

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]

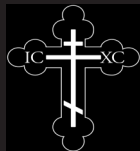
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PARADISE AND HELL IN THE ORTHODOX TRADITION

By *Protopresbyter George D. Metallinos, Dean of the Faculty of Theology, University of Athens, Greece; from Orthodox Tradition, Volume XXVII, No. 3, (2010), pp. 12-19.*

On the Sunday of Meatfare “we commemorate the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and His impartial Judgment.” This phrase in the *Synaxarion*, “we commemorate,” affirms that the Church, as the Body of Christ, experiences the Second Coming of Christ in her worship as an “actuality” and not as something to be awaited in the course of history. This is because through the Eucharist we are translated to the Heavenly Kingdom, to that which transcends history. It is from this perspective that the question of Paradise and Hell is to be approached in an Orthodox spirit.

Mention is made in the Gospels of the *kingdom* and *eternal fire*. (Mt 25:31-46). In the Gospel passage which is read at the Divine Liturgy on the Sunday of Meatfare, the *kingdom* is man's Godward destiny. The *fire* is prepared for the Devil and his angels (the demons), not because God so wills, but because they are unrepentant. The *kingdom* is prepared for those who are faithful to the will of God. The *kingdom* (uncreated glory) is Paradise, whereas the (eternal) *fire* is Hell (*everlasting punishment*, Mt 25:46). At the dawn of history, God calls man to Paradise, to communion with His uncreated Grace. At the end of history, man faces Paradise and Hell. What this means, we shall see in what follows. We hasten to add, however, that what follows is the most central theme of our Faith, the touchstone of Orthodox Christianity.

Paradise and Hell in the New Testament

Paradise and Hell are frequently mentioned in the New Testament. In Luke 23:43, Christ says to the thief: *Today shalt thou be with me in paradise*. However, the thief also refers to Paradise when he says: *Lord, remember me...in thy kingdom*. (Lk 23:42). According to St. Theophylact of “Ohrid,” *the thief is in Paradise, that is, the Kingdom*. The Apostle Paul confesses that already in this world *he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter*. (2 Cor 12:4). In the Apocalypse we read: *To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God*. (Rev 2:7). According to the interpretation of Arethas of Caesarea, *Paradise is to be understood as blessed and everlasting life*. Thus, Paradise, eternal life, and the Kingdom of God are identical.

Regarding Hell, see the following passages from the New Testament: Matthew 25:46 (*into everlasting punishment*); 25:41 (*everlasting fire*); 25:30 (*outer darkness*); 5:22 (*hell [Gehenna of] fire*); I John 4:18 (*...because fear hath torment*). These are all ways of expressing what we mean by the term “Hell.”

The “Location” of Paradise and Hell

Paradise and Hell are not two different places. Such an interpretation is idolatrous. They are two different states (modes of existence), which derive from the same uncreated source and are apprehended as two different experiences. Or rather, they are the same experience, apprehended differently by man in proportion to his internal state. This experience is the vision of Christ in the uncreated light of His Divinity: in His *Glory*. After the Second Coming, and throughout unending eternity, we

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men will all see Christ in His Uncreated Light. And then *shall come forth they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.* (Jn 5:29). In the presence of Christ, men will be separated (*sheep and goats*, to His right and left respectively); that is, divided into two groups: those who see Christ as Paradise (*exceedingly beautiful splendor*) and those who see Him as Hell (*a consuming fire*, Heb 12:29).

Paradise and Hell are the same reality. This is shown by the iconographic depiction of the Second Coming. From Christ there flows a river as radiant as golden light at the upper end, where the Saints are, and fiery at the lower end, where the demons and the unrepentant are (*those who have never repented*, as one of the *Stichera* at the Praises for this day says). For this reason, in Luke 2:34 it is said of Christ that He *is set for the fall and rising again of many*. For some, those who have received Him and followed the cure of the heart proffered by Him, Christ becomes the resurrection unto His eternal life; but for others, who have rejected Him, He becomes their downfall and Hell.

See the following Patristic testimonies: St. John of Sinai (of the *Ladder*) says that the Uncreated Light of Christ is a *fire that consumes and a light that illumines*. St. Gregory Palamas observes: "*He, it says, will baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire (Mt 3:11); fire, that is, which has the capacity to illuminate and to chastise, each person receiving what is appropriate according to the merit of his own disposition.* And elsewhere: the light of Christ, *although single and participable by all, is partaken of not uniformly, but differently.*

Consequently, Paradise and Hell are not simply a recompense or a punishment (condemnation), but the way in which each of us experiences the vision of Christ, in accordance with the state of his heart. In essence, God does not punish,

though for pedagogical reasons Scripture does talk in terms of punishment. The more spiritual one becomes, the more correctly does he understand the language of Scripture and of our Tradition. It is our human condition (pure vs. impure, repentant vs. unrepentant) that determines whether we shall receive the Light of Christ as Paradise or as Hell.

Seeing Christ as Paradise

The anthropological issue in Orthodoxy is how man will see Christ eternally as Paradise and not as Hell; that is, how he will participate in His heavenly and eternal "Kingdom." And it is here that the difference between Orthodox Christianity and various other religions becomes evident. The latter promise some kind of "happiness," and especially after death. Orthodoxy is not a quest for happiness, but a cure for the sickness of religion, as the late Father John Romanides, in the spirit of the Fathers, constantly preached. Orthodoxy is an open hospital within history (a *spiritual infirmary*, according to the Divine Chrysostomos) that provides a cure for the heart (*purification*), in order that, through progressive *illumination* of the heart by the Holy Spirit, one might ultimately attain to *deification*, the unique destiny of mankind. This process, which has been very fully described by Father John Romanides and Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos, is the healing of mankind as experienced by all of our Saints.

This is the meaning of life in the Body of Christ (the Church). This is the Church's *raison d'être*. This is the end at which all of Christ's redemptive work aims. St. Gregory Palamas says that the pre-eternal counsel of God for mankind is that he should *contain the majesty of the Divine Kingdom*, that man should attain to deification. This is the purpose of creation. And St. Gregory continues: *As well, His Divine and ineffable self-emptying, His Theandric way of life, His salvific sufferings, and all of the mysteries* [i.e., the

work of Christ on earth] *were providentially and all-wisely foreordained for this end.*

Responding to Christ's Invitation

It is, however, significant that not all people respond to Christ's invitation, and thus not everyone participates in His uncreated Glory in the same way. Christ teaches this in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. (Lk 16:19-31). Man spurns Christ's offer, becomes an enemy of God, and rejects the salvation offered by Christ. (This is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, since it is in the Holy Spirit that we receive Christ's calling.) Such are those, mentioned in the hymn, *who have never repented* (hymn from the Sunday of the Last Judgment, *Idiomela of the Praises*). *God is never at enmity*, observes the Divine Chrysostomos; it is we who become His enemies and reject Him. The unrepentant man becomes demonized by his own choice. God does not will it. According to St. Gregory Palamas: *...this is not My antecedent will; I did not create you for this purpose, nor did I prepare the fire for you. The unquenchable fire was kindled beforehand for the demons, who have an immutable disposition for evil; you are joined to them by a similarly impenitent resolve*"; *your dwelling with the evil angels is a matter of free choice*. In other words, it is something that man freely chooses.

The rich man and Lazarus behold the same reality, God in His uncreated Light. The rich man attains to the Truth, to the vision of Christ, but cannot participate in it as Lazarus does. Lazarus is *comforted*, whereas the rich man is *tormented*. (Lk 16:25). Christ's statement that *they have Moses and the prophets* (Lk 16:29), regarding those who are still in this world, means that all of us are without any excuse, since we have the Saints, who possess the experience of deification and summon us to enroll in their way of life and to achieve deification as they did. Thus, those in torments, like the rich man, have no excuse.

One's attitude towards his fellow man is indicative of his inner state and is, for this reason, the criterion of the Judgment at the Second Coming. (Mt 25:31-46). This does not mean [of course] that a man's faith and fidelity to Christ will be disregarded. The latter are prerequisites, since our attitude towards others reveals whether or not we have God within us. Compare this with certain related expressions in the Greek language, which is imbued with Orthodoxy: «ἀθεόφοβος» ("accursed, ungodly," or "scoundrel, rascal"; literally, "one who has no fear of God"); «δὲν ἔχει Θεὸν μέσα του» ("he does not

have God in him"), etc. The [themes] of the first Sundays of the *Triodion* revolve around our attitude towards our fellow man. On the first Sunday, the Pharisee (outwardly pious) justifies himself (appears holy) and disdains (disparages) the publican. On the second Sunday, the "elder" brother (a replica of the seemingly pious Pharisee) grieves over the return (salvation) of his brother. Likewise outwardly pious, he had a false piety that did not engender love. On the third Sunday (Meatfare), this attitude extends to the judgment seat of Christ and proves to be the criterion of eternal life.

The Experience of Paradise or Hell

The experience of Paradise or Hell is beyond language and the senses. It is an uncreated reality, not a created one. The Franks forged the myth that Paradise and Hell are created realities. It is a myth that those in torment will not see God, as is the concept of the absence of God. The Franks (e.g., Dante) also understood the fire of Hell as created. Orthodox Tradition remains faithful to Scripture, which says that those in torment will see God (e.g., the rich man in the parable), but as a *consuming fire*. The Frankish Scholastics understood Hell as punishment and privation of the rational vision of the Divine essence. In Biblical and Patristic terms, however, Hell represents man's failure and his refusal to cooperate with Divine Grace in order to attain to the *illuminating* vision of God (Paradise) and selfless love. (*[Love] seeketh not her own*—I Cor 13:8). Consequently, there is no such thing as the absence of God, but only His presence. This is why the Second Coming is fearful.

(*How shall it be in that hour...*, as we chant at the Praises on the Sunday of Meatfare.) It is an ineluctable reality, towards which Orthodoxy is permanently oriented (*I look for the resurrection of the dead...*).

Those in torment, whose hearts are hardened like those of the Pharisees (*[Jesus was] grieved for the hardness of their hearts*, Mk 3:5), eternally see salvation as fire, for their condition does not admit of any other form of salvation. They, too [like the righteous], *come to the end*—to the end of their journey—but only the righteous end up being saved. Those in torment end up being punished. Salvation for them is Hell, since in this life they pursued only happiness. The rich man in the parable *received his good things*, whereas Lazarus endured *evil things*, without a murmur. (Lk 16:25). This point is expressed by St. Paul: *Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall*



try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. (1 Cor 3:13-15) The righteous and the unrepentant pass through the uncreated fire of the Divine presence. The former, however, will pass through unscathed, whereas the latter will be burned. The latter, too, will be saved, but in the way that one passes through a fire. Evthymios Zigabenos (12th century) observes in this regard: [*Paul sees*] *God as fire illuminating and brightening the pure, but burning and darkening the defiled.* Theodoretos of Kyros writes concerning [the words] *he shall be saved: He shall be saved through fire, being himself tried,* that is, as one who passes through fire. If he has a suitable covering, he will not be burned; otherwise, while he is saved, he is nonetheless scorched.

Consequently, the fire of Hell has nothing in common with the Frankish [notion of] "Purgatory," being neither created nor a punishment nor any kind of intermediate state. Such a conception represents a transfer of responsibility to God. It is, however, entirely our own responsibility whether we accept or reject the salvation (cure) offered by God. *Spiritual death* is the vision of the uncreated Light, the Divine Glory, as fire. St. John Chrysostomos comments, in his 9th Homily on I Corinthians: *The punishment is eternal..., sinners "shall be punished with everlasting destruction" [2 Thess 1:9]. ...As for the expression 'shall be burned,' this means that the sinner will not endure the force of the fire.* And he continues: *What he [Paul] means is this: the person himself will not be destroyed like his works, passing into nothingness, but he will abide in the fire. St. Paul calls this state salvation... For we, too, are accustomed to saying, "saved in the fire," with regard to materials that are not directly consumed.*

The scholastic understandings and interpretations which, via the work of Dante ("The Divine Comedy"), have become pervasive in our own sphere have consequences that lead to idolatrous interpretations. For example, the separation of Paradise and Hell into two different places; this occurs because no distinction is made between the created and the uncreated. Similarly, the denial of the eternity of Hell, in the sense of the "restoration" of all things or in the sense of a "good God" (*Bon Dieu*). God is truly good (Mt 19:17) since He offers salvation to everyone. He will have all men to be saved. (1Tim 2:4). The words of Christ that we hear at funerals, moreover, are striking: *I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.* (Jn 5:30) In addition, the concept of "theodicy" as applied in this case is misleading.

Everything is ultimately ascribed to God (He will save or punish), without taking into account synergy (cooperation) as a factor in our salvation. Salvation is possible only within the framework of man's synergy or cooperation with Divine Grace. According to the Divine Chrysostomos, *The greatest*

part, indeed nearly everything, belongs to God; yet He has left us a little something. This something is our acceptance of God's invitation. The thief was saved by using as a key, "Remember me!" (*Synaxarion* for Great Friday). Equally idolatrous is the idea that God is angry against sinners, whereas God, as we have seen, is never at enmity. This is a juridical view of God, which also leads to the understanding of "penances" in Confession as punishments and not as remedies (means of healing).

Paradise and Hell in This Life

The mystery of Paradise and Hell is also experienced in the life of the Church in the midst of the world. The believer's participation in Grace is deified in the Mysteries, so that Grace might be activated in our life as we journey towards Christ. Especially in the Holy Eucharist, the Uncreated—Divine Communion—becomes within us either Paradise or Hell, depending on our condition. It is primarily our partaking of Divine Communion that constitutes our participation in Paradise or Hell in the context of history. This is why we entreat God, before Divine Communion, that the Precious Gifts be within us *not unto judgment, or unto condemnation and not unto eternal punishment.* For this reason, partaking of Divine Communion is bound up with the believer's entire spiritual journey. When we approach for Communion impure and unrepentant, we are punished (burned). Divine Communion becomes inside us *Hell* and *spiritual death*, not, of course, because it is transformed into any such thing, but because our impurity cannot receive it as *Paradise*. Given that Divine Communion is called *the medicine of immortality*, there occurs precisely what occurs with any medication. If our organism does not have the necessary capacity to accept it, then the medicine will produce side effects and will kill instead of curing. In this case, it is not the medicine itself that is responsible, but the condition of our organism. It must be said that if we do not accept Christianity as a therapeutic regimen and the Mysteries as spiritual remedies, then we end up transforming Christianity into a religion; in other words, we turn it into a form of idolatry. This, unfortunately, happens most often when we understand Christianity as a "religion."

