieve true union either we must give up our Orthodox God-Man centrism, or the papist give up their man-centrism. The first is impossible to happen with the Grace of our Lord, for this would have been a betrayal of our Lord and His teachings. But the latter is also difficult to happen. However, *what is impossible by man is possible by God.*

We believe that it also does not benefit the non-Orthodox for us to depart from Orthodoxy. As long as Orthodoxy exists, the unblemished evangelical faith is saved, “once delivered to the Saints.” There exists the living confession of the true community of God with man, the Truth of the Church as a God-Man community. So even the heterodox who lost it, know that it exists somewhere. They hope. Perhaps once they will search for it individually or collectively. They will find her and they will rest. Let us hold onto this holy faith not only for us but for all the heterodox brothers, and for all the world. The two lung theory by which the Church breathes, namely papism and Orthodoxy, cannot be accepted by the Orthodox side, because the one lung (papism), does not worship rightly and in any case it presently suffers incurably.

We thank the All-Holy Mother Theotokos and the life-giving Trinity for the big gift, our holy Orthodox Faith, and for the pious ancestors, teachers, priests and archpriests and our spiritual fathers, who taught us and delivered to us this holy Faith. We confess that we can never find rest in any church where the God-Man Christ is substituted with the “infallible” man, the “pope,” or the “protestant.”

We believe that our Church is THE One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, that has the fullness of Truth and of Grace. We are sad that the heterodox Christians cannot enjoy this fullness and immensely concerned when, at times, they try to derail and proselytize the Orthodox that live in their communities, who may have a partial, fragmented and distorted perception of the Truth. We appreciate the love they have for Christ and for their good works but we cannot agree with the interpretation they give of the Bible of Christ, when it is in such disagreement with the teaching of Christ, of the holy Apostles, of the holy Fathers and of the holy Ecumenical Synods.

We pray that the head-shepherd Christ, the only one who is infallible, Leader and Head of the Church, guide them to the Holy Orthodox Church, that is their father’s house from which once they defected. We also pray that He enlighten us Orthodox, so that we persist in our faith to our death, always faithful to our holy and unaltered Faith. And let us all become even more anchored and more profound in her, *until we all become united in faith and awareness of the Son of God, a perfect man, and in measure of the age of the fullness of Christ. Amen.*

THE THIEF WHO PRAYED DAILY TO THE THEOTOKOS

By St. Kosmas Aitolos.

A man named John was defeated and he became a thief. He became the captain of a band of one hundred thieves, but he had great reverence for the Theotokos. Each morning and evening he read the service of Supplication to the Theotokos.

Wishing to save him because of the great reverence he had for the Theotokos, the gracious God sent a holy monk who was immediately captured by the thieves.

The monk said to them: "I beg you to take me to your captain because I have something to tell you for your own good."

They took him to the captain and he said: "Ask all the men to come so that I can tell you something."

The captain called them and they came. The monk said: "Aren't there any more?"

"I have a cook," the captain replied.

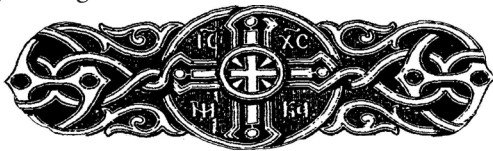
"Ask him to come." But when he came, the cook was unable to look at the monk and turned his face aside.

The monk then said to the cook: "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ I command you to tell me who you are, who sent you, and what you are doing here."

The cook replied and said: "I'm a liar and I always speak falsely. But since you have bound me with the name of Christ, I can't but tell you the truth. I'm the devil and I was sent by my superior to work for the captain and to wait for the day when he wouldn't read the service of Supplication to the Theotokos to put him into hell. I have been watching him now for fourteen years and I have never found a day when he hasn't read the service."

The monk said: "I command you in the name of the Holy Trinity to disappear and no longer tempt Christians." And immediately the devil disappeared like smoke.

The monk then taught the thieves. Some became monks, others married and did good works and were saved. This is why I advise you all, men and women, to learn the service of Supplication and to use it in your prayers. And if you wish, take the book *The Salvation of Sinners*, which contains the seventy miracles of the Theotokos, of which I told you one so that you might understand.



The reason [why all of us do not become Saints] is within us. Firstly, due to our bad intent. Secondly, due to our neglect and laziness. Thirdly, due to the lack—or complete absence—of love for God. Fourthly, due to our complete love of money, our devotion to material things, and our low-mindedness.

Elder Philotheos of Paros (+1980)

OUR MISFORTUNES AND THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

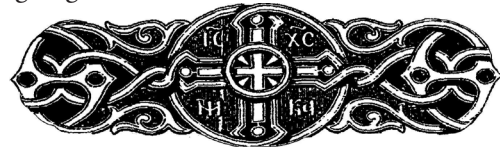
By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

When an unexpected misfortune happens to us who are innocent, we should not immediately grieve but rather we should try to see in this the Providence of God, Who, through that misfortune, is preparing something new and beneficial for us.

One day, unexpected news came to Blessed Theophanes (feastday August 19th), the abbot of Dochiariou, that the Turks had seized his sister's son, forced him to embrace Islam, and taken him to Constantinople. Theophanes immediately traveled to Constantinople and, with the help of God, succeeded to find his nephew and to secretly bring him out of Constantinople and brought him to his monastery on Mt. Athos. There, he again received his nephew into the Christian Faith and, after that, also tonsured him a monk. However, the brethren began to complain against their abbot and his nephew for fear of the Turks, for they were afraid that the Turks would find out and come and destroy the monastery. Not knowing what to do, St. Theophanes took his nephew and, with him, secretly withdrew not only from Dochiariou but also from the Holy Mountain and came to Berea.

The later activities of Theophanes in Berea and in Naousa proved how much that misfortune was beneficial to the Church. That which Theophanes could never succeed to achieve on the Holy Mountain, he achieved in these other places to which he had fled from that misfortune. Namely: he founded two new monasteries, where, in time, many monks were saved and where countless men found comfort for themselves. In addition to this, his holy relics among the Christian people became a source of healing for the strengthening of faith among many unbelievers and those of little faith.

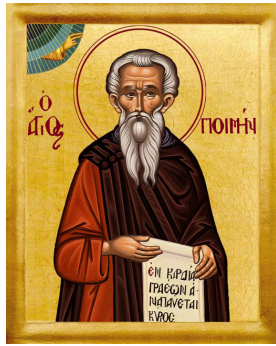
Thus, God wisely directs the destiny of men through unexpected misfortunes, which momentarily seem to men that they are going to their final destruction.



A different pattern of behavior is exhibited by a small number of people who are pleasing to God. They have become the masters of their own wealth. And they have used it, as if it were their faithful slave, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to free the debtors who are insolvent and in prison. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job, Joseph, David acted like this. Money was not the master of these people; they were the masters of their money.

St. Philoxenus of Hierapolis (+523)

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HOLY TRADITION AND THE BIBLE

By Elder Sophrony and St. Silouan the Athonite, from "St. Silouan the Athonite," Ch.5: The Staretz' Doctrinal Teaching.

Sacred Tradition, as the eternal and immutable dwelling of the Holy Spirit in the Church, lies at the very root of her being, and so encompasses her life that even the very Scriptures come to be but one of its forms. Thus, were the Church to be deprived of Tradition she would cease to be what she is, for the ministry of the Spirit of the New Testament is the ministry of the Spirit *written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God: not in tables of stones, but in the fleshly tables of the heart.* (cf. 1 Cor. 3:18-19).

Suppose that for some reason the Church were to be bereft of all her books, of the Old and New Testaments, the works of the holy Fathers, of all service books—what would happen? Sacred Tradition would restore the Scriptures, not word for word, perhaps—the verbal form might be different—but in essence the new Scriptures would be the expression of that same *faith which was once delivered unto the saints.* (Jude 1:3). They would be the expression of the one and only Holy Spirit continuously active in the Church, her foundation and her very substance.

The Scriptures are not more profound, not more important than Holy Tradition but, as said above, they are one of its forms—the most precious form, both because they are preserved and convenient to make use of. But removed from the stream of Sacred Tradition, the Scriptures cannot be rightly understood through any scientific research.

If the Apostle Paul had the *mind of Christ*, how much more does this apply to the whole body of the Church of which St. Paul is one member! And if the writings of St. Paul and the other Apostles are Holy Scripture, then new Scriptures of the Church, written supposedly after the loss of the old books, would in their turn become Holy Scripture for according to the Lord's promise God, the Holy Trinity, will be in the Church even unto the end of the world.

Men are wrong when they set aside Sacred Tradition and go, as they think, to its source—to the Holy Scriptures. The Church has her origins not in the Scriptures but in Sacred Tradition. The Church did not possess the New Testament during the first decades of her history. She lived then by Tradition only—the Tradition St. Paul calls upon the faithful to hold: *Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.* (2 Thess 2:15).

It is a well-known fact that all heresiarchs have always based themselves on the Holy Scriptures, only their interpretations differing. The Apostle Peter spoke of this perversion of the meaning of the Scriptures when they are construed personally, by the individual reader (cf. 2 Pet 3:16).

Individual members of the Church—not excluding her finest sons and teachers—do not achieve the whole fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and so their teachings and writings are marred by one or another imperfection—sometimes even error—whereas as a whole the Church's schooling, possessed of the gifts and knowledge, remains true for all time.

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

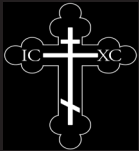
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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ON HALLOWEEN

By His Eminence Kyrill, Archbishop of San Francisco and Western America (ROCOR).

It is that time of the year when the secular society in which we live is preparing for the festival of Halloween. 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 - its 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, 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 31st and into the day of November 1st), 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

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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 Savior 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 intertwined 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 witchcraft, 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. 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 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, Rusalija 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 1st, proclaimed "the international worker's day." That was a simple renaming of a very old satanic feast of "Walpurgis Night" (night of April 30 into the day of May 1st) - 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

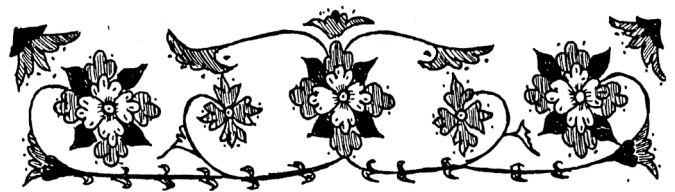
God. In today's society one is continually urged to disregard the spiritual roots and origins of secular practices under the guise that the outward customs, practices and forms are cute, fun, entertaining, and harmless. Behind this attitude lies the dogma of atheism, which denies the existence of both 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 2:12). 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 satanic 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.*



Nothing pains the soul more than slander, whether directed against one's faith or one's manner of life. No one can be indifferent to it except those who have their eyes fixed on God. For only God has the power to rescue from peril, to convince men of the truth, and to encourage the soul with hope.

St. Maximos the Confessor

JUDGING DOES NOT BELONG TO THE CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIFE

By Hieromonk Alexios of Holy Monastery of Karakallou, Holy Mountain.

I have been contemplating and praying about why not judging others seems to be a stumbling block. Perhaps, it is because we consider the spiritual life in the absolutist, rational categories of right and wrong or guilt and innocence, rather than in terms of healthy, living communion with God and diseased, deadening alienation from Him or radiant, grace-attracting humility and darkened, grace-repelling pride.

Judgment demands that the guilty be punished and wrongs be righted. Compassion seeks for the sick to be healed and the proud to be humbled. Judgment divides me from my brother as separate and different from me. Compassion unites us as being one in need of a merciful God. In a somewhat startling passage, Saint Isaac the Syrian (Homily 51) writes: "Justice does not belong to the Christian way of life and there is no mention of it in Christ's teachings... How can you call God just when you come across the Scriptural passage on the wage given to the workers? Friend, I do thee no wrong: I choose to give unto this last even unto thee. Or is thine eye evil because I am good? How can a man call God just when he comes across the passage on the prodigal son who wasted his wealth with riotous living, how, for the compunction alone which he showed, the father ran and fell upon his neck and gave him authority over all his wealth... Where, then is God's justice, for while we are sinners Christ died for us!"

As Christians, we should be concerned with being merciful around others rather than with judging them. And this can take place only if our spiritual eyes are not evil, but pure and single, as are the spiritual eyes of those who are united to God, with humble prayer, ceaselessly being offered up for all, as incense before the ever-merciful and forgiving Lord.

In the Orthodox Church, on the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee the Gospel for that day introduces this parable by noting: And He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. There are two kinds of misjudgment at work here. The presumption of being righteous when one is not and the presumption that others are unrighteous when they are in fact justified before God through their repentance. As to the first misjudgment, in a fallen state, our ego strives to preserve an idealized, but inaccurate self-concept about what "good and upstanding" people we are, reminding us that, "We pray. We go to church. We take care of our family. We don't cheat anyone. We are essentially good persons." And yet we usurp this goodness as though it is ours through our own efforts, apart from God and the only source of that which is genuinely good. And we allow this seeming goodness to become a cloak

that obscures our other sins and failings for which we should repent. As to the second misjudgment, if our judgment about someone else is wrong, we not only judge, but also slander. If our judgment is correct, we still may be in danger of separating ourselves from others, of thinking of ourselves as being better than they are, of becoming unwittingly self-righteous, and of failing to love our enemies.

In an earlier article on "The Self-concept and Our Identity as Christians" I wrote: "And lo, Zachaeus' self-concept changed radically from that blessed meeting with the Lord. He understood himself now in terms of God's compassionate understanding of Zachaeus that in turn made Zachaeus all the more compassionate towards others." When one's attention descends into the heart in humble prayer, believers begin to see themselves in relation to God and their abiding need and desire for purification and illumination. Such awareness leaves little room for judging others.

In response to a recent question, I wrote: "I think your statement 'holding people accountable when the relationship warrants it' is important. There are many cases when the relationship does not warrant it. And outside of the clear examples of parents and their young children as well as priests and their flocks, it is best to be wary of what we should hold others to. Loving unconditionally is certainly unconditional as is holding ourselves accountable to others and to God. As far as the accounts of others are concerned, however, we tread carefully and lovingly if we tread at all. No there are no easy answers, but the heart can sense when what is being done or said is being done from love with kindness and compassion. Simplicity is, of course, a great virtue. Those monks who literally managed to not judge anyone, to hold no one to account for anything, were simple, guileless souls that reached salvation to a large extent by their refusal to ever judge anyone and by their commitment to always judge themselves. The result was an abyss of humility and from humility an abundance of holiness. Of course, simple monks have such a luxury. But for those whose circumstances allow it, such a way is truly blessed."

When we are engaged in the spiritual struggle or when we recognize the great gift inherent in the prayer of the Publican, we cease to search for circumstances or conditions in which we are really justified in judging our brother. Remembrance of God, vigilance in matters of the heart, and the striving for humility leave little room for those types of pursuits. When we pray with the humility and honesty of the Publican we recognize that the temptation to judge others is nothing more than a fool's errand, taking us off course and onto crooked and perverse paths that lead us away from our ultimate goal, the love of our merciful Savior who "makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, sends rain on the just and on the unjust," and promises that those who judge not will not be judged.

REGIME AND DISORDER

Source: "Elder Joseph the Hesychast: Struggles-Experiences-Teachings."



Among the duties which the ever-memorable Elder taught us during the first days of our life under him was that of good order and keeping to a regime, while he described disorder to us in the blackest of colors. He often quoted to us the saying of St. Ephraim the Syrian, *Those who have no guidance fall like leaves*—which signifies, as he told us, the lack of any regime. He also referred

to various incidents in the lives of more recent elders and particularly the life of the Elder Theophylact from the hermitage of St. Artemios, who was renowned for his virtue and spiritual gifts.

Elder Theophylact lived his whole life as an ascetic and hesychast, keeping a strict fast; he did not even eat oil. He once accepted a disciple, the future Father Arsenios, and told him laconically—because this blessed father was temperate even in his speech—“Listen, my boy: if you are going to stay with me, I want you to have order and regime in your life, because without these you will never become a monk. Look round at our few possessions as I show them to you. There’s our jug, there’s the cup, there are the bowls, there are the rusks and so forth, as you see them. I want them always to be in those places. If you happen to make a mistake, the first time I’ll remind you of their proper location according to our rule, but I won’t tolerate it the second time. If you continue this disorder a third time, I shall ask you to take your things and go so that at the least you won’t trouble me, even if you yourself don’t want to gain at all.”

The ever-memorable Elder told us that he had heard that Elder Theophylact was a man of watchfulness, and that he often experienced visions because of the purity of his mind and his spiritual state. “Once,” he told us, “I heard that the demons seized him and took him out of his cell, during the winter period and while it was snowing. They dragged him around in the snow, practically naked, all night long till morning, and then returned him home safely. On that same day, the other fathers brought him back some of his clothes, as they had uncovered from wherever the evil spirits had flung them. Perhaps they had done so to interrupt his mind in its contemplation, as they often used to do with earlier church fathers”.

Once, it is said, a roebuck (male deer, *Ed.*) came to Elder Theophylact’s cell at night and knocked on the door. When

the Elder answered the door, it showed him its leg which was broken; the Elder bandaged it up and told it to come back in eight days, which it did, at the same hour. The Elder changed the dressing, re-banded the roebuck’s leg and repeated his instruction to come again in eight days’ time. When it came back the next time, the Elder saw that its leg was healed and told the roebuck not to come again, and it obeyed accordingly!

One of the main characteristics of these blessed spiritual warriors was their strictness in keeping their rule of life. We could see this also in our own Elder, and he demanded the same of us. He told us that the beginning of acquiring character and personhood lies in insistence on following an ordered and systematic way of life. By making the decision to maintain an invariable regime, man acquires resolve and bravery, something very important and essential in our life since our contest is a struggle and, indeed, a fierce one. *Be sober, be vigilant; because our adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.* (1 Pet 5:8). The presence of the serpent thus demands that we remain vigilant, and not just that he may not injure us somewhat; he can be confronted only with bravery and strength of resolve.

There is another equally imperative reason for order in keeping to a regime: It is the changeability of man’s unstable character since the fall of Adam; and the general sinfulness which each of us carries with us also dulls our courage and resolve. Equally, our inexperience, our ignorance, the unknown form of the invisible war, and the inequality of this struggle naturally increase one’s discouragement. There is no other human factor that is such an aid to success as our firm and steady resolve and a carefully worked out regime.

Particularly characteristic in the lives of the holy fathers is their insistence on order and the *typikon* as the principal elements in their way of life. Our Elder was particularly attached to the book of St. Isaac the Syrian, which he used almost as a manual. He would recite whole chapters to us by heart, particularly those concerning order and rule in our monastic life, from introductory “action” to the contemplation even of perfection itself as far as is possible for man. I recall how many things he reminded us of from the saint’s seventh discourse, “On Order among Beginners, Their State, and What Pertains to These.” The main thing, which I still remember nowadays, is this noteworthy sentence: *Wherever you are, consider yourself less than your brethren, and their servant.*

From the beginning of his spiritual journey, our Elder had inclined towards the life of hesychasm and isolation, and it was only natural that this should dictate a generally more austere manner of living. This is of course commonplace in those who live permanently as hesychasts, whose situation and manner and the means they use are different from those of the com-

mon cenobitic form of life pursued by most monks. Even in earlier days, as the holy fathers write, people of this sort always seemed austere at first sight. As a result, mildness in behavior is not in their character; this probably comes about without their noticing, as a result of being isolated and somewhat antisocial. I remember something of the kind in the Life of Abba Palamon, to whom St. Pachomius (who later was destined to become great in virtue and the founder of systematic cenobitic monasticism), went as a novice.

We asked the Elder a few times about the austerity of his own regime and he responded with positive examples from the lives of the ancient fathers. Those ancient fathers were in no way unaware of the duty of loving one's neighbor, yet they gave priority to love for God and the form of their particular watchfulness in the hesychastic way of life. Since we were making our way towards the same end, he often quoted to us the words of Abba Isaac, that the essential precondition for the monk to make progress is to collect himself in one place and to fast always.

I paid more attention, however, to another point of orderliness, which though it may seem elementary, it nevertheless held great significance for our first beginnings. This was the help afforded by precise observance of the *typikon*, which we maintained wherever we were, regardless of place. By not contravening the *typikon* at all, our fervor was not decreased, nor our ardor, nor our prayer, nor our (generally) inspired state. But when it happened that we did contravene our usual rule, whether of diet or of silence or of being on our guard in general, then everything was thrown into turmoil and we had great difficulty holding onto our usual practice. After a number of mishaps, this finally became a clear lesson to us.

From time to time, in our childish naiveté (state of inexperience or unsophistication, *Ed.*) we overstepped the bounds of propriety and on one occasion we asked the Elder: "Since in character you are not strict with other people, but very sympathetic, how is it that you seem so harsh in the regime of our *typikon*, which creates an obstacle for people?" He smiled and said to us, "I never expected you to have the face to ask me that, but I'll tell you. Testing and experience have convinced me to act in this way; otherwise, I would not be able to continue what God has led me to. St. Paul says: *For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.* (1 Cor 9:17). The Elder told us of his belief that his dedication to his hesychastic regime was not fortuitous, but a vocation from on high.

As he told us, "To accept people's demands with no restrictions is the common path of the all the fathers, and this, by the grace of God, is abundant in this sacred place. Anyone can easily find a response anywhere. But our duty of serving as hesychasts in the sacred tradition of stillness is not known to

all nor attainable by all. While St. Gregory Palamas was concerning himself with stillness during his days here on Athos, he would run away and hide and dig holes in the ground, and do everything he could to achieve isolation. Whom did he receive then, or whom did he meet? It is incontrovertible proof that regulation in life is the main factor in spiritual progress. This is the purpose of the laws and commandments which have been given to human life since most ancient times, whether by God or by men."

The disturbance in the integrity of our character following the fall of our first parents called for legislation to restore equilibrium to the faculties of soul and body which had been split apart. And when are law and commandments and regulation not necessary? Answer: when man regains his personhood through divine grace and the mortal puts on immortality [*So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption.* (1 Cor. 15:54)]. In St. Paul's words again, whatever is mortal is swallowed up—so to speak—by life [... *that mortality might be swallowed up of life.* (2 Cor 5:4)]. Then, and then indeed, no law is laid down for the just: *The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers.* (1 Tim 1:9).



In order not to be in daily bondage to the passions and the devil, you must set yourself an object to aim at, have this object constantly in view, and endeavor to attain it, conquering all obstacles by the name of the Lord. What is this object? The Kingdom of God, the Divine palace of glory, prepared for believers from the creation of the world. But as this object can only be attained by certain means, it also is necessary to have such means at one's disposal. And what are these means? Faith, hope, and love, especially the last. Belief, hope, and love, especially love, disregarding all obstacles; love God above everything and your neighbor as yourself. If you have not sufficient strength to preserve in your heart these inestimable treasures, fall down more often at the feet of the God of Love.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you (Mt 7:7), for He Who has promised is true. Walking, sitting, lying down, conversing, or working, at every time, pray with your whole heart that faith and love may be given to you. You have not yet asked for them as you should ask - fervently and instantly - with the firm purpose of obtaining them. Say now, "I will begin to do so henceforth."

St. John of Kronstadt (+1908)

THE WEDDING GARMENT

By Pope Saint Gregory the Dialogist (+604).

And when the King came in to see the guests, He saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment. (Mt 22:11)

† † †



What is meant, brethren, by this wedding garment? It cannot signify either baptism or faith, since no one can enter the marriage feast without baptism or without faith. Undoubtedly, the mere fact of not believing excludes one from the Church. So, what can we understand by this wedding

garment but charity? We must suppose then, that this man who enters without a wedding garment is a member of our Holy Church by reason of his faith, but he lacks charity. This is the case and with good reason because our Maker wore it when He came as a bridegroom to unite Himself to the Church. Thus, it was through His charity, through God's love by which the Only-begotten could unite the souls of the elect with Himself. This is why John tells us: *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* (Jn 3:16). He who came to men for love's sake, calls this love the wedding garment.

All of you, then, who are members of the Church and believe in God have indeed come to the marriage, but you are without a wedding garment if you discard the cloak of charity. If any of you is invited to an earthly wedding, he changes his dress so that he may show the groom and bride his participation in their joy; he would be ashamed to appear shabbily dressed among the guests and merry-makers. We assist at God's marriage feast and nevertheless, we are loathe to undergo a change of heart. The angels rejoice when they see God's chosen ones admitted into heaven. How do we visualize this spiritual banquet, those of us who lack that festive garment which is the only one that gives us beauty in God's sight?

We must remember that, as a cloth is woven between two wooden frames, one above and the other below, thus also charity is founded on two precepts: the love of God and the love of our neighbor. For it is written: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind and with thy whole strength ... and thy neighbor as thyself.* (Mk 12:30). It is worth noting here that a limit and measure is set to the love of our neighbor, as we read: *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.* The love of God, however, is marked by no limit, as we are told: *Thou*

shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul and with thy whole mind and with thy whole strength. We are not told, then, how much we must love, but the manner in which we must do so: with everything we have. For only he who does not think of himself truly loves God.

It is necessary to observe these two precepts of charity if we desire to be found wearing the wedding garment. This is what the prophet Ezekiel means when he tells us that the front of the gate of the city built on a mountain measures *two cubits* (Ezek 40:9); for undoubtedly we cannot enter the heavenly city if in this church, which is called the gate because it is outside that city, we have no love for God or man. As we see also in the book of Exodus that it is prescribed that the curtains destined for the *tabernacle* should be dyed twice in scarlet coloring (Exod 26:1). You, my brethren, you are the curtains of the tabernacle, veiling by virtue of your faith the heavenly mysteries in your hearts. But the curtains of the tabernacle must be twice dyed in scarlet. That is a color like fire. And what is charity, if it is not fire? But this charity must be twice dyed, that is, steeped in the love of God and in the love of our neighbor.

The man who loves God so that his contemplation leads him to forget his neighbor has indeed the color of scarlet, but not twice dyed. Again, he who loves his neighbor, but whose love leads him to forget God, has the color of scarlet but with a single dye. In order that your charity may be steeped in both, you must be inflamed with love of God and of your neighbor, so that compassion for your fellow-man does not induce you to abandon contemplation of God, nor an excessive desire for that contemplation make you cast aside all pity. So, every man who lives among other men should seek God, the object of his longings, but in such a fashion as not to abandon his neighbor; and he should help his neighbor in such a way that it will never check his progress towards God to Whom he speeds.

We know that the love which we owe to our neighbor is sub-divided into two precepts, as we read in Scripture: *See thou never do to another what thou wouldst hate to have done to thee by another* (Tob 4:16), and Christ tells us: *As you would that men should do to you, do you also to them.* (Mt 7:12). If we act towards our neighbor as we should like him to act towards us, and avoid doing to others what would be displeasing to us ourselves, then we observe the law of charity. But no one should think that he observes this law merely because he loves his neighbor; he must examine first the motive behind his love. For he who loves others, but not for God's sake, has not charity, even though he may think he has. True charity lies in loving our friend with and in God, and our enemy for God's sake. He loves for God's sake, who loves even those by whom he is not loved. Charity is usually proved only by the opposing trial of hatred. So that

our Lord says, *Love your enemies. Do good to them that hate you.* (Lk 6:27). The man who loves his avowed enemies is following this command.

Great and sublime are these precepts and often hard to obey; nevertheless they constitute the wedding garment. And that man who is without it has good grounds to fear that the King, at His coming, will cast him out. For we are told: The King went in to see the guests; and He saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment. It is we, brethren, who attend the marriage of the Word: who believe in the Church, are nourished by the Scriptures, and rejoice in the union of God with the Church. I would have you consider very carefully whether you attend the feast in the wedding garment. Weigh your actions in your heart one by one: whether you foster hatred of anyone, whether you envy the good fortune of others or through malice seek to injure them.

See the King entering the feast; see how He scrutinizes the disposition of our heart. To that man whom He finds stripped of charity, He says in rapid anger: *Friend, how camest thou in hither not having on a wedding garment?* (Mt 22-12). It is striking, dearly beloved, that He calls this man “friend” at the same time as He reproves him, as if His real meaning were: Friend and no friend; friend by faith and no friend by his actions. But He was silent, since—with what pain we must say it—in that final judgment no word of excuse can help us, for He

who accuses us outwardly is also He who accuses the soul’s interior depths, who is a witness of our conscience. And yet we cannot forget that, if anyone has this garment of virtue, although not perfectly woven, he should not despair of obtaining the forgiveness of this Merciful King when He comes, since He Himself gives us this hope when He says through the Psalmist, *Thine eyes did see my imperfect being, and in thy book all shall be written.* (Pss 138:16). We have said these words for the consolation of those who have charity, although weak. We must speak now of those who lack it altogether. The Gospel continues:

Then said the King to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Mt 22:13). That rigorous sentence will bind the hands and feet of those who do not restrain themselves now from wicked actions by amending their life. In other words, suffering will bind hereafter those whom guilt binds here. The feet which refuse to visit the sick, the hands which refuse to help the needy, are now voluntarily unbound to any good works. Therefore the willing

slave of vice here upon earth will hereafter be the unwilling prisoner of endless torments. It is apt to say that he is cast into the outer darkness. Interior darkness is the blindness of the heart, while the outer darkness belongs to the everlasting night of damnation. That man is damned, then, who is banished into outer, not interior, darkness for he is expelled against his will into the night of condemnation who, in this life, fell willingly into blindness of heart. It is said that there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth; the teeth of those who satiated themselves in their intemperance on earth will be set on edge in hell; their eyes will weep because in life they satisfied them with the sight of unlawful things. In this way, each member will suffer a particular torment as here it was used for the satisfaction of a particular vice.

But now that one man has been expelled, one who represents all the various types of evil, a general warning to all is given: *Many are called, but few are chosen.* (Mt 22:14). This is indeed a terrible sentence, my dear brethren. Consider that all of us have been called, by faith, to the marriage of the Heavenly King. We all believe and confess the mystery of His Incarnation, sharing in the banquet of the divine Word. But at a future date the King of Judgment is to come. We know that we have been called; we do not know whether we have been chosen. It is all the more necessary, therefore, that we abase ourselves with humility, since we have not this certainty.

There are some who never tried to do good; there are others who, although they began once, failed to persevere. We see one man pass nearly all his life in wickedness, but as he nears its end he returns to God by repentance and true penance. Another may seem to live the life of a saint, but end his days by falling into error and malice. One begins well and ends better; another plunges into evil from an early age and goes from bad to worse throughout his days. Each man, then, must live in fear, for he does not know what is to come, since we must never forget, but rather often repeat and meditate on the words: *Many are called but few are chosen.*



If anyone reproaches, grieves or offends you in any way, do not become angry against that brother; but going away, pray to God for him in this way: *O Lord, forgive him,* and ascribe this insult to the demon, for it is the demon who teaches us to offend one another.

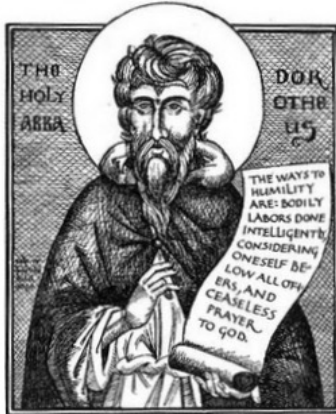
Elder Hilarion of Sarov



The Second Coming

ON LIES

By St. Dorotheos of Gaza.



Brethren, I want to remind you of a few things about falsehood. I see that you are not careful about holding your tongue and through that, we are easily led astray. You see, my brothers, as I always tell you, a habit can tend towards good or towards evil. We therefore need great vigilance so that we are not cheated by lies. No one who lies becomes united with God. The lie is alien to God. It is written that, *Falsehood is from the evil one*, and also that, *he is a liar and the father of lies* (Jn 8:44). You see he calls the devil “the father of lies,” while God is the Truth. He himself said, *I am the way, the truth and the life*. (Jn 14:6). See what we are separating ourselves from and what we attach ourselves to through lies, clearly the devil. Therefore, if we really want to be saved, we are obliged to love the truth, with all our strength and concern, guarding ourselves from all falsehood, so that we are not separated from truth and from life.

There are three different kinds of lies: Lying in thinking, lying verbally, and lying through one’s own way of life.

The person who lies in his thinking is open to suspicions. When he sees someone talking with his brother, he is suspicious and says, “They are talking about me!” If they happen to stop talking, he is still suspicious, suspecting that they stopped because of him. If someone says one word to him, he suspects that he said it to bother him. Simply he is suspicious of his neighbor in everything, saying, “he did that because of me. He said that or did that because of me.” This is the person who lies in his understanding. Nothing he says is true, but all is based on suspicion. From this comes curiosity, slander, eavesdropping, quarreling and condemnation.

Sometimes it happens that he suspects something and it turns out to be true. On account of this, he maintains that he wants to correct himself, so he is always curious thinking that, “if someone speaks against me, I will see what is the mistake he is accusing me of, and thus I can correct myself.”

First of all, this principle is from the devil, since he started with lies. That is to say, he suspected what he did not know. How is it possible for an evil tree to produce good fruits? If this person really wanted to correct himself, when a brother says to him, “don’t do that” or “why did you do that” he should not be distressed, but make a bow and thank him. Then he will be corrected. If God sees that this is his inten-

tion, He will never leave him in error, but will always send him a person who can correct him. However, to say that “I shall believe my suspicions in order to correct myself” and so eavesdrop and be curious about everything, this becomes justification from the devil to destroy him.

When I was present in the coenobium, I was tempted to find out about the inner disposition of someone through his gestures. Such a thing happened to me. I was once standing still when a woman passed in front of me carrying a pitcher. I do not know how I was carried away and stared into her eyes. Immediately, my thoughts told me that she was a prostitute. As I had told myself that, I was greatly troubled and I referred the whole matter to my elder, Abba John in this way: “Master, if without wanting to, I see someone’s gesture and my thoughts tell me his inner disposition, what should I do?” The elder answered me thus, “What! Surely, it happens that a person may have a natural defect and through inner struggle manage to overcome it! It is impossible to learn the state of a person’s soul from that. Therefore never trust your suspicions for even a straight rule can be made crooked by a crooked one. Suspicions are not true and harm us.” From that time on, even if my mind told me that the sun was the sun or that darkness was darkness, I would not believe it. Nothing is graver than suspicions. They are extremely harmful and if we keep them for a long time, they begin to convince us that we clearly see things that do not exist and have never happened.

I will also tell you of a wonderful thing that I witnessed when I was in the coenobium. There we had a brother much troubled by this passion. He was so easily persuaded by his own suspicions that he was certain that all of his suspicions were just as his thoughts dictated to him, and it could not possibly be otherwise. As time passed this passion progressed and the devil had misled him so much that he once went into the garden to spy. He always eavesdropped and pried. He thought he saw one of the brothers stealing figs and eating them. It was Friday and not yet the second hour. Having persuaded himself that what he saw was a reality, he left in silence and watched again during the Eucharist gathering, to see what the same brother would do about Holy Communion. When he saw the brother washing his hands to enter and take Communion, he ran and said to the Elder: “Look at that brother who is going to take Communion with the other brothers. Order that it not be given to him. I saw him stealing figs from the garden this morning and eating them.”

Meanwhile, this brother entered into the holy offering with great compunction. He was one of the most devout monks. When the Abba saw him, he called him, before he reached the priest who was distributing Holy Communion. He took him aside and said to him: “Tell me my brother what you have done today?” The brother was surprised and

said, "Where, master?" The Abba said, "In the garden when you went there this morning, what did you do there?" The surprised brother said again to him, "Father, I was in neither the garden, nor in the monastery this morning, for I have only just come back from the road. Immediately after the dismissal of the vigil the steward sent me on an errand far away." The errand that he referred to was many miles away and he arrived just in time for the Eucharist. The Abba called the steward and asked him: "Where did you send this brother?" He confirmed what the brother had already said, namely that he sent him to that particular town. He made a bow to the Abba saying, "Forgive me, father for not sending him to you to get your blessing. It was after the vigil and you were resting."

When the Abba heard all this he gave them both his blessing and allowed them to take Communion. Then he called the other brother who had the suspicions and reprimanded him, banning him from Holy Communion. Not only that but he gathered together all the brothers after the service and told them what happened, in tears. He marked out that brother, in front of everyone. He had three reasons for doing so: Firstly, to shame the devil and make an example of the sower of suspicion. Secondly, to allow the brother's sin to be forgiven through this dishonor and to obtain God's help for his advancement. Thirdly, to ensure that the brothers never trusted their own suspicions. He gave much advice about this to us and to the brother concerned saying that, "There is nothing more harmful than suspicion," and he proved that by this incident.

The fathers said many similar things to protect us from the harm that suspicion does to us. Therefore, brethren, let us try not to trust our suspicions, with all our strength. For there is nothing that distances a person from taking care of his own sins, or from always being curious about what does not concern him, more than this. No good comes of it; rather manifold troubles and affliction come of it. They leave a person no time to acquire fear of God. Therefore, if suspicions are sown in us through our own evil, let us immediately transform them into good thoughts. Thus, we will not harm ourselves. Suspicions are evil and they never allow the soul to find peace. This is falsehood of the understanding.

As for the liar in words, this is the person who, let us say, is too lazy to get up for the vigil, yet does not say, "Forgive me because I was too lazy to get up." Instead, he says, "I had a fever. I was faint and I couldn't get up. I didn't have the strength." He says ten lying words to avoid making a bow and humbling himself. If someone blames him for something, he sighs and tries to change his words in such a way, so as to refute the person who blames him. Likewise, if he happens to quarrel with his brother, he does not stop justifying himself and saying, "But you have this," or "But

you did that," or "I didn't say that, he did." He says all that, so that he should not have to humble himself. Also, if he happens to want something, he does not come to the point and say, "I like this, I want it," but he persists and says in a round-about way, "I suffer this and I need that" or "they told me to do that" and many other lies so as to fulfill his own will.

Every sin arises from the desire for pleasure, avarice or ambition. Lying has its roots in these three vices. Either from not blaming and humiliating oneself, or for some pleasure or for gain. The liar does not cease from turning this way and says anything to achieve his purpose. This person is never trusted, for even if he says a true word no one believes him. Even when he speaks the truth, the others are in doubt.

Sometimes there is a great need to alter or stretch events and facts. In that case, if one does not hide the details, it could cause great trouble and sorrow. When a person finds himself in such circumstances and there is no alternative, he can, as I said, alter his words so as not to become more sorrowful, troubled and endangered. As Abba Alonios (*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*) said to Abba Agathon, "Suppose two men killed someone in front of you and one of them escapes to your cell. The magistrate is looking for him and asks you saying, 'Did a murder take place in front of you?' If you do not accommodate things you will deliver that man to death."

Even in this case, whereby a person is faced with a great necessity to alter facts, that person must not be without care but he must repent; in tears before God, he must consider this course of events as a time of temptation. He must not use this very often but only as one possibility amongst many others. It is like an antidote for poison or like the purgative, which if taken continuously is harmful, but if taken once a year, when it is necessary, is beneficial. One must face the peculiar situation in a similar way so that if it is necessary, as I said, to adapt the truth, to make that one occasion amongst a great many and only when it is necessary. He must do this rarely and with the fear of God, showing to them his intention and the need, and then God will protect him because even this harms his soul.

Thus, we have discussed the liar in thought and the liar in word but we should also talk about the person that lies during his whole life.

The person that lies in his whole life is the one who, while in reality is dissolute, feigns temperance, and being greedy, he speaks about charity and praises sympathy. He is proud but admires humility. Even then, he admires it, without wanting to praise it. If that was the reason, he should with humility firstly confess his own weakness saying, "Woe is me, wretched one, for I have done nothing good in my life." After confessing his own weakness, he should then have admired and praised the virtue. He praises it without

having the intention of avoiding scandalizing others because in that case he would have thought as follows: "Indeed I am wretched and subject to passions. Why should I scandalize someone else?" With that thought, even if he had sinned, he would have touched upon good.

It is characteristic of humility to accuse yourself and a characteristic of sympathy to take care of your neighbor. However, this person does not admire virtue for the reasons I have mentioned, but rather, either to cover his own shame by giving the impression that he himself has this virtue or often to harm and mislead someone. No evil, no heresy, not even the devil himself can lead someone unless it is transformed into virtue. The Apostle says that *satan himself transforms into an angel of light*. (2 Cor 11:14). It is not strange then when his servants are transformed into the servants of righteousness. Similarly, the liar, either through fear of shame and humiliation or, as I said, because he wants to mislead and cheat someone talks about the virtues, praising and admiring them as if they were his own and he had experience of them. This is the person whose very life is a lie. This is not a simple person but a two-faced one. He has an internal and external face. His own life is two-faced and worthy of scorn.