Furthermore, the present life is to be evaluated in the light of the dichotomy of Paradise and Hell. *Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness* (Mt. 6:33), Christ advises us. *We do all things in preparation for the next life*, St. Basil tells the young. Our life must be a continuous preparation for our participation in Paradise, that is, for communion with the Uncreated, which begins already in this world. Hence, the Apostle Paul says: *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.* (2 Cor 6:2). Each moment of our life is endowed with *soteriological* significance: either we gain eternity, eternal communion with God, or we lose it. This is why Far Eastern religions and cults which preach reincarnation do mankind a disservice, since they shift the issue to other (obviously non-existent) lives. There is, however, only one life, in which we are either saved or lost. Thus, St. Basil

continues: *We maintain that we must cherish and pursue with all our might those things which conduce for us to this life, while we must disregard those which are of no avail for it as being devoid of value.* This is the criterion of Christian life. The Christian constantly chooses that which contributes to his salvation. It is in this life that we either gain Paradise or lose it and wind up in Hell. This is why St. John the Evangelist says: *He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.* (Jn 3:18).

Conclusion

The task of the Church is not to “send” man to Paradise or Hell, but to prepare him for the Last Judgment. The work of the clergy is therapeutic, and not moralistic or character-forming in the worldly sense of the term. The essence of life in Christ is preserved in monasteries—provided, of course, that they are Orthodox, that is, Patristic in spirit. The purpose of the cure offered by the Church is not to create “good” and fundamentally “useful” citizens, but citizens of the Heavenly (Uncreated) Kingdom. Such are the Confessors and Martyrs, the true faithful, the Saints.

This, furthermore, is the litmus test of our mission. To what are we calling people? To the Church understood as a hospital or clinic, or to an ideology that is Christian only in name? All too often we seek a secure place in “Paradise” instead of a cure. As such, we are preoccupied with rituals and not with therapy. This certainly does not mean that we should reject worship. But without *ascesis* (the ascetical life, practical therapy) worship cannot sanctify us. The Grace that flows from it remains inert within us. Orthodoxy does not promise to send man to any kind of Paradise or Hell, but has the capacity, as is evident from the incorrupt and wonder-working Relics of the Saints (*incorruption = deification*), to prepare man to behold the Uncreated Grace and Kingdom of Christ eternally as Paradise and not as Hell.



You've become scattered. It's time to steady yourself, to put aside everything else and sit within your heart. Think about lent and compare it with your present state. What a difference! Take up reading and avoid company. Your situation is ruining you! Arrange an orderly schedule of prayer, reading and handiwork. Cut down on socializing. Just you and God—how good that is! But when this will be, we'll let the Lord decide. It's better to let things take their own course, because then they are not ordered by human wisdom but by God's allowance. And see the result! You are responsible for involving yourself in acquaintanceships and amusements. This is not a trifling matter. Today, tomorrow—who knows when death will come. And there they won't be dealing cards to see what our fate should be.

St. Theophan the Recluse

MAN AFTER ORTHODOX BAPTISM

By Fr. John S. Romanides of blessed memory (+2001), from "Man and His True Life: According to the Greek Orthodox Service Books."

Baptism is the undertaking of a life-long struggle against the dividing powers of the devil by dying to the ways of the world and uniting one's own self to the corporate life of a definite local community living in Christ. Because of this Holy Sacrament's nature, the Church was never in any great hurry to baptize its Catechumens. It was only after careful examination that one was accepted as a Catechumen. If accepted he was “made a Christian” on the first day (canon 7 of the 2nd Ecumenical Council) by having the *prayer for making a Christian* read over him by the bishop and having his name written in the books of the community. (Cyril of Jerusalem, *Procatechesis*, 1). On the second day he was made a Catechumen; the “prayer for making a Catechumen” was read in the name of the Holy Trinity in order to liberate the new disciple of Christ from the power of the devil and to open to him in due time the doors of life and love in Christ by writing his name in the book of life and uniting him to the Church. And, beginning with the third day, exorcisms were periodically read over him until the time for baptism, Holy Saturday. (Canon 7 of the 2nd Ecumenical Council, *The Service of Baptism*, Trembela, p. 18).

A person was thus considered a Christian before Baptism because he had become a disciple of Christ. As a Catechumen he began to have faith. But this faith alone was not what made him a member of the body of Christ. The difference between a Catechumen and a baptized person was that the Catechumen had not yet died in the waters of Baptism and was not yet ready to share in the inner corporate life of selfless love in the Sacraments.

As indicated above, during the period of the *catechesis* (beginning with the third day), the exorcisms were read periodically until the day of Baptism (*The Service of Baptism*, Trembela, p. 20-21). The exorcisms were obviously intended to liberate the candidate for Baptism from any machinations of Satan by cleansing his heart (the will) from selfishness and egocentricism which may darken his understanding and pervert his conception of true membership in the Church. The prayers of exorcisms clearly have as their object the avoidance of easy entrance into the Church of people who are not entirely liberated from wrong motives inspired by the devil. Thus anyone baptized in time of emergency because of severe sickness cannot enter the clergy because his Baptism was motivated by necessity and not by free choice. (Canon 12 of the Council of Neocaesarea, 315, A.D.)

It is interesting to note that in the entire service of Baptism there is not one statement made about the forgiveness of any kind of guilt that may have been inherited from Adam. In the entire set of prayers for making a Christian, for making a Catechumen, and in the exorcisms, there is no mentioning of forgiving the sins of the one being prepared for the day of Baptism. In the prayer

of the baptismal service itself, forgiveness of sins is mentioned only three times and always in the plural and within the context of many other petitions. The idea of original sin in terms of inherited guilt, as is common to the West, is completely foreign to the baptismal texts under consideration. There is no juridical forgiveness of a sin. Man is going through a process of being liberated from being captive to the devil who is the power of sin and corruption.

Baptism and Chrismation

To try to apply to the Sacrament of Baptism an *ex opera operato* type of interpretation whereby a person becomes a member of the body of Christ in terms of being with the original sin of guilt one moment and then without it the next moment, because a magical formula was recited, would be doing violence to the text of the service itself. (*Ex opera operato* means “from the work worked,” referring to the efficacy of the Sacraments deriving from the action of the Sacrament as opposed to the merits or holiness of the priest or participant, *Ed.*) The process whereby an individual is liberated from the devil is very difficult and requires a long period of prayer, fasting, and instruction in the teachings of the prophets and Christ. The heart must be turned from evil and converted to Christ. It must be turned from self-concern and emptied out in the desire to die with Christ in Baptism. Before Baptism, there must take place a spiritual progress which in degrees prepares one for the death of Baptism and acceptance of the seal of the spirit. Baptism, therefore, is not a moment from which one emerges only forgiven for a sin and differing from his previous existence only in terms of having accepted Christ and some vague principles of good conduct. It is rather the reaching of that stage at which one can freely choose to die with Christ to the vanity of the ways of this world and live within the love of the corporate life in the body of Christ.

The biblical conception of the solidarity which exists between man and creation is clearly seen in the prayers for the blessing of the waters. Sin and the devil *entered the world through one man* (Rom 5:12) and creation was *made subject to death and corruption* (Rom 8:20-22). Because man is inseparably a part of and in constant communion with creation and is linked through procreation to the whole historical process of humanity, the fall of creation through one man automatically involves the fall and corruption of all men. Thus the restoration of our communion in the life of God must also come through the purification of fallen creation which is also under the sway of death and corruption. Since man is part of nature, his communion with the life of God can only be



restored through nature. Both man and creation are being saved together. The waters of Baptism, therefore, must also be exorcised and cleansed of all demonic powers before anyone makes his entrance into them for Baptism. The former communion with death and corruption through nature must be transformed into a communion with the life of God. Upon passing through the death of Baptism one is resurrected to the new life by the vivifying seal of the gift of the Spirit which is the positive adoption of man by God Whose indwelling through His Spirit enables man to participate in the corporate life of the Eucharist.

Man after Baptism

According to the presuppositions found in the baptismal rite of the *Euchologion*, as well as in the New Testament writings, it is clear that man after Baptism, although a member of the Body of Christ on both sides of death, is still subject to the possibility of falling into the hands of the devil and being cut off from the body of Christ. Thus, after the newly

baptized emerges from the baptismal waters, having by his spiritual death defeated the devil, the Church again prays to God to «ρῦσαι ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων αὐτοῦ» [*rescue him (her) from the evil one and all of his vocations*, Trembela, p. III, 3, 4]. The re-establishment of communion with God and neighbor through baptismal death and the seal of the gift of the Spirit is no

magical guarantee against the possibility that man can again become a slave to the devil and be cut off from the body of Christ. (1 Cor 5:1-13; Rom 11:21; 2 Thes 3:6; 3:14; 2 Tim 3:5.) In Baptism unconditional war is declared against the devil and his powers of division and corruption. This war is continued in the corporate life of the Eucharist. To give up this fight entails damnation.

The unity of selfless love with Christ in His body and the saints on both sides of death is an end in itself and not a means to any other end. To put any other motivations before this unity in selfless love is to be still living under the power of the devil. Therefore the life of love in the Eucharist cannot be considered as a means to something else. The Eucharist is an end in itself because it is here where the life of selfless love with each other in Christ and the saints is continued and it is at the Eucharistic gathering that the dividing and destructive powers of the devil are continuously being defeated. *For when you assemble frequently «ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό» (in one place) the powers of Satan are destroyed and the destruction at which he aims is prevented by the unity of your faith.* (St. Ignatius, Epistle to the Ephesians, ch. 13.) Anyone, therefore, who does not hear

the Spirit within him calling him to the Eucharistic assembly for the corporate life of selfless love is obviously under the sway of the devil. *He, therefore, who does not assemble with the Church, has even by this manifested his pride and condemned himself...* (Ibid., ch. 5.)

It is more than evident from the basic principles of the baptismal services, from the prayers of the liturgies, and from the canons of the Church, that to be a member of the body of Christ meant to take part not only in the corporate prayers of the Church, but also to share in the body and blood of Christ. Both prayer and communion could not be understood individualistically because it was the whole body of the local Church which prayed «Ἐν ἑνὶ στόματι καὶ μιᾷ καρδίᾳ» (*with one mouth and one heart*), it was the whole Church which said «ἀμήν» (*amen*) to the Eucharistic prayer (1 Cor 14:16), and it is the whole body that is called to communion by Christ. (St. John Chrysostom, 3rd Homily on Ephesians).

Man does not have life of himself. He can have life only by dying to this world and living a life within the Eucharistic life of the community. His salvation, therefore, cannot come by an individualistic piety. It comes only by Grace and the measure by which he fights the devil and struggles to empty himself of self-concern within the life of Christ whose body is made up of real people. The condition for taking communion is not to be perfect, for then salvation would come from one's own worthiness and not as a free gift from God. The only condition possible for communion is a corporate realization of a continuous struggle against the dividing forces of the devil and a continuous attempt at a corporate and selfless love. In this twofold struggle communion is not taken as a crowning reward for a self-complacency that may come from a period of fast or from doing good works. Rather communion is a free gift from God given to the whole body of Christ gathered to receive it. It is not intended for individualistic consumption. The body and blood of Christ are offered as the common food of life in unity so that by this unity the dividing powers of the devil may be continuously destroyed [«Ἡμᾶς δὲ πάντας, τοὺς ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς Ἄρτου καὶ τοῦ Ποτηρίου μετέχοντας, ἐνώσαις ἀλλήλοις εἰς ἑνὸς Πνεύματος Ἁγίου κοινωνίαν ...» (*And unite us all to one another who become partakers of the one Bread and the Cup in the communion of the one Holy Spirit...*), Communion prayer, Lit. of St. Basil]. It is only by the uniting force of life and love in Christ that the destructive powers of death are kept outside the body of Christ.

The dominion of the body of Christ can be limited, therefore, to a local community living in full the sacramental life. Outside this life *Satan and his powers* are still ruling humanity.

(Rom 16:20; 1 Cor 2:6; 2:12; 11:32; 2 Cor 2:11; 4:3; 11:14; Gal 1:4; Eph 2:1-3; 6:11-17; 2 Thes 2:8.) These powers of division and destruction can be defeated only by those who are passing their lives united with each other in Christ and in the consummation of their unity in love. Because the body of Christ is in a continuous process of becoming, it cannot be identified with any kind of organization in terms of extra sacramental institutionalism. The Holy Spirit is not the possession of individuals, but is always being sent upon the Church at its Eucharistic Gatherings. (*Epiklesis*). Although Christians are temples of the One Holy Spirit and members of the One Body of Christ, they are corporately and constantly becoming what they are through the unity of love in Christ. It is only within the life of this unity that the Seal of the Spirit can remain unbroken.

A proper appreciation of the meaning of being a member of



the body of Christ in terms of becoming can be gained by considering the fact that even during times of intense persecution **Christians of the first centuries risked their lives in order to be present at the Eucharist** (Dix, *Shape of the Lit.* p. 141-155.) Although they were partaking by themselves at home daily of the reserved Sacrament they still had to be at the corporate meeting of the Church because **it is at this meeting that the body of Christ is continuously being formed by the Father Who sends the Spirit to form the body of Christ.** To be absent from the invocation of God to send His Spirit and to make the bread and wine the body and blood of Christ is to break the seal of the Spirit and to be cut off from the body of Christ. To be

absent from this gathering because of fear would be illogical because one had already died to the world in baptism. Hence the Church practice of excommunicating non-participants in Eucharistic worship and communion even during times of persecution. (Canons 9, 10 of the Holy Apostles; Canon 2 of the Council of Antioch; Canon 2 of Trullo).



When a person disobeys a commandment of God, only that person is responsible to Him. But when something which goes against the commandments of the Gospel is made into law by the State, then the wrath of God comes upon the whole nation in order to be pedagogically taught a spiritual lesson.

St. Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

ON CONFESSION AND SPIRITUAL ACCOUNTING

A letter by Elder Ephraim of Arizona.



This confession of yours gave my soul much joy, because God and the angels, who were awaiting it, rejoiced. You succeeded in putting the devil to shame, who greatly rejoices when someone hides his thoughts from his spiritual father. When a snake leaves its lair, it rushes to hide somewhere because it feels as if it will be struck—the same thing happens with a diabolical thought, which is like a poisonous snake. When such a thought leaves a person's mouth, it disperses and disappears, because confession

is humility, and since Satan cannot even bear the smell of humility, how could he possibly remain after a humble, sincere confession?

My child, I wish you a good beginning and cautious progress. Don't be ashamed before me. Don't see me as a man, but as a representative of God. Tell me everything, even if you have a bad thought about me, because I am experienced with demonic influences, and I know how the devil fights man. I know that spiritual children have simple hearts and that if evil thoughts come to them, it is due to the devil's malice and the spiritual child's ego, who is permitted to fall and have such thoughts against his Elder, so that the spiritual child may be humbled more. Therefore, don't worry. I will always rejoice when you speak freely and sincerely to me, for without frank confession, there will be no spiritual progress.

My child, have no worries. I have taken up your burden. I only beg you to be at peace. Your words may be just on paper, but I feel the power, the meaning, and the essence of what you write; I enter into the spirit of your words. I entreat you to be at peace from now on. You are forgiven everything with the confession you made. Satan perceived your character and torments you, but without anything serious having occurred. Everything you write (that is, the thoughts that torture you) is a trick of the evil one to make you despair, be distressed, and so forth. Throw everything that happened to you into the depths of the sea. Map out a new course in your life. If you keep thinking the same way, know that you will become the laughing-stock of the demons.

I beg you, just be obedient to me. After your confession, everything has been forgiven, so let bygones be bygones. Don't scratch a wound that made you suffer so much. Don't be deceived by the thought that it is your fault. If you hadn't taken him to the doctors, etc., then such thoughts would

rightfully fight you. Whereas, as things are now, you have fulfilled your duty. God wanted to take him, for a reason that only His infinite wisdom knows, while you are thinking you killed him! Be careful with this thought, or else it might lurk in your heart. It is a ruse of the devil to harm you, as he knows how. This skilled trickster has drowned in the depths of hell countless multitudes with despair. When something happens and the devil sees that a person is upset by it, his trick is to pile on a multitude of supposedly legitimate thoughts in order to lead the poor person to a great storm and drown him. (As the saying goes, a fox loves a scuffle). And when the storm passes, he sees that he was in danger of drowning in just a spoonful of water.

Humble yourself, and from now on confess, for confession contains most holy humility, without which no one is saved. The devil greatly rejoices when he manages to persuade a person to hide diabolical thoughts. This is because he will achieve his premeditated, soul-destroying goal.

I have written to you about the conscience, that we must be careful not to do something that will make it reproach and condemn us. Bear in mind that God sees everything and that nothing is hidden from His eyes. So how could I tell lies before God? Don't you know that lies are from the devil, and that by not being careful, it becomes a practice, then a habit, and then a passion, and don't you know that liars will not inherit the Kingdom of God? (cf. Rev 21:8). Fear God. God is not pleased with material offerings when we neglect attending to our inner heart. But it is necessary to do these also without leaving the others undone. (cf. Mt 23:23). Attend to your conscience, for we do not know the hour of our death. And if we do not repay our creditor (our conscience, that is) everything we owe him, he will accuse us vehemently, without holding back. Then—alas!—our mouth will be silenced, not having any answer to give.

Every night, review how you passed the day, and in the morning review how the night passed, so that you know how your soul's accounts are doing. If you see a loss, try to regain it through caution and forcefulness. If you see a profit, glorify God, your invisible helper. Do not let your conscience prick you for long, but quickly give it whatever it wants, lest it take you to the judge and the prison (cf. Mt. 5:25). Does your conscience want you to attend to your prayer rule* and regain prayer? Give it these things, and behold, you are delivered from going to the judge. Do not weaken the saving voice of your conscience by disregarding it, because later you will regret it to no avail.

See to it that you are sincere in your deeds as well as in your words, and especially in confession. For God searches out *the hearts and reins* (Pss 7:9), and nothing remains obscure in the sight of His sleepless eye. Fear God; *God is not mocked* (Gal 6:7); He is not fooled. He chastises severely when He does not see sincerity; so be careful. When you are disobedient

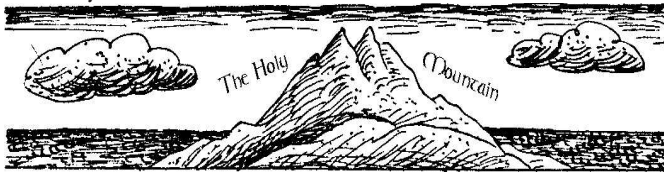
and commit a secret sin, counteract it by openly revealing it in confession. Do not let your ego overcome you and make you hide the truth and remain uncorrected and passionate. Correct everything now if you want to see good days of dispassion*** and peace.

† † †

* Prayer rule (κανών): A prayer rule consists of the prayers and metanoias** (prostrations) which one does daily, under the guidance of one's spiritual father.

** Metanoia (μετάνοια): In its primary sense, «μετάνοια» (pronounced “meh-tah-nee-ah”) means repentance, literally, “a change of mind.” However, it can also mean the specific act of making the sign of the cross, followed by a bow either down to the ground or to the waist. It is a gesture of reverence, worship, respect, or repentance. A typical prayer rule includes a number of metanoias done while saying the Jesus prayer. Some translators use the word “prostration” for this term.

*** Dispassion (ἀπάθεια): Dispassion is achieved when all three aspects of the soul (i.e., the intelligent, appetitive, and incensive aspects) are directed towards God. It is the transfiguration of the passionate aspect of the soul (i.e., the aspect of the soul which is more vulnerable to passion, namely, the appetitive and incensive aspects), rather than its mortification. Thus dispassion in this context does not signify a stoic indifference, but rather, a transfiguration and sanctification of the powers of the soul and eventually of the body also.



The voice you heard saying to you: “Christ has purged you of your sins and deadened your passions,” is from the devil. It is the first stepping-stone that leads man to delusion and destruction. If one listens and pays attention to him and his heart is sweetened and he accepts these words of the devil as true, immediately the devil comes more tangibly to him, and gradually he is overcome. Then it takes much toil to be freed.

This is why, my child, you did well not to pay attention to that voice, and to criticize yourself instead. Next time you hear something, say: “I will tell it to my Elder and will do whatever he tells me.” The devil greatly fears confession to one's Elder, because he knows that all his traps will be ruined!

You should realize, my child, that thoughts of conceit (of pride, in other words) have sprouted within you, and this is why this happened to you. Be careful. Have much humility. Every day entreat God to grant you a spirit of humility. Just as nothing grows on a trodden path, likewise no delusion grows in a trodden humble spirit.

Elder Ephraim of Arizona

NIGHT WATCH OF THE HERMIT

From “A Night in the Desert of the Holy Mountain.

Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord. Lift up thy hands toward him for the life of thy young children, that faint for hunger in the top of every street. [Lam 2:19]

† † †



An old monk wearing a worn-out, patched-up black *nasso* wakes up in the middle of the night, and rises from the floor of his cave in Katounakia, Mount Athos, Greece, to pray.

His meal the previous evening consisted of a piece of dried stale hard bread and some rain water collected in an aluminum can. He has been rising for prayer for the last forty years and his legs no longer allow him to stand without pain but he is undeterred. His callous arthritic shaking hand reaches out for some matches which he is able to find, always in the same place, in spite of the stark darkness that shrouds him, and he lights up what remains of the candle he used the previous night.

The Spartan conditions of his dwelling are intimidating. The cave is cold and narrow. Its jagged walls are naked and the floor where he stands consists of the dirt and loose rocks of the cave. Years ago he managed to gather some thrown away wood, by the monasteries not so near him, and he was able to put together an *iconostasis* and an altar. The paper icons are few and damaged but the faces of the saints encourage him.

As the monk begins the prayers with the opening benediction of the Midnight Office, he considers himself to be the most blessed of men, *Blessed is our God, always, now and ever, and unto ages of ages*. The flickering candles communicate warmth, light and spiritual depth to this sacred space. This cave is Heaven! When the time for the Divine Liturgy comes, the priest-monk is already rapt in God, his face radiant, like Moses, as one who clearly beholds the other world.

Metropolitan Hierotheos was once blessed to be present in a cave like this one during one of these Divine Liturgies: “There were only a few oil lamps lighting the church, enough to show the icons of the Saints and the Most Holy Mother of God and of Christ. The three disciples with their Geronda, stood motionless on the old pews and lived the Mystery. They were not simply attending, but they were celebrating the Liturgy with me! Their faces looked like the faces of the Saints in iconography. It was as if they had come down from the walls and were living the resurrection. Their voices were soft, weak, stifled by their compunction. Their chanting was coming out of a heart wounded by divine love; it was coming out of the depths of their soul, which has been pierced by divine love...”

WHO ART THOU THAT JUDGEST?

By Protopresbyter James Thornton. Sermon on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans (13:11-14:4), Forgiveness Sunday (Cheesefare Sunday).

And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof. Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. (Rom 13:11-14:4).

† † †

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ, tomorrow we Orthodox Christians begin the Great Fast. We now enter an extended period of approximately seven weeks of more intense prayer and fasting until we reach Holy Pascha, the Feast of Feasts, the Feast of Christ's Resurrection. This is a period of golden opportunity for each of us wherein we may look deeply within ourselves and determine what, from a spiritual point of view, is unwholesome or deficient. We may then, during this time, begin the work of excising from our lives that which is unhealthy and, at the same time, augmenting that which is truly sound and truly pleasing to God.

I run the risk here of sounding prosaic and platitudinous when I recall the popular saying, "You are what you eat." Yet I shall take the risk: you are indeed what you eat. It is quite obvious that if we eat luxuriously, if our diet is exclusively confined to the most extravagant foods, exotically flavored and rich in fats, spices, and sugars, as is typical of the contemporary American diet, our individual physiologies will sooner or later bear the marks of those habits, either in various aspects of outward appearance or in the functioning of our bodily systems, or in both.

Moreover, our individual characters, personalities, and temperaments will be marked, and, likewise, and most importantly, our souls. An obsession with the worldly impresses

itself on the whole of our beings. By way of contrast, more prudent choices in our diets, as prescribed during the Fast by our wise Mother the Church, will do the opposite, and may make us physically healthier, and most assuredly will make us spiritually healthier.

Some religious writers of a modernist or fundamentalist bent enjoy drawing our attention to the alleged fact that in early Christianity—primitive Christianity, as it is sometimes called—there were no Holy Canons regarding fasting, no Great Lent, practically no fasting rules at all. Holy Canons and fasting periods are seen by these writers as latter-day and, by implication, needless accretions, even "monkish" accretions in the estimation of many of them.

In today's Epistle reading, St. Paul writes of a difference of opinion between those who believe that they may eat all things and those who *eateth herbs* (i.e., vegetables), as he puts it. We see from this passage that even at this earliest stage, just a few decades after Christ's Ascension, questions about fasting from certain

foods were already present and were already the subject of discussion. So, fasting was not unknown in the Apostolic Church. In fact, Orthodox historians maintain that the Wednesday and Friday fasts are of Apostolic origin and it is likely that, while the Lenten fasts were not codified in their current form until after the Apostolic period, that codification nonetheless reflected an already established, though not always uniform, tradition.



Consequently, what the modernist and fundamentalist writers say is true only to the very limited extent that, in St. Paul's day, certain details about fasting had not yet appeared and would take time to unfold. As with medical science or, let us say, the science of physics, the science that is Orthodox theology required time to mature.

The comparison here between the natural sciences and theology is apt, yet it is imperfect in one respect. In the case of the natural sciences, new discoveries that radically alter the body of fundamental knowledge are always possible. The discovery of the connection between bacteria and disease by nineteenth-century medical science or the displacement of classical physics by quantum physics in the twentieth century are examples of this. In the case of Orthodox theology, that cannot happen.

All knowledge needed for salvation has been given us by Christ; the body of fundamental knowledge remains fixed and changeless. No radical discoveries about this knowledge are possible. But a growth in the understanding of the application of that

body of knowledge to our lives is possible, and that growth, that maturing, has characterized the history of Orthodoxy.

As the grave risk to life and limb that was associated with membership in the primitive Church abated in the early fourth century, it became safe, even fashionable, to belong to the Church. It was then that other methods for forging the spiritual character became an urgent necessity, and for this reason fasting took on an increased importance at that time. When one lives by day and by night under the terror of persecution; when crucifixion, burning alive, being devoured by wild animals, or being sentenced to a life of forced labor, are genuine possibilities for the followers of Christ; when one's outlook is colored by continuous fear of the knock at the door—in those circumstances, it may be argued, the most rigorous type of fasting is not as indispensable as in more tranquil times.

Therefore, those who argue that we ought to return to the more primitive practice of fasting, in which it was somewhat less comprehensively regulated, should understand that if membership in Christ's Church is to achieve anything positive for us at all, then with this less stringent regimen in fasting there must also come a desire for trials of the most severe kind elsewhere in our lives. If membership in Christ's Church is to make us more like Christ, either one or the other is indispensable. Considered that way, we can see that fasting from animal products is not so difficult after all.

Now, let us enter more fully into the message of today's Epistle reading. In writing of the disputations in the early Roman Church between those who did not fast so strictly and those who did, St. Paul offers this admonition: *Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.* What wonderfully beneficial words these are!

St. Paul is telling us that whatever fasting discipline we or others follow, the crucial thing is that we address the matter of our own relationship with our Master, Jesus Christ, and not judge the relationship of our neighbor with Him. When we each face the question as to whether we need to fast more stringently to strengthen our commitment to our Faith, our answer to that question, and the way our answer manifests itself in our lives, will ultimately be judged by the Master Whom we serve, when we stand before His "dread judgment seat." So it is also in all the things we choose. It is not for us to make judgments about our Christian brothers and sisters. For several reasons we do not judge them:

1. To judge another is to usurp the place of God; as St. Paul says: *Who art thou that judgest?*

2. To judge another is to take one's focus off the place where it should be, and must be, to save one's soul, which is on one's own spiritual imperfections.

3. To judge another is to incur the danger of an additional sin, misjudging, since we cannot see into another man's heart and cannot know all of the circumstances of his life. St. Dorotheos of Gaza observes that while one can see another man's sins, one cannot know about that man's standing with God, about his secret prayers of supplication for mercy and forgiveness. *You may well know about the sin, the great Saint writes, but you do not know about the repentance.*

4. To judge another brings further dissension and strife into the Church, a place where peace and love should be the primary attributes.