Thus, we have said that lies come from the devil. We have also discussed truth and said that God is (the) Truth. Let us avoid falsehood, brethren, so as to be delivered from the evil one and let us struggle to obtain the truth so that we may be united to Him, Who said, *I am the Truth*. (Jn 14:6). Let God make us worthy of His own Truth.

Unto Him be glory and dominion, both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.



If artists who make statues and paint portraits of kings are held in high esteem, will not God bless ten thousand times more those who reveal and beautify His royal image? When we teach our children to be good, gentle, forgiving, generous, love their fellow men and regard this present age as nothing, we install virtue in their souls, and reveal the image of God within them. Our task is to educate both ourselves and our children in godliness; otherwise what answer will we have before Christ's judgment-seat? Let us be greatly concerned for our wives and our children, and for ourselves as well. The good God Himself will bring this work to perfection, so that all of us may be counted worthy of the blessings He has promised.

St. John Chrysostom (Homily 21)

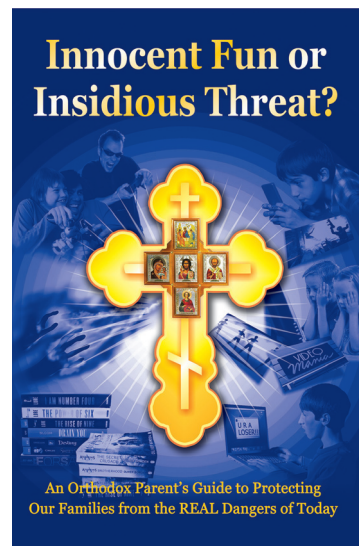
If you pile up on one side of the scales all the works demanded by ascetic life, and on the other side silence, you will find that the latter outweighs the former. Many good counsels have been given us, but if a man embraces silence, to follow them will become superfluous.

Saint Isaac of Syria

NEW BOOK: INNOCENT FUN OR INSIDIOUS THREAT

AN ORTHODOX PARENT'S GUIDE TO PROTECTING OUR FAMILIES FROM THE REAL DANGERS OF TODAY

Compiled by Mary Christodoulou; published by the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen.



Today evil invades our lives more than ever before. Particularly alarming is how easily it disguises itself as entertainment, religion, and even as a subject in public schools. Unfortunately, the primary targets of this demonic onslaught are our children. The Harry Potter books and movies have initiated millions of young people into witchcraft and wizardry; celebrities promote New Age religions adverse

to Christianity; the Twilight books and movies glamorize vampires; the most popular music, video games, television shows, books, and movies not only bombard our children with images and messages of violence, cruelty, and illicit sex, but also portray demonic phenomena, such as witchcraft and psychic powers, in a way that makes them seem acceptable, and even fun.

All this evil may seem insurmountable, but we must fight against it for the sake of our children. A must-read for every Orthodox Christian, this book examines the shocking extent to which evil has infiltrated our lives, and offers guidance and hope for the struggle against it.

The book will be available to our readers in the latter part of October, 2013. It can be ordered through the Brotherhood of St. Poimen (see page 23) as well as through Amazon.com.

Price: \$10 per copy (144 pages); ePub/kindle: \$8 per copy.



We cannot follow...a kind of "reformed" Orthodoxy that happens to be mostly "correct" but is actually outside the tradition of Orthodoxy, a creation of human logic. It's a terrible temptation for our times, and most of the converts will probably be drawn into it. We fear that all our articles about zealotry in the past years have helped to produce a monster. For the future we will have to emphasize the "feel" of Orthodoxy, without which zealotry is empty and even harmful.

Blessed Fr. Seraphim Rose (+1982)

FROM THE DESERT

Source: *John Moschus, Leimonarion (The Spiritual Meadow)*.

Abba John, Abba Anoub, Abba Poimen, and some other brothers went to Terenuthis to settle for a time. They stayed in an old temple several days. Then Abba Anoub said to Abba Poimen, "For love's sake do this: let each of us live in quietness, each one by himself, without meeting one another the whole week." Abba Poimen replied, "We will do as you wish." So they did this.

Now there was in the temple a statue of stone. When he woke up in the morning, Abba Anoub threw stones at the face of the statue and in the evening he said to it, "Forgive me." During the whole week he did this. On Saturday they came together and Abba Poimen said to Abba Anoub, "Abba, I have seen you during the whole week throwing stones at the face of the statue and kneeling to ask it to forgive you. Does a believer act thus?" The old man answered him, "I did this for your sake. When you saw me throwing stones at the face of the statue, did it speak, or did it become angry?" Abba Poimen said, "No." "Or again, when I bent down in penitence, was it moved, and did it say, 'I will not forgive you?'" Again Abba Poimen answered, "No." Then the old man resumed, "Now we are seven brethren. If you wish us to live together, let us be like this statue, which is not moved whether one beats it or whether one flatters it. If you do not wish to become like this, there are four doors here in the temple. Let each one go where he will."

Then the brethren prostrated themselves and said to Abba Anoub, "We will do as you wish, Father, and we will listen to what you say to us." Abba Poimen added, "Let us live together to the rest of our time, working according to the word which the old man has given us." He made one of them housekeeper and all that he brought to them, they ate and none of them had the authority to say, "Bring us something else to eat next time," or perhaps, "We do not want to eat this." Thus they passed all their time in quietness and peace.

† † †

We came to the Thebaid, and at the city of Antinoe we visited Phebamon the Sophist for the benefit of his words. He told us that in the district around Hermopolis there had been a brigand whose name was David. He had rendered many people destitute, murdered many and committed every kind of evil deed; more so than any other man, one might say. One day, while he was still engaged in brigandage on the mountain, together with a band of more than thirty, he came to his senses, conscience-stricken by his evil deeds. He left all those who were with him and went to a monastery. He knocked at the monastery gate. The porter came out and asked him what he wanted. The robber-chief replied that he wanted to become a monk, so the porter went inside and told the abbot about him. The abbot came out and, when he saw

that the man was advanced in age, he said to him, "You cannot stay here, for the brethren labor very hard. They practice great austerity. Your temperament is different from ours and you could not tolerate the rule of the monastery." But the brigand insisted that he could tolerate these things, if only the abbot would accept him. But the abbot was persistent in his conviction that the man would not be able.

Then the robber-chief said to the abbot, "Know, then, that I am David the robber-chief; and the reason why I came here was that I might weep for my sins. If you do not accept me, I swear to you and before Him who dwells in heaven that I will return to my former way of life. I will bring those who were with me, kill you all and even destroy your monastery." When the abbot heard this, he received him into the monastery, tonsured him and gave him the holy habit. Thus he began the spiritual combat and he exceeded all the other members of the monastery in self-control, obedience, and humility. There were about seventy persons in that monastery; he benefited them all, providing them with an example.

One day when he was sitting in his cell, an angel of the Lord appeared to him, saying, "David, David; the Lord has pardoned your sins and, from this time on, you shall perform miraculous signs." David replied to the angel, "I cannot believe that in so short a time God has forgiven me all my sins, which are heavier than the sand of the sea." The angel said to him, "I did not spare Zachariah the priest when he refused to believe me concerning his son. (Lk 1:20) I imprisoned his tongue to teach him not to doubt what I said; how then should I spare you? You shall be totally incapable of speech from this time onwards."

Abba David prostrated himself before the angel and said, "When I was in the world, committing abominable acts and shedding blood, I had the gift of speech. Will you deprive me of it by imprisoning my tongue, now that I wish to serve God and offer up hymns of praise to Him?" The angel replied, "You will only be able to speak during the services. At all other times you shall be completely silent;" and that is how it was. He sang the psalms, but he could say no other word, big or little. The one who told us these things said, "I saw him many times and I glorified God."



A full stomach dries up one's weeping, whereas the shriveled stomach produces these tears. And the man who looks after his belly and at the same time hopes to control the spirit of fornication is like someone trying to put out a fire with oil.

St. John Climacus, "The Ladder of Divine Ascent"

Τὸ Ὅρος τῶν Γυμνῶν Ἀσκητῶν

Γεροδιάκονος Σιλουανός, Λευκάδα, 14 Μαΐου 2010, ἀπὸ τὸ περιοδικὸ «ΠΡΩΤΑΤΟΝ» (τεύχος 119).

Τὸ μυστήριό ἐξακολουθεῖ νὰ παραμένει, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ βεβαιότητά νὰ ἐπιμένει...

Σχετικῶς μὲ τὸ γεγονός που ζήσαμε στὸ κελλί τοῦ Προφήτου Δανιήλ, παραθέτουμε παρακάτω τὴν καταγραφή αὐτοῦ τοῦ γεγονότος, πιστεύοντας πὼς ἀξίζει νὰ γνωστοποιηθεῖ καὶ σὲ ἄλλους.

Πρὸ δύο ἐτῶν περίπου, ἡ Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Ὁσίου Ξενοφῶντος μᾶς «παραχώρησε» τὸ ἀρχαῖο καὶ ἐγκαταλελειμμένο κελλί της—τοῦ Ἁγίου Προφήτου Δανιήλ καὶ τῶν Τριῶν Παίδων. Αὐτὸ τὸ κελλί βρῖσκεται σὲ μία ἐρημικὴ τοποθεσία πάνω στὸ βουνό, ἀνατολικά τῆς Μονῆς Ξενοφῶντος καὶ βόρεια τῆς Σκήτης Ξενοφῶντος. Δὲν γειτονιάζει μὲ κανένα ἄλλο κελλί, παρὰ μόνο μὲ ἓνα ἐρειπωμένο, ἐπ' ὀνόματι τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδος, οὔτε κὰν φαίνεται ἄλλο κελλί ἢ Σκήτη ἢ ὀτιδήποτε ἄλλο οἴκημα, στὸ ὁποῖο νὰ μαρτυρεῖται ἢ νὰ δικαιολογεῖται ἀνθρώπινη παρουσία.

Ὅποιος βρῖσκεται στὴν αὐλὴ ἢ τὸν ἐξώστη—ἀπλωταριὰ τοῦ Προφήτη Δανιήλ ἔχει μία πανοραμικὴ θέα ὄλου σχεδὸν τοῦ φαραγγιοῦ, ἀπὸ τὰ ἀνατολικά, πὸν εἶναι τὰ Δοχειαρίτικα σύνορα, μέχρι τὰ δυτικά—τὴν θάλασσα. Ἡ ἡρεμία δὲ καὶ ἡ ἡσυχία ποὺ ἔχει τὸ κελλί εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὴ, καὶ μόνο κατὰ τὴν ἀνοιξὴ καὶ τὸ καλοκαίρι διακόπτεται ἀπὸ τὶς ἀσταμάτητες λαλιὲς τῶν ἀηδονιῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὠδικῶν πτηνῶν.

Ἐκεῖ βρεθήκαμε, γιὰ μία ἀκόμη φορὰ, καὶ ἐμεῖς, οἱ φιλοξενούμενοι τῆς Μονῆς Ξενοφῶντος καὶ ἔνοικοι τοῦ Ἱεροῦ αὐτοῦ κελλίου. Ἡ παραμονὴ διήρκησε λίγες ἡμέρες, ἀλλὰ εἶχε μεγάλη εὐλογία, μία ἐμπειρία ποὺ δὲν ὑπολογίζαμε νὰ ἀξιοθούμε ποτέ. Ἄς πάρουμε τὰ πράγματα ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχή. Στὶς 21 Ἀπριλίου 2010 (παλ. ἡμ.), προπαραμονὲς τῆς πανηγύρεως τῆς Μονῆς Ξενοφῶντος, πὸν τιμᾶται ἐπ' ὀνόματι τοῦ Ἁγίου Μεγαλομάρτυρος Γεωργίου, βρεθήκαμε στὸ κελλί τοῦ Προφήτη Δανιήλ. Δὲν ἀπομακρυνθήκαμε πολὺ, διότι ἤδη εἶχε σουρουπώσει ἀρκετά. Σὲ ἓνα σημεῖο τῆς διαδρομῆς μας, ἓνας ἀπὸ τὴν ομάδα μας, θέλοντας νὰ συμπεράνει τὸ βάθος τοῦ φαραγγιοῦ ποὺ βρισκόταν μπροστὰ μας, ἔριξε τρεῖς πέτρες, ἀρκετὰ μεγάλες, πρὸς τὸ φαράγγι. Οἱ δύο λαϊκοὶ ποὺ βρισκόνταν στὴν παρέα, ἄδραξαν τὴν εὐκαιρία γιὰ νὰ ἀστερευτοῦν

μὲ τὴν ἐπιπόλαιη αὐτὴ πράξη λέγοντας πὼς ἴσως κάποιος ἐρημίτης ἀσκητὴς νὰ ἦταν δέκτης αὐτοῦ τοῦ πετροβολητοῦ.

Ὁ Γέροντας, ἀποσιωπώντας τὴν κωμικὴ πλευρὰ τοῦ θέματος, ἀναφέρθηκε στὴν ὑπαρξὴ τῶν ἐρημιτῶν καὶ τῶν ἀοράτων ἀσκητῶν, στὶς ἀναφορὲς γύρω ἀπὸ διάφορα σχετικὰ συμβάντα. Ὁ Γέροντας ἄφησε τὸν καθένα ἐλεύθερο νὰ ἀποδεχθεῖ ἢ ὄχι αὐτὴ τὴν παλιὰ ἀγιορείτικη παράδοση γιὰ τοὺς γυμνοὺς καὶ ἀόρατους ἀσκητὲς ποὺ ζοῦν στὶς ἐρημιὲς τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὁρους.

Ὅταν ἐπιστρέψαμε στὸ κελλί, εἶχε ἤδη σκοτεινιάσει. Προσπαθήσαμε νὰ βάλουμε μπρὸς τὴν πετρελαιογεννήτρια, ἀλλὰ παρὰ τὶς ἐπίμονες προσπάθειές μας, ἐπὶ μισὴ ὥρα περίπου, τὸ μηχανήμα δὲν λειτούργησε, καὶ ἔτσι μείναμε «ἀναγκαστικά» μὲ τὰ κερὰ καὶ τὴν λάμπα πετρελαίου (ἐκ τῶν ὑστέρων σκεφτήκαμε ὅτι δὲν ἦταν ἓνα τυχαῖο γεγονός).

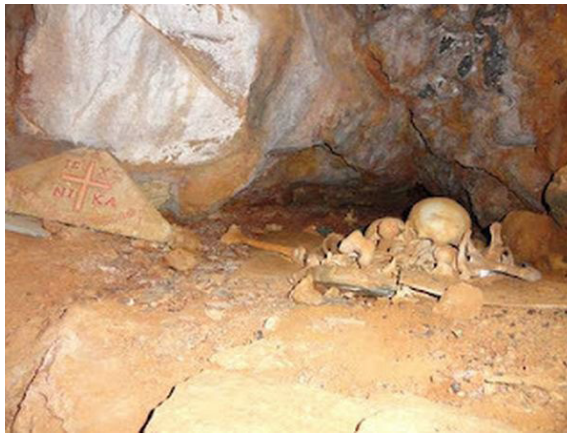
Ἡ νύχτα εἶχε πέσει γιὰ τὰ καλά, τὰ ἀστέρια ἦταν εὐδιάκριτα, παρὰ τὴν ἐλαφριά συννεφιά ποὺ εἶχε ὁ οὐρανός, καὶ τὰ ἀηδόνια εἶχαν παραιτηθεῖ πλέον ἀπὸ τὸ ὀλόήμερο κελάδημά τους. Ἡ σιωπὴ σὲ ὅλη τὴν περιοχὴ ἦταν πιὸ αἰσθητὴ τώρα, μετὰ τὴν πρόσφατη παύση, παρὰ τὰ μεσάνυχτα. Ὁ Γέροντας εἶχε ἀποσυρθεῖ στὸ κελλί του, καὶ τὰ ἄλλα τρία πρόσωπα

κάθισαν μπροστὰ στὴν ἐξώπορτα τοῦ κελλιοῦ καὶ μιλοῦσαν.

Καθὼς μιλοῦσαν, ἓνας ἀπὸ αὐτοὺς διέκρινε καὶ μία ἄλλη—δεύτερη φωνή, μακρινὴ καὶ ἀκαθόριστη—καὶ μὴ θέλοντας νὰ διακόψει τὸν συνομιλητὴ του ἀρχικὰ δὲν ἀντέδρασε. Ἐφ' ὅσον ὅμως αὐτὴ ἡ φωνὴ συνεχιζόταν ἤδη γιὰ πέμπτο λεπτό, παίρνοντας θάρρος διέκοψε αὐτὸν ποὺ μιλοῦσε ρωτώντας τὸν ἕναν: «Ἀκοῦς κάτι;»

Ἀφοῦ συγκέντρωσαν καὶ οἱ δύο τὴν προσοχὴ τους, ἄκουσαν μία φωνὴ ποὺ προερχόταν ἀπὸ τὸ βάθος τοῦ χειμάρρου. Ἦταν μία ἀνδρική ἐνθουσιώδης φωνὴ, ποὺ φώναζε ἐκστατικὰ σχεδόν, μέσα στὴν σιγαλιὰ τῆς νύκτας καὶ κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ πανόραμα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ στερεώματος: «Δόξα Σοὶ ὁ Θεός», «Κύριε σώσον τὸν κόσμον Σου». Τὰ ἐπανελάμβανε συνεχῶς καὶ μεγαλόφωνα, καθὼς καὶ ἄλλα λόγια, τὰ ὁποῖα ἐξ αἰτίας τῆς ἀποστάσεως καὶ τοῦ ἀντίλαλου ἦταν ἀκαθόριστα.

Ἀλλὰ ἀπὸ τὸ ὕφος τῆς φωνῆς ἦταν κάτι σὰν εὐχαριστία καὶ δοξολογία στὸν Θεὸ καθὼς καὶ ἰκεσία



για τὸ ἔλεός Του. Τὸ ἄκουσε κατόπιν καὶ ὁ ἄλλος λαϊκός, ποὺ ἦταν στὴν παρέα. Καὶ οἱ τρεῖς ἀκούγαμε ἓνα ἄνθρωπο, ποὺ βρισκόταν μέσα στὸ «πουθενά», νὰ εὐχαριστεῖ καὶ νὰ δοξολογεῖ τὸν Θεό.

Γρήγορα εἰδοποιήθηκε καὶ ὁ Γέροντας, ὁ ὁποῖος ἄκουσε αὐτὸν τὸν ἄγνωστο νὰ δοξολογεῖ ἀκατάπαυστα, καθαρότατα τὸν Θεό. Στὴν συνέχεια καὶ γιὰ ἓνα μικρὸ διάστημα ὁ ἄγνωστος ἔπαυσε τὴν μεγαλόφωνη προσευχή του. Ὅλοι ἀποσυρθήκαμε στὰ κελλιὰ μας. Ὁ καθένας κράτησε τὴν δική του στάση ἀπέναντί σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν ἀναπάντεχη ἐμπειρία, καὶ κατάκοποι καθὼς ἤμασταν, γρήγορα ἀποκοιμηθήκαμε ὅλοι.

Ὅλοι ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸν Γέροντα, ὁ ὁποῖος κάθισε στὴν ἀπλωταριὰ ἀναμένοντας νὰ ἀκροαστεῖ μία ἀκόμα φορὰ τὸν ἄγνωστο προσευχητή. Καὶ ὄντως μετὰ ἀπὸ ἓνα διάστημα περίπου μισῆς ὥρας τὸν ἄκουσε πάλι. Αὐτὴ τὴν φορὰ ἔψαλε μεγαλόφωνα ἀναστάσιμους ὕμνους. Καὶ αὐτὸ ποὺ μπόρεσε ὁ Γέροντας νὰ διακρίνει ἦταν τὸ τροπάριο τῆς πρώτης ὥδης τοῦ κανόνα τοῦ Πάσχα «Καθαρθώμεν τὰς αἰσθήσεις...», καθὼς καὶ ἄλλες προσευχές, ὅπως «Κύριε σῶσε τὸν κόσμον Σου», καὶ ἄλλα.

Τὴν ἄλλη ἡμέρα ὅλοι κοιτάξαμε πρὸς τὴν πλευρὰ, ἀπ' ὅπου ἐρχόταν ἡ χθεσινοβραδυνὴ φωνή, προσπαθώντας νὰ καταλάβουμε τὸ ἀκριβὲς σημεῖο ποὺ βρισκόταν αὐτὸς ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἢ κάποιον σημάδι τῆς παρουσίας του. Γρήγορα ὅμως καταλάβαμε ὅτι κοπιᾶζουμε μάταια καὶ παραιτηθήκαμε ἀπὸ τὴν προσπάθειά μας. Ἐμεινε ὅμως μέσα στὴν ψυχὴ μας ἡ περιέργεια νὰ μάθουμε ἂν τυχὸν ὑπάρχει κάποιον κελλὶ στὴν περιοχὴ αὐτὴ, ποὺ νὰ εἶναι ἀδιόρατο ἀπὸ τὴν πλευρὰ τοῦ δικοῦ μας κελλίου.

Κατεβήκαμε στὴν Μονὴ γιὰ τὴν ἑναρξὴ τῆς Ἀγρουπνίας πρὸς τιμὴν τοῦ Ἁγίου Μεγαλομάρτυρος Γεωργίου καὶ ὁ Γέροντας συνάντησε τὸν π. Σεραφεῖμ, ὁ ὁποῖος ἔχει γνώση τοῦ χώρου καὶ πολὺ ἀγάπη γιὰ τὸν Προφήτη Δανιὴλ καὶ εἶναι ἀλήθεια ὅτι χωρὶς τὸν π. Σεραφεῖμ δὲν θὰ γίνονταν καὶ πολλὰ πράγματα. Τὸν ρώτησε σχετικὰ, ἂν ὑπάρχει ἐκεῖ κοντὰ κάποιον κελλὶ καὶ τοῦ ἀνέφερε τὸ γεγονός. Μᾶς διαβεβαίωσε πὼς ὄχι μόνο κελλὶ δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ ἀπλὴ παρουσία ὁποιοῦδήποτε ἀνθρώπου εἶναι ἂν ὄχι ἀδύνατη, τουλάχιστον ἀδικαιολόγητη ἐξ αἰτίας τῆς πυκνῆς βλάστησης καὶ τοῦ ἀπροσπέλαστου τῆς περιοχῆς.

Μετὰ ἀπὸ ὅλα αὐτὰ ὁ καθένας κράτησε μέσα στὴν ψυχὴ του τὴν ἀνάμνηση αὐτοῦ τοῦ γεγονότος, ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου μέσα στὴν ἀπόλυτη ἐρημιὰ, ἀνυποψίαστου γιὰ τὴν δική μας παρουσία, ποὺ φώναζε ἐνθουσιασμένος καὶ εὐχαριστοῦσε τὸν Θεό. Καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀόρατους ἀσκητὲς νὰ μὴν ἦταν, μόνο καὶ μόνο αὐτὴ ἡ ἐγκάρδια προσευχή του τὴν νύκτα

στὴν μέση τοῦ δάσους, μᾶς ἔδωσε τὸ μήνυμα ποὺ ὁ Θεὸς ἐπέτρεψε. Συμπληρωματικὰ νὰ προσθέσουμε ὅτι ἡ γεννήτρια, ἂν λειτουργοῦσε τὸ βράδυ, θὰ ἦταν σίγουρα ἀνασταλτικὴ αἰτία γιὰ τὴν αὐθόρμητη καὶ ἐξωστρεφῆ ἐκδήλωση τοῦ ἀγνώστου, διότι ἐξ αἰτίας τοῦ θορύβου καὶ τῶν φώτων θὰ γινόταν ἡ παρουσία μας πέρα γιὰ πέρα αἰσθητή. Καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ γνώμη γίνεται πιὸ ἰσχυρὴ, ἂν λάβουμε ὑπ' ὄψη μας τὸ παράδοξο, ὅτι τὴν ἄλλη ἡμέρα τὸ πρωὶ πῆρε ἀμέσως μπροστά.

Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ ἰδιαίτερη «ἐμπειρία μας» κατὰ τὴν τελευταία ἐπίσκεψή μας στὸ Ἅγιον Ὄρος. Σὰς τὴν παραθέτουμε, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς τὴ ζήσαμε...



Ἡ ψευτιά καὶ ὁ πνευματικὸς ἐκφυλισμὸς ἀπλώνει μέρα μετὰ τὴν ἡμέρα ἀπάνω στοὺς Ἕλληνες καὶ τοὺς παραμορφώνει. Ἐναν λαὸ ποὺ ξεχωρίζει ἀνάμεσα σ' ὅλα τὰ ἔθνη καὶ ποὺ εἶναι γεμάτος πνευματικὴ υἰεία, πᾶμε νὰ τὸν κάνουμε ἐμεῖς... οἱ λογῆς-λογῆς καλαμαράδες, καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι γραμματιζούμενοι, σαχλόν, χωρὶς πνευματικὸ νεῦρο, χωρὶς πνευματικὴ ἀνδροπρέπεια, χωρὶς χαρακτήρα. Οἱ διάφοροι φωστῆρες βαστᾶνε ἀπὸ μία πατέντα στὰ χέρια, καὶ μέρα-νύχτα δουλεύουνε γιὰ νὰ «συγχρονίσουν» τὴν Ἑλλάδα, ἐνῶ στ' ἀληθινὰ σκάβουνε τὸν λάκκο τῆς Ἄμυναλα νευρόσπαστα!..

Ποιὸν θὰ συγχρονίσετε; Αὐτὸ ποὺ λέτε ἐσεῖς «συγχρονισμὸ» καὶ «ἐξέλιξη» εἶναι μία ἄθλια παραμόρφωση, σύμφωνα μ' ἓνα βλακῶδες μοντέλο, ὁποῦ κάνανε οἱ σαρακοστιανοὶ καὶ κάλπικοι ἄνθρωποι, ποὺ τοὺς λέγει ἡ Γραφή «γλιαρούς», δηλαδὴ σαχλοῦς, καὶ γιὰ τοὺς ὁποίους λέγει ὁ Θεὸς ὅτι «**οὕτως ὅτι γλιαρὸς εἶ, καὶ οὔτε ζεστός οὔτε ψυχρός, μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου.**» (Ἀποκάλ. 3:16).

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 οικονομικὴ εὐχέρεια, ἄς συνδράμουν, ἂν θέλουν, στὴν ταπεινὴ προσπάθειά μας ἀποστέλλοντας κάτι περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἐτήσια συνδρομὴ τῶν 24 δολλαρίων πρὸς ἐνίσχυση τῆς ἀδελφότητος «Ὁσιος Ποιμῆν».

Μήνυμα τῆς Ἑλληνορθόδοξης Ρωμηοσύνης Πόνος καὶ Ἀγάπη γιὰ τὴν Πονεμένη Πατρίδα μας...

Τοῦ Πανιερωτάτου Μητροπολίτου Λεμεσοῦ Ἀθανασίου,
«Ἑλληνορθόξη Πορεία», ἀνθολόγιο κειμένων, Ἀθήνα 2008.



Εἶναι γεγονός ὅτι καυχόμαστε γιὰ τὴν Ἑλληνική μας καταγωγή καὶ τὴν σχέση μας μετὸν Χριστὸ καὶ μετὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, ὄχι ἀδίκως βέβαια, παρόλο ποὺ καμμιὰ φορὰ εἴμαστε λίγο ὑπερβολικοί, ὅμως ἡ ἱστορία δικαίῳνει τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ ἔθνος...

Πάρα πολλοὶ λαοὶ ἄκουσαν τὸν λόγο τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, πάρα πολλοὶ λαοὶ δέχθηκαν τὴν ἐπισκέψεις τῶν Ἀποστόλων, πρὸς στιγμὴν ἔγιναν Χριστιανοί, ἀλλὰ στὸ πέρασμα τῶν αἰώνων εἴτε χάθηκαν γιὰτὶ ὑποδουλώθηκαν ἀπὸ ἄλλους λαοὺς, εἴτε ἄλλαξαν θρησκεία ἐξολοκλήρου, εἴτε προσχώρησαν σὲ αἰρέσεις καὶ ἄλλες κακοδοξίες οἱ ὁποῖες νόθευσαν τὴν Ἀλήθεια τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου. Ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ φυλὴ, τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ γένος, οἱ Ἕλληνες, παρὰ τὴς πολλῆς δυσκολίας ποὺ εἶχαν, κράτησαν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο, κράτησαν τὴν πίστη στὴν Ἐκκλησία, στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία. Καὶ ὄχι μόνο δὲν τὴν ἔχασαν ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τῆς Βυζαντινῆς Αὐτοκρατορίας ἔδωσαν τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο καὶ σὲ ἄλλους λαοὺς (π.χ. Ρώσους, Βούλγαρους, Ρουμάνους, Σέρβους, Γεωργιανούς), σὲ ὅλη τὴν ἀνατολικὴ Εὐρώπη.

Οἱ βυζαντινοὶ Ρωμιοὶ πρόγονοί μας ἐπέμεναν, παρόλο ποὺ ἡ Δύση ἀντιδρούσε σὲ αὐτό, ὅτι οἱ νέοι Ὁρθόδοξοι λαοὶ ἔπρεπε νὰ λατρεύουν τὸ Θεὸ στὴν γλώσσα τους. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ οἱ Ἅγιοι Κύριλλος καὶ Μεθόδιος ποὺ μετέφεραν στοὺς Σλάβους τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο ἔφτιαξαν ἀλφάβητο, ὥστε νὰ μποροῦν οἱ ἄνθρωποι νὰ ἔχουν δική τους γραπτὴ γλώσσα, νὰ μορφώνονται, νὰ ἐκπολιτίζονται καὶ νὰ ἔχουν τὴ δική τους συνείδηση καὶ νὰ λατρεύουν τὸ Θεὸ στὴν δική τους γλώσσα. Οὐδέποτε χρησιμοποιήθηκε τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἕλληνες ὡς μέσο κατάκτησης τῶν ἄλλων λαῶν. Ἀντίθετα, ἦταν μία προσφορά σ' αὐτοὺς τοῦ φωτὸς τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, ἐπ' ἐλευθερία, ποτὲ μετὰ τὴ βία. Δὲν ἔχουμε φαινόμενα στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία ἐπιβολῆς τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας μετὰ τὴ βία.

Τὸ ἐρώτημα εἶναι, ἐμεῖς οἱ Χριστιανοὶ Ὁρθόδοξοι, πῶς μποροῦμε νὰ ταυτίσουμε τὴν ἀγάπη πρὸς τὴν πατρίδα μας σὲ συνδυασμὸ μετὰ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη μας;

Ὡς Ἕλληνες καὶ ὡς Ὁρθόδοξοι, καυχόμαστε ὅτι μέχρι σήμερα βαστάζουμε τὴν Ὁρθόδοξη πίστη μας ἀπαρασάλευτη καὶ ἀπαραχάρακτη καὶ μαζί με αὐτὴν ἔχουμε τὴν εὐλογία νὰ βαστάζουμε τὸ σταυρὸ, τὸν εὐλογημένον σταυρὸ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς φυλῆς μέσα στὸν κόσμον, ποὺ κουβάλησε ὅλη αὐτὴ τὴν ἑνδοξίαν μας ἱστορία. Τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ γένος, ἔχοντας πανάρχαιες ρίζες μέσα στὴν ἱστορία, ἔφτασε σὲ τόσο μεγάλα μέτρα γνώσεως τῆς ἀνθρώπινης σοφίας καὶ ἐλευθερίας, ἔφθασε σὲ τόσο ὑψηλὰ ἐπίπεδα φιλοσοφικῶν πτήσεων καὶ ἀποκαλύψεων ὥστε νὰ θεωρεῖται πρόδρομος τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ.

Νομίζω ὅτι τὸ νὰ εἶναι κανεὶς Ἕλληνας, τὸ νὰ εἶναι κανεὶς Ρωμιός, δὲν εἶναι ὑπερηφάνεια ἀλλὰ εἶναι σταυρὸς καὶ μόνο σὰν σταυρὸ καὶ σὰν διακόνημα μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ κρατήσουμε σήμερα. Εἴμαστε Ἕλληνες, ἔχουμε μία ἱστορία, ὅπως ὁ κάθε λαὸς καὶ ἀναγνωρίζουμε σὲ κάθε ἄνθρωπο αὐτὸ τὸ δικαίωμα νὰ καυχᾶται γιὰ τὴν ἱστορία του, γιὰ τοὺς προγόνους του. Καυχόμαστε σὰν Ἕλληνες ὄχι γιὰτὶ λατρεύαμε τοὺς ψεύτικους θεοὺς τοῦ Ὀλύμπου, ἀλλὰ καυχόμαστε γιὰτὶ εἴμαστε ἕνας λαὸς μετὰ φιλοσοφικὲς ἀναζητήσεις, καυχόμαστε γιὰτὶ εἴμαστε ἕνας λαὸς ποὺ γέννησε τὴ δημοκρατία, τὴ φιλοσοφία.

**Τὸ νὰ εἶναι κανεὶς Ἕλληνας,
τὸ νὰ εἶναι κανεὶς Ρωμιός, δὲν
εἶναι ὑπερηφάνεια ἀλλὰ εἶναι
σταυρὸς καὶ μόνο σὰν σταυρὸ
καὶ σὰν διακόνημα μποροῦμε
νὰ τὸ κρατήσουμε.**

Οἱ ἐθνικὲς γιορτὲς εἶναι βέβαια γιορτὲς μνήσεως στὸ νόημα, ἀλλὰ εἶναι καὶ κρίση τῆς ἴδιας τῆς ζωῆς μας. Καὶ πρέπει νὰ ὑφιστάμεθα αὐτὴ τὴν κρίση γιὰτὶ διαφορετικὰ θὰ μᾶς κρίνει ἡ ἱστορία ὡς ἄνθρώπους ποὺ δὲν διδαχτήκαμε

ποτὲ ἀπὸ τὴν ἴδια τὴν ἱστορία καὶ τὴ πορεία μας.

Ἡ ἱστορία ὀφείλει νὰ μᾶς διδάξει καὶ ἐμεῖς ἂν εἴμαστε ἄξιοι τῶν προγόνων μας, πραγματικὰ παιδιά τους, τότε πρέπει νὰ μάθουμε νὰ διδασκόμαστε, γιὰτὶ ἔχουμε τὴ βαρύτερη αὐτὴ κληρονομία νὰ εἴμαστε Ἕλληνες. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὅτι ἔχουμε μία ἱστορία ἑνδοξία σὲ πολέμους καὶ σὲ ἀγῶνες. Οἱ Ἕλληνες κρατοῦσαν τὴ σημαία τους, γιὰ νὰ δείξουν ὅτι ἀγωνίζονται ὅπως ἔλεγαν «ὑπὲρ βωμῶν καὶ ἐστιῶν», γιὰ νὰ δείξουν ὅτι ἀγωνίζονται γιὰ συγκεκριμένα ἰδανικά, ἦσαν ἰδεολόγοι, δὲν ἦσαν πολεμιστὲς μετὰ τὴν πραγματικὴ σημασία τῆς λέξεως, ἀλλὰ γίνονταν πολεμιστὲς ὅταν ἡ ἀνάγκη τοὺς καλοῦσε καὶ ἦταν πράγματι αὐτὴ ἡ ἀνάγκη ἀδῆρητη, γιὰ νὰ φυλάξουν τὴν πίστη τους καὶ τὴν πατρίδα τους.

Σήμερα, ἀδελφοί μου, καλοῦμαστε νὰ κρατήσουμε αὐτὴ τὴν πατρίδα μέσα στὰ περιθώρια ποὺ οἱ ἥρωές μας τὴν παρέδωσαν καὶ ὅπως αὐτοὶ βάδισαν τὸ δρόμον τους μετὰ σύνεση πολλή, μετὰ σοφία πολλή, μετὰ ὑπομονὴ πολλή.

Οἱ ἥρωές μας ἦταν παιδιά, ἦταν ἄνθρωποι τοῦ τόπου ποὺ βγήκαν μέσα ἀπὸ τὸ καλύτερο λίκνο, τὸ λίκνον τῆς

Ἐκκλησίας καὶ πραγματικὰ στέκει κανεὶς μπροστὰ τοὺς μὲ μεγάλο θαυμασμὸ καὶ μὲ μεγάλη συγκίνηση, γιατί διαβάζει κανεὶς γιὰ τὴ ζωὴ τους, διαβάζει κανεὶς τὶς ἐπιστολὲς τους, διαβάζει αὐτὰ τὰ ὁποῖα ἔγραψαν καὶ ὄχι ἀπλῶς συγκινεῖται συναισθηματικὰ ἀλλὰ τὰ κείμενα αὐτῶν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, αὐτὲς οἱ ἐπιστολὲς τῶν ἡρώων τοῦ '55-'59 (στὴν Κύπρο) μᾶς θυμίζουν συναξάρια, μᾶς θυμίζουν λόγια νεομαρτύρων, μᾶς θυμίζουν τὶς ἐπιστολὲς τῶν μαρτύρων τῆς πίστεως, τὶς ἐπιστολὲς καὶ τὰ γραπτὰ τῶν νεομαρτύρων τῆς τουρκικῆς κατοχῆς στὸν Ἑλληνικὸ χῶρο. Δὲν διαφέρει καθόλου τὸ ἦθος τους ἀπὸ τὸ ἦθος τῶν μαρτύρων τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῶν μαρτύρων τῆς πατρίδας. Διαβάζει κανεὶς τὶς ἐπιστολὲς ἐκεῖνες καὶ βλέπει ποῦ ἔστεκαν αὐτοὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ βλέπει τί ἤθελαν σὲ αὐτὸ τὸν τόπο. Δὲν βλέπεις ἴχνος μισαλλοδοξίας, δὲν βλέπεις ἴχνος τρομοκρατίας, κι ἂς τοὺς κατηγοροῦσαν τότε ὅτι ἦταν τρομοκράτες. Διαβάζει κανεὶς τὶς ἐπιστολὲς τους καὶ βλέπει ἓνα ἰλαρὸ φῶς, τὸ φῶς τῆς πίστεως τὸ ὁποῖο τοὺς ὀδηγοῦσε στὴν ἀγάπη τῆς πατρίδας τους, τοὺς ὀδηγοῦσε στὴν ἀγάπη τῆς ἐλευθερίας ἀλλὰ δὲν τοὺς ὀδηγοῦσε ποτὲ στὸ μῖσος ἀκόμα καὶ αὐτῶν ποὺ τοὺς εἶχαν κατακτήσει. Καὶ ἂν χρειάστηκε νὰ κάνουν πόλεμο καὶ νὰ κάνουν ἐπανάσταση, αὐτὸ ἦταν γιατί μὲ τὰ δεδομένα τῆς ἐποχῆς καὶ τῆς ὥρας ἐκείνης ἦταν μία ἀνάγκη καὶ δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ κάμουν διαφορετικὰ.

Μέσα στὶς ἐπιστολὲς τῶν μαρτύρων καὶ τῶν ἡρώων βλέπει κανεὶς τὸ Θεό, τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ νὰ βασιλεύει, ποὺ τοὺς ἔδωσε τὴ δυνατότητα νὰ νικήσουν τὸ θάνατο, νὰ ὑπερβοῦν τὸ θάνατο, ποὺ αἰσθάνονταν τὴ ψυχὴ τους νὰ φτερουγίζει γύρω ἀπὸ τὸ θρόνο τοῦ Θεοῦ· τί ἄλλο εἶναι παρὰ τὰ ἴδια βιώματα τῶν μαρτύρων τῆς πίστεως; Δὲν εἶναι αὐτὰ οἱ ἐπισκέψεις τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ οἱ ὁποῖες παρηγοροῦσαν τὶς ψυχὲς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ποὺ βρισκότουσαν μόνο λίγο πρὸ τοῦ θανάτου; Ταυτόχρονα, βλέπει κανεὶς τὴν πίστη τους καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη τους πρὸς τὴν Ἑλλάδα. Τὴν Ἑλλάδα ὄχι ὡς γεωγραφικὸ χῶρο μόνο, ἀλλὰ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ὡς τὴν κοιτίδα τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ, τὴ μητέρα τῆς φιλοσοφίας, τὴ μητέρα τῆς Ρωμοσύνης.

Ὁφείλουμε λοιπὸν νὰ μαθαίνουμε μέσα ἀπὸ τὴν ἱστορία μας, νὰ διδασκόμαστε. Ὁφείλουμε νὰ ὀδηγηθοῦμε μπροστὰ στὰ διάφορα γεγονότα τῆς ἱστορίας μας καὶ νὰ κρίνουμε τὸν ἑαυτό μας, σιωπώντας καὶ περιορίζοντας τὰ λόγια μας καὶ τὴν ἐξωστρέφειά μας καὶ νὰ ἀφήσουμε νὰ μᾶς δείξουν ὅλοι αὐτοὶ οἱ μάρτυρες τῆς πατρίδας τὸ δικό τους φρόνημα καὶ νὰ μᾶς μιλήσουν γιὰ τὴν ἱστορία μας, νὰ μᾶς μιλήσουν γιὰ τὴν πατρίδα μας, νὰ μᾶς μιλήσουν γιὰ τὴν παράδοσή μας, νὰ μᾶς δείξουν ἀπὸ ποῖο δέντρο καταγόμαστε

καὶ ἀκόμα, νὰ ἔχουμε τὸ θάρρος νὰ δοῦμε ποῦ εἴμαστε ἡμεῖς σήμερα.