5. To judge another is to bring on the temptation of an even worse sin, one of the worst among sins, which is gossip.

6. Finally, and most significantly, to judge another is to bring judgment upon ourselves; Christ Himself warned, *judge not, and ye shall not be judged.*

We are repeatedly warned as Christians not to judge other men and women. Does this require that we completely abandon our critical faculties when it comes to our dealings with other people? If we should know of a man who is a notorious embezzler, do we do right in judging him unfit to be the custodian of the public treasury? If we should encounter a man whom we know to be a psychopathic murderer, do we properly judge it unwise to invite him over to dinner? The answer to both questions, obviously, is yes.

Let us take some less extreme and more likely examples. If we learn that a particular friend or companion exerts an unhealthy influence on us as Christians, or if we believe that a friend or companion of our children may lead those children astray, may we make the appropriate judgment in those cases and terminate such associations? Again, the answer is yes. Of course we may do that. We would be held accountable by Christ for not making these kinds of judgments.

What we are forbidden as Christians to do is to judge another person's ultimate state before God, or to employ our critical faculties to enhance, in our own minds, our own rank or station or footing, in what we fancy are the eyes of God, at the expense of another human being. We are forbidden, in other words, to regard ourselves as "holy" by comparison with someone we regard as "sinful." The Holy Gospel teaches us that Christ God judged the outwardly holy men of His country, the Pharisees, very harshly, while the Good Thief (a most unlikely candidate for salvation, one would think) was assured everlasting happiness. St. John of the Ladder declares that, *[T]he beginning and sum of the passions... [is] unholy self-esteem.* Let us therefore not fasten our gaze upon the imagined inadequacies of other men and women during the Great Fast but examine with the most penetrating contemplation possible our own spiritual failures, that these may be swiftly amended. For most, if not all, of us, that task is sufficient to fill a lifetime.

THE PRODIGAL SON'S BROTHER

By Dr. Alexander Kalomiros, from "The River of Fire."



Now if anyone is perplexed and does not understand how it is possible for God's love to render anyone pitifully wretched and miserable and even burning as it were in flames, let him consider the elder brother of the prodigal son. Was he not in his father's estate? Did not everything in it belong to him? Did he not have his father's love? Did his father not come himself to entreat and beseech him to come

and take part in the joyous banquet?

What rendered him miserable and burned him with inner bitterness and hate? Who refused him anything? Why was he not joyous at his brother's return? Why did he not have love either toward his father or toward his brother? Was it not because of his wicked, inner disposition? Did he not remain in eternal torment because of that? And what was this eternal torment? Was it any separate place? Were there any instruments of torture? Did he not continue to live in his father's house?

What separated him from all the joyous people in the house if not his own hate and his own bitterness? Did his father, or even his brother, stop loving him? Was it not precisely this very love which hardened his heart more and more? Was it not the joy that made him sad? Was not hatred burning in his heart, hatred for his father and his brother, hatred for the love of his father toward his brother and for the love of his brother toward his father?

This is eternal torment: the negation of love; the return of hate for love; bitterness at seeing innocent joy; to be surrounded by love and to have hate in one's heart. This is the eternal condition of all the damned. They are all dearly loved. They are all invited to the joyous banquet. They are all living in God's Kingdom, in the New Earth and the New Heavens. No one expels them. Even if they wanted to go away they could not flee from God's New Creation, nor hide from God's tenderly loving omnipresence. Their only alternative would be, perhaps, to go away from their brothers and search for a bitter isolation from them, but they could never depart from God and His love.

And what is more terrible is that in this eternal life, in this New Creation, God is everything to His creatures. As Saint Gregory of Nyssa says, in the present life the things we have relations with are numerous, for instance: time, air, locality,

food and drink, clothing, sunlight, lamplight, and other necessities of life, none of which, many though they be, are God; that blessed state which we hope for is in need of none of these things, but the Divine Being will become all, and in the stead of all to us, distributing Himself proportionately to every need of that existence. It is plain, too, from the Holy Scriptures that God becomes to those who deserve it, locality and home and clothing and food and drink and light and riches and kingdom, and everything that can be thought of and named that goes to make our life happy.

In the new eternal life, God will be everything to His creatures, not only to the good but also to the wicked, not only to those who love Him, but likewise to those who hate Him. But how will those who hate Him endure to have everything from the hands of Him Whom they detest? Oh, what an eternal torment is this, what an eternal fire, what a gnashing of teeth!

Depart from Me, ye cursed, into the everlasting inner fire of hatred, saith the Lord, because I was thirsty for your love and you did not give it to Me, I was hungry for your blessedness and you did not offer it to Me, I was imprisoned in My human nature and you did not come to visit Me in My church; you are free to go where your wicked desire wishes, away from Me, in the torturing hatred of your hearts which is foreign to My loving heart which knows no hatred for anyone. Depart freely from love to the everlasting torture of hate, unknown and foreign to Me and to those who are with Me, but prepared by freedom for the devil, from the days I created My free, rational creatures. But wherever you go in the darkness of your hating hearts, My love will follow you like a river of fire, because no matter what your heart has chosen, you are and you will eternally continue to be, My children. Amen.



What is the human soul? It is the one same soul or the one same breath of God which God breathed into Adam, and which until now is diffused from Adam upon the entire human race. Therefore all men are as though one man, or one great tree of mankind.

From this comes the most natural commandment, founded upon the unity of our nature: *'You shall love the Lord your God (your Prototype, your Father) with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. You shall love your neighbor (for who can be nearer to me than the man who is like me, of the same blood as me?) as yourself'* (Mk 12:30-31). To fulfill these two commandments is a natural necessity.

St. John of Kronstadt (+1908)

Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή τοῦ 1954 στὴν Πόλη Μία πραγματικὴ ἱστορία μὲ Κρυπτο-Χριστιανούς τῆς Πόλης

Ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίον «Ὁ Κήπος τοῦ Παπποῦ», Ἀγιορειτικὲς διηγήσεις
Ἀρχμ. Γαβριὴλ Διονυσιάτου (+1983).

Σὲ μία Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Γαλατᾶ στὴν Πόλη, ὅπου συχνάζουν οἱ ναυτικοὶ καὶ ταξιδιωτὲς ν' ἀνάψουν τὸ κεράκι τους γιὰ τοὺς δικούς τους καὶ τὸ καλὸ ταξεῖδι πρὸς τὶς φουρτουνιασμένες θάλασσες τοῦ Πόντου. Ἐκεῖ, τὴ Μεγάλη Σαρακοστὴ τοῦ 1954 πῆγε νὰ λειτουργήσῃ καὶ νὰ ξομολογήσῃ τοὺς Χριστιανούς κάποιος Γέρων Πνευματικὸς (πρόκειται γιὰ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν γράφοντα, **Συντ.**), γιὰ πρώτη φορὰ ἐπισκεπτόμενος τὴν Πόλη.

Ὁ τακτικὸς ἐφημέριος, ἐξυπηρετῶν καὶ ἄλλην Ἐκκλησίαν εἰς γειτονικὸν Ἁγίασμα, ἀφοῦ τὸν κατετόπισε εἰς τὰ τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Βήματος, τοῦ ἔδωσε καὶ μερικὲς δεκάδες ὀνομάτων «ζώντων καὶ τεθνεώτων», τὸν ὠδήγησε εἰς συνεχόμενον σκοτεινὸν Παρεκ-

κλήσιον, καὶ ἀφοῦ τοῦ ἔδειξε μικρὰ κλίμακα ἀνερχομένην ἐλικοειδῶς τὰ κατηχούμενα τοῦ Ναοῦ, τοῦ εἶπεν ἐμπιστευτικῶς, ὅτι τὸν περιμένουν ἐπάνω καμμιὰ δεκαριά ἄνθρωποι γιὰ νὰ ἐξομολογηθοῦν. Εἶναι ἀνάγκη ν' ἀνεβῆ νὰ τοὺς ἐξομολογήσῃ καὶ νὰ μεταλάβουν εἴτα εἰς τὴν Λειτουργίαν, διότι ἐπείγονται νὰ φύγουν τὸ βράδυ μὲ τὸ πλοῖον τῆς γραμμῆς· εἶναι ξένοι ἀπὸ μακρὰ. Ἀνέβαινε ὁ Γέρων συλλογιζόμενος τὸ δύσκολον ζήτημα τῆς συνεννοήσεως μετ' αὐτῶν, ἐφ' ὅσον ἦσαν ξένοι ἀπὸ μακρὰ· αὐτὸς δὲ πλὴν τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς, δὲν ἐγνώριζεν ἄλλην γλῶσσαν.

Ἐκεῖ, εἰς τὸ ἡμίφως τοῦ ὑπερώου διέκρινε δεκάδα ἀνδρῶν χωρικῶν μεγάλης ἡλικίας, οἵτινες εἰς τὸ ἀντικρυσμᾶ του, τοῦ ἔβαλον ὅλοι μετάνοιαν καὶ ὁ γεροντότερος τοῦ εἶπεν εἰς Ποντιακὴν διάλεκτον:

—Ἡμεῖς Χριστιανοί, πάτερ, ἃ σὸν Πόντον, καὶ λαλούμεν (φιλοῦμεν) τὰ πόδα σου, νὰ ξαγουρευούμεν καὶ μεταλάβομεν σήμερον καὶ ἀπὲς νὰ λέομεν στὴν ἀγιωσύνην σου ντὸ θέλομεν ἓνα κι ἄλλον.

Εὐτυχῶς ὅτι ὁ Γέρων συναναστραφεὶς πρὸ ἐτῶν μετὰ Ποντίων προσφύγων ἐν Μακεδονίᾳ ἐνεθυμείτο ἀρκετὰ τῆς ἀπηρχαιωμένης αὐτῆς Ἑλληνικῆς διαλέκτου καὶ ἐνόησε τὶ ἤθελον, καὶ τὶ θὰ τοῦ ἔλεγον ἐξομολογούμενοι.

Ἐμαθε λοιπὸν παρ' αὐτῶν ὅτι ὀλόκληρον τὸ χωρίον των εἶναι κρυπτο-Χριστιανοὶ ἀπὸ πολλῶν ἐτῶν, καὶ εἰς

τὴν ἀνταλλαγὴν δὲν τοὺς ἐπετράπη νὰ φύγουν εἰς τὴν Ἑλλάδα, διότι τὰ «νεφούζια» τους (ταυτότητες) ἦσαν μὲ Τουρκικὰ ὀνόματα, ὅτι στὸ φανερὸ εἶναι Ὅθωμανοὶ καὶ Τούρκοι, καὶ στὸ κρυφὸ εἶναι Χριστιανοὶ καὶ Ἕλληνες καὶ περιμένουν νὰ τοὺς γλυτώσει ὁ Θεὸς ἀπὸ τὴν σκλαβιά. Στὰ φανερὰ λέγονται Χασάνηδες καὶ Μεμέτηδες, καὶ τὰ πραγματικὰ ὀνόματά τους εἶναι Γεώργιος, Παναγιώτης κ.λ.π. Ἔχουν ἓνα δικὸ τους δῆθεν Χότζα, ἀλλὰ οὔτε περιτομὴ κάνουν, οὔτε ραμαζάνια καὶ Μπαϊράμια τουναντίον, μυστικὰ σὲ ὑπόγειες Ἐκκλησίες ἐορτάζουν Χριστιανικὰ τὸ Πάσχα, τὰ Χριστούγεννα, τῆς Παναγίας.

Πρὶν τῆς «ἀνταλλαγῆς» ἔπαιρναν παπᾶ ἀπὸ γειτονικὰ χωριά καὶ τοὺς βάπτιζε, τοὺς στεφάνωνε, τοὺς λειτουργοῦσε τὶς μεγάλες ἐορτές καὶ μετελάμβανον. Ἀλλὰ τώρα δὲν ὑπάρχει πουθενὰ παπᾶς καὶ ἀναγκαστικῶς ἔρχονται στὴν Πόλη ἐκ περιτροπῆς γιὰ δουλειές δῆθεν καὶ γίνονται Χριστιανοί.

Ὁ Γέρων Πνευματικὸς τὰ ἤκουσε σασιτισμένος, τοῦ ἐφαίνετο ὅτι διάβαξε συναξάριον τῆς ἐποχῆς τοῦ Διοκλητιανοῦ καὶ δὲν ἠμποροῦσε νὰ συγκρατήσῃ τὰ δάκρυα ἀπὸ τὴν συγκίνηση.

Ἐξομολογήθηκαν βιαστικά, καὶ ὅλοι μαζὶ κατέβηκαν ἀθόρυβα εἰς τὸ σκοτεινὸ Παρεκκλήσι, ἀπ' ὅπου θὰ ἤκουον τὴν Λειτουργίαν τῶν Προηγιασμένων, χωρὶς

κάνεις νὰ τοὺς βλέπῃ. Καὶ ὅταν μετὰ τὴν λῆξιν ἐμετάλαβον οἱ ἄλλοι ἐκκλησιαζόμενοι, ἐγένετο ἡ ἀπόλυσις καὶ ἔφυγε καὶ ὁ κανδηλάπτης, ἔμεινε δὲ μόνος ὁ λειτουργὸς Πνευματικὸς μὲ τὸν γνωστὸν σκοπὸν τῆς ἐξομολογήσεως, τότε κλείσας ἔσωθεν τὰς θύρας καὶ λαβὼν τὰ Ἅγια εἰσήλθεν εἰς τὸ Βῆμα τοῦ Παρεκκλησίου καὶ ἐκάλεσε τοὺς μαρτυρικοὺς Κρυπτοχριστιανούς, ἵνα «μετὰ φόβου Θεοῦ, πίστεως καὶ ἀγάπης προσέλθωσι».

—Μεταλαμβάνει ὁ δοῦλος τοῦ Θεοῦ, Γιολίας-Γεώργιος, τὸ τίμιον καὶ πανάσπιλον καὶ ζωοποιὸν Σῶμα καὶ αἷμα τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ Θεοῦ καὶ Σωτῆρος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν καὶ εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον. Ἀμήν.

—Μεταλαμβάνει ὁ δοῦλος τοῦ Θεοῦ, Ἀναστάς-Ἀναστάσιος εἰς....