Πρέπει νὰ ἔχουμε τὸ θάρρος νὰ ἀνακαλύψουμε τὸν ἑαυτό μας καὶ νὰ ποῦμε τὴ μεγάλη ἀλήθεια, ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ τόπος, εἰάν θέλει νὰ ζήσει πρέπει νὰ γίνῃ Ἑλληνικὸς τόπος κατὰ κυριολεξία. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος πρέπει νὰ τύχει παιδείας, παιδείας φιλοσοφικῆς, παιδείας πνευματικῆς, παιδείας Ρωμαϊκῆς, μὲ Ρωμοσύνη ποὺ σημαίνει ὅτι θὰ ἀπολαύσει ὅλη αὐτὴ τὴν ἱστορία τῆς παραδόσεώς μας. Οὔτε ἀρχαιολάτρες εἴμαστε ἀλλὰ οὔτε καὶ βυζαντινόπληκτοι εἴμαστε. Ξέρουμε ὅτι ὁ τόπος ζύμωσε τὴν ἀρχαία φιλοσοφία καὶ παράδοση μὲ τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία. Καὶ Ὁρθόδοξος σημαίνει ἐλεύθερος. Ὁρθόδοξος καὶ Ρωμῖος σημαίνει ἄνθρωπος χωρὶς παρωπίδες, σημαίνει ἄνθρωπος ὁ ὁποῖος ἀγαπᾷ τὸν ἄλλο καὶ δὲν φοβᾶται τὸν ἄλλο ἄνθρωπο, γιατί ἔχει ἀρχοντιά, γιατί δὲν εἶναι κομπλεξικός, γιατί δὲν αἰσθάνεται μειονεκτικὰ μπροστὰ σὲ κανένα, γιατί εἶναι περήφανος γι' αὐτὸ ποὺ εἶναι καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ περηφάνια δὲν εἶναι ἀλαζονεία ἀλλὰ εἶναι τὸ «γνώθι σ' αὐτὸν» τῶν ἀρχαίων Ἑλλήνων· εἶναι αὐτὴ ἡ γνώση τῆς βαρύτατης κληρονομιάς τὴν ὁποῖα κουβαλοῦμε πάνω μας. Αὐτὴ ἡ Ρωμαϊκὴ ὑπερηφάνεια μπορεῖ νὰ ὑπηρετήσῃ καὶ ὄχι νὰ ὑπηρετεῖται, μπορεῖ νὰ σταθεῖ καὶ νὰ ἀγκαλιάσῃ τὸν κόσμον ὅλο καὶ νὰ γίνῃ διάκονος τῆς ἀνθρωπότητας.

Ἐμεῖς σὰν Ρωμῖοι πάντοτε εἴχαμε τὴ μεγάλη ὑπομονὴ ἢ ὁποῖα ἦταν γέννημα τῆς πίστεως. Καὶ ὁ πιστὸς ἄνθρωπος βλέπει πίσω ἀπὸ τὰ φαινόμενα, πέραν τῶν φαινομενικῶν πραγμάτων. Δὲν μᾶς ἐνδιαφέρει ἡμᾶς ἂν μᾶς μισοῦν ἢ ὄχι οἱ Τοῦρκοι. Ὁ Θεὸς τί θὰ πεῖ στὸ τέλος. Δὲν θὰ γίνῃ τίποτα περισσότερο καὶ τίποτα λιγότερο ἀπὸ ὅσα ὁ Θεὸς θὰ ἐπιτρέψει. Πρέπει νὰ μάθουμε νὰ ἔχουμε τελεία ἐμπιστοσύνη στὸ Θεό. Ἐὰν ἐλπίζεις στὸ Θεὸ καὶ πιστεύεις ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι Πατέρας σου, τότε λοιπὸν γιατί φοβάσαι;

Ἄς ἀνοίξουμε τὸ δρόμο στὴν ἀληθινὴ παιδεία· νὰ φτιάξουμε πρῶτα ἀνθρώπους ἐλεύθερους καὶ ἂν φτιάξῃς ἀνθρώπους ἐλεύθερους, τότε θὰ ἀποκτήσεις καὶ πατρίδα ἐλεύθερη. Ἄν ἔχεις ἀνθρώπους δούλους, τότε καὶ ἡ ἐλεύθερη πατρίδα θὰ γίνῃ δούλη. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἶναι αὐτὸς ποὺ ἐλευθερώνεται πρῶτα καὶ ὕστερα ἐλευθερώνει καὶ γεωγραφικὰ τὸ τόπο του. Ἄν ἐνδιατρίψουμε στὴν ἱστορία μας, ἂν γνωρίζουμε τὴν παράδοσή μας, ἂν ἀσκήσουμε καλόβουλη καὶ θετικὴ κριτικὴ στὶς παρελθούσες πράξεις καὶ ἐνέργειές μας, ἂν εἴμαστε ἔντιμοι, ἀνυστερόβουλοι καὶ εἰλικρινεῖς, τότε θὰ ἀνακαλύψουμε ὅτι ὁ τόπος γεννᾷ ἥρωες, ὁ τόπος γεννᾷ μάρτυρες, ὁ τόπος γεννᾷ ἡγέτες, ὅπως τοὺς ἡγέτες οἱ ὁποῖοι σήκωσαν τὸν τόπο αὐτὸ καὶ ἔδωσαν τὴν ἀνάσταση στὴ πατρίδα μας καὶ στὴ φυλὴ μας. Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ μήνυμα τῆς Ρωμοσύνης, τοῦ πόνου καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης γιὰ τὴ πατρίδα μας!

Ἡ Πόρνη τῆς Παλιᾶς μας Γειτονιάς

Τῆς Ντόρας Πολίτη.



Αὐτὴ ἦταν τὸ μί-
σμα. Οὔτε ὁ σα-
ράφης ποὺ ἔπαιρνε
τὶς χρυσὲς βέρες των
μεροκαματιάρηδων γιὰ
δύο ἐνέσεις πενικιλίνης.
Οὔτε ἡ μεγαλοκυρία
τοῦ ἀρχοντόσπιτου
ποὺ ξυλοφόρτωνε ἀλύ-
πητα τὴν παρακώρη τῆς Περσεφόνη. Οὔτε βέβαια
τ' ἀφεντικὸ τοῦ ἀρχοντόσπιτου ποὺ σορομαδοῦσε
τὴν Περσεφόνη ὅταν κοιόταν ἡ μεγαλοκυρία. Ὅχι
αὐτοί, ἡ Βασιλεία ἦταν τὸ μίσμα. Γιατί, αὐτὴ ἔπαιρνε
ἀντίτιμο ὅταν τὴν «σορομαδοῦσαν» οἱ πελάτες στὴν
κάμαρα τοῦ συνοικισμοῦ στὴ Χρυσομαλλοῦσα. Ἦταν
τότε, στὰ χρόνια τῆς λαϊκῆς γειτονιάς, τῶν ἀνθισμένων
περιβολῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῆς χαμένης ἀθρότητας.

Πελατεία μεγάλη δὲν εἶχε ἡ Βασιλεία. Ἦταν
κακομουτσοῦνη, τὴν εἶχαν πάρει καὶ τὰ χρόνια. Ἡ
Βασιλεία, ποτὲ δὲν μάλωνε μὲ τὴ γειτονιά, κι ἄς
ἔφτυναν στὸ κατόπι τῆς! Περνοῦσε μακριὰ ἀπὸ τὰ
κατώφλια τῶν νοικοκυράδων, μὲ ψηλὰ κρατημένο τὸ
κεφάλι. Σὰν νὰ βλεπε μόνο τὶς κορφὲς τῶν δέντρων.
Πιὸ ψηλὰ δὲν θὰ τολμοῦσε ν' ἀτενίσει. Δὲν ἔσμιγε
τὰ βλέμματα τῶν ἄλλων ἡ Βασιλεία. Λὲς κι ἂν δὲν
ἔβλεπε, δὲν θὰ τὴν ἔβλεπαν κιόλας. Καὶ μόνο σὰν
τύχαινε ξόφαλτσα ν' ἀνταμῶσεις τὰ μάτια τῆς, σ'
ἔπιανε ἓνα σύγκρουο ἀλλιώτικο καὶ δὲν ἤξερες ἀπὸ
ποῦ νὰ φύγεις.

Θυμᾶμαι ἐκεῖνα τὰ μάτια, μὲ τοὺς μελανιασμένους
κύκλους ὀλόγυρα. Εἶχαν κάτι σὰν ἰκεσία, σὰν περαστικὴ
λάμψη ἀγνότητας. Κάτι, σὰν ἄφωνο πόνου δαρμένου
σκυλιοῦ. Κάτι σὰν βουβὸ «κατηγορῶ», σὰν γροθιὰ
ποὺ σ' ἔβρισκε στὸ στομάχι καὶ πονοῦσες μέχρι βαθιὰ
στὴ... συνείδηση! Ἴσως γι' αὐτὸ τὴν ὑπερασπίστηκε
σὲ δίκη μιὰ φορὰ ὁ σπουδαῖος δικηγόρος Γεώργιος
Βογιατζῆς. Γιὰ τὸ βουβὸ «κατηγορῶ» ἴσως γιὰ τὸ πόνου
τοῦ δαρμένου σκυλιοῦ στὰ μάτια τῆς. «Μέγας εἶσαι
κύριε καὶ θαυμαστά τὰ ἔργα σου...».

Οἱ «παντοθεῖς» τῆς γειτονιάς, ἡ κυρὰ-Σοφία καὶ ἡ
κυρὰ-Σταυρίτσα, ἔλεγαν πὼς ἡ Βασιλεία κάνει καὶ
ψυχικά, πὼς ἡ χήρα τοῦ μεθύστακα μὲ τ' ὄρφανὸ τὴ
Βαγγελούδα ζοῦσαν γιατί ἡ πόρνη φρόντιζε. Καὶ πὼς
σὰν πῆρε φωτιὰ ὁ παλιοπύργος τῆς φαμελίτισσας
οἰκογένειας κι ἀπομείναν στὸ δρόμο, ἡ πόρνη πάλι
ἔστειλε παπλώματα καὶ προικιὰ γιὰ τὰ κορίτσια καὶ
θέλησε νὰ μὴν μαθευτεῖ τὸ χερσικό.

Κι ἄλλα πολλὰ, πάρα πολλὰ: πὼς ἄφηγε νύχτα καντήλια
χρυσὰ στὴν Παναγιὰ τὴ Χρυσομαλλοῦσα, πὼς ξεθάβαν

μὲ δικὰ τῆς ἔξοδα ξεχασμένους παρακατιανούς, τοὺς
ἔκανε καὶ κασάκια μὲ τ' ὄνομά τους ἀπ' ἔξω. Ἔτσι λέγαν
πὼς ἦταν ἡ Βασιλεία, ἐκεῖνοι ποὺ ἔξεραν. Ἐγὼ μόνο
ἔξερω—τὸ θυμᾶμαι σὰν ὄνειρο, σὰν παραμῦθι τάχα—
πὼς πίσω ἀπὸ τὸ θολὸ τζάμι τῆς στενῆς τῆς πόρτας μὲ
τὸ ξεθωριασμένο κουρτινάκι, ἔβλεπα ὅλα τα χρόνια
τῆς παιδικῆς μου ζωῆς, ἓνα καντήλι πάντα ἀναμμένο.
Κρεμόταν ἀπὸ τὸ χαμηλὸ ταβάνι, μπροστὰ σ' ἓνα καὶ
μοναδικὸ εἰκόνημα κάποιας θλιμμένης Παναγιᾶς.

Ἐκεῖνη τὴ Μεγάλῃ Παρασκευῇ στὶς Ὁρες, ἡ
Βασιλεία τόλμησε τὸ παράτολμο. Ἐφερε στὴν
ἐκκλησιὰ ἓνα στεφάνι καμωμένο ἀπὸ ροζ μαγιάτικα
τριαντάφυλλα καὶ μὼβ βιολέτες κι ἓνα χαρτὶ γεμάτο
σπιτικὸ μοσχολίβανο. Ἦταν τὰ δῶρα τῆς γιὰ τὸν
Ἐσταυρωμένο. Μισοκρύφτηκε πίσω ἀπὸ τ' ἀνθισμένα
φλάμπουρα τῆς ἐκκλησιᾶς κι ἔδωσε σ' ἐμᾶς τὰ παιδιὰ
τὰ φτωχὰ τῆς δῶρα.

«Γιὰ τὸν Ἐπιτάφιο—εἶπε—δῶστε τα στὸν ἐπίτροπο».
Δὲν χρειάστηκε, ἐκεῖνος εἶχε δεῖ. Ἀφηνιασμένος θαρρεῖς
ὁ «εὐσεβῆς» τοῦτος, ἄρπαξε τὸ στεφάνι τῆς Βασιλείας,
τὸ πέταξε στὸ χῶμα καὶ τὸ τσαλαπάτησε μὲ λύσσα. Καὶ
τὸ μοσχολίβανο τὴν ἴδια τύχη εἶχε. «Μὴν σὲ ξαναδῶ
παλιοβρῶμα κοντὰ στὴν ἐκκλησιὰ θὰ σοῦ ξυρίσω τὸ
κεφάλι...».

Τὸ ἴδιο βράδυ, ὁ Ἐπιτάφιος ἀνέβαινε τὴ Χρυσο-
μαλλοῦσης μὲ τὸ πιστὸ ποίμνιο ν' ἀκολουθεῖ: «Αἱ
γενεαὶ πᾶσαι» ἦταν ἐκεῖ, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὴ Βασιλεία.
Ἐκεῖ, στὸ ἀνηφοράκι τῆς Ἀδαίου, κρυμμένη μὲς τὸ
σκοτάδι, πεσμένη στὰ γόνατα ἦταν ἡ πόρνη. Ἐκλαιγε,
σερνόταν μὲς τὴ σκόνῃ, τὰ μαῦρα μαλλιά τῆς δεμένα
μέσα στὸ πένθιμο μαντήλι. Παιδὶ ἐγὼ καὶ κοιτάξα.
Δὲν μὲ γελοῦσαν τὰ μάτια μου, εἶδα κι ἄκουσα... Μὰ
νὰ 'ταν ἡ Βασιλεία, τούτη ἡ μαυροφοροῦσα ἡ μὴν
ἦταν ἡ Μαγδαληνή;

Τὸ βράδυ στ' ὄνειρό μου, στὸ ξύπνιο μου, τί νὰ 'ταν
ἄραγε, δὲν τὸ ξεδιάλυνα ποτέ, σὰ νὰ μοῦ φάνηκε πὼς
ἀπὸ τὸ κουβούκλιο τοῦ Ἐπιταφίου σηκώθηκε ἓνας
ὀλοφώτεινος Χριστὸς μὲ τὸ στεφάνι τῆς Βασιλείας
ὀλόγυρα στὸ μέτωπο. Ἐκεῖνο ποὺ ποδοπάτησε ὁ
ἐπίτροπος. Καὶ πὼς πῆγε κοντὰ στὴ γονατισμένη πόρνη.
Μόνος Ἐκεῖνος ἀπ' τὸ πλῆθος. Μήπως καὶ στὴν ἐπίγεια
ζωὴ Του ἔτσι δὲν ἔκανε; Μὰ πάλι παιδὶ ἤμουν, ποιὸς
παίρνει στὰ σοβαρὰ τα «νείρατα» τῶν παιδιῶν;

Πολλὰ χρόνια μετὰ, ἔμαθα πὼς ἡ Βασιλεία πέθανε
μια Μεγάλῃ Πέμπτῃ. Τὴν κηδέψανε, θέλοντας καὶ μὴ,
Μεγάλῃ Παρασκευῇ, μαζί μ' Ἐκεῖνον!...



Ἄν δὲν ἔχεις ταπεινώση πνευματικὴ ἢ προσευχὴ
πνευματικὴ, ἀπόκτησε ἔστω σωματικὴ. Κι ἀπ'
αὐτὴν θὰ σοῦ ἔρθει καὶ ἡ πνευματικὴ.

«Μικρὸς Ευεργετινὸς» [ἐκδ. Ἰ. Μ. Παρακλήτου]

Διδάγματα από τὰ Γεγονότα τοῦ Σεπτεμβρίου τὸ 1955

Γράφει ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος Χολέβας, Πολιτικός Ἐπιστήμων.

Τὸ διήμερο 6-7 Σεπτεμβρίου 1955, ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως βίωσε ἓνα ἄγριο πογκρόμ με δύο θανατώσεις κληρικῶν, βιασμούς, προπηλακισμούς, καὶ ἀμέτρητες καταστροφές κοιμητηρίων, ναῶν, οἰκιῶν καὶ καταστημάτων. Ὁ ἀφηνιασμένος τουρκικὸς ὄχλος χρησιμοποιήθηκε ἀπὸ τὶς εἰδικές ὑπηρεσίες ἀνορθόδοξο πολέμου τοῦ τουρκικοῦ στρατοῦ γιὰ νὰ τρομοκρατήσει τὴν πολυπληθῆ τότε Ἑλληνορθόδοξη κοινότητα καὶ γιὰ νὰ τὴν ὀδηγήσει, ὅπως καὶ ἔγινε, στὸν σταδιακὸ ξεριζωμὸ.

Τὰ Σεπτεμβριανά, ὅπως ἔχουν πλέον καταγραφεῖ, ἦταν τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα μακροχρονίου σχεδιασμοῦ, τὸν ὁποῖο τηρεῖ με ἀκρίβεια τὸ τουρκικὸ κράτος στὰ ἔθνικα θέματα, παρὰ τὴν ἐναλλαγὴ κυβερνήσεων.

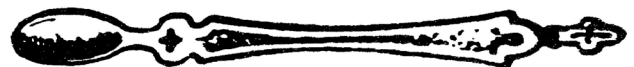
Ἀπὸ τὸ 1914, ὅταν ἄρχισε ἡ γενοκτονία τῶν Μικρασιατῶν—πέντε χρόνια προτοῦ ἀποβιβαστεῖ ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς Στρατός—με ἀποκορύφωμα τὴ γενοκτονία τῶν Ποντίων Ἑλλήνων (1919-1922), μέχρι καὶ σήμερα ἡ πολιτικὴ τοῦ τουρκικοῦ κράτους κινεῖται σὲ δύο σταθεροὺς ἄξονες: (1) Τὴ δημιουργία ὁμοιογενοῦς ἔθνικοῦ κράτους με τὴν ἐξόντωση ἢ ἐκδίωξη τῶν Χριστιανικῶν μειονοτήτων. (2) Τὴν ἐπέκταση τῆς στρατιωτικῆς, οἰκονομικῆς καὶ πολιτικῆς ἐπιρροῆς τῆς Τουρκίας πρὸς ὅλες τὶς κατευθύνσεις καὶ κυρίως πρὸς τὸν ἐδαφικὸ χῶρο τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ. Χαρακτηριστικὸ παράδειγμα, ἡ εἰσβολὴ τοῦ Ἀττίλα στὴν Κύπρο τὸ 1974.

Στὴν ἐπίτευξη τῶν τουρκικῶν στόχων ἔχει βοηθήσει δυστυχῶς ἡ ἀφέλεια καὶ ἡ ἱστορικὴ ἀμνησία ποὺ ἐπιδεικνύει μερικὲς φορὲς ἡ ἑλληνικὴ πλευρά. Κάθε ὑποχώρησή μας δὲν ἐκλαμβάνεται ἀπὸ τὴν Ἄγκυρα ὡς φιλικὴ σχέση μεταξὺ γειτόνων, ἀλλὰ ὡς ἔνδειξη ἀδυναμίας. Θυμίζω τὰ ἱστορικὰ γεγονότα: κατὰ τὴν περίοδο 1928-1932, ὁ Ἐλευθέριος Βενιζέλος καλλιέργησε τὴν Ἑλληνοτουρκικὴ φιλία με τὸν Κεμάλ Ἀτατούρκ. Ἡ ἀνταμοιβή μας ἦταν τὸ «βαρλικ βεργισί». Δηλαδή, κατὰ τὴ διάρκεια τοῦ Β΄ Παγκοσμίου Πολέμου, οἱ πολυάριθμοι Ἕλληνες (Ρωμηοὶ) τῆς Πόλης φορολογήθηκαν ὑπέρογκα καὶ ἄδικα. Ὅποιος δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ πληρώσει ἀποστελλόταν σὲ κάτεργα γιὰ καταναγκαστικὰ ἔργα καὶ πολλοὶ πέθαναν ἀπὸ τὶς κακουχίες. Τὸ 1952 ἡ Ἑλλάδα, σὲ ἔνδειξη φιλίας πρὸς τοὺς γείτονες, ἐπέτρεψε τὴ λειτουργία τουρκόφωνου γυμνασίου στὴ Θράκη με τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Τούρκου προέδρου τῆς Δημοκρατίας Τζελάλ Μπαγιάρ καὶ ἀναγκασε—κακῶς—ὄλους τοὺς μουσουλμάνους τῆς Θράκης νὰ μαθαίνουν τουρκικά. Ἡ ἀνταμοιβή μας ἦταν τὰ Σεπτεμβριανά τοῦ 1955.

Κάτι ποὺ πρέπει νὰ προσέχουμε πάντα εἶναι ἡ συνήθης τουρκικὴ τακτικὴ τῆς «προβοκάτσιας», δηλαδή τῶν σκηνοθετημένων ἐπεισοδίων. Τὸν Σεπτέμβριο τοῦ 1955 ὅλα ἄρχισαν ὅταν ἐξεργάγη μία βόμβα στὸν αὐλόγυρο τοῦ τουρκικοῦ προξενείου στὴ Θεσσαλονίκη, ποὺ χαρακτηρίζεται σὰν τὸ σπῆτι ὅπου γεννήθηκε ὁ Κεμάλ Ἀτατούρκ. Τὸ κλίμα στὶς σχέσεις τῶν δύο χωρῶν ἦταν φορτισμένο λόγω τοῦ ἐνωτικοῦ-ἀπελευθερωτικοῦ ἀγῶνα τῶν Ἑλληνοκυπρίων κατὰ τῶν Βρετανῶν ἀπὸ τὴν 1/4/1955.

Σὲ ἐλάχιστες ὥρες οἱ ἐφημερίδες στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη κυκλοφόρησαν με πηχυαίους τίτλους—ἄρα κάποιον κέντρο τοὺς εἶχε εἰδοποιήσει πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἔκρηξη. Ὁ ὄχλος ἐφοδιάστηκε με ὁμοιόμορφους λοστούς—ἄρα ὑπῆρχε συντονισμὸς πίσω ἀπὸ τὴ μαζικὴ καταστροφὴ ἑλληνικῶν περιουσιῶν. Ὅπως ἀπεδείχθη, τὴ βόμβα τὴν εἶχε βάλει σκοπίμως ἓνας ὑπάλληλος τοῦ τουρκικοῦ προξενείου, ὁ ὁποῖος ἔπειτα ἀπὸ λίγα χρόνια ἀνταμείφθηκε με θέση νομάρχου καὶ με ἄλλα ἀξιώματα στὴν Τουρκία. Θυμίζω ὅτι ἡ μέθοδος τῆς σκηνοθεσίας ἐπαναλήφθηκε καὶ τὸν Ἰανουάριο τοῦ 1996, ὅταν ἡ δῆθεν τυχαία προσάραξη ἑνὸς τουρκικοῦ φορτηγοῦ πλοίου ὀδήγησε στὴν κρίση τῶν Ἴμιων.

Ἀξίζει νὰ διδασκόμαστε ἀπὸ τὶς συνήθειες μεθόδους τῆς τουρκικῆς πολιτικῆς γιὰ νὰ μὴν ξαναβρεθοῦμε πρὸ ἀπροόπτου. Τὸ 1955 ἡ κυβέρνησις τοῦ Ἄντνὰν Μεντερές, με δηλώσεις τοῦ ὑπουργοῦ Ἐξωτερικῶν Ζορλοῦ καὶ ἄλλων ὑπευθύνων, ἔκανε δημοσίως γνωστὴ τὴ σύνδεση τοῦ Κυπριακοῦ με τὰ θέματα τοῦ Αἰγαίου καὶ τῆς Θράκης. Σήμερα ὁ Τούρκος ΥΠΕΞ Ἀχμέτ Νταβούτογλου κάνει γνωστὴ μέσω τῶν βιβλίων του τὴν ἐπιθυμία τῆς Ἄγκυρας νὰ μεταφέρει τὸ «πεῖραμα» Κύπρου στὴ δυτικὴ Θράκη. Δὲν κινδυνολογῶ, ἀλλὰ, ὅπως ἔλεγε ὁ ἀείμνηστος τουρκολόγος Νεοκλῆς Σαρρῆς, ἡ Τουρκία πάντα προαναγγέλλει τὰ σχέδιά της...



Ἡ ἀέλθει καιρὸς ποὺ ὄχι οἱ διωγμοὶ ἀλλὰ τὰ χρήματα καὶ τὰ ἀγαθὰ αὐτοῦ του κόσμου θὰ ἀπομακρύνουν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Καὶ θὰ χαθοῦν ψυχὲς πολὺ περισσότερες ἀπὸ ὅτι τὸν καιρὸ τῶν διωγμῶν. Ἀπὸ τὴν μία θὰ χρυσώνουν τοὺς τρούλους καὶ θὰ βάζουν ἐπάνω τους τοὺς σταυροὺς καὶ ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη παντοῦ θὰ βασιλεύει κακία καὶ ψεῦδος. Ἡ ἀληθινὴ Ἐκκλησία πάντα θὰ διώκεται. Αὐτοὶ ποὺ θέλουν νὰ σωθοῦν θὰ σώζονται με τὶς ἀσθένειες καὶ τὶς θλίψεις. Ὁ τρόπος ποὺ θὰ γίνονται οἱ διωγμοὶ θὰ εἶναι πολὺ πονηρὸς καὶ θὰ εἶναι πολὺ δύσκολο κανεὶς νὰ προβλέψει τοὺς διωγμοὺς. Φοβερὸς θὰ εἶναι αὐτὸς ὁ καιρὸς, καὶ πολὺ λυπᾶμαι αὐτοὺς ποὺ θὰ ζοῦνε τότε...

Ὅσιος Σεραφεῖμ Βίριτσα (+1949)

Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Χρῦσανθος (Φιλιππίδης), Ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος τοῦ 1940

Ἱστορία καὶ Νέα Πνευματικὴ Ἀντίδραση, σελίδα 83.



Στὰ 1881 γεννήθηκε στὴν σκλαβωμένη Κομοτηνὴ ἡ ζωὴ του πέρασε μέσα ἀπὸ συμπληγάδες μὰ θὰ μείνει βαθειὰ στὴν μνήμη τῆς ἱστορίας τὸ βῆμα του, γιατί ὁ ἱεράρχης τῶν Ποντίων, ὁ Μητροπολίτης Τραπεζοῦντος Χρῦσανθος στήθηκε στητὸς καὶ εἶπε ΟΧΙ, ὅταν ὅλοι λέγανε ΝΑΙ ἀπ' ἄκρου σ' ἄκρου στὴν Εὐρώπη.

Τιμημένος ὅσο κανένας Μητροπολίτης Τραπεζοῦντος (1913-1938), στὰ δύσκολα χρόνια, στάθηκε στὸν Ἑλληνισμό τῆς Μαύρης θάλασσας καὶ στὶς πατρογονικὲς ἐστίες ἀλλὰ καὶ μετὰ στὴν προσφυγιά. Πρωταγωνίστησε γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ στὴν Μακεδονία. Ἀποκρισάριος τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ Πατριαρχείου ἐν Ἀθήναις, ὑπεύθυνος σὲ πολλὲς ἀποστολὲς ἐθνικῆς σημασίας στὴν Τιφλίδα, τὴν Ἀλβανία, τὸ Βελιγράδι, τὴν Συρία καὶ ἀλλοῦ. Λόγιος καὶ γλωσσομαθής, ἀφιέρωσε τὸ ταλέντο του σὲ μελέτες γιὰ τὴν ἐκκλησία τῆς Τραπεζοῦντος τὸ 1933, τὸ 1937 ἀναγορεύτηκε ἐπίτιμος διδάκτωρ τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου τῶν Ἀθηνῶν καὶ τὸ 1940 ὀνομάστηκε Ἀκαδημαϊκός. Ἀπὸ τὸ 1938-1941 ἦταν Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀθηνῶν.

Ὁ Πόλεμος τοῦ 1940

Ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Χρῦσανθος σ' αὐτὸν τὸν πόλεμο πολέμησε μαζὶ μὲ τὸ μαχόμενο ἔθνος ἀπὸ τὴν πρώτη στιγμή καὶ κατὰ τοῦ Ἰταλοῦ ἀλλὰ καὶ κατὰ τοῦ Γερμανοῦ εἰσβολέα. Δὲν ὑπῆρξε ἐνέργεια ποὺ πρέπει νὰ κάνει Ὁρθόδοξος Ἱεράρχης ποὺ νὰ μὴ τὴν ἔκανε, δίπλα στὸν μαχητὴ ἀλλὰ καὶ δίπλα στὸν τραυματία. Παρηγορητὴς τῆς χήρας καὶ ἐμψυχωτὴς τοῦ πολεμιστῆ, ἀκούραστα στήριξε τὸν ἄνισα μαχόμενο Ἑλληνισμό, καὶ ὅταν πλησίαζαν τὰ δύσκολα, πιδ πεισματικὰ πύκνωνε τὶς γραμμὲς μὴ καὶ περάσει ὁ ἐχθρός.

Συνθηκολόγηση

Ἄς δοῦμε τί γράφει στὸ ἡμερολόγιό του ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Χρῦσανθος:

«29/4/1941—Πληροφοροῦμαι ὅτι ὁ στρατηγὸς Τσολάκογλου ἀφοῦ σύνηψε τὴν ἐπονεϊδιστὸν συμφωνία μὲ τοὺς Γερμανοὺς ἐπάνω στὸ μέτωπο, κατελθάνει εἰς Ἀθήνας πρόκειται ἐντολὴ τῶν Γερμανῶν νὰ σχηματίσει κυβέρνησιν. Τοῦτο μὲ στεναχωρεῖ πολὺ διότι θὰ περιπέσωμεν εἰς δεινὰ. Προτιμότερον

μόνοι οἱ Γερμανοὶ νὰ ἔχουν τὴν εὐθύνη τῆς διοικήσεως ὅποτε θὰ εἶναι προσεκτικότεροι.»

Πράγματι λοιπὸν, οἱ Γερμανοὶ εὐθεὶς μόλις μπῆκαν στὴν Ἀθήνα καὶ ἐνῶ ἀκόμα ἡ Ἑλλάδα πολεμοῦσε στὴν Κρήτη, πραγματοποιήσαν συναντήσεις μὲ πρόθυμους παράγοντες γιὰ νὰ φανεῖ ἡ κατοχὴ μὴ ὀμαλὴ συνέχεια, ὅλα νὰ ξεχαστοῦν. Μῆτε αἷμα στὰ ὄχυρα χύθηκε, μῆτε ἡ Ἑλλάδα εἶπε ΟΧΙ, μὴ παρένθεση ποὺ πρέπει νὰ πάρουμε μὴ γόμα καὶ νὰ τὴν σβήσουμε ὅτι τάχα δὲν ἔγινε τίποτα. Ὅλοι πρόθυμοι στρατιωτικοί, κάθε εἶδους παράγοντες καὶ ἡ ἐκκλησία θὰ κάνουμε μὴ μασκαράτα καὶ θὰ ξυπνήσουμε μὲ τὸν μηχανισμό ὅπως ἦταν μὲ μὴ κυβέρνησις ποὺ διέθετε Ἑλληνικὰ πιστοποιητικὰ γέννησης, καὶ ὅλα θὰ εἶναι καλὰ ἀγγελικὰ πλασμένα. Κάποιοι Ἰταλοὶ καὶ Γερμανοὶ θὰ παρακολουθοῦσαν καὶ θὰ ἔλεγχαν τὰ πάντα, κάποιες μικρὲς ἀλλαγὲς στὰ σύνορα ὑπὲρ τῶν Βουλγάρων καὶ τῶν Ἰταλῶν (πάει ἡ Θράκη, ἡ Δ. Μακεδονία, τὰ Ἐπτάνησα ἢ Ἡπειρος καὶ οἱ Κυκλάδες), καὶ πὰ σύμμαχοι εἴμαστε βοηθήστε καὶ ἐσεῖς τώρα μὲ τὸ αἷμα σας τὴν ἐπιβολὴ τῆς νέας τάξης τοῦ Χίτλερ. Καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ στὸ Ἑλλή; Καὶ τὰ παιδιὰ μὲ τὰ κομμένα πόδια; Καὶ οἱ χῆρες καὶ τὰ ὄρφανά τῆς βομβαρδισμένης Πάτρας;

Τὰ «ΟΧΙ» τῆς Κατοχῆς

27/4/1941: ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος ἦρθε πρῶτὸν στὴν Ἀρχιεπισκοπὴ. «Δὲν θὰ λειτουργήσω σήμερον γιὰ νὰ εἶμαι ἔτοιμος γιὰ ὅτι προκύψει», εἶπε, καὶ ἔστειλε τὸν Ἀρχιδιάκονο Νικόδημο (μετέπειτα Μητροπολίτη Πατρῶν) νὰ τελέσει τὴν λειτουργία, λέγοντάς του: «Πρόσεχε παιδί μου ἔχε τὸ νοῦ σου μὴ καὶ σὲ εἰδοποιήσω».

Κυριακὴ τοῦ Θωμᾶ λοιπὸν κήρυξε ἀπ' ἄμβωνος ὁ Ἀρχιδιάκονος, καὶ κάποια στιγμή εἶδε ἕνα μαντατοφόρο νὰ τοῦ κάνει νόημα: Γρηγόρα στὸν Ἀρχιεπίσκοπο. Τελείωσε τὴν λειτουργία καὶ πῆγε στὸ γραφεῖο του καὶ τὸν βρῆκε νὰ κλαίει βλέποντας τὴν σημαία τῶν Ναζὶ νὰ κυματίζει στὸν Παρθενῶνα.

Σύντομα, κάθε εἶδους μαντατοφόροι ἄρχισαν νὰ φτάνουν στὸ γραφεῖο τοῦ Χρῦσανθου, μὲ κάθε εἶδους προτάσεις, ἀπειλές, ἐκβιασμούς, γλυκόλογα. Καὶ ὁ Χρῦσανθος ἐκεῖνες τὶς ἡμέρες θυμῆθηκε τὸν Μητροπολίτη Τραπεζοῦντος καὶ μὲ Ποντιακὸ πείσμα εἶπε τέσσερα βασικὰ ΟΧΙ.

Πρῶτο ΟΧΙ

Ἦρθε μὴ ἐπιτροπὴ καὶ πρότεινε γιὰ τὸ καλὸ τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ λαοῦ (καὶ γιὰ νὰ καλοπιάσουνε τὸν κατακτητὴ), νὰ πᾶνε μὲ μπροστάρη τὴν θρησκευτικὴ μας ἡγεσία νὰ παραδώσουμε τὴν πόλη τῶν Ἀθηνῶν στοὺς Γερμανοὺς, καὶ Χρῦσανθος ἀπάντησε: «Οἱ Ἕλληνες Ἱεράρχες δὲν παραδίδουν πόλεις στὸν ἐχθρό, καθῆκον ἔχουν νὰ ἐργαστοῦν διὰ τὴν ἀπελευθέρωση».

Δεύτερο ΟΧΙ

Ἦρθαν κάποιοι καὶ εἶπαν ἄς κάνουμε κάτι νὰ μᾶς πάρουν ἀπὸ καλὸ μάτι οἱ κατακτητές, μὴ τοὺς πᾶμε πιά κόντρα· τελείωσε ὁ πόλεμος, καὶ τί νὰ κάνουμε βρὲ παιδιά; Δὲν κάνουμε μία δοξολογία στὴν Μητρόπολη; Καὶ ἀγρίεψε τὸ μάτι τοῦ Μητροπολίτη Τραπεζοῦντος... «ΔΟΞΟΛΟΓΙΑ; Δοξολογία δὲν ἔχει θέσιν ἐπὶ τῇ ὑποδουλώσει τῆς Πατρίδος μας, ἡ ὥρα τῆς δοξολογίας θὰ εἶναι ἄλλη».

Τρίτο ΟΧΙ

Μίας καὶ οἱ ραγιαδες δὲν μποροῦσαν νὰ τὸν πείσουν νὰ σκύψει, εἶπαν νὰ τὸν θαμπώσουν. Τοῦ ζήτησαν νὰ πάει νὰ δεῖ τὸν στρατηγὸ Στούμμε καὶ τότε ὑποχώρησε Χρῦσανθος. «Θὰ τὸν ἀναμένω» εἶπε. Ὁ στρατηγὸς πῆρε τὰ πόδια του καὶ πῆγε στὸ Ἀρχιεπισκοπικὸ γραφεῖο. Ἀπὸ τὴν πρώτη στιγμή κατάλαβε ὁ Γερμανὸς στρατηγὸς ὅτι δὲν εἶχε νὰ κάνει μὲ προσκνημένο ἀνθρώπακι ἀλλὰ μὲ ἠγέτη ποὺ ὑπερασπιζόταν Θεομοπύλες καὶ τὸ ξεκίνησε μαλακὰ νὰ δεῖ ποὺ θὰ τοῦ βγεῖ: «Ὁμορφὴ ἡ πατρίδα σας», «Οἱ Γερμανοὶ λατρεύουν τὸν Ὅμηρο». Καὶ ὁ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος εὐγενικὰ σεμνὰ ἐκπροσωπώντας τοὺς Ἕλληνες: «Ἐλπίζω νὰ σεβαστεῖτε τὴν Χώρα», «Στρατηγὲ μὴ θίξετε τὴν φιλοτιμία τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ λαοῦ»...

Τέταρτο ΟΧΙ

Τέλος ὁ στρατηγὸς Στούμμε, τὴν ἐπόμενη τσοῦπ ξανὰ στὸ Ἀρχιεπισκοπικὸ γραφεῖο καὶ τί ζήτησε λές; Νὰ ὀρκίσει τὴν κυβέρνησιν Τσολάκογλου! Τὴν ἀπάντησιν δὲν χρειάστηκε νὰ τὴν μεταφράσει διερμηνέας—τὴν εἶπε στὰ Γερμανικὰ ὁ Μητροπολίτης Τραπεζοῦντος καὶ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀθηνῶν: «Δὲν μπορῶ νὰ ὀρκίσω Κυβέρνησιν προβληθεῖσα ἀπὸ τὸν ἐχθρὸ· ἐμεῖς γνωρίζουμε ὅτι τὶς Κυβερνήσεις τὶς ὀρίζει ὁ λαὸς ἢ ὁ Βασιλεὺς. Ἐδῶ τώρα οὔτε ὁ λαὸς ἐψήφισε τὴν Κυβέρνησιν, οὔτε ὁ Βασιλεὺς τὴν ὄρισε. Πῶς ζητᾶτε νὰ ὀρκίσω Κυβέρνησιν ὑποδειχθεῖσα ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐχθροῦ; Δία νὰ εἶναι ὄργανόν των;»

Ἀναφοκοκίνησε ὁ στρατηγὸς ἀπὸ τὸ χαστοῦκι ποὺ δέχτηκε, χαιρέτησε, ἔκανε μεταβολὴ καὶ βγαίνοντας ἀπὸ τὴν πόρτα τῆς Ἀρχιεπισκοπῆς σίγουρα κατάλαβε ὅτι ὁ πόλεμος δὲν εἶχε τελειώσει.

Τώρα ἦταν ἡ σειρὰ τῶν σκουλήκων, οἱ ὁποῖοι γιὰ τὸ τάχα καλὸ τῆς Πατρίδας καὶ τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ τὸ δικό του, τὸν ἐκλιπαροῦσαν νὰ μὴ ἀρνηθεῖ τὴν πρότασιν ποὺ τοῦ ἔκανε ὁ Στούμμε, καὶ ὁ Ἱεράρχης ἀπάντησε «Ἐν γνώσει τῶν συνεπειῶν ποὺ μὲ ἀναμένουν, δὲν δέχομαι τὴν προτεινομένη πρότασιν. Ἐμμένω εἰς τὰς ἀρχάς μου». Καὶ ὅταν τὸν παραπίεσαν: «Ὁ πρωθυπουργὸς ποὺ ὀρκισα βρῖσκεται καὶ ἀγωνίζεται στὴν Κρήτη» εἶπε

καὶ σίγασε πιά κάθε ἄλλη κουβέντα.