Μετὰ τὴν «Εὐχαριστίαν» καὶ τὴν ἀπόλυσιν, εἶπον εἰς τὸν Πνευματικόν:

—πάτερ, νὰ κάνης μᾶς ἄλλον κι' ἓναν χάριν, ἔχομεν ἀδὰ σὴν Πόλιν καὶ τὰς καρίδας (γυναίκας) καὶ τέσσαρα



παιδιά μου, καὶ τὸ πουρνὶν (αὔριον) νὰ βαπτίξης τὰ παιδιά, νὰ μυρώνης τά, πάτερ, κουρμπὰν πάτερ (ἅγιε πάτερ, **Συντ.**), ποῖσον τὰ Χριστιανούς. Ὁ πουπὰν ἀδὰ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας φοβόσκετεν, πάτερ, τοὺς Τουρκᾶδες κ' ἐβάπτισε τά. Ντὸ νὰ κάνουμεν, πάτερ, σεμέτερον τὴν Ἑλλάδα κ' ἀφήνουν μας νὰ δεβαίνουμεν. Στὸ Χριστὸ καὶ στὴν Παναγίαν τὴν Σουμελᾶν ὀρκίζομεν σε, πάτερ, ποῖσον τὸ καλὸν ἃ σὲ μᾶς τὰ παιδιά σου.

—Μὰ ὁ παπᾶς ἀδὰ εἶπε μέ, πὼς θὰ φύγετε τὸ βράδυν μὲ τὸ παπόρ.

—Νὰ συγχωρῆς μας, πάτερ, λέομεν ψεματίας, ὡσὰν νὰ λάσκομεν τὲς δουλειῆς μας. Ντὸ νὰ κάνουμεν, πάτερ; Ὁ Θεὸν νὰ λυπᾶται τὰ μέτεραν τὰ βάσαναν.

Ἔμειναν σύμφωνοι νὰ ἔλθουν τὸ βράδυν μὲ τὰς γυναῖκας καὶ τὰ παιδιά, νὰ μείνουν στὸ δωμάτιο τοῦ παπᾶ, ὁ ὁποῖος ὑπὸ μίαν πρόφασιν θὰ ἔλειπε, καὶ τὴν νύκτα μυστικὰ θὰ γινόταν ἡ βάπτισις ὅλων τῶν παιδιῶν κ.λπ.

Ἦλθον τμηματικὰ καὶ μὲ προφυλάξεις τὸ βράδυν πρὸς τὸ σουρούπωμα, ἕως ὅτου καθησυχᾶση ὁ κόσμος. Ἐξωμολογήθηκαν καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες, καὶ πρὸ τοῦ μεσονυκτίου ἐγένετο καὶ ἡ βάπτισις, τὸ μύρωμα καὶ ὁ Ἐκκλησιασμὸς τῶν παιδιῶν εἰς τὸ Παρεκκλήσιον.

Μετὰ τὸ νεοβάπτισμα κοιμηθῆκανε ἐπάνω ὑπὸ τὴν φύλαξιν μίας γυναίκος, οἱ δὲ ἄλλοι ἐξημερώθηκαν εἰς τὸν Ναόν... Ὁ Γέρων Πνευματικὸς τοὺς ἔκαμε εὐχέλαιον, κατόπιν τοὺς ἔκανε καὶ παρακλήσιν τῆς Παναγίας, καὶ ἐνόσω αὐτὸς ἐδιάβαζεν καὶ ἔψαλλεν, **αὐτοὶ ὅλοι, ἄνδρες καὶ γυναῖκες γονατιστοὶ** ἐψιθύριζον τὸ «Κύριε ἐλέησον» καὶ «Παναγία Θεοτόκε, σῶσον ἡμᾶς».

Ὅταν ἐξημέρωσε, τοὺς εἶπε νὰ μὴ φύγουν, νὰ πᾶνε νὰ ἡσυχάσουν καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ἡμέραν τὴν Παρασκευὴν θὰ κάμη πάλιν Λειτουργίαν νὰ μεταλάβουν αἱ γυναῖκες καὶ τὰ νεοβάπτιστα παιδιά. Τοὺς ἄφησε καὶ εἰσήλθε εἰς τὸ Ἱερόν, ἵνα ρίψη ὀλίγον νερὸ εἰς τὸ πρόσωπόν του εἰς τὸν «Νιπτῆρα» καὶ ἀνανήψη ἐκ τῆς ἀγρυπνίας. Αὐτοὶ ἀνέβηκαν ἐπάνω καὶ σὲ λίγο κατέβηκαν πάλιν δύο, οἱ γεροντότεροι καὶ τοῦ εἶπαν:

—Ἄ τώρα, πάτερ, νὰ λέομεν σε ἕναν κ' ἄλλον τὰ ἀμέτεραν τὰς δουλειᾶς. Τὰ πόδα σου νὰ λαλεύομεν, κουρμπὰν πάτερ, ν' ἀκούης μας, σ' ἐμέτερον τὸ χωρίον πουπὰν κ' ἔχουμεν, ἀνάστασιν καὶ ξερομεν ἀδὰ στὰ τράντα χρονίας. Ντὸ ψυὴν νὰ δίομεν σὸν Θεόν, πάτερ; Τὰ παιδιά μου ἀντρέβουν χωρὶς πουπὰν,

στεφὰν ποῖον νὰ θέκη τὰ στὸ ἀφκάλι; Γκουρτσουλὰν (οἱ καϋμένοι) παποῦδες μας καὶ χασταληδες (ἄρρωστοι) ποθαίνουν χωρὶς Λειτουργίαν, πάτερ. Ἄχ! Ἀφωρισμένον σκλαβίαν. Ἐνέγκαμεν, πάτερ, ἕνα σακὶν μικρὸ, χῶμα τεμέτερον τὸ κοιμητήρ, νὰ διαβάξης τό, νὰ ρίξωμεν ἐκεῖ καὶ σὴν τάφοιν του. Νὰ διῆς μας, πάτερ, λειτουργίαν, νὰ δίομεν σαμέτερα τα παιδιά, Πάσχα ἔρχετεν, πάτερ, καὶ νὰ κάνης μας καὶ ἵνα ἀνάστασιν, ν' ἀκούσουμε «Χριστὸς ἀνέστη». πάτερ, κ' ἀπὲς ἃς πεθάσκομεν.

Τοὺς εἶπεν ὁ Πνευματικὸς νὰ ἔλθουν πάλιν καὶ τὸ βράδυν ὅλοι τους, ὅπως καὶ ἔγινε. Καὶ ἀφοῦ κοιμήθηκαν τὰ παιδιά, τοὺς εἶπε ὅσα ἠδύνατο περὶ τῆς θρησκείας μας, τοὺς συνεβούλευσε νὰ εἶναι σταθεροὶ εἰς τὴν πίστιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ νὰ ἔχουν εἰς αὐτὸν τὴν ἐλπίδα τους, ὅτι μία μέρα θὰ τελειώσουν τὰ βάσανά τους. Τὸν διέκοπταν μὲ ἐρωτήσεις σπαρακτικές:

—Ντὸ κάνουν ταμέτερα τὰ παιδιά, πάτερ, στὴ Πατρίδα μας τὴν Ἑλλάδα; Ντὸ κάνει ὁ Βασιλέαν ὁ Κωνσταντῖνον;...

Τοῦ ξέφυγε καὶ τοὺς εἶπε μὲ δάκρυα στοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ὅτι ὁ Κωνσταντῖνον ὁ Βασιλέαν ἀπέθανεν!... Ὅλοι τους ἤρχισαν τὰ κλάματα, καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες περισσότερον νὰ κλαίγουν λέγοντας:

—Ὁ Κωνσταντῖνον μας κ' ἐπεθαίνει, ὁ Βασιλέαν μας ζῆ, ὁ Κωνσταντῖνον μας θὰ παίρνῃ μᾶς νὰ

δεβαίνουμεν στὴ Πατρίδα, ἀοῖκον λόγον χαπάρ κ' ἔχουμε, πάτερ.

Τοὺς καθησύχασε λέγοντας, ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς θὰ στείλῃ ἄλλον Κωνσταντῖνον νὰ τοὺς ἐλευθερώσῃ καὶ νὰ τοὺς πάγῃ ὅπου αὐτὸς θέλει, καὶ μόνον ὑπομονὴν καὶ ἐλπίδα νὰ ἔχουν καὶ ἀγάπη μεταξὺ των. Μετὰ κατέβηκαν στὴν Ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ὁ Γέρων Πνευματικὸς ἀνέγνωσε τὴν νεκρώσιμον ἀκολουθίαν μὲ τὰ ὀνόματα των «τεθνεώτων» ἐπὶ τοῦ χῶματος, ἔπειτα τοὺς ἔδωσε καὶ τὸ κλειδίον τοῦ ἄλλου δωματίου, ὅπου ἔμενον αὐτὸς καὶ τοὺς ἔστειλε νὰ ξεκουραστοῦν, καὶ τὸ πρῶν θὰ τοὺς ξυπνοῦσε ὁ ἴδιος.

Ὁρθρου βαθέος ἀνέβηκε καὶ τοὺς ἐξύπνησε, καὶ ἕως ὅτου αὐτοὶ ἐτοιμαστοῦν, ἔψαλλε τὸν κανόνα τοῦ Μεγάλου Σαββάτου «Κύματι θαλάσσης», κατέβηκαν καὶ αὐτοὶ καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ γράμματα κατάλαβαν, ὅτι θὰ τοὺς κάνῃ τὴν Ἀνάστασιν.

Ἐκάλεσε τὸν γεροντότερον καὶ τοῦ εἶπε νὰ πάρῃ ἀπὸ τὸ παγκάρι κηρία, ὅσες ψυχές εἶναι εἰς τὸ χωρίον των καὶ νὰ μοιράσῃ εἰς ὅλους ἀνὰ δέκα. Εἰσελθὼν δὲ εἰς



τὸ Ἅγιον Βῆμα καὶ φορέσας λευκὰ ἄμφια ἐξήλθεν εἰς τὴν ὥραϊαν Πύλην μὲ ἀναμμένη λαμπάδα καὶ εἶπε μὲ φωνὴν παλλομένην:

—*Δεῦτε λάβετε φῶς, δεῦτε λάβετε φῶς, δεῦτε λάβετε φῶς ἐκ τοῦ ἀνασπέρου φωτὸς καὶ δοξάσατε Χριστὸν τὸν ἀναστάντα ἐκ νεκρῶν...*

Τοὺς εἶπε καὶ ἤναψαν ὅλα τὰ κηρία, ἀνέγνωσαν ἔπειτα τὸ Β' ἑσθινὸν «*Διαγενομένου τοῦ Σαββάτου*» καὶ μετὰ τὸ «*Δόξα τῇ ἀγία καὶ ζωοποιῷ καὶ ἀδαιρέτῳ Τριάδι...*» ἔψαλλε τὸ «*Χριστὸς ἀνέστη*» ἐκ τρίτου. Καὶ ὅτε ἔστρεψε ἵνα εἶπη εἰς αὐτοὺς νὰ ψάλλουν καὶ αὐτοί, ὅλοι τους ἦσαν ἀγκαλιασμένοι καὶ ἔκλαιον καὶ κατεφιλοῦντο. Ἦρπασε καὶ αὐτὸς εἰς τὰς ἀγκάλας του τὰ μικρὰ νεοφώτιστα καὶ τὰ ἐφίλησε, εἶτα τοὺς εἶπε παρηγορητικούς λόγους, ὅτι:

—Καὶ τὸ Γένος θ' ἀναστηθῆ μίαν ἡμέραν ὁλόκληρον, καὶ ἠνωμένον θὰ ἐορτάζη πλεόν τὴν Ἀνάστασιν τοῦ Κυρίου, ὡς μία οἰκογένεια!

Τοὺς συνέστησε ἔπειτα νὰ σβήσουν τὰ κηρία, καὶ ὅταν ὑπάγουν εἰς τὸ χωρίον των τὴν ἡμέραν τοῦ Πάσχα νὰ τὰ μοιράσουν εἰς ὅλους νὰ τὰ ἀνάψουν βαπτισμένοι καὶ ἀβάπτιστοι, νὰ ψάλλουν τὸ «*Χριστὸς ἀνέστη*», καὶ ὅτι ὅσοι εἶναι βαπτισμένοι καὶ στεφανωμένοι νὰ μεταλάβουν ἀπὸ τὴν Ἁγίαν Κοινωνίαν, ποῦ θὰ τοὺς δώση αὖριον νὰ πάρουν μαζί τους.

Ἔως ὅτου ξημερώση καλά, ἐδιάβαζεν εἰς ἐπήκοον πάντων τὴν Ἀκολουθίαν τῆ Μεταλήψεως, εἶτα τὴν συγχωρητικὴν εὐχὴν. Ὅλοι τους εἰσηλθον εἰς τὸ Παρεκκλήσιον, ἀφ' ὅπου ἤκουον τὴν Θεϊαν Λειτουργίαν. Εἰς τὸ τέλος μετέδωκε πρῶτον τὰ ἄχραντα Μυστήρια εἰς τὰ νεοφώτιστα παιδιά, εἰς τὰς γυναῖκας ἔπειτα, καὶ κατόπιν εἰς τοὺς ἄνδρας.

Ἐκεῖνοι ἐδίσταζαν:

—Ἴνεται, πάτερ, ἓναν καὶ ἄλλον κοινωνίαν;

—Γίνεται, τοὺς εἶπε, «*Σῶμα Χριστοῦ μεταλάβετε, πηγῆς ἀθανάτου γεύσασθε*».

Ἔλα ἔγιναν ἐν τάξει. Καὶ ὅταν μετ' ὀλίγον ἀνέβηκε εἰς τὸ δωμάτιον καὶ ἐπρόκειτο νὰ χωρισθοῦν, ἵνα πρὸς τὸ ἐσπέρας φύγουν μὲ τὸ πλοῖον, θρηῆνος καὶ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὀδυρμὸς πολὺς, ἀλλὰ σιωπηλὸ κατέκλυσε τὴν αἴθουσα: Αὐτοὶ δὲν ἤθελον νὰ τὸν ἀφήσουν, καὶ αὐτὸς δὲν ἠμποροῦσε νὰ τοὺς ξεπροβοδίση πέραν τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, διότι φοροῦσε τὰ ρᾶσα... καὶ ἡ ... «πολιτισμένη» αὐτὴ χώρα δὲν τὰ ἐπιτρέπει.