Πρέπει νὰ σημειώσουμε ὅτι αὐτὴ ἡ πράξις τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Χρῦσανθου ἦταν ἡ πρώτη πράξις ἐθνικῆς ἀντίστασιν στὴν κατεχόμενη Εὐρώπη.

Ὁ Τσολάκογλου Πῶς Ὀρκίστηκε;

Στὶς 29/4/1941, 11π.μ., ὀρκίστηκε ἡ πρώτη κατοχικὴ κυβέρνησιν ἀπὸ τὸν διάκονο τῆς ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Ἁγίου Γεωργίου Καρύτση. Φυσικὰ οὔτε ὁ Τσολάκογλου οὔτε οἱ Γερμανοὶ λησιμόνησαν αὐτὴ τὴ συμπεριφορὰ τοῦ Χρῦσανθου. Ἔτσι, στὶς 2/6/1941 ἐπαύθει μὲ Συντακτικὴ Πράξις τῆς ψευδοκυβέρνησιν Τσολάκογλου, γιὰ νὰ τοποθετηθεῖ κάποιο πιὸ «βολικὸ» ἄτομο στὴ θέση τοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου.

Ὁ Χρῦσανθος σὲ ὅλη τὴ διάρκεια τῆς Γερμανικῆς Κατοχῆς τήρησε τὴν ἴδια ἐχθρικὴ στάσιν ἀπέναντι σὲ ὅλες τὶς δοσιλογικῆς

κυβερνήσεις, ἀκόμα καὶ ὅταν τοῦ δόθηκε ἀπὸ τὴν Κυβέρνησιν τοῦ Ἰωάννη Ράλλη ἡ δυνατότητα νὰ ἐπανέλθει στὸν ἀρχιεπισκοπικὸ θρόνο, κάτι ποὺ πλήρως ἀπέρριψε.

Μεταπελευθερωτικὰ οἱ Ἑλληνικῆς κυβερνήσεις δὲν προέβησαν στὴν ἀκύρωσιν τῶν διαταγμάτων τῆς Κυβέρνησιν Τσολάκογλου μὲ τὰ τῶν ὁποίων εἶχε παυθεῖ ὁ Χρῦσανθος ἀπὸ τὸν ἀρχιεπισκοπικὸ θρόνο.

Ἀνεπαύθη ἐν Κυρίῳ τὸ 1949. Αἰωνία του ἡ μνήμη!...



Ὁ φυσικὸς σαρκικὸς πόλεμος ὑποχωρεῖ μὲ τὴν νησιεῖα, ἀγρυπνία, προσευχὴ, ὅταν δὲν ὑπάρχει ὑπερηφάνεια. Οἱ βλάσφημοι λογισμοὶ εἶναι ὅλοι τοῦ διαβόλου καὶ ὄχι τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Μὲ βλάσφημους λογισμοὺς βασανίζει ὁ διάβολος συνήθως τοὺς εὐαίσθητους ἀνθρώπους, γιὰ νὰ τοὺς θλίβει καὶ νὰ τοὺς φέρνει σὲ ἀπόγνωσιν.

Ἡ θεικὴ πληροφορία τῆς εὐπρόσδεκτης προσευχῆς μετὰ τὴν προσευχὴ. Ἀνάλογα μὲ τὴν θυσία καὶ τὴν προσευχὴ ποὺ κάνει ὁ ἀνθρώπος γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτό του ἢ γιὰ τὸν συνάνθρωπό του, θὰ δεχθεῖ καὶ τὴν θεία βοήθεια. Ὅποιος κουράζεται γιὰ τὸν πλησίον του ἀπὸ καθαρὴ ἀγάπη, ξεκουράζεται μὲ τὴν κούρασιν. Ἐνῶ ἐκεῖνος ποὺ ἀγαπάει τὸν ἑαυτό του καὶ τεμπελιάζει, κουράζεται καὶ μὲ τὸ νὰ κάθεται.

Ὅταν ἀδικεῖσαι νὰ μὴ λες «Νὰ τὸ βρεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό», γιατί τότε καταριεῖσαι μὲ εὐγένεια.

Γέρων Παΐσιος Ἀθώνιτης (+1994)

ON ACCOUNT OF THE ANGELS: WHY I COVER MY HEAD

By Elisabet, from the web site of the "Orthodox Christian Information Center," <http://orthodoxinfo.com/>, printed with permission.

For this cause ought the woman to have power [i.e., cover] on her head, because of the angels. [1 Cor 11:10]

At first reading of this verse I thought, "Good grief, that, at least, can't have anything to do with women today." I was a new convert to Christianity and making a valiant effort to read the Bible "as if it were true." St. Paul was hard to swallow, and so were angels—along with fairies and trolls! My grudging acceptance of Christianity was based on honest doubt rather than conviction. No one had proved to me that it was true, but neither could I prove it false. On that flimsy hope I chose to make what Kierkegaard called "a leap of faith over the abyss of the absurd." It was a desperate act. I was at the end of my rope, at a loss to explain the painful contradiction between my good intentions and the reality of my life. I was no longer able to pretend success as a wife, mother of four, or writer (even though my book had been sold on first submission to a leading publisher). In truth I didn't even know who I was, although I loudly proclaimed my manifesto as atheist, humanist, and feminist, with strong opinions on most issues. I had spent most of my young life trying to define myself by "proving" I could do anything a man could do, only better. (What man could bear children!) But inside was a black hole and I was about to fall in.

Somehow I "happened" across a Bible and read that God (whoever He or It was) created *man in our image, male and female created He them*. I read of Moses encountering a *burning bush which was not consumed*—and a God who identified Himself as *I AM*. That caught my attention. If there was a great *I AM* from whom all small "I ams" received their identity, there was hope of discovering myself and what it meant to be a woman.

One night, under a canopy of stars in the desert, I cried out: "God, if you are there, I want to find You!" But my mind refused to accept the Bible stories of sacrificial lambs and Christ crucified and resurrected. Descartes said, "I think, therefore I am," and I agreed. My ability to reason was my life! With a heavy heart I gave up on the "mindless" Christian solution. But when all seemed lost, a quiet little thought lodged in my head: "If it were true—would you accept it? And can you prove that it is not?" The question

would not let go. In fear and trembling I chose to "sacrifice" my reason, accept the incomprehensible in hopes it would prove true, and live the rest of my life as if it were. It felt as if I were dying, but I saw no other way.

The proof of the pudding, of course, was in the eating. The truth of the Bible could only be tested through obedience. I determined to do whatever "leapt at me" in the daily reading of Scripture. I disagreed with St. Paul's view of women, but he did say, *there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* (Gal 3:28). Clearly we were equal in salvation and worthiness—then why different rules? Were they only cultural, not applicable to us today? Then one day I prayed, "God, You made me a woman; I want to live the fullness of womanhood as you meant it—spiritually, emotionally, every way, even if it means doing as St. Paul says!"

Soon after that, during morning prayer, 1 Cor 11:10 leapt at me. It seemed silly, but I got up from my knees, found a kerchief to put over my head, and went on with prayers. Somehow it felt right. One day I wore the scarf in my Southern Baptist church. There were glances, but no comments. Gradually it became more of a habit, both during prayers at home and in church. As the only woman with a head-covering, I felt conspicuous at times, but could not bring myself to take it off. I decided I would rather err on the side of obedience than against it. And there were the angels to consider. By now I believed in them, but why they should care about my head was still a mystery.

After I had been a "Christian" for thirteen years, a desire for the sacraments drew me to the Episcopal church. It was 1979, and three-fourths of the women in the congregation wore head-coverings. I rejoiced. During the Eucharist the priest, standing before the altar, chanted: *Therefore, with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Thy glorious Name, evermore praising Thee, and saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts: heaven and earth are full of Thy glory..."* The glory hit me: We were worshipping God in the company of a heavenly host! Was St. Paul alluding to that?

When I learned of the Jesus Prayer and adopted a rule of prayer, it seemed appropriate to wear something on my head at all times. I sewed matching dresses and scarves which my friends accepted as my "style"—artistic and a bit eccentric. That was fine with me (and I hoped, with the angels!) I was saddened when other women in our parish stopped wearing a head-covering. They thought it unnecessary and outdated, and some saw it as a sign of inferiority. Women and men were equal, and—according to current unisex fashions in clothing,



life and hairstyles—practically alike and interchangeable. For nearly two thousand years Christian women had covered their heads in church, and usually elsewhere—but now we were “liberated” from that.

In 1995 I became Orthodox and was surprised to find myself again the only woman wearing a head-covering in my parish. An Orthodox sister told me, with a nod to my scarf, “We don’t have to wear that anymore.” I smiled and said, “I know, but I want to.” St. Paul had said “ought,” not “must.” It was my voluntary obedience, even if I didn’t understand the “why’s.” By now I had no intention of giving up the benefits. I felt blessed and protected, feminine, and, paradoxically, confident and free—in the presence of guardian and ministering angels.

In Orthodox worship the angels were even more in evidence. The Divine Liturgy is full of references to the various ranks of angels, emphasizing our participation with them in the joyous worship of the Holy Trinity. St. John Chrysostom (d. A.D. 407), in a sermon at the feast of the Ascension, spoke both of angels and the veiling of women: “The angels are present here... Open the eyes of faith and look upon this sight. For if the very air is filled with angels, how much more so the Church! ...Hear the Apostle teaching this, when he bids the women to cover their heads with a veil because of the presence of the angels.” Origen, another early Church Father, said, “There are angels in the midst of our assembly... we have here a twofold Church, one of men, the other of angels... And since there are angels present... women, when they pray, are ordered to have a covering upon their heads because of those angels. They assist the saints and rejoice in the Church.” Instructions for catechumens in *The Apostolic Tradition*, probably written in the second century by St. Hippolytus of Rome, include this: “Moreover, let all the women have their heads veiled with a scarf...” And St. Cyril of Alexandria, commenting on I Corinthians, wrote: “The angels find it extremely hard to bear if this law [that women cover their heads] is disregarded.”

The Church taught that it mattered to the angels whether women cover their heads. But why? Was the covering “a sign of submission to her husband,” as some commentaries say, or “a cultural statement of inferiority,” as one woman told me in explaining why she would not wear a veil? A friend and former dean of a Lutheran seminary in Norway, Håkon Haus, pointed to another possible reason. He looked up I Cor 11:10 in Greek: *Therefore the woman shall have exousia [right, power, authority] on her head for the sake of the angels.* The word *exousia*, said Håkon, also occurs in John 1:12: *As many as received Him, to them He gave exousia to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.* I felt a light go on.

Was St. Paul saying that the head-covering was an outward sign of my *authority, right, power* as a female child of God, recognized by the angels? It rang excitingly true! God asks voluntary submission and obedience of His children. I chose to wear the sign of my feminine—as distinguished from masculine—authority. But why should the angels care?

In her book, *The Holy angels*, Mother Alexandra writes: “The Celestial hierarchies are the... spiritual reality of ordered creation, the stable patterns in which disruption is unknown...” Obedience is characteristic of the angelic realm. Dionysius the Areopagite, influential since the 5th century, wrote of nine orders or hierarchies of celestial beings, arranged in three choirs. Seraphim and cherubim are in the first, arch-angels and angels in the third choir, closest to us. Without obedience there is chaos and disorder. St. John Chrysostom, in a sermon on I Cor, speaks of how distinction in male and female dress—and particularly the veiling of women—“ministers effectively to good order among mankind.” Taking



off the veil was “no small error,” said St. John; “...it is disobedience.” It “disturbs all things and betrays the gifts of God, and casts to the ground the honor bestowed... For to [the woman] it is the greatest of honor to preserve her own rank.”

To some who argued that a woman, by taking off her covering, “mounts up to the glory of man,” Chrysostom answers: “She doth not mount up, but rather falls from her own proper honor... Since not to abide within our own limits and the laws of God, but to go beyond, is not an addition, but a diminution...” Always emphasizing the equality between man and woman, Chrysostom admonishes the man “not to dishonor her who governs next to thyself.” The issue was order, not superiority or inferiority. At Matins for Orthodoxy Sunday, we sing, *Come and let us celebrate a day of joy: Now heaven makes glad! Earth with all the hosts of angels and the companies of mortal men, each in their varied order, keeps the feast.*

The answer to my prayer nearly thirty years ago, that I might know what it means to be a woman, and to live it as God wills for me, is becoming clearer in obedience—often in little things, like putting on a scarf. The mystery of womanhood is still incomprehensible, but now I think, so it must be. I don’t have to understand fully what it means to be a woman in order to know that I am a woman and to live it. God knows the meaning and I trust Him. I don’t have to fight for my place or my right; it is given me in the glorious ranks of angels and mortals.

Fr. Basil Rhodes wrote in his “Master of Divinity” thesis in 1977 on “The Veiling of Women:” “Man is the head of the woman, according to Genesis and to St. Paul who compares

the relationship of man and woman with that of the Son to the Father: *And the head of Christ is God* (I Cor 2:3). It would be a grave error to say that Christ is inferior to His Father. The veiling of the woman, for St. Paul, is an outward sign of the acceptance of God's order, and His divine purpose in creation. The veil is the woman's 'yes' to God, a physical, visual 'Amen.'

St. John Chrysostom thought that Paul, in admonishing women to wear a covering "because of the angels," meant it "not at the time of prayer only, but also continually, she ought to be covered." Fr. Rhodes agrees: "The veil can be the constant symbol of the true woman of God... a way of life... a testimony of faith and of the salvation of God, not only before men, but angels as well." Timothy McFadden, who is working on his doctoral thesis at Oxford on the subject of "Man/Woman—God/Christgod," writes: "Members of the Godhead—and His image—are not interchangeable. As God Father and Son are equal and One in nature, so also they are unique and not interchangeable. Similarly, though equal in nature, man is not woman, woman is not man. They are distinguishable."

In my pre-Christian days, when I sought to understand myself in light of the doctrines of feminism, I believed that men and women shared male and female characteristics, which made us pretty much interchangeable. (And if we were interchangeable, we didn't really need each other except to conceive babies!) Today some say we have both a masculine and a feminine self that must be lived out. But how do women live out their "masculine self," and men their "feminine self"? That presents an identity problem (another modern notion) for both men and women (not to mention adolescent boys and girls!). No doubt it also adds to the chaos and gender confusion of our times.

I no longer believe we are a mixture of masculine and feminine characteristics and selves. As God in Trinity is One in essence and three Persons in function, so man and woman, created in God's image, share a human nature, yet are distinct personal selves with different functions. As Christians we both have *exousia*—power, right, and authority—as children of God, but woman's authority is distinctly feminine, as man's is distinctly masculine. Hers does not contradict or usurp his, but complements it. And as the Trinity would not be complete with one of the Three missing, so man and woman are both essential to each other and to the whole. Being in the holy order of God's creation as lived in Orthodoxy calms the troubled waters of my soul. I don't understand the mystery of Trinity—nor the mystery of man and woman—but I know I am woman, and I both want and love to live it. St. Paul wrote, "woman is the glory of man" (I Cor. 11:7), a hard verse to take for some of us. McFadden suggests that "all women may somehow participate in the glory of the Theotokos."

Woman's unique and God-given capacity to give birth made the Incarnation possible. The woman Theotokos is

indeed the glory of all mankind, "our solitary boast," as one writer called her. Eve, our first mother, contributed to the fall of man by choosing to disobey. Mary, the mother of our Lord—and of the Church which is His Body—made our salvation possible by obeying God's will. If she whom we hymn as *more honorable than the cherubim and more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim* is always seen in icons wearing her head-covering, it certainly cannot be a sign of "inferiority to men"!

McFadden calls the veil a "badge of authority" between equals, perceived by the angels who maintain order among themselves. Why head-coverings matter to the angels may be unclear, but that they matter seems evident. Fr. Rhodes says, "The angels watch what we do and rejoice when we obey." A scarf may be a small matter, but obedience often hinges on small things, small choices. My scarf is seen by men, but to me it signifies obedience to God, a way of living my womanhood. It is my feminine "I am" reflected outwardly. In putting on my head-covering I mean to say to God, *Behold your handmaiden, be it unto me according to Your word—Your will, not mine.*

For twelve years I have worn a scarf at all times. I now perceive that it has been—and continues to be—essential for the pilgrim journey and salvation of my soul. The bottom line for me—and a growing number of my sisters—remains obedience. And with it comes a sense of being in our rightful place in God's ordered universe, rejoicing with the angels. Now I gratefully say, "I am!" in the presence of the great *I AM*—at prayer and in church, surrounded by the angelic host, worshipping our Lord and King. To God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be the glory, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen!



New psychiatric hospitals are being built, and young psychiatrists go on for post-graduate studies. Many of them do not even believe in God, or accept the existence of the soul. How can these people help the human soul, when they themselves are full of anxiety? How can one feel truly comforted, if he does not believe in God and the true and eternal life after death? When man grasps the deeper meaning of this true life, stress goes away, divine consolation comes and he is healed. If someone went to the psychiatric hospitals and read the Abba Isaac to the patients, those who believe in God would get well; because they would come to understand the deeper meaning of life.

People try to calm themselves with tranquilizers or with theories of yoga, and they neglect altogether the true serenity that comes when the soul is humble; and God fills it with divine consolation.

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

THE POLITICAL PROBLEM OF EVIL

By Robert Oscar Lopez, "American Thinker," August 9, 2013.

I had a recent meeting with a priest, who said something to me that I would have never taken seriously prior to a year ago. He said, "You are fighting against real darkness." He was referring to my involvement in a movement to protect the rights of children to be raised by a mom and dad.

For most of my life I'd been wary of anything that seemed superstitious. The Catholicism I knew as a youth was a liberation theology championed by my lesbian mother and articulated by radical priests who'd gotten involved in Central American insurgencies. For twelve years of public school in upstate New York, regardless of the racism around us, the curriculum was wholesomely multicultural. Then I went to an Ivy League college a year after Allan Bloom published *The Closing of the American Mind*. Back then, only a few old people had realized that open-mindedness taken to the extreme would become moral blindness.

Needless to say, little in my life prompted me to speak in terms of good and evil prior to 2012. It was a year ago, however, in an article on *The Public Discourse*, that I came forward with a truthful critique of the LGBT movement. That movement and its problems were something that I knew more personally than almost anyone in the world, since I'd been raised from my toddler years onward in a gay household, and I came out as bisexual myself the same year that my mother passed away.

My piece in *The Public Discourse* on August 6, 2012, "Growing up with Two Moms," wasn't grounded in religious condemnations of homosexuality. It was, rather, an uncensored summary of what life was like for a child born into leftist utopian dreams gone awry. It did not seem implausible for me to love my mother, yet concede that her divorce from my father and her taking up with another woman for almost all the years that I was being raised by her, caused me lifelong wounds that never healed.

The gay lobby had few ways to rebut my point, so they had to resort to vomiting out random insults. I wasn't lying, so investigating my personal life wasn't going to help. I wasn't a closet case, so they couldn't "out" me the way they had crushed many of their other antagonists. And while I am just as much of a sinner as the next guy, hypocrisy was a tough charge to throw at me, because I'd actually applied what I'd learned from my own difficult childhood to my choices as a father later on. As an adult, when I found out that I had gotten a woman pregnant, I decided I would never put another human being in the same situation I knew as a boy. I would not repeat the mistake of the father who abandoned me when I was born. I would not repeat the mistake of the mother who entangled me in a homosexual imbroglio that left me socially defenseless against a cruel world when she died.

I knew what it was like to be the child of a gay parent, the child of divorce, an orphan. I knew what it was like to be a gay parent as well. I knew there was no excuse for depriving a child of a mom or a dad, just to embark on a new endeavor called "same-sex parenting," which was just a fancy word for the unjustified exploitation of children for personal gain.

I stayed with the mother of my child, to raise our child together, because I knew better than anyone else that that's the best thing for a kid. Millions of years of evolution, not to mention thousands of years of cultural history, have left the human being with a developmental template designed for growth under the custody of a man and a woman in a mutually supportive sexual relationship. My decision to place my daughter and wife ahead of politics, I realized, wasn't merely a personal choice. It was an ethical imperative that I felt called upon to share with others, because the gay lobby was pushing many people to do the opposite—that is, to place sexual ideology before the duty to love all of their children, including the halves of their children that came from the opposite sex.

In the ensuing year, my life became an endless array of traumas. Repeated attempts to get me fired failed, so finally the gay lobby placed me on a "commentator accountability" list with a host of other people identified as "anti-gay" and blocked from access in the mainstream media. The Supreme Court cases on DOMA and Proposition 8 sucked me into the vortex, as did the fight for gay marriage in Minnesota, the struggle for gay marriage in France and Britain, and the battle over gay adoption in Russia's Duma. I'd spent twenty years trying to be a writer, but I ended up receiving international attention not for what I wrote, but rather because my life seemed to people like a tawdry Jerry Springer vignette. Those who disagreed with me recruited students, family members, and colleagues to denounce me. They dug up an old novel that I'd written and trashed it, calling me the worst writer ever. They tear-gassed my camp in Paris, butted against barricades to lunge at us in Brussels, and called me "loathsome" in St. Paul. They filed complaints, issued denunciations, e-mailed me hate and vileness beyond anything I could ever imagine.

No leftist came to my defense. Only Christians did.

Being sinful and unenlightened, I became involved with politics, in the beginning, with a fear of being labeled a believer. I thought somehow that if I kept God out of my arguments, and by necessity out of my thought process, the secular, liberal world would heed my message and give a fair hearing to the rights of the weakest among us. I marched in France with leaders of the kids' rights movement, at one point a million people strong on the streets of Paris, beseeching the world to place a child's right to a mom and dad above the clamor of gay adults to own children.

The leaders of the French "Manif pour Tous" worked hard to keep religious iconography out of their march. Like me,

they saw Christian theology as a liability for their movement. De-theologizing themselves backfired. The result was that François Hollande's socialist government ignored them, legalized homosexual adoption, and put in motion plans to make sperm-banking universally available to lesbian couples—something they'd promised the French never to do. Publicly subsidized surrogacy arrangements for gay men are soon to follow.

My fear of being associated with God, of talking about God, and of diagnosing the real evil behind what we fight has been not a rational strength, but rather an existential weakness. To fight what we fight, we have to understand that it is an ancient beast, recorded in the biblical books like Job and Ecclesiastes. When Ecclesiastes wrote that there was nothing new under the sun, he meant the message for us. We can't ignore it.

A similar message was meant for us when God asked a beleaguered Job, *Hast thou an arm like God? Or canst thou thunder with a voice like him??* (40:9). Our political foes are stronger than us, but nobody is stronger than God. Only if we call upon God will we find any reprieve from the free-fall of a post-modern America defined by Obama's left.

After seeing same-sex parenting advance in leaps and bounds in country after country, I realized that the priest is right. Ecclesiastes saw this long ago. The message to Job is still as real as it was when first delivered. **It is real darkness that we fight.**

The gay movement will never make peace with us until we disown the most important message of Christ. Christ says we must not live in the urges and ambitions of this world, but must live according to his pure vision of love. God gave up Christ to be sacrificed so that we would all be freed from the bondage of sin. There is no way to reconcile this doctrine with the gay lobby's insistence that they can define themselves according to fleshly desires of this world and buy immortality by purchasing children. Make peace with the gay lobby, and we lose God, condemning ourselves to an eternity without the greatest love of all.

"The hate you encounter," the priest told me, "is the cry of pain from people who are hurting, because they are living in such darkness."

What will the right be without God? Without the courage to name and fight evil? Without discernment? I have found an answer to those questions, but all of us must decide on our own, I suppose.



The chief cause of all the woes which befall a man and deprive him of peace and prosperity is his departure from the Single Source of life and well-being, our Creator, Provider, and Savior, God, and his flouting of the Divine laws and rules which are man's only salvation.

Archbishop Averky (+1976)

CONTROLLING THE TONGUE

By Saint Martyr Sergius Mechev (+1941).



Born on September 17th, 1892, Saint Martyr Sergius Mechev was the son of a clairvoyant lay-elder of Moscow, Archpriest Alexey Mechev. He received a secular education at a regular school, and received his religious training at home and in church, principally by observing his father in the altar.

Patriarch Tikhon became very fond of him and urged him to become a priest. His decision to do so was inspired by a discussion he had with Elder Anatole of Optina in the fall of 1918. The following April, on Holy Thursday, he was ordained by Bishop Theodore Pozdееv at St. Daniel's Monastery.

Saint Martyr Sergius served at the Maroseyka church until his arrest in November 1929. Like so many clergy, he did not recognize Metropolitan Sergius' Declaration of 1927, which essentially brought the Church under government control. He was charged with heading a counter-revolutionary underground church and sentenced to three years of exile in the far north, near Arkhangelsk. His matushka managed to visit him with their three children (another had died in infancy), and he kept in touch with his spiritual children, writing to them individually and addressing five letters to them in common, letters that have been preserved.

It was several months after his term had expired that Fr. Sergius was finally released; however, he was never free again. A second arrest followed in March 1934, carrying a five-year sentence. He spent some years in hiding, wandering from place to place, before being arrested yet again. The spiritual daughter with whom he was imprisoned reported that he was executed in early November 1941; elsewhere, his martyric death is commemorated December 9th.



For one who is repenting, my friends, it is not natural to be silent, as much as possible, in order to accomplish his salvation in repentance. But we constantly talk idly, constantly judge and criticize others, constantly do evil with our tongue. Thereby, we bring evil both upon ourselves, who are speaking evil, and upon those who are listening to our evil speaking.

The Holy Fathers point out that our tongue is a little member, but that it does great evil; how readily it arms one person against another. In failing to control our tongue, we allow it to act as an instrument of murder. St. Anthony the Great plainly says: *Whoever receives a man speaking evil or a calumniator, associates with a murderer.* You see, a calumniator and

a murderer, according to the words of the Holy Father, are one and the same. *Withdraw from the calumniator, whoever he might be, and be not ashamed to withdraw from him.* The holy fathers of our Church tell us that *it is safer to live with a serpent, than with a calumniator.* St. John Climacus forbids one to render esteem to such men. *Never render esteem to one who speaks to you evilly of a neighbor. Thereby, you will heal both yourself and your neighbor.*

You may say, my friends, that here the matter concerns calumny (slander, *Ed.*). But what if you hear that they are speaking badly of a man, and what they are saying may be true? What is to be done then? Since we are prone, my friends, to evil speaking, it is better for us not to listen to such conversations. After all, we might communicate to him of whom they were speaking: "They are saying this and that about you," or we might discuss this with another person, with a second, with a third, and so forth. Whenever you begin to stop whomever is speaking, he usually justifies himself by the fact that, after all, he heard this with his own ears. And then what happens? The one speaking evil falls into pride. No, my friends, a Christian ought not to act so, even if he himself has been present at some vile act or other. He ought not to spread another's sin, but cover it with his love. Let us learn from the saints how they acted in such cases. Here is an example.

A hermit came to a skete where some ascetics lived, and he abode there. One of the skete elders gave him a cell, and he began to live in concord with the *begoumen* (abbot, *Ed.*) and the brethren of the community. But soon this concord was broken, since the skete elder that had given the ascetic the cell envied the newcomer, to whom many people had begun to go for counsel and spiritual guidance. Prompted by envy, he sent his young disciple to the guest with an order to leave the monastery, and he commanded this to be conveyed in these words: "Get thee thence from whence thou camest."

The disciple went, and although, out of obedience, he ought to have conveyed the words of his elder exactly, he began to reason: "If I convey the words to the newcomer just as the elder said them, I might arouse malice in him, and it will cause enmity to flare up between the two elders. It is surely better that, in the name of the Lord and general peace, I hide these evil words and take everything upon myself." (Abba Dorotheus, in his instructions, allows one to do this in prayer and struggle). And so the disciple, on coming to the elder, instead of saying "Get thee thence," as he was ordered, bowed down and said: "My father has asked me to inquire of thee, 'Art thou well?'" To this, the elder replied: "Tell thy father that I ask for his prayers, for I am a little ill." On returning, the disciple said to his elder: "That elder has found himself another cell and will soon leave." Give heed, my friends; what love! After some time, the elder again sent the disciple to drive out the hermit. And the disciple, on coming to him,

said: "My father, having learned that thou art ill, has sent me to visit thee." "Tell thy father," responded the hermit, "that by his prayers I am now completely well."

The disciple conveyed something entirely different to his elder: that the guest asked to live in the monastery only a week more and would then move to another cell. In a week, the enraged elder himself went to drive the hermit out of the cell. But the disciple, having learned of this, out of love for peace and his elder, ran ahead and informed the newcomer that his father was coming to him to call him to join him in the refectory. On hearing this, the hermit went out straightway to meet the elder with a look full of love and said: "Trouble not thyself to come unto me; I myself am coming to thee." Struck by the newcomer's lack of malice, the elder was touched in his soul, his malice disappeared, and he really did conduct the guest to join him in the refectory. While the guest went on ahead, the elder learned how his disciple had acted. He fell down at his feet and said: "Henceforth thou art my preceptor, for by thy words our souls have been saved."

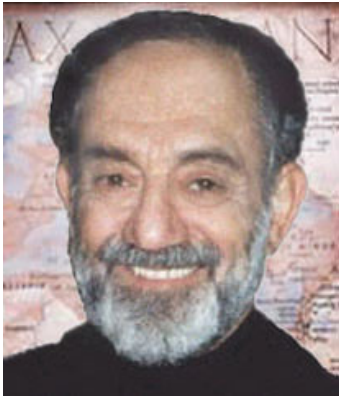
Here, my friends, is how the saints acted. Even when they were sent to say or to do something evil, they did not do this, although they ought to have done just as their elders ordered them. But we, with the greatest readiness and pleasure, recount everything evil, everything bad about a man; and if it is something we ourselves have heard, we object strenuously when we are stopped, we begin to wound one another, and we do, as the Holy Fathers say, the work of scorpions and serpents with our tongue.

During the days of fasting and repentance, we ought to watch our tongue more than ever. Ascetics truly are sick at heart over one who speaks evil of his neighbor. And we, in the name of what seems to us to be the truth, are constantly doing evil. Every society suffers more than anything else from evil speaking and condemnation, which is communicated in every possible way.

So while we are repenting, come, my friends, let us attend to our tongue, let us join real battle with it, and we will have great gain. If we will not speak evil of another, but instead of this will pray for him; if we will remember that by our one word we can undermine a whole edifice of relations between men, then we shall understand why Ephraim the Syrian asks in his prayer that the Lord not give him idle talk. Even in church, before the beginning of a service, we post bulletins, if not "on walls," then orally. Thereby, my friends, we break down the Church; we become her real destroyers and also the destroyers of our own and another's structure. Let this disciple serve as an example to us. Let us strive in every way to get out of the habit of evil speaking, calumny and condemnation. Then we shall acquire for ourselves many more friends-not in calumny and evil speaking, but friends in God and in the struggle with sin, and this will unite us in the one flock of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

ARE WE DIFFERENT?

By Protopresbyter John S. Romanides (+2001), from "Patristic Theology: The University Lectures."



St. Makarios of Egypt carefully informs and explains that Christians who do not have *noetic* prayer are not intrinsically different from believers in other religions. The only factor that makes such Christians different from believers of other religions is that these Christians intellectually believe in Christ and merely accept

Christian doctrine, while the believers in other religions do not accept Christian doctrine.

Such Christians, however, do not gain anything from this kind of intellectual faith, because it does not heal them or purify their hearts from the [enslavement to] the passions. In terms of healing the human personality, they remain without benefit and with behavior that does not differ from that of non-Christians. This can be seen in their way of life. *Purification* is the first stage in the spiritual life, a stage that is also the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit Who *purifies, illumines, and grants theosis*. It is God Who *purifies, illumines, and glorifies*. The teaching about *purification* and *illumination* not only defines the central task set before the catechumen, but it is also the chief duty of his spiritual father who is to open the eyes of the catechumen's soul and to prepare him for holy baptism. In order for one's soul to be purified of the passions, the fear of God and repentance must first be present and continue throughout the stage of *purification* until it is completed with divine *illumination*, the *illumination of our nous* by the grace of the Holy Spirit...

The passions of soul and body cannot be purified merely through knowledge. Of course, we need to know about dogma. We need to know what is written in the Bible. We need to know about prayer, and so forth. Our ability to reason can help us to weigh our decision, to determine (*diakrisis*) what our treatment should be, and even to decide whether or not we want to be cured. In this way, we count the costs, we determine whether the anticipated results are worth the effort, and we finally make our decision.

In the Patristic tradition, either you attain to *illumination* or you attain to *theosis* once you have already passed through *illumination*. Orthodox tradition is nothing other than this curative course of treatment through which the nous is purified, illumined, and eventually glorified together with the entire man, if God so wills. Therefore, is there such a

thing as an illumined liberal or an illumined conservative in this context? Of course not. You are either illumined or you are not. You have either reached *theosis* or you have not. You have either undergone this treatment, or you have not. Apart from these distinctions, there are no others.

The Fathers stress that salvation does not result automatically from Orthodox doctrine alone. Doctrine is not what saves people. It simply opens the pathway for man to reach *purification* and *illumination*. Without Orthodox dogma, however, no one can reach *purification* and *illumination*. Without an awareness and sensitivity to right doctrine, without Orthodox practice in one's daily life, and without participation in the liturgical life of the Orthodox Church, *purification* and *illumination* are not attainable.

Doctrine and liturgical life are not the means by which someone purifies his soul and reaches *illumination*. They are, however, the basic prerequisites and the necessary foundation that enables someone to be guided towards *purification* and *illumination*. In other words, doctrine alone does not automatically lead one to these states. On the basis of this tradition, a spiritual father can tell when his spiritual child has passed from a state of purification to a state of illumination. Isn't this something that a spiritual father is able to know? And how does he know it? How does a spiritual father know that their spiritual child has reached the stage of *illumination*? He knows it from what we have just described. So when we talk about theology based on experience, we are talking about piety based on experience, but not pietism. Theology is experiential piety. It is not just talk. It is really something quite concrete.

Does "contemporary" Orthodox theology enable us to detect a genuine doctor and to distinguish him from a quack? In other words, if we were to take a group of spiritual fathers today, would we be able to discover who is genuinely a spiritual father in a position to heal others? Or to put it differently, are we able today to spot a saint within a crowd? It seems difficult. Today, Christians have reached the point where it is difficult to separate spiritual doctors from quacks. And we have reached this position because we have replaced experiential patristic theology with a textbook theology of dogmas that can be classified with western theology and that does not guide the soul to *purification* from the passions. We have driven out the hesychastic tradition and replaced it with dogmas and morality (or moralism)...

God's creative energy is not the same as His preserving energy, His purifying energy, His illumining energy, or His glorifying energy. They are not the same because, if they were the same, then all creation would participate in the glorifying energy of God. All these observations stem from the holy fathers' experience of *theosis* and lay the foundation for their teaching in response to the heretics. In other words, the starting point for the Patristic teaching is the

ability to differentiate and observe distinctions between the energies of God. So the history of Orthodox theology is not the history of the attempt made by certain theologians to speculate philosophically on doctrine.

From an Orthodox viewpoint, someone probes more deeply into dogmas only when he uses them in his attempt to reach the stage of *illumination*. This is the Orthodox way to probe more deeply into the mysteries and dogmas. It is not an intellectual probing that aims at attempting to comprehend the mysteries or the dogmas or to enter their depths. Dogmas cannot be comprehended. In fact, dogmas are annulled in an experience of *theosis*, because they are replaced by the very living truth that they express. Dogmas are simply guides to God. When you behold God, then dogma is set aside.



The faster you acquire a virtue, the easier it is lost. The more slowly and laboriously you acquire it, the more steadfastly it remains; just like that squash plant that grew tall and said to the cypress tree: “See how much I’ve grown in just a few days! You’ve been here for so many years and haven’t grown much at all!” “Yes,” said the cypress tree, “but you still haven’t seen storms, heat waves, and cold spells!” And after a little while, the squash plant dried up, while the cypress tree remained where it was.

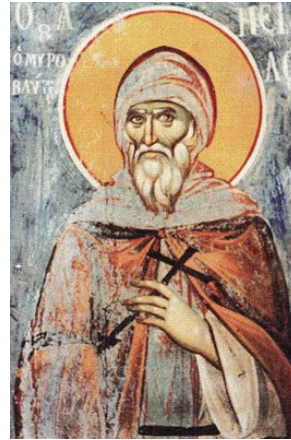
This is also how a spiritual man is. Both during a storm and during times of peace he remains the same. Why? Because the long period of time has created stability. When he first renounced the world, his spiritual condition was unstable, but with time, the grace of God gradually worked out his salvation and freedom from the passions. Thus, a person needs to force himself today, and the grace of God will start acting by itself tomorrow. Then you will not need to force yourselves to have good thoughts; the grace that remains within you is what brings them to your mind without your effort. Then you will see great mysteries! You will have a feeling, so to speak, of the remembrance of death, or of another beneficial recollection. When you wake up and are still opening your eyes, instead of feeling sleepy, you will have progressed; you will have already passed through the entire mystery of *theoria* and will say, “But how does this thing happen, since I am still getting up? How does this thing happen?” All the same, the grace of God acts by itself—it is the result of a long-standing habit.

The same thing happens with sin: whether awake or sleeping, a sinful man constantly thinks about evil. When sin is helped by a bad habit and by the devil, it becomes a constant evil. Likewise with good; a good habit assisted by the grace of God becomes second nature to him.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou
From “*Counsels from the Holy Mountain*”

A REMINDER FOR ALL ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS OF OUR DAYS

From the prophesies of St. Nilus the Myrrh-Gusher (+1651).



After the year 1900, toward the middle of the twentieth century, the people of that time will become unrecognizable. When the time of the advent of the Antichrist approaches, people’s minds will grow cloudy from carnal passions, and dishonor and lawlessness will grow stronger. Then the world will grow unrecognizable.

People’s appearances will change, and it will be impossible to distinguish men from women due to their shamelessness in dress and style of hair. These people will be cruel and will be like wild animals because of the temptations of the Antichrist. There will be no respect for parents and elders, love will disappear, and Christian pastors, bishops, and priests will become vile men, completely failing to distinguish the right-hand way from the left.

At that time, the morals and Traditions of Christians and of the Church will change. People will abandon modesty, and dissipation will reign. Falsehood and greed will attain great proportions, and woe to those who pile up treasures. **Lust, adultery, homosexuality, secret deeds, and murder will rule in society...**

...And this will result from the fact that the Antichrist wants to be lord over everything and become the ruler of the whole universe, and he will produce miracles and fantastic signs. He will also give depraved wisdom to an unhappy man so that he will discover a way by which one man can carry on a conversation from one end of the earth to the other. At that time, men will also fly through the air like birds and descend to the bottom of the sea like fish. And when they have achieved all this, these unhappy people will spend their lives in comfort without knowing, poor souls, that it is the deceit of the Antichrist. And the impious one! He will so complete science with vanity, that it will go off the right path and lead people to lose faith in the existence in God.

...Then God will see the downfall of the human race and will shorten the days for the sake of those few who are being saved, because the enemy wants to lead even the chosen into temptation, if that is possible.

...Then the sword of chastisement will suddenly appear to kill the perverter.

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

ON THE UPBRINGING OF CHILDREN

By Elder Porphyrios.

Pray and then speak. That's what to do with your children. If you are constantly lecturing them, you'll become tiresome and when they grow up they'll feel a kind of oppression. Prefer prayer and speak to them through prayer. Speak to God and God will speak to their hearts. That is, you shouldn't give guidance to your children with a voice that they hear with their ears. You may do this too, but above all you should speak to God about your children.

Say, "Lord Jesus Christ, give Your light to my children. I entrust them to You. You gave them to me, but I am weak and unable to guide them, so, please, illuminate them." And God will speak to them and they will say to themselves, "Oh dear, I shouldn't have upset my mother by doing that!" And with the grace of God this will come from their heart.

This is the most perfect way: for the mother to speak to God and for God to speak to the children. If you do not communicate in this way, constant lecturing becomes a kind of intimidation. And when the child grows up it begins to rebel, that is, to take revenge, so to speak, on its father and mother who coerced it. One way is the perfect way - for the mother's and father's holiness and love in Christ to speak. The radiance of sanctity and not human effort makes for good children.

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

Two sisters came to see me. One of them had gone through some very distressing experiences and they asked me what was the cause of these. I answered them:

"It's because of your home; it stems from your parents." And as I looked at the girl I said:

"These are things you've inherited from your mother."

"But," she said, "my parents are such perfect people. They're Christians, they go to confession, they receive Communion

and we had a religious upbringing. Unless it is religion that is to blame..."

I said to them:

"I don't believe a word of all that you're telling me. I see one thing only, and that is that your parents don't live with the joy of Christ."

On hearing this, the other girl said:

"Listen, Maria, the Father's quite right. Our parents go to confession and receive Holy Communion, but did we ever have any peace at home. Our father was constantly complaining about our mother. And every day either the one refused to sit at the table or the other refused to go out somewhere together. So you see what the Father is saying is true."

"What's your father's name?" I asked her,

She told me.

"What's your mother's name?"

She told me.

"Well," I said, "the feelings you've got inside you towards your mother are not at all good."

You see, the moment she told me her father's name I saw his soul, and the moment she told me her mother's name, I saw her mother and I saw the way her daughter looked at her.

Another day a mother came to visit me with one of her daughters. She was very distressed and broke down in tears.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I'm in total despair over my older daughter. She threw her husband out of the house and deceived us all with a pack of lies."

"What kind of lies?" I inquired.

"She threw her husband out of the house ages ago and she didn't tell us anything. We would ask on the phone, "How's Stelios doing?", and she would reply, "Oh, he's fine. He's just gone out to buy a newspaper." Each time she would think up some new excuse so that we wouldn't suspect anything. And this went on for two whole years. A few days ago we learned the truth from Stelios himself when we bumped into him by chance."

So I said to her:

"The fault's your own. It's you that's to blame, you and your husband, but you most of all."

"What do you mean!" She said indignantly. "I loved my children to the point that I was never out of the kitchen. I had no life of my own at all. I took them to the church and I was always telling them the right thing to do. How can you say that I'm to blame?"

I turned to her other daughter who was with her and asked: "What do you think about the matter?"

"The Father's right, Mom," she said. "We never ever enjoyed a single day when you weren't quarrelling with Dad."

"Do you see? It is you that are to blame. You traumatized the children. They are not to blame, but they are suffering the consequences."

WHO IS THE TRUTH...

Source: "St. Silouan the Athonite" by Archimandrite Sophrony, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, p. 111-113.



The Lord said to Pontius Pilate, *I came into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth*, to which Pilate replied skeptically, "What is truth?" and convinced that there could be no answer to the query, did not look for one, even from Christ, but went out to the Jews.

Pilate was right. There is no answer to the question "WHAT is truth?" if we have in mind the ultimate truth at the root of the whole existence of the world. But if Pilate, meaning Primal or Axiomatic Truth, had phrased his question as it should have been phrased—if he had asked "WHO is truth?" he would have received the answer that, a little while previously, Christ, foreseeing Pilate's query, gave at the Last Supper to his beloved disciples, and through them to the whole world: *I am the truth*.

Science and philosophy set themselves the question, "WHAT" is truth?, whereas Christian religious perception always considers truth as "WHO."

Scientists and philosophers, not infrequently, look upon Christians as unsound daydreamers, whereas they themselves stand on firm ground and so label themselves positivists. In a curious way they do not realize all the negativeness of truth as "WHAT." They do not understand that authentic Truth, absolute Truth, can be only "WHO," never "WHAT," since Truth is not some abstract formula, some abstract idea, but life itself.

In fact, what could be more abstract, more negative than truth as "WHAT?" And we notice this tremendous paradox throughout the history of the human race, starting with Adam's fall. Enchanted by his reasoning mind, man lives intoxicated as it were, so that not only "positive" science and philosophy, like Pilate, pose the question, "WHAT is truth?" but even in the religious life of mankind we find the same great delusion, with people continually seeking truth as "WHAT." They reason that if they can arrive at the truth they seek as WHAT, they will be possessed of magic power and become unrestrained masters of being.

If man in his religious life adopts the course of rational research, his approach to the world will inevitably be pantheistic. Every time the theologizing mind essays of its own strength to know the truth about God, whether or not it understands, fatally it falls into the same error in which science and philosophy and pantheism are sunk—intuiting truth as "WHAT."

Truth as "WHO" is never arrived at through reason. God as "WHO" can be known only through communion in being—that is, only by the Holy Spirit. Starets Silouan constantly emphasized this. And the Lord Himself spoke of it thus:

If a man loveth me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him... The Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things.

Orthodox ascetic experience rejects the course of abstract contemplation. Whoever restricts his thinking about God to abstract contemplation of good, beauty, eternity, love and so on, is on the wrong road. The one who only strips himself of all empirical forms and conceptions has also not found the true path.

Orthodox contemplation of God is not abstract contemplation of good, love and the like. Nor is it a simple withdrawal of the mind from all empirical forms and conceptions. True contemplation is given by God through His coming into the soul. The soul then contemplates God and beholds that He loves, that He is good, magnificent, eternal; sees Him celestial, ineffable. But in the abstract nothing can be contemplated.

Imagination plays no part in true spiritual life, which is wholly concrete and positive. Genuine concourse with God is to be sought solely through personal prayer to the personal God. Real spiritual Christian experience is communion with God absolutely free, and so does not depend only on man's efforts and will, as is possible in non-Christian (pantheistic) experience.



After any good deed, or after some spiritual joy that you might possibly experience, take heed, lest you be tempted by a thought of pride. Because not only will you lose what you have gained, but the war [of thoughts] that shall follow will be greater.

The enemy is full of envy, and if he is unable to hinder the good work, he tries to blacken it with thoughts of pride. If you do not drive away these thoughts, God will allow a fall; so that you might come to yourselves. Lucifer was not driven out of Paradise because of evil deeds, but because of his pride.

Knelt before your icon corner, and say to Him: *Having been far from Thee for so many years, I have grieved Thee—living in darkness. But grant me now a little of Thy light, and do not forsake me, O my Christ. Thee alone do I have. People love today and abandon tomorrow. I am a sheep of Thy rational flock. Seek me out, who am gone astray, O God; and have mercy on me. Thy fatherly arms, do Thou open to me quickly.*

Elder Ieronymos of Aigina (+1966)

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THE TALE OF THE PRAYER AND THE LITTLE FOX

From The Prologue.



In Egypt, in whose ancient Christian past there had once been many grand monasteries, there once lived a monk who befriended an uneducated and simple peasant farmer. One day this peasant said to the monk, “I

too respect God who created this world! Every evening I pour out a bowl of goat’s milk and leave it out under a palm tree. In the evening God comes and drinks up my milk! He is very fond of it! There’s never once been a time when even a drop of milk is left in the bowl.”

Hearing these words, the monk could not help smiling. He kindly and logically explained to his friend that God doesn’t need a bowl of goat’s milk. But the peasant so stubbornly insisted that he was right that the monk then suggested that the next night they secretly watch to see what happened after the bowl of milk was left under the palm tree.

No sooner said than done. When night fell, the monk and the peasant hid themselves some distance from the tree, and soon in the moonlight they saw how a little fox crept up to the bowl and lapped up all the milk till the bowl was empty. “Indeed!” The peasant sighed disappointedly. “Now I can see that it wasn’t God!”

The monk tried to comfort the peasant and explained that God is a spirit, that God is something completely beyond our poor ability to comprehend in our world, and that people comprehend His presence each in their own unique way. But the peasant merely stood hanging his head sadly. Then he wept and went back home to his hovel.

The monk also went back to his cell, but when he got there he was amazed to see an angel blocking his path. Utterly terrified, the monk fell to his knees, but the angel said to him:

“That simple fellow had neither education nor wisdom nor book-learning enough to be able to comprehend God otherwise. Then you with your wisdom and book learning took away what little he had! You will say that doubtless you reasoned correctly. But there’s one thing that you don’t know, oh learned man: God, seeing the sincerity and true heart of this good peasant, every night sent the little fox to that palm tree to comfort him and accept his sacrifice.”

Good and blessed is that simplicity which some have by nature, but better is that which has been goaded out of wickedness by hard work. The former is protected from much complexity and the passions, while the latter is the gateway to the greatest humility and meekness. There is not much reward for the one and no end of reward for the other. If you wish to draw the Lord to you, approach Him as disciples to a master, in all simplicity, openly, honestly, without duplicity, without idle curiosity. He is simple and uncompounded. And He wants the souls that come to Him to be simple and pure. Indeed you will never see simplicity separated from humility.

St. John Climacus, “*The Ladder of Divine Ascent*”

Orthodox Heritage

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

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

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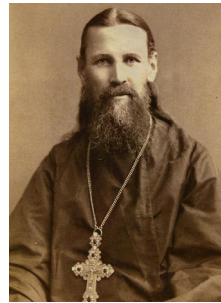
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THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST: THE FEAST OF RENEWAL

By St. John of Kronstadt.



We are approaching, beloved brethren, the world-saving feast of the birth in the flesh of our Lord God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. For several days before the feast, the holy Church will celebrate this wondrous mystery in the spiritual hymns of her daily services. These hymns remind us of our divine birthright, and the squandering of our sonship through sin; of its restoration through repentance of our common spiritual kinship and of the spirit of love and care for one another.

In order that we celebrate this feast of God's limitless love and His extreme condescension, not in a worldly but, in a spiritual manner, let us briefly consider the following: Why did God become man while remaining God? And what does God's incarnation require of us?

Having set forth these two questions, I shall answer the first one with the words of the Archangel to Joseph, the betrothed of the Holy Virgin: God became man to *save His people from their sin*. (Mt 1:21). For this reason He is called Jesus, which means *Saviour*. And so, it was for our salvation that

the Lord came to earth and became man, for the regeneration in us of the image of God which had fallen. The Son of God became the Son of Man in order to make us sons of God who were the children of wrath and eternal damnation. In the words of the Holy Apostle John the Theologian: *that we should be called the sons of God* (I Jn 3:1); *Now God became man, that He may make Adam a god.* (Stichera for lauds of Annunciation).

O the unutterable love of God! O the unspeakable compassion of the Lord! And He, the Most Holy, did this: He deified mankind in His chosen ones, cleansed them from all evil both of soul and body, sanctified, glorified, led them from corruption to everlasting life, made them worthy to stand in blessedness before the terrible throne of His glory. And He deified us also, brothers and sisters; He gave us a new birth through water and the Holy Spirit, sanctified us, made us His sons, gave us the promise of eternal life and eternal blessings, surpassing all telling and imagining. And in confirmation, as a surety of the future blessings, He gave to us, still here on earth, the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts: God *hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.* (Gal 4:6) writes the Apostle.

And so, my brothers, the feast of the Nativity of Christ reminds us that we are born of God, that we are sons of God, that we have been saved from sin and that we must live for God and not sin; not for flesh and blood, not for the

The staff of "Orthodox Heritage" and the Brotherhood of St. POIMEN wish our readers a blessed Nativity season and a prosperous New Year. As we complete our eleventh year of publication, we wish to thank our supporters for their prayers, ideas, feedback and monetary support throughout the last eleven years. We remind our readers that this periodical is made possible through your donations and thus ask that you not forget your 2013/2014 subscription contributions. Please refer to the top of the next page for contribution and payment information.

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whole world which lies in evil and wickedness (1 Jn 5:19), not for earthly corruption. We must live for *an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you* (1 Pet 1:4), and for which the Lord Himself will give you a sign; *behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel.* (Isa 7:14).

You who are preparing yourselves to meet the feast of Christ's Nativity, ask yourselves: Have you preserved that spiritual birth from God which we each received in baptism? Are you always heedful of your Divine sonship and the sacred treasure of the Spirit which you acquired in baptism? Have you grown closer to God through faith and love, like His beloved children? Have you loved one another as befits children of God? Have you despised ugly, evil and all-destructive sin? Have you loved truth and every virtue? Have you loved immortal and eternal life prepared in a land which will not pass away and to which we are called by Him Who now has come to our corrupt earth? These are questions which we must ask ourselves now and decide; our decisions cannot be only with our minds, but above all, with our hearts and with our very deeds.

In general, we should not allow ourselves to celebrate any Christian feast without seriously considering: What is its meaning and what is its purpose? What is our responsibility towards it? We must know the Christian meaning behind every feast. Then the feast will become profitable for our soul's salvation. Otherwise, the enemy of our salvation will snatch us and turn the feast of God into a feast of the flesh, of lawlessness, as so often happens.

Having resolved the first question on "why did God become man?", We came also to the resolution of the second: What does the Incarnation of the Son of God require of

us? It requires of us to remember and hold in sacred honor the fact that we are born of God, and if we have sullied and trampled upon this birthright with our sins, we must restore it by washing it with tears of repentance; we must restore and renew within us the image of God which has fallen and the union with God of blessedness, truth and holiness which has been destroyed.

The incarnation of the Son of God requires from us, above all, mutual love, humility, that we help and serve one another; for how can we not love one another when we see the love that God has towards us? How can we not be humble, seeing such humility, such voluntary condescension for our sake of the Son of God? How can we not help one another in every way possible, when the Son of God Himself *came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many?* (Mt 20:28).

Like the wisemen, let us, brothers, also prepare gifts for the new-born King. Instead of gold, frankincense and myrrh, let us bring Him the gifts of faith, hope, and love. Amen.



Today Christ is born of the Virgin in Bethlehem. Today He who knows no beginning now begins to be, and the Word is made flesh. The powers of heaven greatly rejoice, and the earth with mankind makes glad. The Magi offer gifts, the shepherds proclaim the marvel, and we cry aloud without ceasing: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will among men.

Lauds for Nativity

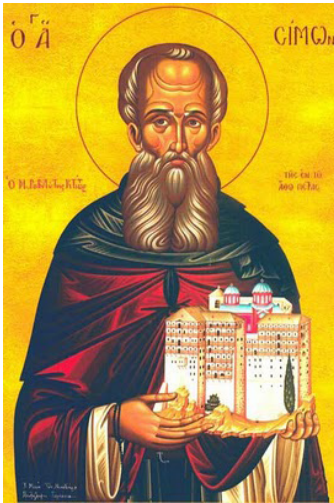
ST. SIMON THE MYRRH-GUSHER FEASTDAY: DECEMBER 28TH

From the "Athonite Paterikon".

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 28th, shortly after the Feast of the Nativity, the 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 named New Bethlehem. Today, seven 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. Some time in the 13th 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 Saint Simon unaware. 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-profiting counsel, thus fulfilling the word of God: *A city that is set on an 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 every one, 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: *Glorry 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, 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 holding 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 28th 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, 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* [see picture on previous page, *Ed.*], 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.*



Our life is a spiritual warfare with unseen evil spirits. They arouse us through our weaknesses and passions, they urge us to disobey the commandments of God. When we look with discernment, we will find that for every passion there is a cure—an opposing commandment. Therefore, the enemies of mankind try to keep us from this saving cure.

St. Macarius of Optina (+1860)

ON SANCTIFICATION AND DISPASSION

Source: "Elder Joseph the Hesychast: Struggles, Experiences, Teachings," by Elder Joseph of Vatopaidi.

We have already said how difficult it is to describe spiritual figures. We repeat this once again, adding that it is a very bold undertaking to try to enter into the depths and breadth of illumined minds and spirit-bearing beings. But this attempt becomes even harder when the person undertaking it is ignorant and inadequate to the task. We have therefore *cast our anxiety upon the Lord* (1 Pet 5:7) in order that, *in the riches of His kindness* (Rom 2:4), He may make known to the hearts of our readers *what is the breadth and depth and height* (Eph 3:18) of the spiritual realm into which *all who are led by the Spirit of God* (Rom 8:14) enter and in which they move, becoming and remaining sons of God. *For to all who received Him... He gave power to become children of God.* (Jn 1:12).

In the spiritual sphere, the human rules of ordinary logic do not apply. This is why St. Paul frees spiritual people from obligations, saying, *the law is not laid down for the just* (1 Tim 1:9). But during the course of the struggle, which is the realm of becoming, there are deficiencies which are evident. Called from ignorance to knowledge—and therefore to faith and repentance—we human beings enter upon a cycle of learning and progress in which the further we advance, the further we reduce the void of our previous deficiency.

We see in part, we make progress in part, we are perfected in part; and this by the grace and mercy of God. In this partial progress which is according to nature it is to be expected that deficiencies should appear, which are not due to our right intention bending or giving way, nor to a deviation "to the left." Rather, it is analogous to something that happens with the sun: When the sun has not yet reached its height, its rays do not light up the back of a body so as to bathe the whole body in light. In other words, the spiritual warrior has not yet arrived directly under the fullness of grace, and for that reason he still has some points which are unillumined and, consequently, some deficiencies; but even so, fullness and perfection are his life-long aim.

An almost total lack of practical experience in the spiritual life leads modern man to ask many questions, which we hear constantly in our daily encounters and conversations. *Sanctification*, in other words perfection in God, and its real meaning are almost always wrongly interpreted by those who are far from true experience. In fear and modesty, let me mention some of the things the Fathers have said on the subject, so as to interpret the meaning and significance of sanctification according to the patristic spirit. In presenting and commenting on some of the sayings of the chief Fathers we shall speak about what is meant by *sanctification*; where

it begins, where it leads and how it is achieved, in order to help provide some sort of orientation.

It is possible for anyone to taste a *partial* form of *sanctification*, because the struggle and journey towards *complete sanctification* passes progressively through several stages. Each person, some less and some more, can and should attain to one or another of these stages. The road that leads to sanctification and perfection in Christ is repentance, since we *all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God*. (Rom 3:23). As one ascends the ladder of repentance, so one encounters the gradations of sanctification. This is the definition of true repentance, when man regains the divine grace that was lost through sin, or of which he was deprived by living far from faith and knowledge of God. The regaining of grace is not something partial but the totality of adoption, which Christ grants to the faithful through His Church. If they desire, the faithful are able to attain to perfection insofar as is possible, which the Fathers divide into three states: those of *purification, illumination* and *perfection*. The third state, perfection, is also called *dispassion*, or divine knowledge, or love for God. It is also referred to as “keeping the Sabbath and rest,” when man rests from the works of repentance, just as God rests from His works on the seventh day.

The great Maximus the Confessor refers to three more general states commonly found in monks, which characterise those who are approaching sanctification. The first consists in *not sinning at all in action*; this is the stage of purification and the spiritual warrior, after *lawful striving* (2 Tim. 2:5), goes beyond the unnatural state. The second is when *the soul does not dally with impassioned thoughts*; this is the state of illumination, characterized chiefly by the capacity to receive divine illumination, so that the intellect controls impassioned thoughts. The third state, that of perfection, is when we can *contemplate dispassionately in the mind the forms of women and those who have given us offence*; in this state the soul succeeds in coming near to freedom, because even if impassioned conceptual images are still present they cannot stir the intellect to be ravished by them, and this more or less is the principal aim of spiritual life. The right use of conceptual images follows the right use of things and thus evil in general is done away with, because *if one does not first sin in the mind, he will never sin in action*, as the Fathers say.

Faith, divine fear, the fervor that results from these things and strict obedience to the commandments mortify soul, which is thus turned in its entirety towards God because, in the words of the Apostle, *what is mortal is swallowed up by life*. (2 Cor 5:4). The senses then function according to the law of need alone; they are obedient to self-control, and thus produce mourning and awareness of our sinfulness.

Even though perfection extends to the levels we have spoken of, it is nevertheless possible to participate partially in dispassion. In these three states, even though man is not yet totally perfected, he has nevertheless come to know the law of freedom, albeit partially, and acquired experience of sanctification. The same person is in a position to describe both positions exactly: those of grace and of error, of virtue and of vice, of struggle and of defeat and, generally, the mysteries of the unseen war.



The brotherhood of Elder Joseph at New Skete, shortly before his repose: (from left to right) Fr. Athanasios, Fr. Ephraim (later abbot of Philotheou), Fr. Arsenios, Fr. Joseph (later Joseph of Vatopaidi), Elder Joseph the Hesychast, Fr. Theophylactos, and Fr. Charalambos (later abbot of Dionysiou)

At another point, St. Maximus distinguishes four gradations of dispassion. The first type is abstinence from the body's impulse towards the commission of sin. The second is complete expulsion from the soul of impassioned thoughts. The third is the complete quiescence of passionate desire. The fourth is the complete exclusion from the mind of all sensible images. And St. Paul, too, recognizes two kinds of perfection, considering himself both perfect and not perfect. He says that *not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect and immediately afterwards, let those of us who are perfect be thus minded*. (Phil 3:12, 15).

But we consider that the following patristic passages from the Philokalia will help us to a fuller understanding of the terms sanctification and dispassion. According to St. Maximus the Great, *sanctification is the total complete cessation and mortification of desire in the senses, and dispassion is a peaceful condition of the soul in which the soul is not easily moved towards evil*. According to Abba Thalassios, *the person who is not affected either by material things, or by his memories of them, has attained perfect dispassion*. St. Diadochos, Bishop of Photiki, says that *dispassion is not freedom from attack by demons... but it is to remain undefeated when they do attack*; and elsewhere he gives the definition, *it is not only to cease from evil that brings purity, but actively to destroy evil by pursuing what is good*. And St. Isaac the Syrian says that *dispassion is not that we do not experience the passions, but that we do not accept*

them. For through the many and various virtues that we have acquired, both hidden and manifest, the passions have grown weak within us and cannot easily rebel against the soul, and the intellect does not always need to pay attention to them. And again Mark the Ascetic says that *an intellect which by God's grace accomplishes acts of virtue and has come near to knowledge feels little from the evil and senseless part of the soul. For its spiritual knowledge snatches it up on high and makes it a stranger to everything that is in the world.* St. Ephraim the Syrian also says that *those who are dispassionate, stretching insatiably towards the ultimate attainable, make perfection endless, because there is no end to the eternal good things.*

These definitions, which are not the only ones, describe as far as is possible for human beings the perfection which in fact remains without end because—as the Apostle says—*here we see in part and we know in part*; and only when in the future the final perfection comes, *then the partial will pass away.* (1 Cor 13:10).

This much is the duty of all humans as rational beings, in which nature requires them to stand firm. Infringing these terms reduces rationality to the position of the irrational and unnatural. For man not to sin and to act righteously is a law of nature, and in consequence a duty. The laws of grace begin from here on; they are on the one hand a continuation of what has gone before, but are not prescribed for all people, being hard to achieve and rare especially under the conditions of life in society. When our Lord was asked what one must do to be saved, He initially cited the keeping of the commandments, as did the great Forerunner as the preacher of repentance. Only to those seeking the highest perfection did He command renunciation, and to follow Him with exactitude. (Mt 19:21).

Standing firm at the first position, the keeping of the commandments, the righteous from all ages were called pure and blameless. Paul often calls them *saints*. In the second letter to the Corinthians he refers to all the *saints* who were in Achaia, while in the letter to the Romans there are several passages where he refers to ministering to the *saints* who were in Jerusalem, and so forth. Luke mentions that the parents of St. John the Baptist were *both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.* (Lk 1:6).

But the coming of God the Word and the assumption by His Godlike majesty of our own nature raised man to the fullness of his perfection, to his original destiny. To be *in the image and likeness*, as the basis of personhood, was now given to man as his inheritance. From that time on noble beings, Godlike intentions, purposes divine in form—with our Lord Jesus as the prototype—have surpassed the law of duty, the *law of commandments* (Eph 2:15), and entered into the dogma of love, having received from the Prototype

the grace and power to *do greater works than this* (Jn 14:12), ruled and guided by Him.

The noble rivalry to enter within the innermost veil where Jesus, the focus of their love, has entered, has become and remained their chief concern. Detached from the causes and occasions by means of which our fallen nature is led astray, they continue this incomparable struggle and—according to Abba Isaac—*wander about in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground, being ordered in the midst of unruliness.* On the basis of a comprehensive self-denial, these lovers of God bound for heaven did not only deny the world and everything to do with it, but even their own souls. And thus, naked of anything of their own *whether within, or without, or around them*, they are given over totally to the grace of the Lord and to *lawful striving*, under the guardianship of their teachers in God. During this life-long contest of their sojourn here they keep *their loins girded and their lamps burning* (Lk 12:35), according to the Lord's command, and await *power from on high* and the promise of the Father (Lk 24:49). *Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.* (Jn 17:17). *I in them and Thou in me... that the love with which Thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.* (Jn 17:23, 26).



Blessed are all who believe in God, in the manner in which the Lord Jesus Christ showed God to the world.

If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus Christ and you will receive the answer. God is as Jesus Christ is. This means that God is all-powerful, all-wise, all-gentle. His power cannot be resisted. His wisdom cannot be contradicted. All malice must submit to His gentleness.

If you wish to be able to come running to God, if you desire wisdom, entrust yourself to God. If you desire the blessing of either wisdom or goodness or love, hold fast to God. Know and remember that only weakness, foolishness and malice rise up against God. But all rebellion against God is condemned in the end to defeat and destruction, while all that remains with God in the end is exalted and rejoices, living eternally.

This is all shown by the person and destiny of the Lord Jesus Christ, and also through the destinies of His followers and His enemies. And therefore we say: *Blessed are all who believe in God in the manner in which the Lord Jesus Christ showed God to the world.*

St. Nikolai Velimirović (+1956)

THE GIFTS OF THE MAGI

By St. Innocent (Borisov), Archbishop of Kherson, translated by Maria Belaeff, from a leaflet published by the Vladimir Mother of God Convent, San Francisco.

And when they had opened their treasures they presented unto Him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

[Mt 2:11]

† † †



Not without reason, my brethren, were there three gifts at the manger of Christ; three—no more, no less. Was this a sign of the Most Holy Trinity as the essence of the Godhead? Or, did it symbolize the triune nature of Christ's future ministry, i.e., prophetic, royal, priestly? Or was it perhaps an expression of the three parts of the nature of man, spirit,

soul, and body? We leave it up to your faith and reasoning to consider this question. Here our attention rests upon the gift-bearing magi.

One could say that these pilgrims of the Orient stood before the manger of Christ for all mankind. Their gifts represent symbolically all that we, followers of the Saviour, bring to Him. The gold signifies material gifts; the frankincense, immaterial gifts, gifts of the spirit; and the myrrh represents those gifts that are at once both spiritual and material.

There are, accordingly, persons who bring the Lord gold; there are those who bring frankincense; still others bring myrrh; lastly, some bring several gifts together. Who are these individuals? In examining this question, we shall see how we too, like the magi, can serve our Lord and Saviour.

Who brings the Lord gold?

Gold is brought by those who, for the glory of God and the benefit of their neighbor, offer anything of their labors and possessions. For example, you bring gold to the Lord if you build, renew or adorn God's temple. Your gift pleases Him, for even though He sits now on the throne of glory, for the sake of our salvation He continues at the same time to appear in the manger as well. This manger is present in church upon the table of oblation, where at every Liturgy

He is, as it were, born again so as to offer Himself anew as a sacrifice for our sins. How often He suffers want in this manger. Here, He needs both clothing and shelter, light and warmth. Therefore, if you do anything for the benefit of the church, your offering delights the Lord—as much as did the gift of the magi who brought Him gold.

How much of this gold is brought to the Lord? Oh, if we were to compare what is brought with that which is spent to answer the demands of the passions, for the satisfaction not only of our needs, but of our very whims—or even with that which is patently surrendered for the flesh and the world to consume—then it shall turn out to be the very smallest part... Before us a poor man shakes from bitter cold, hunger, and disease; we either rebuff him harshly or give him a measly pittance, and that same day we are ready to exhaust half our fortune in a senseless game, or to display our munificent squandering at some gaudy spectacle. Such is our gratitude to Him Who, *though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.* (II Cor 8:9).

Who brings the Lord frankincense?

These are they who apply their abilities, knowledge, and talents to the glory of God and the benefit of their neighbors; for these are immaterial gifts of greater value than gold or silver. These are gifts which God gives to men, but they also are—and should be made—men's gifts to God.

This costly frankincense is offered to the Lord by each one who, sparing not himself, serves his neighbor. Frankincense is offered to the Lord by that shepherd of the Church, who faithfully stands alert guarding souls and hearts against the confusions and temptations of the age, who ardently proclaims the ways of the Lord, who guides those who have lost their way, comforts those in despair, instructs all. Frankincense is brought to the Lord by that mother who does not rely upon servants, who does not spend time in idleness and vain amusements, but rather devotes her time and abilities to the rearing of her children in the fear of God, to nurturing in them the habit of self-denial, the spirit of meekness, of prayer, and of love for mankind. Permeating the home, the fragrance of this frankincense is thereafter diffused everywhere by those who received in that home a pious upbringing. Frankincense is brought to the Lord by that artist who does not utilize his tal-



ents to pander to human lust in keeping with the spirit of the time, but rather, strives to turn all his creative powers into means of disseminating—with the refined and beautiful—what is true and good. This frankincense envelops many with its heavenly fragrance. And just as there is no-one who does not possess abilities or talents of some kind, neither is there anyone who is unable to bring the Lord frankincense by using his abilities to the glory of God and the true profit of his neighbors.

The third gift to the Lord from the magi was myrrh. This was the last gift and therefore more exalted than gold or even frankincense. What kind of gift is this, and why is it so important? Like frankincense, myrrh exudes a heavenly fragrance, but its distinguishing quality lies in its great bitterness; for this reason it represents our trials and sorrows, our tears and sufferings.

Now it is clear who brings to the Lord the gift of myrrh. They bring it who patiently bear trials in life and suffer blamelessly without giving in to bleak despair, nor fainthearted complaining, nor useless sighing; those who, in enduring their trials, are moved neither to prideful scorn towards others, nor to the desperate stifling in themselves of all human feeling, but to a lively hope in the living God—to the thought that through suffering he or she is cleansed from sins, made perfect in virtue, and, what is even more gladdening, made like unto their Saviour, Who died for them upon the Cross. Such endurance, in the spirit of faith and love, of the tribulations and sorrows of the age is also a gift to the Lord, a gift more precious than gold and of a sweeter savor even than frankincense.

May all those who suffer cruelly hear this, and may they come to fathom the advantage of their condition which is seemingly bitter, but actually not without its sweetness if only they consider their faith and the Cross of Christ. May they hasten to bring their myrrh to the Lord as a gift. Those who are satisfied in this world cannot do this; unacquainted with want, they seem to lack nothing; but they have no

myrrh. Many of those who possess frankincense—that is, exceptional talents, also cannot do this; they have no heavy trials to bear, no myrrh.

It is all with you, God's bloodless passion-bearers; you, who through no guilty act of your own—whether by the lot of your birth or by the perversity of circumstance, by human malice or by our corruptible physical nature—greet virtually every day, and also end it, with sighs; and who, it may be, this very morning greeted Christ's holy feast day with tears. Those who look upon you disdain your hardship; you yourselves, perhaps, stumble at times beneath the weight of earthly trial. But we, in the name of our Saviour, greet you with the precious likeness of His Cross! Cherish the precious myrrh which you have received as your portion; do not exchange it for frankincense, and even more guard against trading it for mere gold. And do not rob it of its heavenly fragrance by complaint or fainthearted murmuring.

What is the use of complaining? The Lord sees everything without it. Each of your tears counts with Him, each of your sighs knows its weight—and in time you shall receive for all of these a hundredfold. Amen.

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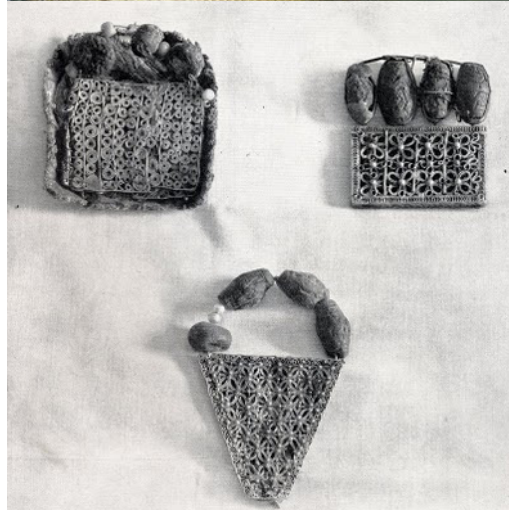
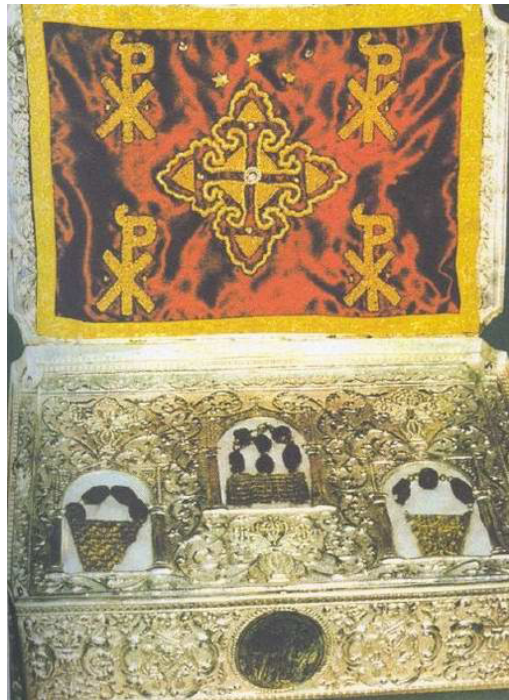
Apolytikion of the Precious Gifts

Three boasted Gifts the Magi, rulers from Persia, gave to You. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh, seeing You as a babe O Christ, and faithfully worshipped You and were sanctified, venerating Your holy treasures. We all receive grace, and offer a hymn to Your Nativity, O Lord.



In human nature, pleasure has a dual character. In the soul, it is activated by dispassion and in the body, by passion. The one which our free will chooses will dominate over the other.

St. Gregory of Nyssa



Picture and a close-up of the authentic Gifts of the Magi, at the Holy Monastery of St. Paul, in Holy Mountain

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD ACCORDING TO ST. GREGORY PALAMAS

Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos, from his book "Orthodox Psychotherapy."



We must pray fervently for God to grant us to reach this knowledge of God. The exhortation is clear: Come, let us ascend unto the mountain of the Lord, even to the house of our God, and behold the glory of His transfiguration, glory of the Only-begotten of the Father. Let us receive light from His light, and with uplifted spirits let us forever sing the praises of the

consubstantial Trinity.

When a person rises from bodily knowledge to the soul's knowledge and from that to spiritual knowledge, then he sees God and possesses knowledge of God, which is his salvation. Knowledge of God, as will be explained further on, is not intellectual, but existential. That is, one's whole being is filled with this knowledge of God. But in order to attain it, one's heart must have been purified, that is, the soul, nous (intellect) and heart must have been healed. *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* (Mt 5:8).

Let us look at things more analytically.

Barlaam insisted that knowledge of God depends not on vision of God but on one's understanding. He said that we can acquire knowledge of God through philosophy, and therefore he considered the prophets and apostles who saw the uncreated light, to be below the philosophers. He called the uncreated light sensory, created, and "inferior to our understanding."

However, St. Gregory Palamas, a bearer of the Tradition and a man of revelation, supported the opposite view. In his theology, he presented the teaching of the Church that uncreated light, that is, the vision of God, is not simply a symbolic vision, nor sensory and created, nor inferior to understanding, but it is deification. Through deification man is deemed worthy of seeing God. And this deification is not an abstract state, but a union of man with God. That is to say, the man who beholds the uncreated light sees it because he is united with God. He sees it with his inner eyes, and also with his bodily eyes, which, however, have been altered by God's action.

Consequently *theoria* (vision of God) is union with God. And this union is knowledge of God. At this time one is granted knowledge of God, which is above human knowledge and above the senses.

St. Gregory explains this whole theology in places throughout his writings. But since it is not our intention to make a systematic exposition of his whole teaching about the knowledge of God, we shall limit ourselves to analyzing the central point in it as it is presented in his basic work "On the Holy Hesychasts," known as the Triads. Again we must add that we shall not present the whole teaching as it is set out in that book, but only the central points.

Here is a characteristic passage in which he briefly presents this teaching:

One who has cleared his soul of all connection with things of this world, who has detached himself from everything by keeping the commandments and by the dispassion that this brings, and who has passed beyond all cognitive activity through continuous, sincere and immaterial prayer, and who has been abundantly illuminated by the inaccessible light in an inconceivable union, he alone, becoming light, contemplating by the light and beholding the light, in the vision and enjoyment of this light recognizes truly that God is transcendently radiant and beyond comprehension; he glorifies God not only beyond his nous' human power of understanding, for many created things are beyond that, but even beyond that marvelous union which is the only means by which the nous is united with what is beyond intelligible things, imitating divinely the supra-celestial minds.

We find the central teaching of St. Gregory in this passage. In order to attain vision of the uncreated light, a person must cut off every connection between the soul and what is below, detach himself from everything by keeping Christ's commandments and through the dispassion which comes from that, he must transcend all cognitive activity *through continuous and sincere and immaterial prayer*. Therefore he must have been healed already, through keeping Christ's commandments and through freeing his soul from all sinful connection with created things. He is illuminated by the inaccessible light *abundantly through an inconceivable union*. He sees God through union. Thus he becomes light and sees by the light. Seeing the uncreated light, he recognizes God and acquires knowledge of Him, because now *he recognizes truly that God is above nature and beyond comprehension*.

St. Gregory also develops this teaching at other places in the Triads.

The vision of God, *theoria* of the uncreated light, is not a sensory vision but a deification of man. Speaking of Moses' vision of God *face-to-face and not in enigmas*, he recalls the passage in St. Maximus the Confessor that says:

Deification is an en-hypostatic and direct illumination which has no beginning but appears in those worthy as something exceeding their comprehension. It is indeed a mystical union with God, beyond nous and reason, in the age when creatures will no longer know corruption.

So the vision of the uncreated light is man's deification. He sees God through deification and not through cultivating intelligence. The vision of uncreated light is called a deifying gift. It is not a gift of created human nature, but of the Holy Spirit. St. Gregory concludes: *Thus the deifying gift of the Spirit is a mysterious light which transforms into light those who receive its wealth. He not only fills them with eternal light but also grants them knowledge and life appropriate to God.*

Thus the vision of God is not external but comes through deification. This deification is union and communion with God. According to St. Gregory: *Vision of the uncreated light is not simply abstraction and negation, it is a union and a divinisation which occurs mystically and ineffably by the grace of God, after the stripping away of everything from here below which imprints itself on the nous, or rather after the cessation of all noetic activity; it is something which goes beyond abstraction.*

The contemplation of uncreated light is *by the divinising communion of the Spirit. So the contemplation of this light is a union, even though it does not endure in the imperfect: but is the union with this light other than a vision?*

St. Gregory also speaks of ecstasy. But this ecstasy, in patristic teaching, has nothing to do with the ecstasy of Pythia and the other religions. Ecstasy comes when, in prayer, the nous abandons every connection with created things: first *with everything evil and bad, then with neutral things.*

Ecstasy is mainly withdrawal from the opinion of the world and the flesh. With sincere prayer the nous *abandons all created things.*

This ecstasy is higher than abstract theology, that is, than rational theology, and it belongs only to those who have attained dispassion. But it is not yet union. That is to say, the ecstasy which is unceasing prayer of the nous, in which one's nous has continuous remembrance of God and has no relation with the "world of sin" is not yet union with God. This union comes about when the Paraclete *illuminates from on high the man who attains in prayer the stage which is superior to the highest natural possibilities and who is awaiting the promise of the Father, and by His revelation ravishes him to the contemplation of the light.*

Illumination by God is what shows His union with man. Vision, deification and union with God are the things which offer man existential knowledge of God. Then man possesses real knowledge of God. The deifying gift of the Holy Spirit, which is a mysterious light, transforms into divine light those who have attained it and not only fills them with eternal light, *but also grants them a knowledge and a life appropriate to God.*

In this state a person possesses knowledge of God. In reply to Barlaam's teaching that God is known by the greatest contemplators, the philosophers, and that knowledge of God transmitted *by noetic illumination... is by no means true, St.*

Gregory Palamas declares: *God makes Himself known not only through all that is but also through what is not, through transcendence, that is, through uncreated things, and also through an eternal light that transcends all beings.* This knowledge, he says, is offered today as a kind of pledge to those who are worthy of it and which *illuminates them unendingly in the unending age.* That is just why the saints' vision of God is true, *and he who calls it false has strayed from the divine knowledge of God.*

Thus anyone who ignores and disregards the vision of God, which offers true knowledge, is in reality ignorant of God. Conclusively, the vision of God, deification, union and knowledge of God are closely bound together. They cannot be understood apart from one another. Breaking this unity takes man further away from knowledge of God. The basis of Orthodox epistemology is illumination and God's revelation within the purified heart of man.

As we have seen, knowledge of God is beyond human knowledge. Vision of the uncreated light surpasses all epistemological activity and is *beyond sight and knowledge.* Since vision of the uncreated light is offered to the hearts of the faithful and perfect, that is why *it is superior to the light of knowledge.* And not only is it superior to the light of human knowledge "from Hellenic studies," but also the light of this theoria differs from *the light that comes from the Holy Scriptures,* since the light of the Scriptures may be compared to *a lamp that shines in an obscure place, whereas vision of the uncreated light resembles the morning star which shines in the day, that is to say, the sun.* The grace of deification thus transcends nature, virtue and human knowledge.