—Νὰ λαλεύομέν σε, πάτερ... νὰ μνημονεύης, πάτερ, ντὸ νὰ λέομεν σέ, πάτερ;

—Νὰ εἰπῆτε τὰς εὐχὰς μου στοὺς Χριστιανούς μας, νὰ εἶναι καλοὶ Χριστιανοί, νὰ πιστεύουν στὸν Χριστὸν μας καὶ στὴν Ἑλλάδα μας καὶ ὁ Θεὸς θὰ τοὺς εὐλογῇ, ἡ Πατρίδα μας θὰ τοὺς σκέφτεται πάντοτε καὶ ἐγὼ δὲν θὰ σὰς λησμονήσω ποτέ.

Καὶ πῶς νὰ τοὺς λησμονήσῃ, ὅπου τὰ δάκρυά των κατέβρεξαν τὰς χεῖρας του, πῶς νὰ μὴν ἐνθυμῆται τὴν ἄκραν εὐλάβειάν των καὶ τὰ περιστατικά των, ὅμοια πρὸς τὰ τῶν Χριστιανῶν τῶν πρώτων αἰώνων, πῶς νὰ ξεχάσῃ τὴν κατακόμβην τοῦ Παρεκκλησίου τῆς Γοργοεπηκόου; Πάντοτε τοὺς ἐνθυμεῖται καὶ ἀρκεῖται ἤδη ἐν γῆρει εἰς τὸ ψαλμικόν:

—*«Μνήσθητι, Κύριε, τῆς ταλαιπωρίας τῶν πτωχῶν καὶ τοῦ σπαραγμοῦ τῶν πενήτων Κύριε, ἐπίφανον τὸ πρόσωπόν σου καὶ σωθησόμεθα».*

Πῶς νὰ λησμονήσω τὰ βάσανα τῆς ἐκλεκτῆς αὐτῆς Φυλῆς, ποῦ βρέθηκε γεωγραφικῶς μεταξὺ λαῶν βαρβάρων τὴν ψυχὴν, λαῶν ἀνεπίδεκτων πραγματικοῦ πολιτισμοῦ, λαῶν μὲ θηριώδη ἐνστικτα!...



Ἡ Μεγίστη Δωρεὰ

Πηγή: «*Διδαχαὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ*». Ἑβδομαδιαία Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ Ἐφημερὶς «*Ὁρθόδοξος Τύπος*», τεύχη 1823-1827.

Μερικὲς βασικὲς ἀλήθειες τῆς πίστεώς μας ἄλλοτε τὶς ἀγνοοῦμε καὶ ἄλλοτε δὲν τὶς στοχαζόμεστε ὅσο πρέπει. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ μένομε χωρὶς συναισθηματικὴ φόρτιση. Καὶ ὅταν ἀκόμα γιορτάζουμε τὰ μεγάλα γεγονότα τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τῶν Ἁγίων, μένομε δίχως γόνιμη συγκίνηση. Ἀσχολοῦμαστε πολὺ μὲ τὰ ἐξωτερικὰ καὶ ἐλάχιστα μὲ τὰ οὐσιώδη.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Κοσμᾶς, ἀναφερόμενος στὴν ἐνανθρώπηση τοῦ «*γλυκύτατου αὐθέντη καὶ δεσπότη*» Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, λέει ὅτι «*ἀπὸ τὴν πολλὴν ἀγάπην ὅπου ἔχει εἰς τὸ γένος μας, σιμὰ εἰς τὸ ἄπειρο χάρισμα (δῶρα) ὅπου μᾶς ἐχάρισε καὶ μᾶς χαρίζει καθ' ἐκάστην ἡμέραν καὶ ὥραν καὶ στιγμὴν ἐκαταδέχθη καὶ ἔγινε καὶ τέλειος ἄνθρωπος ἐκ Πνεύματος Ἁγίου καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ καθαρῶτατα αἵματα τῆς Δεσποίνης ἡμῶν Θεοτόκου καὶ ἀειπαρθένου Μαρίας, διὰ νὰ μᾶς ἐκβάλλῃ ἀπὸ τὰς χεῖρας τοῦ Διαβόλου, νὰ μᾶς κάμῃ υἱοὺς καὶ κληρονόμους τῆς βασιλείας του, νὰ χαιρώμεσθαι πάντοτε εἰς τὸν Παράδεισον μαζί μὲ τοὺς ἀγγέλους καὶ νὰ μὴ καιώμεσθαι εἰς τὴν Κόλασιν μαζί μὲ τοὺς ἀσεβεῖς καὶ τοὺς διαβόλους».*

Ὁ Χριστὸς ἔγινε ἄνθρωπος γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία μας. Δίδαξε καὶ θαυματούργησε γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία μας. Σταυρώθηκε καὶ ἀναστήθηκε γιὰ νὰ μᾶς ἀνοίξῃ τὴ βασιλεία Του, τὸ ἀπάνεμο λιμάνι τῆς αἰώνιας μακαριότητος. Πολὺ μεγάλη ἡ δωρεὰ. Ὅποιος τὴ στοχάζεται μὲ εὐλάβεια, τὴ θεωρεῖ μεγίστη καὶ συνεχῶς αὐξανόμενη.

Χαίρε Σταυρέ τῶν Δολίων Πολιτικῶν τὸ Τραῦμα

Γράφει ὁ Δρ. Κωνσταντῖνος Βαρδάκας.

Ἡ παραπάνω εὐχή δὲν ἀναφέρεται σὲ αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἐλάχιστους ποὺ κόσμησαν ταπεινὰ τὴν πολιτικὴ ἀλλὰ σὲ δόλιους πολιτικούς καὶ στὰ παρακολουθήματά τους.

Μήπως δὲν ἔχουμε τέτοιους καὶ δὲν τὸ ξέρουμε; Ὁ λαὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἡ παγκόσμιος Ὑψωση τοῦ Τιμίου καὶ Ζωοποιοῦ Σταυροῦ ἐν μέσω τοῦ θηριώδους ἀποκορυφώματος τῆς ἀντιχρίστου Παγκοσμιοποιήσεως. Βάλθηκαν οἱ ἀντίχριστοι νὰ «ἀγιάσουν» ὅλη τὴν οἰκουμένη καὶ μὲ μᾶς ἔγιναν σταυρωτὲς καὶ σήκωσαν τὰ λάβαρα τῆς ἥττας τους δηλ. Σταυροὺς μὲ ἀθώα θύματα ἀπὸ τὴν Συρία μέχρι τὴν Οὐκρανία καὶ κανεῖς δὲν ξέρει ποῦ ἄλλοῦ σε λίγο.

Ἔτσι, ἡ φετινὴ Ὑψωση τοῦ Τιμίου καὶ Ζωοποιοῦ Σταυροῦ ἀποκτᾶ μιὰ ἰδιαίτερη σημειολογία μέσα στὴν καθημερινότητα καὶ μᾶς δείχνει ἄπειρες σταυρικὲς διαδρομὲς συνανθρώπων μας ἀλλὰ καὶ Ἐθνῶν ποὺ καταλήγουν στὸ ἴδιο το σημεῖο τοῦ Γολγοθᾶ. Καὶ πᾶμε στὰ καθ' ἡμᾶς καὶ στὸν μνημονιακὸ Γολγοθᾶ τῆς ἔρημης Πατρίδας. Πρὶν ἀνέβει ἡ Ρωμηοσύνη τῆς Συρίας στὸν Σταυρὸ τῆς ἀνέβηκε ἡ μάνα Ρωμηοσύνη-Ἑλλάδα καὶ παραμένει μέχρι τὴν σήμερον «καρφωμένη» ἐκεῖ.

Ποιοὶ τὴν ἀνέβασαν πάνω στὸ Σταυρικὸ Ἰκρίωμα γιὰ νὰ παρακολουθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸ ὕψος τοῦ Σταυροῦ τῆς τοὺς «σταυρωτὲς-τοκογλύφους» νὰ ξεδιψοῦν τὴν ἀγωνία καὶ τὰ ἀδιέξοδά της μὲ ὄξο καὶ χολή; Πῶς τὴν ἀνέβασαν; Ἀφοῦ πρῶτα τὴν παραπλάνησαν μὲ ψεύτικες ὑποσχέσεις καὶ λόγια μεγάλα καὶ ξαφνικὰ ἀπὸ τὴν παραδεισένια ζωὴ τοῦ Εὐρώ βρέθηκε ἀναρτημένη στὸ «σταυρὸ τῶν μνημονίων».

Ἦταν ἄραγε ἓνα στιγμιαῖο ἀτύχημα στὴν Ἐθνικὴ ζωὴ μας τὸ ὁποῖο προσπαθεῖ σήμερον νὰ τὸ διαχειρισθεῖ ἡ κυβερνητικὴ ἐξουσία; Μὴν γελιόμαστε; ἡ δυστυχία ποὺ εἰσάγεται μὲ ἔξωθεν ὀδηγίες δὲν διαχειρίζεται καὶ μάλιστα ὅπως τὴν βιώνει ἡ παιδικὴ ψυχὴ ποὺ καθημερινὰ τὴν ψηλαφᾷ μέσα στὴν ἀνεργὴ οἰκογένεια μὲ πείνα καὶ ἀνέχεια.

Ὁ Σταυρικὸς θάνατος ὅμως ἔχει μιὰ ἰδιαιτερότητα: Ὁ Ἐσταυρωμένος Ἑλληνισμὸς τῶν ἡμερῶν μας ἀπὸ τὸ ὕψος τοῦ ἰκριώματος βλέπει τοὺς σταυρωτὲς τοῦ τοκογλύφους ἀπὸ ψηλά, ἐνῶ αὐτοὶ ἀτενίζουν τὴν «σταυρωμένη ἀδικία» τους ἀπὸ τὰ χαμηλά. Ἔστω καὶ σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν δύσκολη συγκυρία αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ θέση τοῦ Ἑλληνα, ἐκεῖ ψηλὰ μὲ ὅλη τὴν ἱστορικὴ σημειολογία της. Ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ πνευματικὴ σημειολογία τοῦ γεγονότος αὐτοῦ εἶναι ἀνώτερη γιατί προσεγγίζουμε θεολογικὰ Αὐτὸν τὸν Ἴδιον

τὸν Ἐσταυρωμένο Κύριο ποὺ ἔκανε τὴν Ἀρχὴ καὶ ἀποτελείωσε τὸ κέντρο τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τὴν ἀδικία τῶν διαχρονικῶν τοκογλύφων ὄλων των ἐποχῶν. Ἔτσι πλέον ἡ ἐπώδυνη αὐτὴ γνώση τῆς ὕψωσης τοῦ Ἐθνικοῦ μας Σταυροῦ εἶναι καὶ τὸ πνευματικὸ νίκος καὶ τὸ κλειδί τῶν ἐπερχομένων ἐξελίξεων.

Ἄς προσπαθήσουμε νὰ προσεγγίσουμε αὐτὸ τὸ γεγονὸς μὲ τὴν Πνευματικὴ καὶ τὴν οἰκονομικὴ διάστασή του ἀνάμεσα στὶς ὁποῖες μπορεῖ νὰ τοποθετηθεῖ καὶ ἡ κοινωνικὴ συνέπεια. Πῶς μᾶς βάλανε στὴν διαφημιζόμενη ζώνη τοῦ Εὐρώ καὶ μᾶς ἔσυραν σὲ αὐτὴν τὴν κατάντια; Κάποιοι ἰσχυρίζονται μὲ νοθευμένα καὶ παραποιημένα στοιχεῖα.

Νὰ λοιπὸν πῶς τὰ παραποιημένα αὐτὰ στοιχεῖα ἔγιναν τὰ καρφιά τῆς μελλοντικῆς σταύρωσής μας. Ὁ Σταυρικὸς θάνατος ἦταν (πρὶν τὸ Χριστό), θάνατος αἰσχύνης καὶ μὲ αὐτὸν θανατώνανε τοὺς κακούργους καὶ τοὺς ἀπατεῶνες. Ἔτσι καὶ οἱ σύγχρονοι τοκογλύφοι δανειστὲς βρῆκαν τὶς ἀμέτρητες περιπτώσεις διαφθορᾶς-διαπλοκῆς καὶ κακουρηματικῆς ἀπάτης τοῦ νέοελληνικοῦ μορφώματος δῆθεν σὰν τὴν καταλληλότερη δικαιολογία γιὰ νὰ μᾶς ἀναρτήσουν πάνω στὸ ξύλο τῆς αἰσχύνης τοῦ Σταυροῦ.

Μὲ τὴν μόνη διαφορὰ δὲν σταύρωσαν τὸν ὑπεύθυνο κακούργο Βαραββὰ-δόλιο πολιτικὸ ἀλλὰ τὸν ἀθώο λαὸ τῆς Ἑλλάδας. Καὶ τώρα τί γίνεται; Κάποιοι λένε νὰ βγάλουμε τὰ καρφιά δηλ. νὰ βγοῦμε ἀπὸ τὶς μεταρρυθμίσεις τῶν μνημονιακῶν δεσμεύσεων καὶ νὰ κατεβοῦμε ἀπὸ τὸν Σταυρὸ μόνον μας. Ἄλλοι ἀντιδιαλέγουν ὅτι ἂν βγάλουμε τὰ καρφιά αὐτὰ θὰ πεθάνουμε ἀπὸ αἰμορραγία οἰκονομικὴ. Ποιὸς μπορεῖ νὰ βγάλει ἄκρη ὅταν κάποιος ἐδῶ καὶ χρόνια δούλεψαν γιὰ νὰ μᾶς φέρουν σὲ αὐτὸ τὸ προμελετημένο ἀδιέξοδο.