The vision of the uncreated light and the knowledge that comes from this are not an unfolding of the rational power, they are not perfection of rational nature, as Barlaam asserted, but they are superior to reason. They are knowledge offered by God to the pure in heart. Anyone who asserts that the deifying gift is a development of the rational nature puts himself in opposition to Christ's Gospel. If contemplation were a natural gift, then all people should be gods, one less and another more. But *the deified saints transcend nature,* they are engendered by God, as He gave them power to become *children of God.*

The vision of the uncreated light, which offers knowledge of God to man, is sensory and suprasensory. The bodily eyes are reshaped, so they see the uncreated light, *this mysterious light, inaccessible, immaterial, uncreated, deifying, eternal, this radiance of the Divine Nature, this glory of the divinity, this beauty of the heavenly kingdom.*

Palamas asks: *Do you see that light is inaccessible to senses which are not transformed by the Spirit?* St. Maximus, whose teaching is cited by St. Gregory, says that the Apostles saw the uncreated Light *by a transformation of the activity of their senses, produced in them by the Spirit.*

Vision of the uncreated Light and the knowledge which comes from it transcend not only nature and human knowledge, but virtue as well. Virtue and the imitation of God prepare us for the divine union, but the mysterious union itself is effected by grace.

Thus deification, which is the goal of the spiritual life, is a manifestation of God to the pure heart of man. This vision of the uncreated Light is what creates spiritual delight in the soul. For, according to St. Gregory, evidence of that light is that the soul ceases to give itself over to wrong pleasures and passions, and that it acquires peace and stillness of thoughts, and rest and spiritual joy, contempt for human glory, humility joined with secret rejoicing, hatred of the world, love of heavenly things, or rather love of the God of Heaven alone, and a vision of uncreated light even if one's eyes should be covered or plucked out.

From what has been said it is clear that the end of man's cure is vision of the uncreated light. But since we are speaking about theoria, we may also look at Palamas' teaching that there are many degrees of theoria.

He says that this theoria has a beginning, and the things that follow on from this beginning differ in degrees of darkness or clarity, but there is never an end, for its progress, like that of the rapture in revelation, is infinite. Illumination is one thing and continuous vision of light is another, and still another is the vision of things in that light whereby even things far off are accessible to the eyes, and the future is shown as already existing. So, there are degrees of theoria, and with it, degrees of knowledge.

At this point we may also look at the teaching of St. Peter of Damascus about the eight stages of theoria (Philokalia 3:108). The first seven belong to this age, while the eighth belongs to the age to come.

The **first** theoria is knowledge of the trials and tribulations of this life. The **second** is "knowledge of our own faults and of God's bounty." The **third** is knowledge of the terrible things before and after death. The **fourth** is deep understanding of the life led by our Lord Jesus in this world and of His disciples and the other saints, that is to say, the words and actions of the martyrs and the holy Fathers. The **fifth** is knowledge of the nature and flux of things. The **sixth** is theoria of created beings, or knowledge and understanding of God's visible creation. The **seventh** is understanding of God's spiritual creation, that is to say, of the angels. The **eighth** is knowledge concerning God, or what we call *theology*.

Consequently theoria has many stages and degrees, and many must come before vision of the uncreated light, which is *the beauty of the age to come, the food of the heavens*. Among the degrees of theoria are remembrance of death, which is a gift from God, unceasing prayer, the inspiration to keep Christ's commandments fully, knowledge of our spiritual

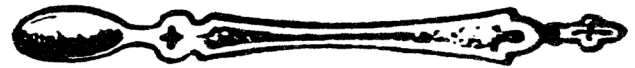
poverty, that is to say, understanding of our sins and passions, and the repentance following it.

All these things come about through the operation of divine grace. Certainly perfect theoria is vision of the uncreated light, which itself is differentiated into vision and continuous vision, as Palamas says.

So the purification which takes place by the grace of God creates the necessary preconditions for attaining that theoria which is communion with God, deification of man, and knowledge of God. The ascetic method of the Church leads to this point. It is not based on human criteria and it does not aim to make the person "nice and good," but to heal him perfectly and for him to achieve communion with God. As long as a man is far from communion and union with God, he has not yet attained his salvation. The spiritually trained person who sees the uncreated light is said, in the language of the Fathers, to be "deified."

This expression is used by St. Dionysios the Areopagite, St. John of Damascus, and repeatedly, as we have seen, by St. Gregory Palamas. The healing of the soul, nous and heart leads a person to the vision of God and makes him know the divine life. This knowledge is man's salvation.

And, *You were transfigured upon the mountain, O Christ our God, showing to Your disciples Your glory as much as they could bear. Do also in us, sinners though we be, shine Your everlasting light, at the intercession of the Theotokos, O Giver of light. Glory to You.* (Apolytikion for the feast of Holy Transfiguration).



Glory to His holy name, because we came to know Him and worship Him as much as we are able, and we shun the confusion and vanity of this age. *Glory to God Who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood.* (Rev 1:5).

Know, my child, that when the heart is free from the things of this world and occupies itself with the study of the divine Scriptures, vain thoughts flee, and the nous is confined to thinking divine thoughts. It is not interested in this present life, but by the great pleasure of continuous meditation it is lifted up to God. Through the continuous invocation of the name of God by means of the unceasing prayer, *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me*, man receives a sense of the other life, of the age to come, and of the hope which is stored up for the righteous. He foretastes the magnificence of that life and says with astonishment, *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of the unsearchable God!* (Rom 2:33)—for He has prepared another world that is so wondrous in order to bring into it all the prudent people to keep them there in life everlasting.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou
From "*Counsels from the Holy Mountain*"

Τὸ Παιδίον Ἰησοῦς Κύριος τοῦ Κόσμου καὶ τῆς Ἱστορίας

Μήνυμα Χριστουγέννων τοῦ καθηγουμένου τῆς Ἱ. Μονῆς Γρηγορίου Ἀγ. Ὁρους Ἀρχμ. Γεωργίου Καψάνη (23-12-2011).

«Προσκυνοῦμεν σου τὴν Γένναν Χριστέ».

† † †

Μὲ τοὺς Ὁρθόδοξους Χριστιανοὺς ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου θὰ κληθοῦμε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἁγία Ὁρθόδοξον Ἐκκλησία νὰ προσκυνήσουμε ὡς «παιδίον» εἰς τὰς ἀγκάλας τῆς ἁγίας Μητρὸς Του Αὐτόν, ποὺ εἶναι «ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος» (Ἀποκ. 1:8), ὁ «μεγάλης βουλήs ἀγγελος», ὁ «ἐξουσιαστήs», ὁ «ἄρχων τῆς εἰρήνης», ὁ «πατήρ τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος» (Ἦσ. 9:6).

Ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ γῆ συμμετέχουν εἰς αὐτὴν τὴν προσκύνῃσιν. Ὅπως ψάλλει ἡ Ἐκκλησία: «Οἱ ἄγγελοι (προσφέρουν) τὸν ὕμνον, οἱ οὐρανοὶ τὸν ἀστέρα, οἱ μάγοι τὰ δῶρα, οἱ ποιμένες τὸ θαῦμα, ἡ γῆ τὸ σπῆλαιον, ἡ ἔρημος τὴν φάτην» καὶ τὸ γένος τῶν ἀνθρώπων «μητέρα Παρθένον», στὸν νηπιάσαντα Κύριο τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῆς γῆς. Καὶ τοῦτο, διότι τὸ βρέφος αὐτό, τὸ φαινομενικὰ ἀδύνατο, εἶναι ὁ Παντοκράτωρ, ὁ Λυτρωτῆς, ὁ Σωτῆρ, ὁ Θεάνθρωπος.

Θεωροῦντες τὰ πράγματα διὰ τῆς πίστεως γνωρίζομε ὅτι τὸ ἀδύνατο αὐτὸ βρέφος εἶναι ὁ «πρὸ αἰῶνων Θεός», ὁ Κύριος τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τῆς ἱστορίας. «Μέγα τὸ μυστήριον».

Τὸ «μόνον καινὸν ὑπὸ τὸν ἥλιον», κατὰ τὸν Ἅγιο Ἰωάννη τὸν Δαμασκηνό. Δὲν ἔχει προηγούμενο οὔτε μπορεῖ νὰ ἐπαναληφθῆ. Βλέποντες τὴν ἱστορία μὲ τὴν προοπτικὴ αὐτή, μποροῦμε νὰ ἐλπίσουμε ὅτι Αὐτός, ὁ σαρκωθεὶς Θεός, θὰ βοηθήσῃ τὸν λαόν Του νὰ ὑπερβῇ τὴν παροῦσα κρίσι.

Εἶναι πολλὰ τὰ κοινὰ σημεῖα τῆς ἐποχῆς μας μὲ τὴν ἐποχὴ, κατὰ τὴν ὁποία ἐγεννήθη ὁ Χριστὸς ἐπὶ «Καίσαρος Αὐγούστου», «ἐν Βηθλεὲμ τῆς Ἰουδαίας». Καὶ τότε ὑπῆρχε μία μορφή παγκοσμιοποιήσεως ἀνάλογη μὲ αὐτήν, ποὺ ἐπιχειρεῖται σήμερα. Ἡ φορολογία ἦταν ἀπάνθρωπη. Τὸ ἀνθρώπινο πρόσωπο συνετριβετο, προκειμένου νὰ ἐπιτευχθοῦν οἱ στόχοι τοῦ Καίσαρος. Εἶναι γνωστοὶ οἱ ἐξανδραποδισμοὶ καὶ τὰ βασανιστήρια, ποὺ

ὑφίσταντο οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἀπὸ τοὺς τότε δυνάστας. Ἀκόμη εἶναι γνωστὰ τὰ ἔκλυτα ἤθη τῆς τότε κοινωνίας, ἀντίστοιχα πρὸς τὴν φαυλότητα τῶν «θεῶν», ποὺ ἐλάτρευαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι.

Καὶ σήμερα ἡ κρίσις ποὺ ἀντιμετωπίζομε δὲν εἶναι μόνον οἰκονομικὴ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἠθικὴ καὶ θεολογικὴ. Κρίσις οἰκονομικὴ, διότι ἡ πτωχεῖα καὶ ἡ ἀνέχεια μαστιζεῖ πολλοὺς ἀδελφούς μας. Κρίσις ἠθικὴ, διότι ὁ πολιτισμὸς μας ὅλο καὶ περισσότερο ἐδράζεται στὴν φιλαυτία καὶ ὄχι στὴν ἀγάπη. Κρίσις θεολογικὴ, διότι μεταίρονται ὄρια αἰῶνια, τὰ ὁποῖα ἔθεσαν οἱ ἅγιοι Πατέρες (πρβλ. Παροιμ. 22:28), καὶ ἀντικαθίστανται ἀπὸ ξενόφερτες «θεολογίες». Αὐτὲς οἱ «θεολογίες» ἄδειασαν τὶς Ἐκκλησίες τῆς Εὐρώπης καὶ κινδυνεύουν νὰ ἀδειάσουν καὶ τοὺς δικούς μας Ναοὺς, ὅπως εἶπε

Προτεστάντης θεολόγος, **διότι καλλιεργοῦν τὸν ὀρθολογισμὸ καὶ τὸν σκεπτικισμὸ.**

Ὅπως στὸν εὐρισκόμενον «ἐν χώρα καὶ σκιᾷ θανάτου» κόσμῳ τῆς ἐποχῆς ἐκείνης «φῶς ἀνέτειλεν αὐτοῖς» (Ματθ. 4:16), ὁ Θεάνθρωπος Κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, προσφέροντάς του τὴν λύτρωσι, ἐλπίζομε ὅτι καὶ στὴν παροῦσα κρίσιμη φάσι τῆς ἱστορίας τοῦ ἔθνους μας ὁ Παντοκράτωρ Κύριος δὲν θὰ μᾶς στερήσῃ τὴν Χάρι Του καὶ τὴν εὐλογία Του καὶ δὲν θὰ ἀφήσῃ νὰ χαθῇ τὸ πολυπαθὲς Ἔθνος μας. Ὁ Ἅγιος Κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, ὡς Κριτῆς τοῦ κόσμου, μπορεῖ νὰ ἐπέμβῃ γιὰ τὴν σωτηρία μας. Μπορεῖ νὰ ἐπέμβῃ καὶ νὰ ἐνεργήσῃ. Σεβόμενος ὅμως τὴν ἐλευθερία

μας περιμένει καὶ τὴν δική μας συνέργεια, ποὺ ἐκφράζεται μὲ τὴν μετάνοια καὶ τὴν προσευχή μας. Ἐκεῖνος θὰ ἐνεργήσῃ τὴν σωτηρία μας, ἐὰν ἐμεῖς συνεργήσουμε.

Εἶναι πάντοτε ἐπίκαιροι οἱ λόγοι τοῦ μεγάλου Σέρβου Ἱεράρχου, Ἁγίου Νικολάου Βελμιρόβιτς, ὁ ὁποῖος τὸ 1929 ἔγραφε: «Μέχρι πότε θὰ διαρκέσει ἡ κρίσις; Ὅσο τὸ πνεῦμα τῶν ἀνθρώπων παραμείνει δίχως ἀλλαγὴ. Ὅσπου οἱ ὑπερήφανοι ὑπαίτιοι αὐτῆς τῆς κρίσεως νὰ παραιτηθοῦν μπροστὰ στὸν Παντοδύναμο. Ὅσπου οἱ ἄνθρωποι καὶ οἱ λαοὶ νὰ θυμηθοῦν, τὴν ἀκαταλαβίστικη λέξι «κρίσις», νὰ τὴ μεταφράζουν στὴ γλώσσα τους, ὥστε μὲ ἀναστεναγμὸ καὶ μετάνοια νὰ φωνάξουν: «ἡ Θεία δίκη!» («Δρόμος δίχως Θεὸ δὲν Ἄντέχεται...», σελ. 35-36).

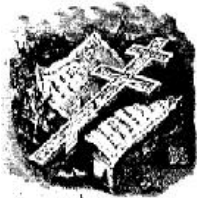


Ὁλος ὁ λαὸς καλούμεθα σὲ μετάνοια καὶ προσευχή, γιὰ νὰ ἐπέμβῃ ὁ Θεός, ὅπως ἔγινε στὴν Νινευὶ (Ἰωνᾶ 3:10). Ἄλλ' ἐὰν δὲν μετανοοῦν καὶ δὲν προσεύχονται οἱ πολλοί, τοῦλάχιστον ἂς μετανοοῦμε καὶ ἂς προσευχώμεθα οἱ ὀλίγοι πιστοί, καὶ ὁ Θεὸς μπορεῖ νὰ μᾶς σώσῃ, ὅπως θὰ ἔσωζε τὰ Σόδομα καὶ τὰ Γόμορρα, ἐὰν ὑπῆρχαν ἔστω καὶ δέκα δίκαιοι. (Γέν. 18:20-32).

Πιστεύουμε ὅτι, ἂν ἔτσι ἐνεργήσουμε, ὁ Φιλάνθρωπος Κύριος, ὄχι μόνο θὰ μᾶς βοηθήσῃ νὰ ὑπερβοῦμε τὴν παροῦσα κρίσι, ἀλλὰ θὰ ἐξαγάγῃ ἀπὸ τὴν πικρίαν τῆς δοκιμασίας αὐτῆς καρποὺς γλυκεῖς καὶ σωτηρίους, ὅπως χαρακτηριστικὰ λέγει ὁ Ἅγιος Μάξιμος ὁ Ὁμολογητής: «Καὶ τοῖς γενομένοις κακοῖς ἀγαθοπρεπῶς κέχρηται πρὸς διόρθωσιν ἡμῶν ὁ Θεός». (PG 4 305 D).

Προσκυνοῦμε τὸ Θεῖον Βρέφος μὲ πίστι καὶ ἐλπίδα, ὅτι θὰ ἐπιβλέψῃ εὐμενῶς εἰς τὸν λαόν Του.

Εὐλογημένα καὶ Ἅγια Χριστούγεννα!



Ὁ Ἄξιος Ἱερεὺς

Τοῦ Πρωτοπρεσβυτέρου Διονυσίου Τάτση.



Ἡ πνευματικὴ ἀποστολὴ τοῦ ἱερέα εἶναι μεγάλη, ἀλλὰ λίγοι ἱερεῖς τὴν ἔχουν συνειδητοποιήσει. Λείπει, δυστυχῶς, ἢ κατὰ Θεὸν καλλιέργεια, τὴν ὁποία, ὅπως ἔχει διαπιστωθεῖ, δὲν παρέχουν οἱ ἐκκλησιαστικὲς καὶ θεολογικὲς σχολές, οὔτε φυσικὰ καὶ οἱ ἱερατικὲς συνάξεις, ποὺ κάνουν οἱ Μητροπολίτες.

Ἀναγκαία προϋπόθεση, γιὰ νὰ πετύχει ἓνας ἱερέας

εἶναι ὁ ἱερὸς ζῆλος. Νὰ θέλει νὰ προσφέρει ἀπὸ ἐλεύθερη προαίρεση καὶ μὲ φόβο τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἐὰν δὲν ὑπάρχει ἱερὸς ζῆλος, ἡ ἱερωσύνη καταντᾷ ἐπάγγελμα καὶ αὐτὸ πρέπει νὰ θεωρεῖται ὀλέθριο. Ὁ ἐπαγγελματίας ἱερέας θὰ χάσει τὴν ψυχὴ του.

Ὁ Γέροντας Παΐσιος ἔλεγε ὅτι οἱ ἄνθρωποι σήμερα δύο πράγματα θέλουν ἀπὸ τοὺς ἱερεῖς. Νὰ εἶναι ἀφιλοχρήματοι καὶ νὰ ἔχουν ἀγάπη. Ὅταν οἱ ἄνθρωποι δοῦν αὐτὰ τὰ δύο στοὺς ἱερεῖς, ἐκδηλώνουν τὸ σεβασμὸ τους, τοὺς θεωροῦν ἁγίους

καὶ τρέχουν στὴν Ἐκκλησία. Τὸ τραγικὸ ὅμως εἶναι ὅτι στὴν ἐποχὴ μας δὲν βλέπουν συχνὰ τέτοιους ἱερεῖς. Ἡ φιλοχρηματία κατεδαφίζει καὶ ἐξαφανίζει κάθε θετικὸ, ποὺ ἐνδέχεται νὰ ἔχει ἓνας ἱερέας. Μπορεῖ γιὰ παράδειγμα νὰ εἶναι καλλίφωνος καὶ νὰ λειτουργεῖ μὲ ἐντυπωσιακὸ τρόπο, νὰ εἶναι ἐκπαιδευμένος στὶς κοινωνικὲς σχέσεις, νὰ κηρύττει μὲ χάρισμα καὶ νὰ ἔχει χρυσοκέντητα ἄμφια κ.λπ., ἂν ὅμως εἶναι φιλοχρήματος, ὅλα αὐτὰ εἶναι περιττά, γιὰ νὰ μὴ πῶ προκλητικὰ καὶ ἀπωθητικὰ. Ἐπίσης ἐὰν λείπει ἡ ἀγάπη στὴν ὁποία ποιμαντικὴ δραστηριότητα ἔχει, πάλι τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα εἶναι μηδενικὸ. Ὁ ἱερέας δίχως ἀγάπη μοιάζει μὲ πουλί, ποὺ ἔχει κομμένα φτερὰ καὶ μὲ μεγάλη δυσκολία διανύει μικρὲς ἀποστάσεις.

Ἡ φιλοχρηματία καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη δὲν συμβαδίζουν. Ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ποὺ ἀγαπάει τὸ χρήμα δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἀγαπήσῃ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Κἀτ' ἀναλογία, καὶ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀγάπης δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι φιλάργυρος καὶ πλεονέκτης. Αὐτὸ ἰσχύει περισσότερο γιὰ τὸν ἱερέα, ποὺ καλεῖται νὰ ὀδηγήσῃ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους στὴ σωτηρία.

Ὁ Γέροντας Παΐσιος, ὅταν ἐπικοινωνοῦσε μὲ ὑποψήφιους ἱερεῖς ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲ ἱερεῖς, μιλοῦσε γιὰ τὴν ἐργασία, ποὺ πρέπει νὰ κάνουν στὸν ἑαυτό τους, γιὰ νὰ εἶναι φωτεινὸ παράδειγμα στοὺς ἐνοριῖτες τους. Δίχως πνευματικὸ πλοῦτο—ποὺ ἀποκτᾶται μὲ τὴν τήρηση τῶν ἐντολῶν καὶ τὴν ἄσκηση—δὲν μποροῦν νὰ βοηθήσουν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Εἶναι χαρακτηριστικὸς ὁ λόγος τοῦ Γέροντα: «Ἡ μυστικὴ ἐργασία ἔχει τὴν ιδιότητα νὰ κηρύττει μυστικὰ τὸν λόγο τοῦ Θεοῦ μέσα στὶς ψυχὰς τῶν ἀνθρώπων. **Ὁ χαριτωμένος ἄνθρωπος τοῦ Θεοῦ μεταδίδει θεῖα χάρη καὶ ἀλλοιώνει τοὺς σαρκικοὺς ἀνθρώπους.** Τοὺς ἐλευθερώνει ἀπὸ τὴν σκλαβιά τῶν παθῶν καὶ τοὺς πλησιάζει μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν τρόπον στὸν Θεὸ καὶ σφύζονται».

Μακάρι κάποτε ὅλοι οἱ ἱερεῖς νὰ ἀποδεχτοῦμε τὸ λόγο τοῦ Γέροντα Παΐσιου καὶ νὰ ἀρχίσουμε τὴ μυστικὴ ἐσωτερικὴ ἐργασία, ἢ ὁποία θὰ μᾶς δίνει τὰ ἀπαραίτητα ἐφόδια, γιὰ νὰ εἴμαστε ἀποδοτικοὶ στὸ ἔργο, ποὺ καλοῦμαστε νὰ ἐπιτελέσουμε.



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 ἀληθινὸ, ποὺ 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.

Γέρον Πορφύριος Κανσοκαλυβίτης (+1991)

Μία Απάντηση πρὸς τὴν Φιλοπατρικὴν «Ἀγαπολογία»

Τοῦ κυρ-Φώτη Κόντογλου «Μυστικά Ἄνθη», ἐκδ. «Ἀστὴρ», σελ. 51-53.



Μεγάλο, πολὺ μεγάλο καὶ σπουδαῖο εἶναι ἓνα ζήτημα, πὸν δὲν τοῦ δώσανε σχεδὸν καθόλου προσοχὴ οἱ περισσότεροι Ἕλληνες. Κι αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ ὅτι ἀπὸ καιρὸ ἀρχίσανε κάποιιο δικοὶ μας κληρικοὶ νὰ θέλουν καὶ νὰ ἐπιδιώκουν νὰ

δέσουν στενὲς σχέσεις μὲ τοὺς παπικοὺς, πὸν ἐπὶ τόσοις αἰῶνες μᾶς ρημάζανε.

Γιατί, στ' ἀληθινά, δὲν ὑπάρχει πιδὸ μεγάλο ἀντίμαχος τῆς φυλῆς μας, κι ἐπίμονος ἀντίμαχος, πὸν, σώνει καὶ καλά, θέλει νὰ σβῆσει τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία. Οἱ δεσποτάδες, πὸν εἶπα πὸς τοὺς ἔπιασε, ἄξαφνα κι ἀναπάντεχα, ὁ ἔρωτας μὲ τοὺς Λατίνους, λένε πὸς τὸ κάνουνε ἀπὸ «ἀγάπη». Μὰ αὐτὸ εἶναι χονδροειδεστάτη δικαιολογία καὶ καλὰ θὰ κάνουνε νὰ παρατήσουνε αὐτὰ τὰ ροσόλια τῆς «ἀγάπης», πὸν τὴν κάνανε ρεζίλι. Ὁ διάβολος, ἅμα θελήσει νὰ κάνει τὸ πιδὸ πονηρὸ παιγνίδι του, μιᾶ, ὁ ἀλιτήριος γιὰ ἀγάπη.

Ὅ,τι εἶπε ὁ Χριστὸς, τὸ λέγει κι αὐτὸς κάλπικα, γιὰ νὰ ξεγελάσει. Τώρα, στὰ καλὰ καθούμενα, τοὺς ρασοφόρους μας στὴν Πόλη, τοὺς ἔπιασε παροξυσμὸς τῆς ἀγάπης γιὰ τοὺς Ἰταλιάνους, πὸν στέκονται, ὅπως πάντα, κρύοι καὶ περήφανοι καὶ δὲν γυρίζουνε νὰ τοὺς δοῦνε αὐτοὺς τοὺς «ἐν Χριστῷ ἀδελφούς», πὸν ὅσα τοὺς κάνανε ἀπὸ τὸν καιρὸ τῶν Σταυροφόρων ἴσα μὲ τώρα, δὲν τοὺς τᾶκανε μήτε Τοῦρκος, μήτε Τάταρος, μήτε Μωμαχετᾶνος. Ἴσως κι οἱ δικοὶ μας νὰ τὸ κάνουν ἀπὸ παρεξηγημένη καλωσύνη.

Ὅπως εἶπα, οἱ περισσότεροι δικοὶ μας δὲν δώσανε καμιὰ σημασία σ' αὐτὲς τὶς φιλοπατρικὲς κινήσεις, πὸν εἶναι θάνατος γιὰ τὸ γένος μας καὶ πὸν τὶς κινήσανε οἱ καταχθόνιες δυνάμεις, πὸν πολεμᾶνε τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ πὸν μὲ τὰ λεπτά τους ἀγοράζουνε ὅλους· δὲν δώσανε λοιπὸν καμιὰ σημασία, γιατί τὰ θεωροῦνε τιποτένια πράγματα, ἂν δὲν εἶναι κι οἱ ἴδιοι ἀγορασμένοι, ἄξια μοναχὰ γιὰ κάποιους στενοκέφαλους παλιοημερολογίτες καὶ φανατικοὺς ἀποπετρωμένους Χριστιανούς. Τώρα τὰ μυαλὰ γινήκανε φαρδειά, καὶ καταγίνονται μὲ ἄλλα, κοσμοϊστορικὰ προβλήματα! «Θὰ καθόμαστε νὰ

κοιτάζουμε τώρα παπάδες κι Ὁρθοδοξίες»; Μὰ αὐτοὺς δὲν τοὺς μέλει κι ἂν ἐξαφανισθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν κόσμο κάθε Ἑλληνικὸ πρᾶγμα. καὶ θὰ ἐξαφανισθεῖ ὄχι τόσο εὐκόλα μὲ τὸν ἀμερικανισμό, πὸν πάθαμε, ὅσο ἂν γίνουμε στὴ θρησκεία παπικοί. Γιατὶ γι' αὐτοῦ πᾶμε, παπικὴ Ἑλλάδα θὰ πεῖ ἐξαφάνιση τῆς Ἑλλάδας.

Νὰ γιατί εἶπα πὸς εἶναι πολὺ σπουδαῖο ζήτημα αὐτὲς οἱ ἐρωτοτροπίες, πὸν ἀρχίσανε κάποιιοι κληρικοὶ δικοὶ μας μὲ τοὺς παπικοὺς, κι ἡ αἰτία εἶναι τὸ ὅτι δὲν νοιώσανε τι εἶναι Ὁρθοδοξία ὀλότελα, μ' ὅλο πὸν εἶναι δεσποτάδες. τὸ κακὸ εἶναι πὸς ὁ λαὸς δὲν πῆρε, καλὰ-καλὰ, εἶδηση γιὰ τὴ συνωμοσία. Ποιὸς νὰ τὸν πληροφορήσει ἀφοῦ οἱ γραμματισμένοι τὰ θεωροῦνε αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα ἀνάξια γιὰ τὴ μοντέρνα σοφία τους, καὶ τρέχουν σημαιοφόροι σὲ κάθε νεωτερισμό;

Ἀπὸ τότε πὸν ἀρχίσανε οἱ λυκοφιλίες ἀνάμεσα στοὺς δικούς μας καὶ στοὺς παπικοὺς (καὶ σημείωσε πὸς οἱ δικοὶ μας φαγοθήκανε πρῶτοι νὰ πιάσουνε σχέση μὲ τοὺς Λατίνους σάν νὰ πήρανε ἀπὸ κάπου διαταγή, κι ὀλοένα μιᾶνε γιὰ «τὸν διάλογον» μαζί τους, δίχως νὰ ξέρουνε καλὰ-καλὰ τι λένε), ἀπὸ τότε λοιπὸν, ἀκοῦμε, κάθε τόσο, κάτι πράγματα θεατρικά, ἄνοστα, ἀνόητα, δίχως καμιὰ σοβαρότητα, ὅπως εἶναι ἡ λεγόμενη «Διάσκεψις τῆς Ρόδου», τὰ νέα παρεκκλήσια τοῦ Βατικανοῦ, κ.τ.λ. Στὴ Ρόδο πήγανε οἱ δικοὶ μας μὲ σκοπὸ νὰ πουλήσουν τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, γιατί γι' αὐτοὺς εἶναι καθυστερημένη μορφή τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ, δηλαδή ἓνας βλάχικος Χριστιανισμὸς, καὶ ν' ἀρχίσουν τὸν «διάλογον», πὸν νὰ τὸν πάρει ἡ εὐχὴ αὐτὸν τὸν «διάλογον».

Καὶ τι κάνανε; Τίποτα! Λόγια πολλὰ καὶ χαμένα, πὸν νὰ ντρέπεται κι ὁ τελευταῖος Ἕλληνας Ὁρθόδοξος. Προχθὲς πάλι μάθαμε πὸς ὁ Πάπας ἐγκαινίασε ἓνα νέο παρεκκλήσιο στὸ Βατικανὸ καὶ ἔβαλε γιὰ εἰκόνες (μὴ χειρότερα!) τὶς φωτογραφίες τοῦ Πάπα καὶ τοῦ Ἀθηναγόρα, «ὁ ὁποῖος ἴσταται ὀπισθεν τοῦ Ποντίφηκος»! Φαντασθεῖτε παρεκκλήσιο μὲ φωτογραφίες (τὶ ἀκαλαίσθητα πράγματα!). Ὁ Πάπας λοιπὸν θὰ προσεύχεται μπροστὰ στὶς δικὲς του φωτογραφίες! Δηλαδή τρελάθηκαν οἱ ἄνθρωποι! Αὐτὰ δὲν τὰ κάνανε μήτε οἱ ἀραπάδες τῆς Ἀφρικῆς. Συλλογίζομαι πόση σοβαρότητα ἔχουν οἱ Μουσουλμᾶνοι στὴ θρησκεία τους, καὶ πὸν καταντήσανε τὴ θρησκεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ αὐτοὶ οἱ ἀθεόφοβοι Ἰταλι ἀνοι, πὸν προσκυνᾶνε ἀγάλματα τῆς Παναγίας μὲ κοκκινάδια, μὲ σκουλαρίκια καὶ μὲ δαχτυλίδια. Κι ἐμεῖς οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι, πὸν φυλάξαμε τὸ βαθὺ μυστήριον τῆς εὐσέβειας, τώρα, στὰ καλὰ καθούμενα, πᾶμε νὰ γίνουμε ἓνα μ' αὐτούς, πὸν γελοιοποίησανε τὸν Χριστὸ ὅσο κανέναν ἄθεος.

Ἄλλά, ἀπὸ ποῦ νὰ πιάσει κανένας καὶ ποῦ νὰ τελειώσει; Ὅσοι ἦτανε ἕως τώρα ἀδιάφοροι γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία καὶ γιὰ τὴν Ἐκκλησία, καὶ ποῦ πολλοὶ ἀπ' αὐτοὺς τὶς περιπαίζανε μάλιστα, ὅλοι αὐτοὶ γινήκανε ἔξαφνα παπόφιλοι, καὶ μασᾶνε σάν μαστίχι τὴν ψεύτικη λέξη «ἀγάπη». Μεγαλύτερο ρεζιλίκι δὲν ἔγινε. Ἐμεῖς οἱ ἄλλοι ποῦ εἴμαστε κολλημένοι ἀπὸ νεότητος στὴν Ἐκκλησία μας, εἴμαστε στενοκέφαλοι, μοχθηροί, γυμνοὶ ἀπὸ ἀγάπη κι ἀπὸ ἀληθινὴ εὐσέβεια. Ἡ μόδα εἶναι τώρα νὰ φαίνεσαι ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἐποχῆς μας, ποῦ ἔνοιωσε τὰ «αἰτήματά» της. [...]

Πίστη ἀσάλευτη στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, ποῦ ἐμεῖς οἱ προκομμένοι τὴν πήραμε κληρονομιά καὶ τὴν πουλάμε «ἀντὶ πινακίου φακῆς» καὶ ἀσπασμοῦ τῆς παντόφλας τοῦ Πάπα! Μὰ σὲ τέτοιο σημεῖο ἐκφυλισθήκαμε; Αἰτία εἶναι ἡ ἔμφυτη ματαιοδοξία μας, ποῦ μᾶς κάνει νὰ θέλουμε νὰ φαινόμεστε ἔξυπνοι, συγχρονισμένοι, προοδευτικοί, κι ὄχι καθυστερημένοι. Μὲ τὴ συναίσθηση τῆς κατωτερότητας, ποῦ ἀποχτήσαμε, φοβόμαστε σάν τὸν διάβολο μήπως μᾶς ποῦνε «παλιὰ μυαλά, παλιοημερολογίτες, καθυστερημένους». καὶ τρέχουμε νὰ πᾶμε πρῶτοι σὲ κάθε κίνηση, ποῦ περνᾶ γιὰ «μοντέρνα», θέλεις μίμηση τῆς «ἀφηρημένης ζωγραφικῆς», θέλεις ἀκαταλαβίστικες «λογοτεχνίες» (καημένη λογοτεχνία, ποῦ κατάντησες!), θὲς φιλοπαπισμὸς, θὲς ἀμερικανισμὸς, στὰ πάντα, στὰ ντυσίματά μας (πρὸ πάντων τῆς νεολαίας), στὸν τρόπο ποῦ μιλάμε καὶ σκεπτόμαστε, ἀκόμα καὶ στὶς χειρονομίες. Δηλαδή, καταντήσαμε μαϊμούδες τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους «ἐν ὀνόματι τῆς προόδου καὶ τῆς θαυμασίας ἐποχῆς μας»...

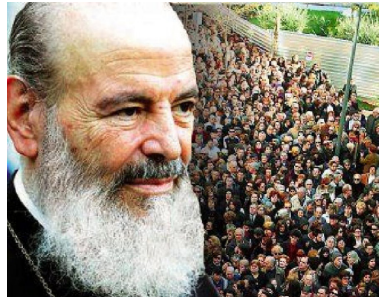


Οἱ ἄνθρωποι καταντήσανε σάν ἄδεια κανάτια, καὶ προσπαθοῦν νὰ γεμίσουν τὸν ἑαυτό τους, ρίχνοντας μέσα ἓνα σωρὸ σκουπίδια, ἐκθέσεις μὲ τερατουργήματα, μπάλλες, ὀμιλίες καὶ ἀερολογίες, καλλιστεῖα, ποῦ μετριεῖται ἡ ἔμορφιὰ μὲ τὴ μεζούρα, ἡλίθιους καρνάβαλους, συλλόγους λογιῆς-λογῆς μὲ γεύματα καὶ μὲ σοβαρὲς συζητήσεις γιὰ τὸν ἴσκιό τοῦ γαϊδάρου, συνδέσμους ἀφιερωμένους στοὺς ἀποθεωμένους ἄνδρας τῆς Εὐρώπης κι ἓνα σωρὸ ἄλλα τέτοια. Αὐτὴ, μὲ μιὰ ματιά, εἶναι ἡ εἰκόνα τῆς ἀνθρωπότητας σήμερα, ποῦ νὰ μὴν ἀβασκαθῆ! Ποῦ νὰ βρεῖ κανένας καταφύγιο; ... Δόξα στὸν Θεό, ποῦ ὑπάρχει ἀκόμα κάποιο καταφύγιο γιὰ μᾶς ποῦ δὲν εἴμαστε σὲ θέση νὰ νοιώσουμε «τὸ μεγαλεῖο τῆς ἐποχῆς μας». Δόξα στὸν Θεὸ ποῦ ὑπάρχουν ἀκόμα κάποιοι τόποι ποῦ δὲν τοὺς ἐξήρανε αὐτὴ ἡ φυλλοξήρα ποῦ λέγεται σύγχρονος πολιτισμὸς.

Φώτης Κόντογλου (+1965)

Λόγια Προφητικά τοῦ 2001

Τοῦ Μακαριστοῦ Ἀρχιεπισκόπου Ἑλλάδος Χριστοδούλου (+2008).



Ποιός, ἀλήθεια, ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς ἐδῶ ἀδυνατεῖ νὰ κατανοήσει στὰ χέρια τίνων θὰ περάσει ὁ ἀπόλυτος ἔλεγχος τῶν media; Μήπως στὰ χέρια δύο-τριῶν Ἀμερικανῶν

ἐπιχειρηματιῶν; Θὰ ἦταν ἀπίστευτα ρομαντικὴ μία τέτοια ὑπόθεση. Σε ποιὸν θὰ περάσει ὁ ἔλεγχος τῆς πολιτικῆς ζωῆς; Στὰ χέρια πέντε-δέκα χορηγῶν τῶν κομμάτων; Αγγίζει τὰ ὄρια τοῦ γελοίου ἡ ἐρώτηση. Ποιοὶ λοιπὸν θὰ εἶναι αὐτοὶ ποῦ θὰ ἐλέγχουν τὴ ζωὴ; Κάποιοι πλούσιοι τραπεζίτες μήπως; Ἄς μὴν τολμήσουμε νὰ ἀπαντήσουμε. Ἄλλὰ ὁ εὐρωπαϊκὸς πολιτισμὸς εἶναι τὸ προῖόν μίας παράλληλης δράσης δύο στοιχείων: τῆς ἐλεύθερης οἰκονομίας καὶ τῆς κοινωνικῆς ἀλληλεγγύης. Πληρώσαμε πάρα πολὺ ἀκριβὰ ὅλοι οἱ Εὐρωπαῖοι κάθε προσπάθεια κατάρτησης αὐτῆς τῆς παραλληλίας.

Ἐπιπλέον, πρέπει καὶ πάλι νὰ δοῦμε τὴν ἄλλη ὄψη τοῦ νομίσματος: Ἡ παγκοσμιοποίηση θὰ ἀνεβάσει στὸ ἐπίπεδο τοῦ Εὐρωπαίου τὸν δυστυχεῖ Ταϊλανδὸ ἐργάτη, ποῦ τώρα δουλεῦει γιὰ ἓνα μικρὸ κομμάτι ξερὸ ψωμί, μήπως, θὰ εἶναι ἀποτελεσματικότερη ἂν κατεβάσει τὸν Εὐρωπαῖο σὲ ἐπίπεδο παρόμοιο μὲ τοῦ Ταϊλανδοῦ;

Ἐλπίζω ὅτι ὅλοι θὰ ἔχουμε σὲ κάποιες ὥρες μας ἀναρωτηθεῖ ποῦ πηγαίνει ἓνας πολιτισμὸς ὅταν ἀναγορεύει τὴν οἰκονομικὴ ἀνάπτυξη σὲ αὐτοσκοπὸ, δίνοντας τῆς τὸ δικαίωμα νὰ γίνεταί βωμὸς τοῦ Μολώχ. Ὅλοι θὰ ἔχουμε ἀναρωτηθεῖ πὼς μπορεῖ νὰ ὀνομάζεται ἀναπτυξιακὴ μία οἰκονομία ποῦ δὲν ὑπολογίζει στὸ κόστος τῆς τὴν καταστροφή τοῦ πλανήτη καὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, δηλαδή τοῦ περιβάλλοντος καὶ τοῦ πολιτισμοῦ.



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, ἄς συνδράμουν, ἂν θέλουν, στὴν ταπεινὴ προσπάθειά μας ἀποστέλλοντας κάτι περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἐτήσια συνδρομὴ τῶν 24 δολλαρίων πρὸς ἐνίσχυση τῆς ἀδελφότητος «Ὅσιος Ποιμῆν».

Ὁ Πόλεμος, τὸν Ὅποῖον δὲν Βλέπομεν

Αἰματηραὶ Διώξεις Χριστιανῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἰσλάμ, Ὅχι διὰ τὴν Ἐκκαθάρισιν τῶν Ἀπίστων, Ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν Ἐπιβολὴν τοῦ Ἰσλάμ!

Τοῦ παλαιμάχου δημοσιογράφου κ. Τηλεμάχου Μαράτου, ἐφημερίδα «ΕΣΤΙΑ», 18^η Ὀκτωβρίου, 2013.

Εἰς τὸ ἄρθρον αὐτὸν ὁ δημοσιογράφος πραγματεύεται τὰς συγχρόνους διώξεις τῶν Χριστιανῶν καὶ ἰδιαιτέρως ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἰσλάμ, ὑπογραμμίζων ὅτι αἱ διώξεις αὐταὶ δὲν γίνονται διὰ τὴν «ἐκκαθάρισιν» ὑπὸ τῶν ἀπίστων, ἀλλὰ διὰ τὴν ἐπιβολὴν τοῦ Ἰσλάμ ὡς θρησκείας.

† † †

Ἡ λέξις «Ἰσλαμοφοβία» εἶναι μία ξένη λέξις, ἡμῖα ἀπὸ πολλὰς ποὺ κατασκευάσαν οἱ ἀγγλοσάξονες καὶ οἱ Γάλλοι, μὲ Ἑλληνικὰ στοιχεῖα, τὰ ὁποῖα ὅμως δὲν κατενόησαν πλήρως ἢ εἶχαν ἐλαφρῶς διαφορετικὸν νόημα στὰ ἀρχαῖα, ποὺ ἔμαθαν στὸ σχολεῖο. Ἐμεῖς, ἰδιαίτερα οἱ «πολιτικῶς ὀρθοί», φιλο-αριστεροί, παίρνουμε πίσω τὴν Ἑλληνόμορφη ξένη λέξις καὶ τὴν ἐρμηνεύουμε ὡσὰν νὰ ἦταν Ἑλληνική. Οἱ λέξεις αὐτὲς ὅμως (ἰδίως ἐκεῖνες ποὺ τελειώνουν σὲ «φοβία») ἔχουν μία πολιτικὴ φόρτιση καὶ—συγχρόνως—ἓνα ἠθικὸ πρόσταγμα.

Ἑλληνικὰ «ἰσλαμοφοβία» σημαίνει, βεβαίως, τὸν φόβο τοῦ Ἰσλάμ ἐνῶ ἀγγλικά σημαίνει τὴν ἀπέχθεια, ἀκόμη καὶ τὸ μῖσος, λόγω προκαταλήψεως, καὶ τὸν φόβο ὑπαρκτοῦ ἢ φαντασιακοῦ κίνδυνου ἀπὸ τὸ Ἰσλάμ. Ἡ λέξις δημιουργήθηκε καὶ χρησιμοποιοῦται πάντοτε ὑποτιμητικὰ γιὰ ἐκείνους ποὺ ἔχουν ἐπιφυλάξεις γιὰ τοὺς ἀκρωτηριασμούς, λιθοβολισμούς (γυναικῶν), τὴν «μπούρκα» καὶ τὶς ἄλλες πολιτιστικὰς καὶ θρησκευτικὰς ἰδιαιτερότητες τοῦ Ἰσλάμ. Ἡ ἐπικρατοῦσα «ἀλήθεια» τῆς πολιτικῆς (ἀριστερῆς) ὀρθότητος, μὲ λίγα λόγια, εἶναι ὅτι ἡ «διαφορετικότητα» τῶν μουσουλμάνων πρέπει νὰ ἀντιμετωπίζεται μὲ κατανόηση, γιὰτὶ πάντοτε φταῖμε ἐμεῖς, οἱ δυτικοί, οἱ λευκοί, οἱ Χριστιανοί. Ἀκόμη καὶ ὅταν κορίτσια 9 καὶ 10 ἐτῶν ἀναγκάζονται νὰ παντρευτοῦν μεσήλικες συγγενεῖς τους.

Οἱ σταυροφορίες δὲν θεωροῦνται ἐκστρατεῖες ἀπελευθερώσεως τῶν Ἁγίων Τόπων, ποὺ κατεκτήθησαν ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἄραβες, ἀλλὰ πειρατικὰς εἰσβολὰς ὑποδουλώσεως καὶ λεηλασίας. Ἀκολουθοῦν οἱ ἐγκληματικὰς διώξεις αἰρετικῶν, ἢ Ἱερὰ Ἐξέτασις,

ὁ Γαλιλαῖος κ.ο.κ. Ὑπὸ αὐτὸ τὸ πνεῦμα οἱ σημερινὲς διώξεις τῶν Χριστιανῶν δὲν προσελκύουν τὰ φῶτα τῆς δημοσιότητος. Ὁ φόνος ἐνὸς μαύρου ἀπὸ ἀστυνομικοὺς ἔχει μεγαλύτερη κάλυψη ἀπὸ τὴν σφαγὴ ἑκατὸ χιλιάδων Χριστιανῶν. Ὅλων τῶν χρωμάτων.

Ὑπερβάλλω; Καὶ ὅμως ὄχι. Τὴν τελευταία δεκαετία [σύμφωνα μὲ μελέτες ἐπιστημονικῶν (μὴ θρησκευτικῶν) κέντρων παρακολουθήσεως Ἀνθρωπίνων Δικαιωμάτων στὴν Φρανκφούρτη καὶ στὴ Μασσαχουσέττη] 100.000—ἑκατὸ χιλιάδες—κατὰ μέσο ὄρο, Χριστιανοὶ σκοτώνονται κάθε χρόνο. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὅτι 11 Χριστιανοὶ σκοτώνονται σὲ κάποιο μέρος τοῦ κόσμου κάθε ὥρα, κάθε μέρα, 365 μέρες τὸν χρόνο. (Στοιχεῖα ἀπὸ τὸν «Spectator» τεύχος 5/10/13).

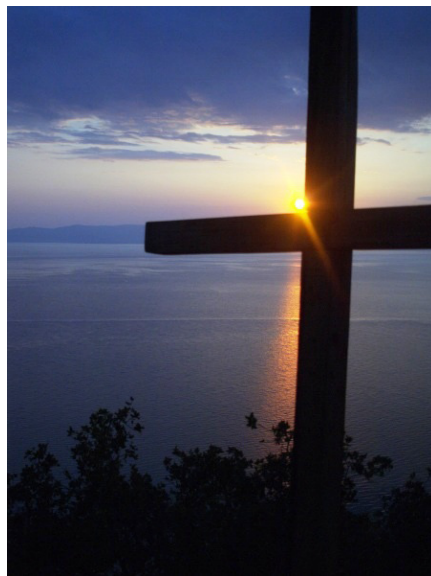
Ὅλοι γνωρίζουμε τοὺς διωγμοὺς τῶν Χριστιανῶν μαρτύρων τοὺς πρώτους αἰῶνες τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ.

Σχεδὸν κάθε ἡμέρα τοῦ ἡμερολογίου εἶναι ἀφιερωμένη σὲ μάρτυρες καὶ ἁγίους. Ὅπως εἶναι φυσικὸ οἱ περιγραφὲς τῶν μαρτυριῶν εἶναι ἐντυπωσιακὲς στὸν «Συναξαριστὴ», καὶ διάφορες παραδόσεις, ποὺ πῆραν τὴν μορφή θρύλου. Ὅ,τι καὶ νὰ ἔγραψαν ὅμως, ὅσο ὑπερβολικὸ καὶ νὰ φαίνεται, ὡχρῖα μπροστὰ σὲ αὐτὰ ποὺ συμβαίνουν σήμερα σὲ μία κλίμακα πρωτοφανῆ στὴν ἱστορία.

Στὸ Ἰράκ τὸ 1991 (πρὸ τοῦ πολέμου) ὑπῆρχαν 1,5 ἑκατομμύρια Χριστιανοί. Σήμερα εἶναι ἀμφίβολο ἂν ὑπάρχουν 500.000. (Σημειωτέον ὅτι περίπου 500.000 ἄσχετοι φαίνεται νὰ σκοτώθηκαν, στὸ ἴδιο

διάστημα ἀπὸ τοὺς φανατικοὺς Σουννίτες, ποὺ δὲν ἔχουν συμβιβασθεῖ μὲ τὴν ἰδέα ὅτι ἔχασαν τὴν ἐξουσία, ποὺ ἀπελάμβαναν ἐπὶ Σαντάμ Χουσεΐν, ἂν καὶ μειοψηφοῦσαν). Ἀπὸ τὶς 65 ἐκκλησίες, οἱ 40 ἔχουν ὑποστῆ βομβαρδισμὸ ἢ κατακρεοῦργηση ἱερέων καὶ πιστῶν κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τῆς Θεῆς Λειτουργίας. Στὴν Νιγηρία τὸ Ἰσλαμικὸ κίνημα Μπόκο Χαράμ εἶναι ὑπεύθυνο γιὰ πάνω ἀπὸ 3.000 θανάτους Χριστιανῶν, ἐνῶ στὸ Πακιστάν, στὸ Σουδάν, στὴν Κένυα, στὶς Φιλιππίνες καὶ στὴν Ἰνδονησία οἱ βομβαρδισμοὶ καὶ οἱ πολυβολισμοὶ ἐκκλησιῶν εἶναι συνεχεῖς.

Τὸ κείμενο αὐτὸ προέβαλε τὸν κίνδυνο τοῦ Ἰσλάμ, διότι αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ σημερινὸς κίνδυνος πλησιέστερα στὴν Εὐρώπη, κυρίως. Οἱ ἀριθμοὶ ὅμως τῶν διώξεων Χριστιανῶν σὲ ἄλλες χώρες, γιὰ πολιτικοὺς ἢ θρησκευτικοὺς λόγους, εἶναι τρομακτικοί. Στὴν Βόρεια Κορέα πάνω ἀπὸ 100.000 Χριστιανοὶ ζοῦν σὲ



στρατόπεδα καταναγκαστικής εργασίας, ενώ 300.000 Χριστιανοί έχουν εξαφανισθεί. Στο Ίνδικό κράτος Ὁρίσσα στις διώξεις εξαγριωμένου ὄχλου Ἰνδουιστῶν τὸ 2008, πάνω ἀπὸ 5.000 σπίτια Χριστιανῶν καὶ 350 ἐκκλησίες κατεστράφησαν, ἐνῶ χιλιάδες Χριστιανοὶ κατέφυγαν σὲ καταυλισμοὺς στὴν ἐξορία. Στὴν Βιρμανία περιοχὲς, ποὺ κατοικοῦν Χριστιανοὶ ἔχουν κηρυχθεῖ «μαῦρες ζῶνες», ὅπου τὰ στρατιωτικὰ ἐλικόπτερα πολυβολοῦν κατὰ βούληση.

Ἐπανερχομαι στὴν «Ἰσλαμοφοβία». Σὲ πολλὰ κράτη οἱ Χριστιανοὶ διώκονται καὶ σφαγιάζονται λόγω τῆς θρησκευτικῆς, καὶ πολιτικῆς διαφορᾶς ἀπὸ τὴν ἐπικρατοῦσα θρησκεία ἢ τὸ καθεστῶς ἐκεῖ. Ἔτσι ἦταν πάντα. Ἀπὸ τὴν Ρώμη μέχρι τὴν Σοβιετικὴ Ἑνωσις. Ἡ διαφορὰ μὲ τὸ Ἰσλάμ εἶναι ὅτι αὐτὸ ποὺ ὁραματίζονται δὲν εἶναι ἡ «ἐκκαθάριση» τῆς χώρας τοὺς ἀπὸ τοὺς «ἀπίστους». Εἶναι ἡ ἐπιβολὴ τῆς θρησκείας τοὺς στὸν ὑπόλοιπο κόσμον καὶ μετὰ ἡ ἐκκαθάριση. Αὐτὸ φοβάμαι.



Ψευδόχριστοι καὶ Ψευδομεσσίαὶ ἀπὸ τὸ 1000 μ.Χ. μέχρι Σήμερα

Τοῦ πρωτ. π. Βασιλείου Α. Γεωργοπούλου, Λέκτορος Θεολογικῆς Σχολῆς Α.Π.Θ.

Ὁ εὐαγγελικὸς λόγος εἶναι σαφής, καὶ ἀκριβής, καὶ διαχρονικὰ ἐπίκαιρος. Διαβάζουμε στὸ ἱερὸ εὐαγγέλιο τοῦ Λουκᾶ: «Βλέπετε μὴ πλανηθῆτε πολλοὶ γὰρ ἐλεύσονται ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματί μου λέγοντες ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμὶ καὶ ὁ καιρὸς ἤγγικε μὴ οὖν πορευθῆτε ὀπίσω αὐτῶν». (Λουκ. 21:8, πρβλ. Ματθ. 24:5). Ἐδῶ μᾶς πληροφορεῖ ὁ Κύριος γιὰ ἓνα φαινόμενο πολὺ ἐπικίνδυνον, τὸ ὁποῖο ἐμφανίζεται ἐνδημικὰ μέσα στὴν ἱστορία, καὶ αὐτὸ δὲν εἶναι ἄλλο ἀπὸ τὴν ἐμφάνιση διαφόρων ψευδόχριστων καὶ ψευδομεσσιῶν.

Στὸ παρὸν ἄρθρο μας θὰ κάνουμε μία ἱστορικὴ ἀναδρομὴ καὶ καταγραφὴ τῶν ὀνομάτων τέτοιων ψευδόχριστων καὶ ψευδομεσσιῶν ἀπὸ τὸ 1000 μ.Χ. μέχρι τὴς ἡμέρες μας, τὸ θεωροῦμε μία χρήσιμη ὑπόμνηση σὲ μία περίοδο τῆς παγκόσμιας ἱστορίας, ὅπως εἶναι ἡ δική μας, ποὺ ἡ σύγχυση καὶ οἱ πνευματικοὶ κίνδυνοὶ εἶναι τόσοι πολλοί. Τέτοιον ψευδομεσσιᾶς ὑπῆρξαν:

1. **Fra Dolcino Torielli.** Ἐδρασε στὴν Ἰταλία τὸν 13^{ον} αἰώνα. Κήρυττε ὅτι ἦταν ἓνα ἐκλεκτὸ ὄργανο τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ὀνόμαζε τὸν ἑαυτὸ του «Ἄγγελος τῶν Θυατείρων» (Ἀποκ. 2:18) μὲ ἰκανὸ ἀριθμὸ

ψευδοπροφητειῶν.

2. **Melchior Hofmann** (1495-1543). Ὑπῆρξε ἀκραῖος Ἀναβαπτιστὴς στὰ χρόνια τῆς Μεταρρύθμισης, ποὺ παρουσίαζε τὸ πρόσωπό του ὡς τὸν ἐπανερχόμενο προφήτη Ἡλία.

3. **Augustin Bader.** Τὸ 1529 ὑποστήριξε ὅτι εἶναι ὁ Ἡλίας καὶ τὸ μικρὸ του παιδί ὅτι εἶναι ὁ Μεσσίας καὶ βασιλιὰς τοῦ ἐπίγειου χιλιετοῦς βασιλείου.

4. **Jan Bockelson.** Ἀκραῖος Ἀναβαπτιστὴς στὰ χρόνια τῆς Μεταρρύθμισης, ποὺ τὸ 1534 ἰσχυρίστηκε ὅτι ἦταν προφήτης καὶ βασιλιὰς τῆς Σιών.

5. **Hans Hut** (1490-1527). Ὑποστήριξε ὅτι ἦταν ὁ δεῦτερος Νῶε καὶ ὁ προφήτης τῶν ἐσχάτων χρόνων.

6. **David Joris** (1501-1556). Αὐτοχαρακτηριζόταν, ἐπίσης, ὡς προφήτης τῶν ἐσχάτων χρόνων.

7. **Klauss Ludwig.** Ἀναβαπτιστὴς ποὺ κήρυττε ὅτι ἦταν ὁ ἐρχόμενος Χριστὸς.

8. **David Bahr.** Πέθανε τὸ 1723 καὶ ὑποστήριξε ὅτι ἦταν ὁ Χριστὸς τοῦ Δαβίδ.

9. **Antoinette Bourignon de la Porte** (1616-1680). Διακήρυττε ὅτι ἦταν ἡ γυναίκα ἡ ντυμένη μὲ τὸν ἥλιο, γιὰ τὴν ὁποία γίνεται λόγος στὸ 12^{ον} κεφ. τῆς Ἀποκαλύψεως.

10. **Anna van Buchel.** 18^{ος} αἰώνας. Ὑποστήριξε ὅτι ἦταν ἡ μητέρα τοῦ νέου Μεσσία καὶ ἐνσάρκωση τῆς ἀγαθότητος τῆς θεότητος.

11. **Eva von Buttlar** (1670-1717). Μία ἀκόμη μητέρα τοῦ νέου Μεσσία.

12. **Father Divine.** Ἰδρυτὴς τῆς σέκτας Peace Mission. Παρουσιαζόταν ὡς δεῦτερη ἐνσάρκωση τοῦ Θεοῦ. Πέθανε στὴς 10-9-1965.



Νέος μοναχὸς ἀκόμη ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ποιμὴν, ζήτησε νὰ μάθῃ ἀπὸ τὸν Μέγα Ἀντώνιο τί ἔπρεπε νὰ κάνῃ γιὰ νὰ βρῇ τὴ σωτηρία του:

- Νὰ παραδέχεσαι τὰ σφάλματά σου, μὲ συντριμμένη καρδιά, τοῦ ἀποκριθῆκε ὁ Πατὴρ τῶν Πατέρων, καὶ νὰ ταπεινώνεσαι μπροστὰ στὸν Θεό. Νὰ ὑπομένῃς ἐπίσης καρτερικὰ τοὺς πειρασμούς, ποὺ σοῦ συμβαίνουν, καὶ νὰ εἶσαι βέβαιος πὼς θὰ σωθῆς.

Μάθε νὰ ἐξευτελίῃς τὸν ἑαυτό σου καὶ σ' ὅποιο τόπο κι ἂν κατοικήσης, θὰ βρῆς ἀνάπαυση, λέγει ὁ Ὅσιος Ποιμὴν.

Ὅποιος πειρασμὸς κι ἂν βρῇ τὸν ταπεινόφρονα Χριστιανό, λέγει ὁ Ἀββᾶς Ποιμὴν, νικᾷ γιατί σωμαίνει.

Ἀπὸ τὸ «Γεροντικὸν»

Ἡ Εἰκόνα τῆς Γεννήσεως τοῦ Κυρίου στήν Ὁρθόδοξη Τέχνη

Νικολάου Ζία, Καθηγητοῦ Ἱστορίας τῆς Τέχνης.

Ἡ Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὸ μέγα αὐτὸ γεγονός τῆς ἱστορίας τοῦ κόσμου, γιορτάζεται ἀπὸ τὴν Ἁγία Ὁρθόδοξο Ἐκκλησία μὲ δοξολογία καὶ κατάνυξη, ποὺ θαυμαστά ἐκφράζονται στὴν ἠδυμελὴ ὑμνογραφία καὶ τὴν εἰρηνόχυτο εἰκονογραφία.

Ἔτσι μέσα στὸ χῶρο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας ὁ ἀπλὸς Ὁρθόδοξος Χριστιανὸς ζεῖ τὸ μυστήριό τῆς σαρκώσεως μὲ τὶς αἰσθήσεις του, ποὺ μεταμορφώνονται, γιὰ νὰ γίνουν μέσα κοινωνίας μὲ τὸ ἄρρητο. Προσκυνώντας τὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Γεννήσεως «βλέπει» μὲ τὰ μάτια του τὴ θεολογία τῆς Σαρκώσεως καὶ αἰσθάνεται τὴν εὐφροσύνη τῆς ἐνανθρωπήσεως. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ ἄγευστος πνευματικῆς ζωῆς μελετητῆς, μπορεῖ κι' ἀπὸ αὐτὴν καὶ μόνο τὴν εἰκόνα ν' ἀντιληφθεῖ τὸ πνευματικὸ μεγαλεῖο, τὸ μυστικὸ βάθος καὶ τὸ αἰσθητικὸ κάλλος τῆς Ὁρθόδοξου τέχνης, ποὺ συνήθως τὴ λέμε Βυζαντινὴ.

Τὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Γεννήσεως στὴν ὀλοκληρωμένη της μορφή τὴ βρίσκουμε κυρίως στοὺς ἔπειτα ἀπὸ τὴν εἰκονομαχία χρόνους. Στὴν Ἑλλάδα μας ἔχουν σωθεῖ δυὸ ἐκκλησιῆς τοῦ 11^{ου} αἰ., καθολικὰ ἄλλοτε τῶν Μοναστηριῶν τοῦ Ὁσίου Λουκά καὶ τοῦ Δαφνίου, ποὺ στὰ ψηφιδωτὰ τους βλέπουμε τὴν παράσταση τῆς Γεννήσεως στὴν αὐθεντικώτερή της μορφή. Ἄς συνοψίσουμε τὰ βασικὰ στοιχεῖα ποὺ συνθέτουν τὴν εἰκόνα.

Τὸ κεντρικὸ τμῆμα καταλαμβάνει βουνὸ «βραχώδες, ἀλλ' εὐχαρὶ καὶ φωτεινόχρωμο», ποὺ στὴν κοιλιὰ του ἀνοίγεται σκοτεινόχρωμο σπήλαιο καὶ μέσα φάτνη μὲ τὸν νήπιο Χριστὸ ἐσπαργανωμένο, ἐνῶ ἡ Παναγία Μητέρα του εἶναι στὸ πλάι ξαπλωμένη πάνω σ' ἓνα στρώμα. Ἄλλοτε εἰκονίζεται καθισμένη ἢ γονατιστή. Πίσω ἀπὸ τὴ φάτνη προβάλλουν τὰ κεφάλια τους δυὸ ἀγαθὰ ζῶα, βόδι καὶ ὄναριο ξεσταίνοντας τὸ θεῖο Βρέφος μὲ τὴν ἀναπνοή τους. Ἐξω ἀπὸ τὸ σπήλαιο, στὸ κάτω ἄκρο τῆς εἰκόνας, κάθετα συλλογισμένος ὁ Ἰωσήφ ἔχοντας ἴσως ἀκόμη τὸ σαράκι τῆς ἀμφιβολίας μέσα του. Στὴν ἄλλη ἄκρη τῆς εἰκόνας παριστάνεται τὸ πρῶτο λουτρό, ποὺ ἔκανε ἡ μαία Σαλώμη στὸ Νεογέννητο.

Δεξιὰ κι' ἀριστερὰ ἀπὸ τὸ βουνὸ ἄγγελοι προσκυνοῦν καὶ δοξολογοῦν τὸ Χριστὸ ἢ φέρουν στοὺς ποιμένες, ποὺ ξενυχτοῦν, τὸ χαροποῖδ ἄγγελμα.

Ἐνα τσοπανόπουλο κάθετα διπλοποδισμένο παίζοντας φλογέρα. Ζωγραφίζονται ἀκόμη καὶ ἄλλοι τσοπάνοι μὲ τὰ κοπάδια τους. Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη ἄκρη ἔρχονται ντυμένοι μὲ τὶς ἐξωτικές τους φορεσιές οἱ τρεῖς Μάγοι κομίζοντας τὰ βασιλικὰ τοὺς δῶρα. Ὁ λαμπρὸς ἀστέρας, ποὺ τοὺς ὀδηγοῦσε, ἔχει σταθεῖ πάνω ἀπὸ τὸ σπήλαιο, «ὡσὰν δροσοσταλίδα κρεμάμενη ἀνωθεν τῆς κεφαλῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ», ὅπως γράφει ὁ μακαριστὸς Φώτης Κόντογλου. Ὁ ἴδιος ἅγιος γράφος - συγγραφέας ὀλοκληρώνει τὴν περιγραφή τῆς παραστάσεως μὲ τὴ λιτὴ φύση, ποὺ τὴ στολίζει: «Ἄγρια πρινάρια καὶ εὐώδη χόρτα, μυρσίνες, θυμάρια καὶ ἄλλα στολίζουν ταπεινὰ τοὺς βράχους, ὅπως τὰ βλέπει κανένας εἰς τὰ εὐλογημένα βουνὰ τῆς πατρίδος μας».

Εἶπαμε στὴν ἀρχή, ὅτι ἡ εἰκόνα φανερώνει τὴ θεολογία, τὸν πνευματικὸ χαρακτήρα τῆς Γεννήσεως καὶ πρὶν νὰ δοῦμε τὸ καθένα στοιχεῖο τῆς συνθέσεως τί συμβολικὰ ἀποκαλύπτει, ἂς δοῦμε ὀλόκληρη τὴ σύνθεση μαζί καὶ τὴν τεχνοτροπία της. Ἡ σύνθεση στοιχείων ἀπὸ τὴν ἱστορικὴ πραγματικότητα (βουνό, σπήλαιο, φάτνη, κ.λ.π.) μὲ τὸ πνευματικὸ στοιχεῖο τοῦ Οὐρανοῦ, ποὺ συμβολίζει τὸ χρυσὸ βάθος τῆς εἰκόνας, καθὼς καὶ ὁ ἀντιρεαλιστικὸς δισδιάστατος χαρακτήρας τῆς ζωγραφικῆς, μᾶς δίνουν ὀπτικὰ τὴ σύνθεση τοῦ γήινου καὶ τοῦ Θείου, τὴν ἔνωση τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου καὶ τοῦ Θείου· καὶ αὐτὸ γιὰτί οὔτε ἀνθρωποποιεῖ τὴν παράσταση σὰν μία παχυλὴ εἰδωλοποίησι στὸν καθρέφτη,

οὔτε ἀφαιρεῖ τὴν ἱστορικότητα τῶν γήινων στοιχείων καὶ συστατικῶν, ἀλλὰ τὰ μεταμορφώνει. Ἡ σύνθεση ἀκολουθεῖ περισσότερο—στὶς λεπτομέρειες ἰδίως—τὴν ὑμνογραφικὴ παράδοση, ποὺ ἔχει σχέση μὲ τὰ λεγόμενα Ἀπόκρυφα Εὐαγγέλια. Ἔτσι ζωγραφίζεται σπήλαιο σκοτεινόχρωμο, σὰν τὴ σκοτεινιά τοῦ προχριστιανικοῦ κόσμου, ὅπου λάμπει κατάλευκο τὸ ἐσπαργανωμένο Βρέφος.

Στὴ Δυτικὴ ζωγραφικὴ ὁ μικρὸς Χριστὸς εἰκονίζεται γυμνός, ἐνῶ τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο σαφῶς μας λέει «καὶ σπαργάνωσεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἀνέκλινεν αὐτὸν ἐν τῇ φάτνῃ» (Λουκ. 2:6).

Τὰ δυὸ ζωντανὰ μᾶς ὑπενθυμίζουν κάθε φορὰ ποὺ προσκυνοῦμε τὴν εἰκόνα ὅτι «Ἐγὼ βοὺς τὸν κτησάμενον καὶ ὄνος τὴν φάτνην τοῦ Κυρίου αὐτοῦ, Ἰσραὴλ δὲ μὲ οὐκ ἔγνων καὶ ὁ λαὸς μου οὐκ συνήκεν» (Ἦσ. 1:3).



Τὴν κεντρικὴ θέση στὴ σύνθεση κατέχει μαζὶ μὲ τὸ Χριστὸ ἡ Παναγία καὶ ἔχει κανεὶς τὴν ἐντύπωση, ὅτι ἀποτελοῦν τὸν κεντρικὸ κύκλο δείχνοντας τὴ σημασία τῆς Παναγίας στὸ σχέδιο τῆς σωτηρίας τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τῆς Παναγίας τονίζεται ἡ σημασία τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους καὶ ἡ συμβολὴ τοῦ στὴ θεία συγκατάβαση.

Ὁ Ἰωσήφ μένει ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ κύκλωμα αὐτό. Ἔτσι ἀμέσως μὲ τὴν πρώτη ματιὰ συνειδητοποιεῖ ὁ πιστὸς ὅτι ἄνανδρος ἢ σύλληψις, καὶ ὁ Ἰωσήφ, καθὼς μάλιστα κάθεται συλλογισμένος, ἐπιβεβαιώνει μὲ τὴν ἄγνοιά του, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ἀμφιβολία του τὸ μέγα μυστήριον. Ἐνα τροπάριο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας θαρρεῖς ὅτι ὑπομνηματίζει αὐτὴν τὴν ἀμφιβολία: «*Τάδε λέγει Ἰωσήφ πρὸς τὴν Παρθένον Μαρία, τί τὸ δράμα τοῦτο, δ' ἐν σοὶ τεθέσται; Ἀπορῶ καὶ ἐξίσταμαι καὶ τὸν νοῦν καταπλήττομαι.... οὐκ ἔτι φέρω λοιπόν, τὸ ὄνειδος ἀνθρώπων...*».

Ἡ σκεπτικὴ στάση τοῦ Ἰωσήφ δίνει κουράγιο σ' ὅσους ταλαιπωροῦνται ἀπὸ λογισμοὺς ἀμφιβολίας, ὅσον ἀφορᾷ τὴ μυστηριακὴ Γέννηση. Ὅσοι δὲν μποροῦν νὰ δεχτοῦν μὲ ἀπλὴ καρδιά, τὸ μήνυμα τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, ὅπως οἱ καλόκαρδοι ποιμένες, ἐλπίζουν στὸ ἔλεος τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ τὴν ὑπέρβαση τῶν ἀμφιβολιῶν καὶ τῶν διαφορῶν δεινῶν λογισμῶν. Γιατί σὲ ἄλλο τροπάριο ὁ Ἰωσήφ θὰ δώσει τὴν ἀπάντησι: «*Εγώ, φησί, τοὺς προφήτας ἐρευνήσας καὶ χρηματισθεὶς ὑπὸ ἀγγέλου πέπεισμαι ὅτι Θεὸν γεννήσει ἡ Μαρία ἀνεργηνεύτως*».

Οἱ Μάγοι - σοφοὶ καὶ καλοπροαίρετοι ἀναζητητὲς τῆς ἀλήθειας τοῦ καιροῦ τους γίνονται ἐδῶ ἐκπρόσωποι ὄλων ὄσων ψάχνουν καὶ πορεύονται δρόμους μακρυνούς, γιὰ νὰ βροῦν τὴν ἔνσαρκο ἀλήθεια, ποῦ εἶναι ὁ τεχθεὶς Χριστός.

Μένει ἀκόμα ἡ τρυφερὴ λεπτομέρεια τοῦ πρώτου λουτροῦ τοῦ Βρέφους. Ἴσως παραξενεύει καμιά φορὰ τοὺς πιστοὺς ἢ σκηνὴ αὐτὴ, ἀλλὰ ἡ Παράδοξη τὴ δέχεται ἤδη ἀπὸ τὸν 6^{ον} αἰ. μέχρι σήμερα μὲ σποραδικὲς ἐξαιρέσεις. Στὸ τρυφερὸ αὐτὸ γεγονός, ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ μία οἰκειότητα, ποῦ προσδίδουν στὴν εἰκόνα ὀρισμένοι θεολόγοι, βλέπουν μίαν ἀκόμη ἐπίρρωση στὴν πίστη τῆς σαρκώσεως καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσεως τοῦ Λόγου. Κι' ἀκόμη μὲ τὸ βύθισμα στὸ λουτρὸ πιστεύουν ὅτι προεικονίζεται ἡ Βάπτισις τοῦ Κυρίου.

Ἄν κάνουμε μία σύγκριση μὲ τὴν εἰκονογραφία στὴ Δύση, ἰδίως μετὰ ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀναγέννηση, θὰ βροῦμε ἀρκετὲς διαφορὲς, ποῦ μερικὲς σημαίνουν τὴ διαφορὰ τοῦ πνεύματος ἀνάμεσα στὶς δυὸ παραδόσεις. Τὸ σπῆλαιο γίνεται ἕνας στάβλος ἰδωμένος μὲ ρομαντικὴ ματιὰ, ποῦ ὄλο καὶ τὸν ἐξωραίζει. Ἡ Παναγία εἶναι μία ὁμορφὴ χωριατοπούλα καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς ἕνα χαριτωμένο παχουλὸ μωρὸ, ποῦ εἰκονίζεται μάλιστα γυμνὸ. Ὁ

Ἰωσήφ παίρνει θέση δίπλα στὸ Βρέφος, ἰσάξια μὲ τὴν Παναγία. Ἡ προσκύνησι τῶν Μάγων μετατρέπεται σὲ μία πολυπρόσωπη παρέλασι τῆς ἀριστοκρατίας τοῦ καιροῦ τοῦ ζωγράφου. Ὁ συναισθηματισμὸς μὲ τὶς ρομαντικὲς προεκτάσεις του καὶ κάποτε τὶς κλασικιστικὲς ἀναμνήσεις του παραμερίζει τὸ Μυστήριον, μεταλλάσσοντας τὴ συμβολικὴ ἀπεικόνισι τοῦ ἀρρήτου αὐτοῦ μυστηρίου σὲ ὠραία καταγραφὴ ἑνὸς μυθικο-ιστορικοῦ γεγονότος μέσα στὰ πλαίσια τῆς Οὐμανιστικῆς ἀμορφίας καὶ τῆς καλομελετημένης ἀρμονίας.

Ἐπιστρέφοντας στὴν Ὁρθόδοξη Εἰκόνα τῆς Γεννήσεως βλέπουμε πράγματα, ποῦ ξεπερνοῦν τὴ λογικὴ καὶ τὴν καλοστημένη τάξι. Βλέπουμε πράγματα γιὰ τὴν κρίσι μᾶς παράδοξα. Ὁ Χριστὸς π.χ. νὰ εἰκονίζεται στὴ φάτνη καὶ συγχρόνως καὶ στὸ λουτρό. Οἱ Μάγοι νὰ παριστάνονται δυὸ φορές.

Τὸ χρόνο ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος ζωγράφος τὸν χρησιμοποιεῖ ἐλεύθερα, γιατί ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ χρόνο. Γιατί κι ἂν σαρκώθηκε καὶ γεννήθηκε σὲ μία ἱστορικὴ στιγμὴ, δὲν παύει νὰ εἶναι χτὲς καὶ σήμερα καὶ αὔριο ὁ Ἰδιος. Αὐτὴ τὴν ὑπέρβαση τοῦ χρόνου, τὸ λειτουργικὸ χρόνο, ὅπου τὰ πάντα εἶναι παρόν, μᾶς παρουσιάζει μὲ τὰ μέσα τῆς ἢ ζωγραφικῆς.

Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη εἰκόνα τῆς Γεννήσεως μορφοποιεῖ τὴ θεολογία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, βρίσκοντας τὸ μέτρο ἀνάμεσα στὸ Θεϊκὸ καὶ τὸ ἀνθρώπινο, δοξολογεῖ μὲ χρώματα καὶ σχήματα, μὲ τρυφερότητα, ἀλλὰ χωρὶς γλυκερότητα, τὴν ἐνανθρώπησι καὶ προσφέρει στὸν πιστὸ τὴν πύλη γιὰ τὴν εἴσοδο στὸ Μυστήριον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν αἰσθητικὴ χαρὰ καὶ εὐφροσύνη τῆς ἀληθινῆς τέχνης.



Αγωνίσου μὲ ὄλη τὴν δύναμι τῆς ψυχῆς σου νὰ κρατᾷς καθαρὸ τὸν νοῦ σου τὴν ὥρα τῆς προσευχῆς καὶ νὰ συγκεντρῶνεις ὄλο σου τὸν λογισμὸ στὴν κατανόησι τοῦ λόγου καὶ τῆς εὐχῆς ποῦ κάνεις.

Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Σιναΐτης

Ὅταν καλλιεργοῦμε τὴν προσευχή, χρειάζομαστε ὁπωσδήποτε τὸν σωματικὸ πόνον ποῦ προξενεῖ ἢ νηστεία, ἢ ἀγρυπνία καὶ τὰ παρόμοια.

Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς

Γιὰ νὰ σταματήσεις τὴ συνεχῆ ἀνακατωσούρα τῶν λογισμῶν σου, πρέπει νὰ δέσεις τὸ νοῦ σου μὲ μία σκέψη, ἢ καλύτερα μὲ τὴ σκέψη τοῦ Ἐνός.

Ἐπίσκοπος Θεοφάνης ὁ Ἑγκλειστος

A PASTORAL EPISTLE ON “SAME-SEX UNIONS”

A timeless and prescient statement by the Western American Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia issued nearly a decade ago, in 2004.

What is most important for us, what is most precious, what is the greatest? It is holiness.

[St. John of San Francisco, (+1966)]

† † †

It is with profound sorrow and great concern for the future that we, the clergy of the Western American Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, with our Archpastor, the Most Reverend Kyrill, Archbishop of San Francisco and Western America, view the flagrant disregard for the laws of God and the state with the granting of what are purported to be licenses for marriage to persons of the same gender, and the performing of ceremonies which claim to establish a union that is marriage for these persons. We cannot condone or ignore the defiance of the law in San Francisco, or in municipalities in Oregon, Massachusetts, New York, and New Mexico; nor remain silent, and thereby give implicit consent to this practice.

It is the duty of the Church to direct Her children to obedience to the laws of the state when these do not conflict with the law of God. When the law of the state deviates from the way of righteousness appointed by God, the Church must call attention to the dangers such a departure presents. We are compelled to address our flocks concerning the nature of Holy Matrimony, otherwise known as marriage. *We ought to obey God rather than men.* (Acts 5:29).

Holy Matrimony consists of the union of two persons into one, through the union of their souls and bodies, through mutual submission and obedience, and, most importantly, through the action of God's grace. It is a holy mystery, a sacrament, an avenue of the Grace of God given to us not for the indulgence of our passions, but for the working out of our salvation. For this reason, it cannot be merely a social or civil contract entered into by two persons. Marriage is the God-ordained union of a man and a woman, for the purpose of creating a home, a “little Church,” in which the couple, and the children which are their progeny (being the product of the physical affection for one another), are able to work out their salvation. Marriage is a sacrament that is not created by the husband and wife out of their love for one another, or by their pledge of loyalty and mutual submission to one another; marriage is a mystery bestowed by God through the action of the Church upon those who are made one thereby.

The estate of marriage cannot be established by human action alone; it must be bestowed by God alone. Nor can this (or any) grace be bestowed by the state, for it is the gift of God given within the confines of, and subject to the discipline of, the Holy Mother Church. Although the state chooses to recognize this union as beneficial to the stability of society and so bestows certain benefits under law through licensure of this action, marriage is not now, nor has it ever been, an action of the state. The sacrament of Marriage is a divine action subject only to the grace and will of God, which is expressed in the unbroken and pure tradition of the Orthodox Church.

In addition to the salvation of the souls of the husband and wife and of their children, the sacrament of marriage also serves as a guardian and standard of moral behavior. Any lustful activity outside of the bounds of sacramental marriage is damaging to the soul and creates a barrier between man and God. The sacrament defines the limits of physical and emotional intimacy between two persons. These limits include (but are not limited to) the fact that marital relations are only possible between a man and a woman, that the conception, bearing and raising of children is the natural and desired product of marital relations, and that such relations are only permitted within the sanctified bounds of marriage. Any type of intimacy outside of these boundaries is considered to be sinful and constitutes a barrier to the spiritual life and communion with God.

Man is created for the purpose of communion with God. To that end, we are endowed with the image and likeness of God, and any barrier to the fulfillment of that image and likeness runs counter to our created purpose. When we do not act in accordance with God's will, engaging in behavior which is sinful—that is, behavior which prevents the realization of God's image and likeness in us—then we suffer the eternal consequences of those actions.

In the modern culture, much emphasis has been placed on the “culture of the flesh” and the eternal and spiritual nature of man has been minimized. Self-indulgence has become the primary value and is protected by our modern society under the pretext of individual “civil rights.” Personal gratification and fulfillment in this world has supplanted the spiritual striving for purity and holiness, which is the true source of joy. The love of God has been replaced by love of self. The desire of eternal bliss has been replaced by the desire for worldly bliss. The fear of eternal punishment has been replaced by the fear of worldly discomfort and condemnation. Man has supplanted God as the measure of all things.

It is said by some that there is no difference between the ban that once made interracial marriages illegal, and the prohibition now in law against allowing same-sex marriages. We do not accept that this is an issue of civil rights, or the

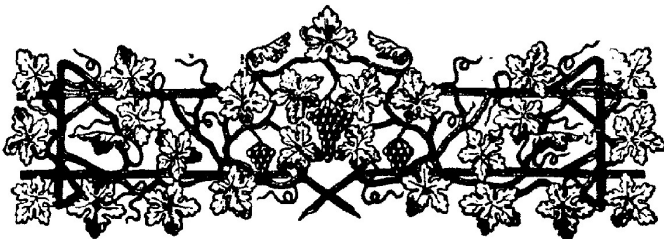
protection of a minority. The decision by a state to extend the provisions of law covering civil marriage to include same-sex unions is irrelevant in God's eyes. Within the Church, the mystery of Holy Matrimony is not a right; it is a calling, intended by God for a specific purpose, and not merely the fulfilling of earthly lusts, or the comfort of a life shared together. The argument that same-sex unions is "natural," while apparently a powerful argument, ignores the truth that our human nature is fallen and corrupted by death, and driven to the satisfaction of the desires of the flesh. The expression of sexual desires without the blessing of the grace of God is not directed to a life that is natural, but is an extension of a death-directed existence. Only by striving to live the life of Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, can we begin to understand and achieve a life which is truly "natural."