Ἄν κατορθώσουμε σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν συγκυρία νὰ πιάσουμε τὴν ἄκρη τοῦ νήματος ἀπὸ τὸ μερδεμένο κουβάρι τῆς ζωῆς μας καὶ νὰ ἀρχίσουμε νὰ ξεπλέκουμε τοὺς κόμπους μπορεῖ νὰ συλλάβουμε τὴν πραγματικότητα ποὺ μᾶς στέρησαν. Ψήγματα πραγματικότητας μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι ἡ ψεύτικη Ἑλλάδα τῆς διαφθορᾶς καὶ τῆς λαμογιᾶς ἀργοπεθαίνει καὶ θὰ πεθάνει. Τὰ λαμόγια ἤδη κρύβονται καὶ στὸ ἄκουσμα τῆς λέξης μόνον, ὅλοι εἶναι σὲ θέση μάχης ἄσχετα ἂν στὸ παρασκήνιο ἐξακολουθοῦν νὰ προάγουν τὴν συνήθειά τους στὴν ἀρπαχτή. Αὐτὰ τὰ πολιτικὰ ὄντα δίκην λαμογιῶν ἔγιναν συσταυρωτὲς μας μαζί μὲ τοὺς τοκογλύφους καὶ «ἐπὶ τὸν ἱματισμὸ τῆς πατρίδας ἔβαλαν κλήρον».

Καὶ τί δὲν ἔχει αὐτὸς ὁ ἱματισμὸς; Ἀπὸ ἐνεργειακὰ οἰκόπεδα, ἀκίνητα φιλέτα, ὠραῖες παραλίες, ὄρυκτὸ πλοῦτο, κ.ἄ. Ὅμως αὐτοὶ ἀπὸ μόνον τους μᾶς ἀνέβασαν στὸν Σταυρὸ ἢ οἱ ἴδιοι δώσαμε δικαιώματα σὲ δόλιους πολιτικούς γιὰ νὰ μᾶς ἀνεβάσουν στὸν Σταυρὸ καὶ αὐτοὶ μὲ τὴν σειρὰ τους ἐφώνηξαν καὶ Ρωμαϊκὴ

κουστωδία τοκογλύφων; Μόνοι μας λοιπόν άνεβήκαμε, άπλως αυτοί μās κάρφωσαν με έπώδυνα καρφιά και ή Ρωμαϊκή κουστωδία τών τοκογλύφων επί τέσσερα και χρόνια μās ποτίζει με δξος και χολή.

Σταυρωθήκαμε μόνοι μας γιατί άπεμπολήσαμε τις άξιες και τα ιδανικά της ράτσας μας και δώσαμε τὸ δικαίωμα σὲ άσχετους νὰ χειραγωγήσουν τις ζωὲς τών οίκογενειών μας, δηλ. **ή Σταύρωση μας εἶναι πρῶτα πνευματικὴ-κοινωνικὴ και μετὰ οἰκονομικὴ.** Ὅπως άνεβήκαμε με εύκολοπιστία στοὺς «Σταυροὺς τών μνημονίων» μπορούμε και νὰ κατεβοῦμε εύκολα. Ἄρκει νὰ βγάλουμε με προσοχή τὰ καρφιά που εἶναι και τὸ πιὸ έπώδυνο μέρος.

Αὐτοὶ οἱ Σταυροὶ έγιναν οἱ πνευματικὲς εμπειρίες τοῦ καθενὸς μας μέσα στην άβίωτη καθημερινότητα τών τελευταίων τεσσάρων ετών. Αὐτὲς τις Σταυρικὲς εμπειρίες μας τις έπισκιάζει σήμερα ή Θεοφόρος Σκια τοῦ Τίμιου και Ζωοποιοῦ Σταυροῦ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν που ὑψώνεται θαρρετὰ στις Ἐκκλησιὲς έν μέσω φοβερῶν παγκόσμιων γεγονότων. Και ή ἴδια Θεοφόρος Σκια μās καλεῖ τώρα με αὐτοὺς τοὺς προσωπικοὺς Σταυροὺς νὰ τροπώσουμε τὰ σμήνη τών δαιμόνων-τοκογλύφων που δέν λένε νὰ ξεκουμπιστοῦν από την πεφλημένη πατρίδα...



Λόγια Ενὸς Γέροντος

Μέσα σὲ αὐτὴ τὴν μεγάλη κρίση και άναμπουμπούλα που επικρατεῖ ακούγονται συνεχῶς ή διαβάζετε στο διαδίκτυο για προφητικὰ λόγια τοῦ Ἁγίου Κοσμά τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ, ή τοῦ γέροντος Παΐσιου. Αὐτὰ μιλάνε για Ἑλλάδα ελεύθερη, δυνατὴ, Χριστιανικὴ, αλλά μετὰ από μία δύσκολη περίοδο. Μεγάλοι άνδρες, με παρηρησία ένώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἀλλά ἄς σκεφτοῦμε τὴν Ἑλλαδίτσα μας τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια, (μὴ πηγαίνουμε πολὺ πίσω). Περάσαμε πολέμους, κατοχή, πείνα. Τώρα νὰ αναλογιστοῦμε γιατί τὰ περάσαμε όλα αὐτὰ ; Για τις άμαρτίες μας. Οἱ άνθρωποι ζητοῦν μία ζωή όχι ὅπως ὁ Χριστὸς μās παρέδωσε αλλά μία ζωή εύκολη, τρυφηλή. Θέλουν άνέσεις, πολλὰ χρήματα, λίγη δουλειά, θέλουν νὰ διασκεδάσουν, νὰ χαροῦν τὴν ζωή τους. Κάνουν τὸ πᾶν γι' αὐτὴ τὴ ζωή, και νομίζουν ότι με τὴν ανθρώπινη καταξίωση εἶναι σωστοὶ και ὅτι έπιτέλεσαν τὸ έργο τους ἐδῶ πάνω στη γῆ. Και ὅταν λέω κάνουν τὸ πᾶν τὸ έννοῶ. Πατᾶνε στο πτώμα τοῦ διπλανοῦ τους για νὰ ικανοποιήσουν τὸ θέλημά τους. Μὴ νομίζεις ὅτι τὰ λόγια αὐτὰ εἶναι ὑπερβολικὰ γιατί θὰ σοῦ μιλήσω για τὴ ζωή τοῦ ανθρώπου από τὴ γέννησή του μέχρι τὸ θάνατό του.

Ἀνάλυση Εὐχῆς Ὁσίου Ἐφραίμ τοῦ Σύρου

Ἀλέξανδρος Σμέμαν, από τὸ βιβλίο «Μεγάλη Σαρακοστή», εκδόσεις «Ἀκρίτας».

Ἐνάμεσα σὲ ὅλες τις προσευχὲς και τοὺς ὕμνους τῆς Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστῆς μπορεῖ νὰ ὀνομαστεῖ ή προσευχή τῆς Μεγάλης Τεσσαρακοστῆς. Ἡ Παράδοση τὴν ἀποδίδει σὲ έναν από τοὺς μεγάλους δασκάλους τῆς πνευματικῆς ζωῆς, τὸν Ἅγιο Ἐφραίμ τὸ Σύρο. Νὰ τὸ κείμενο τῆς προσευχῆς:

«Κύριε και Δέσποτα τῆς ζωῆς μου, πνεῦμα ἀργίας, περιεργείας, φιλαρχίας και ἀργολογίας μὴ μοι δῶς.

Πνεῦμα δὲ σφροσუნης, ταπεινοφροσύνης, ὑπομονῆς και ἀγάπης, χάρισά μοι τῷ σῷ δούλῳ. Ναι, Κύριε Βασιλεῦ, δώρησαί μοι τοῦ ὁρᾶν τὰ ἐμὰ πταίσματα, και μὴ κατακρίνειν τὸν ἀδελφόν μου, ὅτι εύλογητὸς εἶ, εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τών αἰώνων.

Ἀμήν.»

Τούτη ή προσευχή λέγεται δύο φορὲς στο τέλος κάθε ακολουθίας τῆς Μεγάλης Σαρακοστῆς από τὴ Δευτέρα ὡς τὴν Παρασκευή. Τὴν πρώτη φορὰ λέγοντας τὴν προσευχή κάνουμε μία μετάνοια σὲ κάθε αίτηση. Ἐπειτα κάνουμε δώδεκα μετάνοιες λέγοντας: «Ὁ Θεός, ἰλάσθητι μοι τῷ ἁμαρτωλῷ, και ἐλέησόν με». Ὁλόκληρη ή προσευχή έπαναλαμβάνεται με μία τελικὴ μετάνοια στο τέλος τῆς προσευχῆς.

Ἡ Σημαντικὴ Θέση τῆς

Γιατί αὐτὴ ή σύντομη και άπλη προσευχή κατέχει μία τόσο σημαντικὴ θέση στην ὅλη λατρεία τῆς Μεγάλης Σαρακοστῆς;

Διότι ἀπαριθμεῖ, με ἓνα μοναδικὸ τρόπο, ὅλα τὰ ἀρνητικὰ και τὰ θετικὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς μετάνοιας και ἀποτελεῖ, θὰ λέγαμε, ἓνα «κανὸνα ἐλέγχου» τοῦ προσωπικοῦ μας ἀγώνα στην περίοδο τῆς Μεγάλης Σαρακοστῆς. Αὐτὸς ὁ ἀγὼνας σκοπεύει πρῶτα από ὅλα στην ἀπελευθέρωσή μας από μερικὲς βασικὲς πνευματικὲς ασθένειες που διαμορφώνουν τὴ ζωή μας και μās κάνουν πραγματικὰ άνίσχυρους ἀκόμα και για νὰ κάνουμε ἀρχὴ στροφῆς στο Θεό.

Ἡ Ἀργία

Ἡ βασικὴ ασθένεια εἶναι ή ἀργία. Εἶναι ή παράξενη ἐκείνη τεμπελιά και ή παθητικότητα ὀλόκληρης τῆς ὑπαρξῆς μας, που πάντα μās σπρώχνει πρὸς τὰ «κάτω» μᾶλλον παρὰ πρὸς τὰ «πάνω» και που διαρκῶς μās πείθει ὅτι δέν εἶναι δυνατό νὰ ἀλλάξουμε και ἐπομένως δὲ χρειάζεται νὰ ἐπιθυμοῦμε τὴν ἀλλαγὴ. Εἶναι ἓνας βαθιὰ ριζωμένος κυνισμὸς που σὲ κάθε πνευματικὴ πρόκληση ἀπαντᾶει με τὸ «γιατί;» και καταντᾶει τὴν ζωή μας μία ἀπέραντη πνευματικὴ φθορά. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ή ρίζα ὅλης τῆς άμαρτίας γιατί δηλητηριάζει κάθε πνευματικὴ ενεργητικότητα στην πιὸ βαθιὰ τῆς πηγῆ.

Ἡ Λιποψυχία

Τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα τῆς «ἀργίας», εἶναι ἡ «λιποψυχία». Εἶναι μία κατάσταση δειλίας ποὺ ὅλοι οἱ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας τὴ θεώρησαν τὸ μεγαλύτερο κίνδυνο τῆς ψυχῆς. Ἡ λιποψυχία, ἡ ἀποθάρρυνση, εἶναι ἡ ἀνικανότητα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου νὰ βλέπει καθετὶ καλὸ ἢ θετικὸ. Εἶναι ἡ ἀναγωγή τῶν πάντων στὸν ἀρνητισμὸ καὶ στὴν ἀπαισιοδοξία. Εἶναι στὰ ἀλήθεια μία δαμιονικὴ δύναμη μέσα μας γιατί ὁ Σατανᾶς εἶναι βασικᾶ ἕνας ψεύτης. Ψιθυρίζει ψευτιὲς στὸν ἄνθρωπο γιὰ τὸ Θεὸ καὶ γιὰ τὸν κόσμο, γεμίζει τὴ ζωὴ μὲ σκοτάδι καὶ ἀρνητισμὸ.

Ἡ λιποψυχία εἶναι ἡ αὐτοκτονία τῆς ψυχῆς, γιατί ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος κατέχεται ἀπὸ αὐτὴ, εἶναι ἐντελῶς ἀνίκανος νὰ δεῖ τὸ φῶς καὶ νὰ τὸ ἐπιθυμῆσει.

Ἡ Φιλαρχία

Πνεῦμα φιλαρχία! Φαίνεται παράξενο πὼς ἡ ἀργία καὶ ἡ λιποψυχία εἶναι ἀκριβῶς ἐκεῖνα ποὺ γεμίζουν τὴ ζωὴ μας μὲ τὸν πόθο τῆς φιλαρχίας. Μολύνοντας ὅλη μας τὴν τοποθέτηση ἀπέναντι στὴ ζωὴ, κἀνοντας τὴν ἄδεια καὶ χωρὶς νόημα, μᾶς σπρώχνουν νὰ ἀναζητήσουμε ἀντιστάθμισμα σὲ μία ριζικὰ λανθασμένη στάση ἀπέναντι στὰ ἄλλα πρόσωπα.

Ἄν ἡ ζωὴ μου δὲν εἶναι προσανατολισμένη πρὸς τὸν Θεό, ἂν δὲν σκοπεύει σὲ αἰώνιες ἀξίες, ἀναπόφευκτα θὰ γίνῃ ἐγωιστικὴ καὶ ἐγκεντρικὴ, πράγμα ποὺ σημαίνει ὅτι ὅλοι οἱ ἄλλοι γίνονται τὰ μέσα γιὰ τὴ δική μου αὐτοϊκανοποίηση. Ἄν ὁ Θεὸς δὲν εἶναι ὁ «Κύριος καὶ Δεσπότης τῆς ζωῆς μου», τότε τὸ ἐγὼ μου γίνεται ὁ κύριος καὶ δεσπότης μου, γίνεται τὸ ἀπόλυτο κέντρο τοῦ κόσμου μου καὶ ἀρχίζω νὰ ἐκτιμῶ καθετὶ μὲ βάση τὶς δικές μου ἀνάγκες, τὶς δικές μου ιδέες, τὶς δικές μου ἐπιθυμίες καὶ τὶς δικές μου κρίσεις.

Ἔτσι ἡ ἐπιθυμία τῆς φιλαρχίας γίνεται ἡ βασικὴ μου ἁμαρτία σὲ σχέσεις μὲ τὶς ἄλλες ὑπάρξεις, γίνεται μία ἀναζήτηση ὑποταγῆς τους σὲ μένα. Δὲν εἶναι πάντοτε ἀπαραίτητο νὰ ἐκφράζεται ἡ φιλαρχία μου σὰν ἐντονὴ ἀνάγκη νὰ διατάζω καὶ νὰ κηδεμονεύω τοὺς «ἄλλους». Μπορεῖ ἐπίσης νὰ ἐκφράζεται καὶ σὰν ἀδιαφορία, περιφρόνηση, ἔλλειψη ἐνδιαφέροντος, φροντίδας καὶ σεβασμοῦ. Καὶ εἶναι ἀκριβῶς ἡ «ἀργία», μαζὶ μὲ τὴ «λιποψυχία» ποὺ ἀπευθύνονται αὐτὴ τὴ φορὰ πρὸς τοὺς ἄλλους ἔτσι συμπληρώνεται ἡ πνευματικὴ αὐτοκτονία μὲ τὴν πνευματικὴ δολοφονία.