We, the clergy of the Western American Diocese of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia, having concluded our conference with the celebration of the Presanctified Divine Liturgy of the Precious Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, in which we pray for the *purification of souls and bodies, and for the restraint of the passions, reject and decry this erosion of eternal and spiritual values and truths*. We **affirm** that the sacrament of marriage is only obtained from God and within the confines of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. We **affirm** that this marriage is limited to the union of one man and one woman and that the conception, bearing and rearing of children is a normal and desired part of the marital union. We **affirm** that any other "marital" relationship, even though it may bear the sanction of the state or the society at large, cannot be considered marriage and that it is sinful and creates a barrier between God and man and frustrates the purpose of man to enter into union with God.

† † †

Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

[2 Thess 2:15].



These four principle virtues—justice, moral judgment, self-restraint and courage—govern the three aspects of the soul. When these aspects are properly guided, they keep the senses away from degrading things. Then the intellect, tranquil, its powers with God's help under control and tractable, fights the noetic battle readily and bravely.

St. Philotheos of Sinai

THE ASCETIC AND THE ROBBER

From a handwritten Gerontikon of the Sacred Monastery Filotheou of the Holy Mountain, original source: "Hagiorite Witness," a quarterly publication of the sacred monastery of Xiropotamou, Holy Mountain, Issue No.4, June-August 1989.

Our God is not a "Prosecutor" of His creatures; on the contrary, He seeks opportunities for their salvation. He is a God of love; a God Who deserves to be loved, even though His love is rarely reciprocated. God is also not "fair," at least in the human sense of justice. He "shortchanges" His creatures—and as a matter of fact in a scandalous manner—when He seeks to save them. That is our God! A God Who vindicates a robber out of the excess of His love and Who looks for opportunities in the unlikeliest of places, in order to display a love that annuls our own kind of "justice." The following story best exemplifies this love of our God and Creator.

There used to be an elderly recluse and anchorite, who lived an ascetic life in a desert for seventy long years, with fasting and celibacy and vigil. However, during all those years that he served God, he was not favoured with any vision or revelation by God.

This gave rise to concern, and the following thought entered his mind:

— Could it be that there is a reason I am not aware of, which makes my ascesis unfavorable to God, and my labours unacceptable? That must be the reason I am not able to have any revelation and see any mystery...

With these thoughts in mind, the elder began to beseech and ask the Lord even more fervently, by praying and saying:

— Lord, if my ascesis is favorable to You, and you have accepted my labours, this sinner and unworthy one beseeches You to favour me also, with just a droplet of one of Your gifts, so that I might be informed with the revelation of a mystery that You have heard my prayer, and thus spend my ascetic life informed and with confidence...

Having thus prayed, a voice sent by God came to the saintly elder, saying:

— If you indeed desire to see My glory, then go into the innermost depths of the desert, and mysteries shall be revealed to you.

As soon as the elder heard this voice, he immediately left his cell; but no sooner had he walked for some distance, he was approached by a robber, who, upon spotting the elderly Abba, rushed towards him, with the intent to murder him. As soon as he had grabbed hold of him, he said:

— It is a fortunate moment that I encountered you, old man; now I can complete my business and be saved. Because we robbers have this custom and this particular law and belief—that whoever is able to commit one hundred murders, will definitely go to heaven. Well, after having

strived so hard until this day, I have so far accomplished only ninety-nine murders, and, lacking only one more, I have taken a lot of trouble and care to complete the hundred, in order to be saved. Therefore, I am greatly indebted to you and I thank you, as on this day, because of you, I shall savour Paradise.

On hearing what the robber told him, the elder was taken aback and alarmed at this sudden and unexpected incident. So, he turned his mind's eye upwards towards God, and on thinking over what happened, said the following to Him:

— Was this the glory, my Lord and Master, that You promised to show me, Your servant? Was this the will that You inspired to this sinner—to leave his cell and to inform him with such a terrible mystery? Are You rewarding with such a reward the labours of my ascesis that I have borne for Your sake? Now I have truly realized, Lord, that all my labours were in vain; and that every one of my prayers has been regarded as a detestable abomination. However, I thank You for Your philanthropy, Lord, because you educate my unworthiness the way that You know—as befits me for my innumerable sins—and that must be why you delivered me into the hands of a robber and murderer.

Having said this, and feeling deeply troubled, the old man became thirsty, so he said to the robber:

— My child, because of my sinfulness, God has delivered me into your hands to be murdered, and thus your desire will be fulfilled in the manner that you desire, and I shall be deprived of my life—being the evil man that I am. For this, I beg you to do me one favour and a small errand and bring me a drink of water, then you may cut off my head.

On hearing these words by the elder, and in the desire to fulfil his business, the robber sheathed his dagger—which he had bared—then took out of his bosom a flask, which he took to a stream that was nearby and stooped down to fill it and bring it back to the elder to quench his thirst. And just as he was filling the flask, he drew his last breath and died on the spot.

Well, seeing that quite some time had passed and the robber did not reappear, the elder wondered to himself:

— Perhaps he was tired and lay down and fell asleep, and that is why he is delayed; so I am now permitted to leave and return to my cell. However, because I am also old, I am afraid, as I do not have enough strength to run, and because of my frailty, I shall tire quickly and he will overtake me. Then, having angered him in this way, he will want to torture me mercilessly, cutting me up into many pieces while I am still alive. Therefore I should not leave, but instead, I should go to the stream, and see what he is doing.

So the elder went forth, after making all these thoughts, and he discovered the robber laying dead; upon seeing him, he stood in wonder and surprise. Then lifting his arms up towards heaven he said:

— My merciful Lord, unless You reveal this mystery to me, I shall not lower my arms. Please therefore have pity on my troubles and reveal what this occurrence was about.

And with this prayer of the elder, an Angel of the Lord came to him and explained:

— Do you see this person, Abba, who lays dead before you? It was for your sake that he was gripped by sudden death, so that you would escape from being murdered. Now proceed to bury him as one who was saved. Because the obedience that he showed you—by sheathing his murder weapon in order to bring you a drink of water to quench the fire of your thirst—was the act that appeased God's wrath and rendered him accepted as a worker of obedience. Furthermore, his admission of the ninety-nine murders was taken into account as Confession. Therefore bury him, and count him among the saved. And know by this the ocean of God's philanthropy and compassion. Now return joyfully to your cell, and henceforth be more willing in your prayers and do not sorrow and say that you are a sinner and devoid of revelations. Behold, the Lord revealed a mystery to you. And know this also: that all of the labours of your ascesis are welcome before God, for there is no labour performed for the Lord's sake that does not appear before Him.

On hearing this, the elder buried the dead man as instructed.



We can keep guard over the whole world by keeping guard over the atmosphere of heaven within us; for if we lose the Kingdom of Heaven, we will save neither ourselves nor others. He who has the Kingdom of God within himself will imperceptibly pass it on to others. People will be attracted to the peace and warmth in us; they will want to hear us, and the atmosphere of heaven will gradually pass on to them. It is not even necessary to speak to people about this. The atmosphere heaven will radiate from us even when we keep silent, or talk about ordinary things. It will radiate from us even though we may not be aware of it.

The Lord is present everywhere, and nothing happens without His will or His permission—either in this life or eternity. When we accept this idea, everything is made easier. If God would allow us to do everything the way we desire and when we desire, this would certainly result in catastrophe. One cannot even imagine the chaos that would occur.

Elder Thaddeus of Serbia (+2002)

WHAT ORTHODOX ICONOGRAPHY IS

By Photios Kontoglou, from the "Word Magazine," a publication of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, September 1964, pp. 5-6.



The religion of Christ is the revelation, by Him, of the truth. And this truth is the knowledge of the true God and of the spiritual world. But the spiritual world is not what men used to—and still do—call "spiritual."

Christ calls His religion *new wine and bread that cometh down from Heaven*. The Apostle Paul says: *Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*

In a religion like this, one that makes the believer into a *new man*, everything is "new." So, too, the art that gradually took form out of the spirit of this religion, and which it invented to express its Mystery, is a "new" art, one not like any other, just as the religion of Christ is not like any other, in spite of what some may say who have eyes only for certain meaningless externals.

The architecture of this religion, its music, its painting, its sacred poetry, insofar as they make use of material media, nourish the souls of the faithful with spirit. The works produced in these media are like steps that lead them from earth up to heaven, from this earthly and temporary state to that which is heavenly and eternal: This takes place so far as is possible with human nature.

For this reason, the arts of the Church are *anagogical*, that is, they elevate natural phenomena and submit them to *the beautiful transformation*. They are also called *liturgical arts*, because through them man tastes the essence of the liturgy by which God is worshipped and through which man becomes like unto the Heavenly Hosts and perceives immortal life.

Ecclesiastical liturgical painting, the painting of worship, took its form above all from Byzantium, where it remained the mystical Ark of Christ's religion and was called *hagiographia* or sacred painting. As with the other arts of the Church, the purpose of *hagiographia* is not to give pleasure to our carnal sense of sight, but to transform it into a spiritual sense, so that in the visible things of this world we may see what surpasses this world.

Hence this art is not theatrically illusionistic. Illusionistic art came into being in Italy during the so-called Renaissance, because this art was the expression of a Christianity which, deformed by philosophy, had become a materialistic, worldly

form of knowledge, and of the Western Church, which had become a worldly system. And just as theology followed along behind the philosophy of the ancients—so, too, the painting which expressed this theology followed along behind the art of the ancient idolators. The period is well named Renaissance, since, to tell the truth, it was no more than a rebirth of the ancient carnal mode of thought that had been the pagan world's.

But just as those theologians were wading around in the slimy swamp waters of philosophy, and were in no position to taste and understand the clear fresh water of the Gospel, *drawn up to life eternal*, so, too, the painters who brought about the Renaissance were in no position to understand the mystical profundity of eastern liturgical iconography, the sacred art of Byzantium. And just as the theologians thought that they could perfect Christ's religion with philosophy, since for them it seemed too simple, they being in no position to penetrate into the depths of that divine simplicity: just so, the painters thought that they were perfecting liturgical art, more simply called Byzantine, by making it "more natural." So they set to work, copying what was natural—faces, clothes, buildings, landscapes, all as they appear naturally—making an iconography with the same rationalism that the theologians wanted to make theology with. But the kind of theology you can get out of rationalism is exactly the kind of religious iconography you can get out of copying nature.

This is why their works have no Mystery, nor any real spiritual character. You understand that you have before you some men masquerading as saints—not real saints. Look at the various pictures of the Mother of God. "Madonnas" who pose hypocritically, and those in tears, weeping, which are even falsier yet! Corpses and idols for shallow men! Our people, who for centuries have received a great and profound nurture from Christ's religion, even though outwardly they seem uneducated, call a woman who pretends to be respectable but who is really not, a *Frankopanaghia*, a "Frankish Virgin," thus making a clear distinction between the "Frankish Virgin" and the true Virgin, the Mother of Christ our God, the austere *Odigitria*, Her *more precious than the Cherubim, and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim*. In other words, in the simplest way possible they make a neat, sharp distinction between the art of the world and the art belonging to worship.

Western religious painters who wanted to depict the supernatural visions of religion took as models certain natural phenomena—clouds, sunsets, the moon, the sun with its beams. With these they tried to portray the heavenly glory and the world of immortality, calling certain things "spiritual" which are merely sentimental, emotional, not spiritual at all.

In vain, however, because the blessedness of the other life is not a continuation of the emotional happiness of this world,

neither does it have any relation to the satisfaction the senses enjoy in this life. The Apostle Paul, talking about the good things of the blessedness to come, says that they are such that *eye hath not seen, and ear hath not heard, neither have entered into the heart of man*. How, then, can that world, which lies beyond everything a man can grasp with his senses—how can that world be portrayed by an art that is “natural” and that appeals to the senses? How can you paint *what surpasses nature and surpasses sense*?

Certainly, man will take elements from the perceptible world, “for the senses’ sake,” but to be able to express *what surpasses sense* he must dematerialize these elements, he must lift them to a higher plane, he must transmute them from what is carnal into what is spiritual, just as faith transmutes man’s feelings, making them, from carnal, into spiritual. *I saw*, says St. John of the Ladder, *some men given over with passion to carnal love, and when they received the Light and took the way of Christ, this fierce carnal passion was changed inside them, with divine grace, into a great love for the Lord*.

Thus, even the material elements which Byzantine iconography took from the world of sense were supernaturally transmuted into spiritualities, and since they had passed through the pure soul of a man who lived according to Christ, like gold through a refiner’s fire, they express, as far as is possible for a man who wears a material body, that which the Apostle Paul spoke of, *which eye hath not seen, neither hath entered into the heart of man*.

The beauty of liturgical art is not a carnal beauty, but a spiritual beauty. That is why whoever judges this art by worldly standards says that the figures in Byzantine sacred painting are ugly and repellent, while for one of the faithful they possess the beauty of the spirit, which is called *the beautiful transformation*.

St. Paul says: *We (who preach the Gospel and live according to Christ) are ... a sweet savour of Christ unto them that are saved and unto them that perish. Unto them that have within them the smell of death (of flesh), we smell of death; and unto them that have within them the smell of life, we smell of life*. And the blessed and hallowed St. John of the Ladder says, *There was an ascetic who, whenever he happened to see a beautiful person, whether man or woman, would glorify the Creator of that person with all his heart, and from a mere glance his love for God would spring afresh and he would pour out on his account a fountain of tears. And one marveled, seeing this happen, that for this man what would cause the soul of another to stink had become a reason for crowns and an ascent above nature. Whoever perceives beauty in this fashion is already incorruptible, even before the dead shall rise in the common Resurrection*.

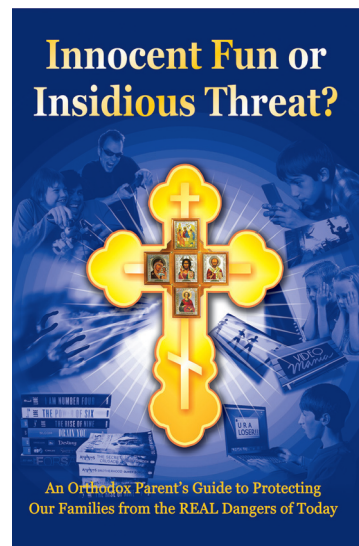
† † †

Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. [Rom 12:2]

NEW BOOK: INNOCENT FUN OR INSIDIOUS THREAT

AN ORTHODOX PARENT’S GUIDE TO PROTECTING OUR FAMILIES FROM THE REAL DANGERS OF TODAY

Compiled by Mary Christodoulou; published by the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of St. Poimen.



Today evil invades our lives more than ever before. Particularly alarming is how easily it disguises itself as entertainment, religion, and even as a subject in public schools. Unfortunately, the primary targets of this demonic onslaught are our children. The Harry Potter books and movies have initiated millions of young people into witchcraft and wizardry; celebrities promote New Age religions adverse

to Christianity; the Twilight books and movies glamorize vampires; the most popular music, video games, television shows, books, and movies not only bombard our children with images and messages of violence, cruelty, and illicit sex, but also portray demonic phenomena, such as witchcraft and psychic powers, in a way that makes them seem acceptable, and even fun.

All this evil may seem insurmountable, but we must fight against it for the sake of our children. A must-read for every Orthodox Christian, this book examines the shocking extent to which evil has infiltrated our lives, and offers guidance and hope for the struggle against it.

The book will be available to our readers in December, 2013. It can be ordered through the Brotherhood of St. Poimen (see page 31) as well as through *Amazon.com*.

Price: \$10 per copy (144 pages); ePub/Kindle: \$8 per copy.



Nowadays, young people have lost their zest for life. You ask them, “What will give you peace?” “Nothing,” they reply. Such vigorous young men and nothing pleases them. What has happened to us? We believe that we will correct God with our inventions. We turn night into day, so that the hens will lay eggs! And have you seen these eggs? If God had made the moon to shine like the sun, people would have gone mad. God created the night so that we may take some rest, and look at us!

Elder Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

ON FAMILY LIFE

Glams from the writings of St. John Chrysostom on marriage.

A Successful Marriage

A successful marriage is one that regards success in terms of virtue rather than wealth. The husband must have a virtuous soul, goodness, prudence, and fear of God. St. Chrysostom says, *A young woman who is prudent, independent, and cultivates piety, is as valuable as the whole world... Many people who had amassed a great fortune lost it all, for they didn't have a sensible wife capable of preserving it.*

Many men seek after a beautiful wife. Is this enough for a marriage to succeed? The Saint emphasizes that *the beauty of the body, when it is not accompanied by virtue of the soul, can imprison the husband for twenty or thirty days, it won't last longer though, for when she shows her bad side, the love will be destroyed. When, however, women shine from the beauty of their souls, as time passes and increasingly reveals the nobility of their souls, their husbands are drawn ever closer to them.*

Let us see what St. John Chrysostom has to say regarding the responsibilities of the spouses. He directs his words, for the most part, towards husbands. This may be because male egotism is difficult to subdue and many times they act harshly. Chrysostom condemns the use of physical violence and the husband's abuse of his wife. This is something that is still a problem today. On the contrary, what is necessary is for the husband to have a spirit of sacrifice, a willingness to forgive, and not threats and intimidation. Through indulgence and concord, the family's deep peace will be assured, discontent will be kept at bay, and each spouse's dedication to the other will increase. Chrysostom notes that, *there is nothing, nothing more valuable than for one to be loved so much by one's wife and to reciprocate this love.*

St. Chrysostom also refers to a bonding element, which is the foundation of marriage: communication between the spouses. It is the daily influence that one spouse has on the other. Communication takes place with and without words. It is positive or negative. The most important element of communication is discussion. Etymologically, the Greek word for "communicate" (σὺν + ζήτησις) refers to the cooperative search for what needs to be done regarding issues pertaining to the common life and to family life. Discussion needs to take place with familiarity, mutual respect, in a climate of freedom, equality, and love. Then a solution can be found, should a disagreement or contention arise. *For nothing is more bitter than the battle that occurs between people that love one another, and this shows that when one is estranged from his own member, as it is said, this must be caused by a severe bitterness. The role of the husband is to love and the role of the wife is to give way. If each one plays their part, everything will be firm. And the wife will become amicable and loving.*

The mutual display of affection is a necessary aspect of marital love. Love is revealed through tenderness, through politeness, through showing interest. Love is expressed through words. Words are the food of emotions, and inspire love. The secret of a happy family life is often found in simple daily things. Unfortunately, couples today have forgotten this. They forget to express their respect and appreciation for their spouse's gifts, abilities, attempts, and successes. This could even refer to a simple compliment on their appearance, their clothing, or the food they have prepared. The wife's love for doing good increases when she feels loved. The same happens with husbands. In their case, a good sense of self-confidence is encouraged. Love is preserved through the creation of ways to express this love. The satisfaction of particular desires and the tolerance of the weaknesses of the other help in the cohesion of the spouses.

St. Chrysostom, with his emphasis on love, essentially says that spouses need to learn to forgive and to be tolerant of one another. The more mature of the two needs to take the first step. Within a marriage, it does not matter who erred or why they did something. What is important is who attempts to fix the situation in the quickest manner. *Let us be tolerant, the Saint says, of one another, with love. How is it possible to be tolerant if you are angry and foul-mouthed? Save the day, with love. If you can't tolerate your neighbor, how will God tolerate you? If you can't bear the person who is your co-struggler, how will the Lord tolerate you?*

Through love, the alienation of spouses from each other is addressed, as is the death of the relationship, which usually comes with the passage of time, with fatigue, and indifference. Then we are speaking of a marriage of compromise. St. John knows that communication is necessary for dealing with disagreements. This depends on how and what one says. To the question, "What should I say to her?", he provides the following answer. Listen carefully to his counsel:

Speak words of love to her... Above all, I prefer your love and nothing is more painful for me than to be distanced from you. Even though I might lose everything, and if I'm in danger at the end, I can bear everything, as long as you are all right with me. The children also love me, as long as you love me. Everything belongs to you. This is what Paul told me when he said that the husband does not rule his own body, but his wife rules it. And if I don't have control over my own body, but you have control, how much does everything else belong to you as well.

And he continues: *Never speak in a mundane fashion, but with compliments, with respect, and with much love. Respect her, and she won't feel it necessary to seek respect from others. Prefer her above all others for all things, for beauty, for her temperance, and compliment her. Make it clear to her that you like her company and that you prefer to stay at home with her, to be with her, than to go out to the marketplace. Prefer*

her company above that of all of your friends, and the children that she gifted you with, love them out of love for her.

How well do you communicate? Do you speak with one another? Do you share your thoughts? What do you do for your daily communication? Do you dedicate time, from that which is left, to be together and to speak affectionately? Or perhaps you are indifferent to the interests and the problems of the other and give your mouth free reign? Isn't this the conclusion that one comes to after having read the above text?

The Upbringing of Children

An aspect of the family that particularly concerned St. Chrysostom was that of children and young people. The older generation is responsible for the good or bad spiritual state of young people. They live, develop, and are shaped in the environment of the older generation.

Chrysostom offers incomparable descriptions and analyses of the state of the young people of his age. He writes, "*Youth is a difficult time of life, when one is unstable and easily tricked, prone to falling, it's an age that requires a very strong bridle... Youth is a wild thing... it is like an untamed horse and a wild beast.* It is a fire that is easily spread and burns up everything. It is like a storm on the open sea, because of its foolishness and natural instability. There are people who do foul things worse than those done by wild donkeys, living as though in a desert and kicking. It is in this state that most young people find themselves. This is why the Saint said, *Our primary concern is the family, the children. All things are secondary to the care of our children.*

According to St. Chrysostom, a parent is not one who brings children into the world, but one who expends the energy to raise them. **Not "child-making" but "childrearing" is the mark of a parent.** *For a person does not become a father simply because he helped to bring about the birth of a child, but by raising the child correctly.* Even then there were complaints about the disconcerting path of young people—disobedient, rebellious, bold, disrespectful, anarchic. Certainly, the contemporary situation is also disconcerting, where sin is largely accepted by society and has nearly become regarded as lawful; and the urging of sin is most felt by the unstable young people! Chrysostom attributes the situation to the absence of care by the older generation and to the lack of direction. *The reason for the overturning of all things is that we aren't caring for our own children. We take care of their bodies, but we ignore the upbringing of their souls.* St. Chrysostom goes on to ask, *Do you want a child that is obedient? From their first steps, feed them on the wisdom and counsels of the Lord.* If we showed the same interest in the spiritual education of children as we do in their education in other spheres, we would forestall many evils.

The development of the child's character takes place through the parents. Checks are necessary, but with discernment.

They need to be done in such a way that the child is able to assimilate them and to acquire the necessary internal structure that will facilitate the development and completion of his personality. As St. John says:

When the father of a very gentle child only gives him sweets, refreshments, and whatever he likes when he's ill, but not what he actually needs for his sickness; or if a doctor checks him out and confesses, "What can I do? I can't stand to see the child cry." Poor, foolish traitor! The only name I can't give such a person is that of father. How much better it would be for you if you upset your child a little bit so that he might be healthy for all time, rather than making this fleeting pleasure the foundation for continuous sorrow.

With the satisfaction of the child's every desire, we make him egocentric, and with such a character, he will be unhappy in the world. The Saint encourages to *be like sculptors and make every effort to make your children wonderful sculptures that look like God. It will happen if you take away everything that is unnecessary, if you add whatever is necessary, and if you check daily to see what physical defects they have that you can fix.*

Good teachers work like farmers, who cut away some plants and leave others to grow. Some times they punish the bad, while they encourage and facilitate the good. The child that is given the observation and the reproach must understand that the person that is reproaching him does it out of love and not to sadden him. Then he accepts the words, not as though they came from anger, but from the concern of a concerned father.

The Saint counsels, *If you punish (the child), sometimes looking at him severely, sometimes with bitterness and disrespect, and sometimes with nice words and promises... If there are threats that are not followed through on, the child does not understand that they are threats. Threats work when the child believes that they are going to be realized. If the child who has made a mistake understands that you are threatening him, without following through, he will become indifferent. He should be expecting punishment, without actually being punished, so that he does not lose the fear of punishment.* He continues: *This is exactly the characteristic of the educator, who is not in a hurry to punish, but seeks the child's correction, and is hesitant to punish.*

St. Chrysostom considers it unconstructive to teach the child to separate himself from, and to reject his anger. We should instead teach him ways to creatively channel his anger. He tells parents: *Let's consider the very significant action of the soul, that of anger. We should neither uproot it completely from the child, nor allow the child to use it anywhere, without discernment. We need to educate young people from a young age in such a way that, when they are treated poorly, to endure and not get angry. At the same time, if they see someone else being treated poorly, they should boldly intervene to support them in*

an appropriate way. The child must learn to not be irritable and to be able to accept disappointment, or the failure to achieve one of his desires, without getting upset. When the child learns to endure small failures and disappointments, later on he will be able to endure larger disappointments, if God allows it.

It's necessary to offer the child ways to have fun that are not harmful, and to lead him to virtuous people, to show him the beauty of nature and of art, and to give him some freedom of movement, as we tell him that immodest and lecherous entertainments have no value. *When we tell him all of these things, the holy father tells us, we need to give him many kisses and to hold him tight, to show him the great love we have for him.*

The child's spiritual development must be the parents' main concern. Children should learn more than letters and arts to earn a living, but need to be fed with *the wisdom and counsel of the Lord.* St. Chrysostom insists, *I'm not telling you to keep your child from getting married and to send him into the desert, or to force him to become a monk. No, this is not what I'm telling you. Certainly, I would be glad for it and my wish is that everyone would decide to become a monk. But because it seems to be heavy, I don't insist. So raise an athlete of Christ and teach him like a person of the world to be pious from an early age.*

St. Chrysostom dedicates many pages to illustrating the value of the example of the older generation. *In whatever ground the plant is put, that's the type of fruit it will bear... How could you fix your son, to give the necessary counsels to someone who is not careful, when you yourself, who are in advanced old age, do such terrible things? I say these things in judgment of the elderly, not to excuse young people from every accusation and reproach, but through the elderly to protect the young... How can the father teach others to restrain their passion, audacity, and anger, when he has not learned to restrain himself?... We probably need teachers, not our children, since their mistakes cannot be very great, while our mistakes are very great... All of the evils of our children come from our own lack of attention and because we didn't guide them from the beginning, from an early age, down the road of piety.*

When one reads St. John Chrysostom, one sees the fullness of his thought and its timeliness. His word spans the ages. He does not leave any aspect of the human soul uninspected. He has in-depth knowledge of the meaning of man's existence. Of course, because of the chronological distance that separates us, the answers he provides can be accepted under a certain set of preconditions. His spirit, however, is always timely and contemporary. Because Christ is at the center of his thought, because it is Christocentric, his teaching transcends time. Essentially, he offered the word of the Gospel to his age, through the Holy Spirit who lived within him and enlightened him. Whenever we read him he always has something

to say regarding the problems of his age, which seem to also be our own contemporary problems.

Our age might seem demanding and perhaps heavy. One could argue that the things he says cannot be implemented today. In his day similar voices were heard. "We won't make our children into monks," some parents shouted. Chrysostom, with holy passion silenced them from the front of the church. *It's not necessary that they become monks, make them good Christians.*

In today's era of the crisis of institutions and values, in this age of the rejection of all things, the institution of marriage is greatly under attack. In northern Europe it has nearly disintegrated. Marriages only take place for the sake of custom, for tradition, so that people can take photographs, and so they can have a party. Many of these marriages last for six months, or a year. Eponymous artists don't merely say that they don't want to have a family, but that their goal is the disintegration of families. These are the role models for today's children.

Modern Greeks face problems and crises of values, of institutions, in society, and existentially when they voluntarily cut themselves off from the Orthodox tradition. For the Orthodox Greek, this tradition is precious, is priceless, is an ancestral inheritance. For this reason, anyone that rejects it is essentially rejecting his ontological being and he faces a great crisis of self-consciousness.

Only he who is in harmony with and lives the Orthodox tradition according to the precepts of our Saints, according to the commandments of Christ, is the mature person who cannot be shaken by any sadness or crisis. He lives the life in Christ outside of every ethical system or sense of obligation. He lives in Christ twenty four hours a day. He lives in God within daily life, in the family, in his work, in society.

We, as Athonites, feel pain and are very concerned for the path of the family today. The advancement of the family in Christ is the request of our humble daily prayers, along with the preservation of God's blessing on marriage. God might have given us the blessing to live outside of the world, to not raise families, but we also came from families. In addition, as spiritual fathers bearing the keys to the hearts of people, we see that many young people are completely ignorant regarding the subjects of our faith and simultaneously approach life with a great frivolity. And we are confronted with the question: How can these people create proper families of their own? What will they tell their children, since they themselves are completely empty?

Unfortunately, a humanistic approach to life rules the world today, whose goal is human prosperity. Many teach that we need to become good people and that this will bring peace and happiness. However this is, essentially, nothing. If we do not become grace-filled people, vessels of divine grace, *we have done nothing.*

THE JESUS PRAYER

By Metropolitan Anthony (Bloom) of Sourozh, of the Russian Orthodox Church in Great Britain and Ireland (+2003), from "Living Prayer," Templegate Publishers Springfield, IL, 1966, p. 84 – 88.

Those who have read "The way of a Pilgrim" are familiar with the expression *The Jesus Prayer*. It refers to a short prayer, the words of which are: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*, constantly repeated. The Way of a Pilgrim is the story of a man who wanted to learn to *pray constantly* (1 Thes 5:17). The book remains as the best possible introduction to this prayer, which is one of the greatest treasures of the Orthodox Church.

The prayer is profoundly rooted in the spirit of the gospel, and it is not in vain that the great teachers of Orthodoxy have always insisted on the fact that the Jesus Prayer sums up the whole of the gospel. This is why the Jesus Prayer can only be used in its fullest sense if the person who uses it "belongs to the gospel," i.e., is a member of the Church of Christ.

All the messages of the gospel, and more than the messages, the reality of the gospel, is contained in the name, in the Person of Jesus. If you take the first half of the prayer you will see how it expresses our faith in the Lord: *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God*. At the heart we find the name of Jesus; it is the name before whom *every knee shall bow* (Isa 45:23), and when we pronounce it, we affirm the historical event of the incarnation. We affirm that God, the Word of God, co-eternal with the father, became man, and that the *fullness of the Godhead dwelt in our midst* (Col 2:9) bodily in His Person.

To see in the Man of Galilee the incarnate Word of God (in accordance to the prophets of Israel), to see God become man, we must be guided by the Spirit, because it is the spirit of God who reveals to us both the incarnation and the Lordship of Christ. We call Him Christ, and we affirm thereby that in Him were fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament. To affirm that Jesus is the Christ implies that the whole history of the Old Testament is ours, that we accept it as the truth of God. We call Him Son of God, because we know that the Messiah expected by the Jews, the man who was called *Son of David* by Bartimaeus, is the incarnate Son of God. These words sum up all we know, all we believe about Jesus Christ, from the Old Testament to the New, and from the experience of the Church through the ages. In these few words we make a complete and perfect profession of faith.

But it is not enough to make this profession of faith; it is not enough to believe. *The devils also believe, and tremble.* (Jas 2:19). Faith is not sufficient to work salvation, it must lead to the right relationship with God; and so, having professed, in its integrity, sharply and clearly, our faith in the Lordship and in the Person, in the historicity and in the divinity of Christ, we put ourselves face to face with Him, in the right state of mind: *Have mercy on me, a sinner.*

These words, *have mercy*, are used in Orthodoxy as the response of the people to all the petitions suggested by the priest. Our modern translation *have mercy* is a limited and insufficient one. The Greek word which we find in the gospel and in the early liturgies is *eleison*. *Eleison* is similar (but not of the same root, *Ed.*) as *elaion*, which refers to the oil from an olive tree. If we look up the Old and New Testament in search of the passages connected with this basic idea, we will find it described in a variety of parables and events which allow us to form a complete idea of the meaning of the word. We find the image of the olive tree in Genesis. After the flood Noah sends birds, one after the other, to find out whether there is any dry land or not, and one of them, a dove—and it is significant that it is a dove—brings back a small twig of olive. This twig conveys to Noah and to all with him in the ark the news that the wrath of God has ceased, that God is now offering man a fresh opportunity. All those who are in the ark will be able to settle again on firm ground and make an attempt to live, and never more perhaps, if they can help it, undergo the wrath of God.

In the parable of the good Samaritan, olive oil is poured to soothe and to heal. In the anointing of kings and priests in the Old Testament, it is again *oil that is poured on the head* as an image of the grace of God that *comes down and flows on them* (Pss 133:2), giving them new power to fulfil what is beyond human capabilities. The king is to stand on the threshold, between the will of men and the will of God, and he is called to lead his people to the fulfilment of God's will; the priest also stands on that threshold, to proclaim the will of God and to do even more: to act for God, to pronounce God's decrees and to apply God's decision.

The oil speaks first of all of the end of the wrath of God, of the peace which God offers to the people who have offended against him; further it speaks of God healing us in order that we should be able to live and become what we are called to be; and as He knows that we are not capable with our own strength of fulfilling either His will or the laws of our own created nature, He *pours His grace abundantly on us.* (Rom 5:20). He gives us power to do what we could not otherwise do. The words *milost* and *pomiluy* in Slavonic have the same root as those which express tenderness, endearing, and when we use the words *eleison, have mercy on us, pomiluy*, we are not just asking God to save us from His wrath—we are asking for love.

If we turn back to the words of the Jesus Prayer, *Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner*, we see that the first words express with exactness and integrity the gospel faith in Christ, the historical incarnation of the Word of God; and the end of the prayer expresses all the complex rich relationships of love that exist between God and His creatures.

The Jesus Prayer is known to innumerable Orthodox, either as a rule of prayer or in addition to it, as a form of devotion,

a short focal point that can be used at any moment, whatever the situation.

Numerous writers have mentioned the physical aspects of the prayer, the breathing exercises, the attention which is paid to the beating of the heart and a number of other minor features. The Philokalia is full of detailed instructions about the prayer of the heart. Ancient and modern Fathers have dealt with the subject, always coming to the same conclusion: never to attempt the physical exercises without strict guidance by a spiritual father.

What is of general use, and God given, is the actual praying, the repetition of the words, without any physical endeavour—not even movements of the tongue—and which can be used systematically to achieve an inner transformation. More than any other prayer, the Jesus Prayer aims at bringing us to stand in God's presence with no other thought but the miracle of our standing there and God with us, because in the use of the Jesus Prayer there is nothing and no one except God and us.

The use of the prayer is dual, it is an act of worship as is every prayer, and on the ascetical level, it is a focus that allows us to keep our attention still in the presence of God. It is a very companionable prayer, a friendly one, always at hand and very individual in spite of its monotonous repetitions. Whether in joy or in sorrow, it is, when it has become habitual, a quickening of the soul, a response to any call of God. The words of St. Symeon, the New Theologian, apply to all its possible effects on us: *Do not worry about what will come next, you will discover it when it comes...*



THE IMAGE OF THOSE WHO HOPE IN GOD

By Saint Nektarios of Pentapolis.

People who hope in God are truly blessed. God is their constant helper and they fear no evil, even if others provoke them. They hope in God and do good. They have set their every hope on Him and they confess to Him with all their heart. He is their boast, their God and they call upon Him day and night. Their mouths direct praise to God; their lips are sweeter than honey and wax when they open them to sing to God; their tongue, full of grace, is moved to glorify God. Their heart is eager to call upon Him, their mind ready to be elevated towards Him, their soul is committed to God and *His right hand has upheld them. Their souls will boast in the Lord.* They ask and receive from God whatever their heart desires. They ask and find whatever they seek. They knock and the gates of mercy are opened.

People who hope in God rest upon untroubled waters. And God grants them His rich mercy. The right hand of God directs their paths and the finger of the Lord guides

them on their way, on every step, and for every day of their earthly lives.

Those who hope in the Lord do not fail. Their hope never dies. God is their expectation, the furthestmost desire of their hearts. Their hearts sigh before Him all the day long: *Lord, do not delay, arise, hasten, come and remove my soul from every necessity, bring my soul out of prison. I will glorify you with my whole heart, Lord. Every word which proceeds from my mouth will be directed to you.*

Those who hope in the Lord bless the Most High, His Redeemer and also sanctify *His holy name*. They hope, and cry to God from the depths of their hearts: *Lord, when shall I come and appear before Your face.*

Those who hope in the Lord will call upon the Lord and enter into His holy place, in order to see and rejoice in His wonders. And the Lord will hear the voice of their supplication.

Those who hope in the Lord enjoy extreme peace; serenity reigns in their heart and their soul is governed by tranquility. When they have God as their helper, what shall they fear? What shall make them quake? Should war arise against them, they will not flounder, for they hope in the Lord. If they are persecuted by evil-doers, they will not fear, for they know that all things are under the control of the Lord. They do not hope in their bow nor their quiver, nor does their salvation depend on the sword, but on their Lord and God, Who is able to wrest them from the hands of those who war against them, from the trap of the sinner and from the tempest. They are convinced of the power of the Lord and of *His high right arm and the Lord will save them.*

Those who hope in the Lord walk calmly in the struggle of life and stride along the path with no concern for tribulations. They toil unceasingly for the good, the pleasing and the perfect, and God blesses their works. They sow with a blessing and reap the rich rewards of their efforts. They have boldness before the Lord and are not diverted by the temptations which surround them. Before the trials of life, they do retreat, but hope, because when things seem at their most dire, that is when God shows the way through. Through their faith, they also await the hope of righteousness.

Those who hope in the Lord do not hope in riches, nor in the extent of their power, but are content with the assistance that the Lord will provide.

Those who hope in the Lord are full of faith and love towards God, they live with confidence in their pure conscience, they appear with the boldness of one of His children before their heavenly Father and call upon Him to send His kingdom to earth and ensure that His will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

Those who hope in the Lord are absolutely devoted to Him and raise their hearts to the good and immortal God. They ask of Him the supreme good, and immortality in the kingdom of Heaven. And God hears them.

Blessed are they who hope in the Lord!

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THE WORLDLY MIND

Soul-Profiting Stories From Monk Savas (disciple of Elder Ephraim of Filotheou) from a homily he delivered at Panagia Prousiotissa Monastery in Lawsonville, NC on Saturday, February 12, 2000.

The mindset of the world is the cause of much evil and suffering. The worldly mind is worse even than the devil himself, in that it kills the soul slowly. The cause of this is frequent exposure of our minds to the ways of the world.

Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain gave the analogy of the frog to demonstrate this. He explained that when you want to cook a frog, you do not directly throw it into a pot of boiling water. Rather, you gently place the frog into a pot of cool water set on a burner and slowly turn up the heat. Unknowingly the frog will adjust itself to the heat and without noticing will become cooked.

The worldly mind works the same upon us. The more we expose ourselves to its flames, the more silent our conscience becomes, and the more we are destroyed. Under such conditions, only a miracle can save us.

A theologian from Africa once told the following fable: Once upon a time there was a cat who was chosen to become King of a particular forest. Overjoyed upon his election, the cat dropped everything he was doing and accepted the great honor. Dignitaries came and sat the cat upon a luxurious carriage, crowned him with a magnificently brilliant crown, and processed the newly elected cat to his castle to be ceremoniously enthroned. Along the way the cat spotted some mice in

the distance. Immediately the cat sprang from his carriage and chased the mice into the dense forest, losing his way back to the procession and the once in a lifetime opportunity to become King.

This is how the worldly mind works. The cat forgot his higher calling by succumbing to his old nature, in turn forfeiting his glorious throne. The mice in the story are vainglory, money, lust, and the pride of life, that is, all those things which prevent us from becoming inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal salvation.

A mother and her young daughter asked Fr. Savas a question one time while he was visiting a monastery in Toronto. The mother had requested Fr. Savas to admonish her daughter that dancing and going to dances were a sin.

Fr. Savas responded: "No, dancing is not a sin." Delighted in her victory, the daughter affirmed to her mother that she can go to dances on the monk's word and that she will be fine. As a last word, Fr. Savas gave an analogy which he learned from Elder Paisios of the Holy Mountain. He said that when you take a very wet sponge and place it next to a fire, of course the wet sponge will be fine due to its dampness. Eventually however the sponge will dry up after time and exposure to such heat, and burn.

So it is with frequent exposure to dances. Initially you will be fine. As time goes on, however, and you keep going to dances, you will experience many soul destroying desires and eventually give in. He advised the girl to attend these dances with her parents.