Ἡ Ἀργολογία

Τέλος εἶναι ἡ ἀργολογία. Ἀπὸ ὅλα τὰ δημιουργήματα μόνον ὁ ἄνθρωπος προικίστηκε μὲ τὸ χάρισμα τοῦ

λόγου. Ὅλοι οἱ Πατέρες βλέπουν σ' αὐτὸ τὸ χάρισμα τὴν ἀκριβὴ «σφραγίδα» τῆς Θείας Εἰκόνας στὸν ἄνθρωπο, γιατί ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεὸς ἀποκαλύφθηκε σὰν Λόγος (Ἰωάν. 1:1).

Ἀλλὰ ὄντας ὁ λόγος τὸ ὑψιστὸ δῶρο, ἔτσι εἶναι καὶ ὁ ἰσχυρότερος κίνδυνος. Ὅπως εἶναι ἡ κυρίαρχη ἔκφραση τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, τὸ μέσο γιὰ τὴν προσωπικὴ του πλήρωση, γιὰ τὸν ἴδιο λόγο, εἶναι καὶ τὸ μέσο γιὰ τὴν πτώση του, γιὰ τὴν αὐτοκαταστροφή του, γιὰ τὴν προδοσία καὶ τὴν ἁμαρτία. Ὁ λόγος σώζει καὶ ὁ λόγος σκοτώνει ὁ λόγος ἐμπνέει καὶ ὁ λόγος δηλητηριάζει. Ὁ λόγος εἶναι τὸ μέσο τῆς Ἀλήθειας ἀλλὰ εἶναι καὶ μέσο γιὰ τὸ δαμιονικὸ ψέμα.

ἔχοντας μία βασικᾶ θετικὴ δύναμη ὁ λόγος, ἔχει ταυτόχρονα καὶ μία τρομακτικὰ ἀρνητικὴ. Ὁ λόγος δηλαδὴ δημιουργεῖ θετικὰ ἢ ἀρνητικὰ. Ὅταν ἀποσπᾶται ἀπὸ τὴ Θεία καταγωγή καὶ τὸ Θεῖο σκοπὸ τοῦ γίνεται ἀργολογία. «Ἐνισχύει» τὴν ἀργία, τὴ λιποψυχία, καὶ τὴ φιλαρχία καὶ μετατρέπει τὴ ζωὴ σὲ κόλαση. Γίνεται ἡ κυρίαρχη δύναμη τῆς ἁμαρτίας.

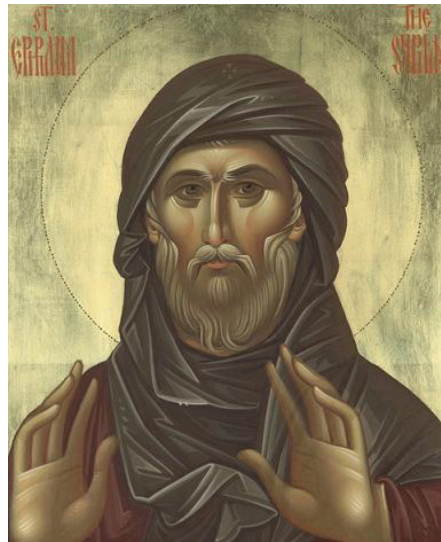
Αὐτὰ τὰ τέσσερα σημεῖα εἶναι οἱ ἀρνητικοὶ «στόχοι» τῆς μετάνοιας. Εἶναι τὰ ἐμπόδια ποὺ πρέπει νὰ μετακινήθουν. Ἀλλὰ μόνον ὁ Θεὸς μπορεῖ νὰ τὰ μετακινήσει. Ἀκριβῶς γι' αὐτὸ καὶ τὸ πρῶτο μέρος τῆς προσευχῆς αὐτῆς εἶναι μία κραυγὴ ἀπὸ τὰ βάθη τῆς καρδιάς τοῦ ἀβοήθητου ἀνθρώπου.

Στὴ συνέχεια ἡ προσευχὴ κινεῖται στοὺς θετικοὺς σκοποὺς τῆς μετάνοιας.

Ἡ Σωφροσύνη

Σωφροσύνη! Ἄν δὲν περιορίσουμε—πράγμα ποὺ συχνὰ καὶ πολὺ λαθεμένα γίνετα—τὴν ἔννοια τῆς λέξης «σωφροσύνη» μόνον στὴ σαρκικὴ σημασία της, θὰ μπορούσε νὰ γίνῃ κατανοητὴ σὰν τὸ θετικὸ ἀντίστοιχο τῆς λέξης «ἀργία». «Ἀργία», πρῶτα ἀπὸ ὅλα, εἶναι ἡ ἀδράνεια, τὰ σπάσιμο τῆς διορατικότητας καὶ τῆς ἐνεργητικότητάς μας, ἡ ἀνικανότητα νὰ βλέπουμε καθολικά, σφαιρικά. Ἐπομένως αὐτὴ ἡ ὀλότητα εἶναι τὸ ἐντελῶς ἀντίθετο ἀπὸ τὴν ἀδράνεια.

Ἄν συνηθίζουμε μὲ τὴ λέξη σωφροσύνη νὰ ἐννοοῦμε τὴν ἀρετὴ τὴν ἀντίθετη ἀπὸ τὴ σαρκικὴ διαφθορὰ εἶναι γιατί ὁ διχασμένος χαρακτήρας μας, πουθενὰ ἄλλοῦ δὲν φαίνεται καλύτερα παρὰ στὴ σαρκικὴ ἐπιθυμία, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ ἀλλοτρίωση τοῦ σώματος ἀπὸ τὴ ζωὴ καὶ τὸν ἔλεγχο τοῦ πνεύματος. Ὁ Χριστὸς ἐπαναφέρει τὴν «ὀλότητα» (τὴ σωφροσύνη) μέσα μας καὶ τὸ κάνει αὐτὸ ἀποκαθιστώντας τὴν ἀληθινὴ κλίμακα τῶν ἀξιών, μὲ τὸ νὰ μᾶς ὀδηγεῖ πίσω στὸ Θεό.



Ἡ Ταπεινοφροσύνη

Ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὑπέροχος καρπὸς τῆς σωφροσύνης εἶναι ἡ ταπεινοφροσύνη. Πάνω ἀπὸ ὅλα εἶναι ἡ νίκη τῆς ἀλήθειας μέσα μας, ἡ ἀπομάκρυνση τοῦ ψεύδους μέσα στὸ ὁποῖο ζοῦμε. Μόνο ἡ ταπεινοφροσύνη εἶναι ἄξια τῆς ἀλήθειας· μόνο με αὐτὴ δηλαδή μπορεῖ κανεὶς νὰ δεῖ καὶ δεχτεῖ τὰ πράγματα ὅπως εἶναι καὶ ἔτσι νὰ δεῖ τὸ Θεό, τὸ μεγαλεῖο Του, τὴν καλωσύνη Του καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη Του στὸ καθετί. Νὰ γιατί, ὅπως ξέρουμε, ὁ Θεὸς «*ὑπερηφάνους ἀντιτάσσει, ταπεινοὺς δὲ δίδωσι χάριν*».

Ἡ Ὑπομονή

Μετὰ τὴ σωφροσύνη καὶ τὴν ταπεινοφροσύνη, κατὰ φυσικὸ τρόπο, ἀκολουθεῖ ἡ ὑπομονή. Ὁ «φυσικὸς» ἢ «πεπτωκῶς» ἄνθρωπος εἶναι ἀνυπόμονος, γιατί εἶναι τυφλὸς γιὰ τὸν ἑαυτό του, καὶ βιαστικὸς στὸ νὰ κρίνει καὶ νὰ καταδικάσει τοὺς ἄλλους. Μὲ διασπαρμένη, ἀτελὴ καὶ διαστρεβλωμένη γνώση τῶν πραγμάτων ποὺ ἔχει, μετράει τὰ πάντα με βάση τὴς δικῆς του προτιμήσεις καὶ τὴς δικῆς του ιδέας. Ἀδιαφορεῖ γιὰ τὸν καθένα γύρω του ἐκτὸς ἀπὸ τὸν ἑαυτό του, θέλει ἡ ζωὴ του νὰ εἶναι πετυχημένη τώρα, αὐτὴ τὴ στιγμή.

Ἡ ὑπομονή, βέβαια, εἶναι μία ἀληθινὰ Θεϊκὴ ἀρετή. Ὁ Θεὸς εἶναι ὑπομονετικὸς ὄχι γιατί εἶναι «συγκαταβατικὸς», ἀλλὰ γιατί βλέπει τὸ βάθος ὅλων τῶν πραγμάτων, γιατί ἡ ἐσωτερικὴ πραγματικότητά τους, τὴν ὁποία ἐμεῖς με τὴν τυφλότητά μας δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ δοῦμε, εἶναι ἀνοιχτὴ σὲ Αὐτόν. Ὅσο πιὸ κοντὰ ἐρχόμαστε στὸ Θεὸ τόσο περισσότερο ὑπομονετικοὶ γινόμαστε καὶ τόσο πιὸ πολὺ ἀντανακλοῦμε αὐτὴ τὴν ἀπέραντη ἐκτίμηση γιὰ ὅλα τα ὄντα, πράγμα ποὺ εἶναι ἡ κύρια ιδιότητα τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Ἡ Ἀγάπη

Τέλος, τὸ ἀποκορύφωμα καὶ ὁ καρπὸς ὅλων των ἀρετῶν, κάθε καλλιέργειας καὶ κάθε προσπάθειας, εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγάπη ποῦ, ὅπως ἔχουμε πεῖ, μπορεῖ νὰ δοθεῖ μόνο ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό, εἶναι τὸ δῶρο ποὺ ἀποτελεῖ σκοπὸ ποὺ ἀποτελεῖ σκοπὸ γιὰ κάθε πνευματικὴ προετοιμασία καὶ ἄσκηση.

Ἡ Ὑπερηφάνεια

Ὅλα αὐτὰ συγκεφαλαιώνονται στὴν τελικὴ αἴτηση τῆς προσευχῆς τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἐφραίμ με τὴν ὁποία ζητᾶμε: «*...δώρησαι μοὶ τοῦ ὁρᾶν τὰ ἐμὰ παίσματα, καὶ μὴ κατακρίνειν τὸν ἀδελφόν μου...*». Ἐδῶ τελικὰ δὲν ὑπάρχει παρὰ μόνο ἓνας κίνδυνος: ἡ ὑπερηφάνεια. Ἡ ὑπερηφάνεια εἶναι ἡ πηγὴ τοῦ κακοῦ καὶ ὅλο το κακὸ εἶναι ἡ ὑπερηφάνεια. Παρ' ὅλα αὐτὰ δὲν εἶναι ἀρκετὸ γιὰ μένα νὰ βλέπω τὰ «ἐμὰ παίσματα» γιατί ἀκόμα καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ φαινομενικὴ ἀρετὴ μπορεῖ νὰ μετατραπῆ σὲ ὑπερηφάνεια.

Τὰ πατερικὰ κείμενα εἶναι γεμάτα ἀπὸ προειδοποιήσεις γιὰ τὴν ὑπουλὴ μορφὴ ψευτοευσέβειας ἢ ὁποῖα στὴν πραγματικότητά με τὸ κάλυμμα τῆς ταπεινοφροσύνης

καὶ τῆς αὐτομεμψίας μπορεῖ νὰ ὀδηγήσει σὲ μία πραγματικὰ δαιμονικὴ ὑπερηφάνεια. Ἀλλὰ ὅταν βλέπουμε τὰ δικὰ μας σφάλματα καὶ δὲν κατακρίνουμε τοὺς ἀδελφούς μας, ὅταν με ἄλλα λόγια, ἡ σωφροσύνη, ἡ ταπεινοφροσύνη, ἡ ὑπομονὴ καὶ ἡ ἀγάπη γίνονται ἓνα σὲ μᾶς, τότε καὶ μόνο τότε ὁ αἰώνιος ἐχθρὸς—ἡ ὑπερηφάνεια—θὰ ἀφανιστεῖ μέσα μας.

Στὴ συνεχὴ καὶ δύσκολη προσπάθεια τῆς πνευματικῆς ἀνάρρωσής μας, ἡ Ἐκκλησία δὲν ξεχωρίζει τὴν ψυχὴ ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα. Ὁ ὅλος ἄνθρωπος ἀπομακρύνθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό· ὁ ὅλος ἄνθρωπος πρέπει νὰ ἀνορθωθεῖ, ὁ ὅλος ἄνθρωπος πρέπει νὰ γυρίσει. Ἡ καταστροφὴ τῆς ἀμαρτίας ὑπάρχει ὅταν νικάει ἡ σὰρκα—τὸ ζῶδες, τὸ παράλογο, ἡ σαρκικὴ ἐπιθυμία μέσα μας—τὰ πνευματικὸ καὶ τὸ Θεῖο. Ἀλλὰ τὰ σῶμα εἶναι δοξασμένο, τὸ σῶμα εἶναι ἅγιο, τόσο ἅγιο ποῦ ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Θεὸς «*σὰρξ ἐγένετο*».

Ἡ σωτηρία καὶ ἡ μετάνοια, ἐπομένως, δὲν εἶναι ἡ περιφρόνηση τοῦ σώματος οὔτε ἡ παραμέλησή του, ἀλλὰ εἶναι ἀποκατάσταση τοῦ σώματος στὴν πραγματικὴ του λειτουργικότητα ποὺ εἶναι ἡ ἔκφραση καὶ ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ πνεύματος, ὁ ναὸς τῆς ἀνεκτίμητης ἀνθρώπινης ψυχῆς.

Ἡ Χριστιανικὴ ἀσκητικὴ εἶναι ἀγώνας ὄχι κατὰ ἀλλὰ ὑπὲρ τοῦ σώματος. Γι' αὐτὸ τὸ λόγο ὁ ὅλος ἄνθρωπος—ψυχὴ καὶ σῶμα—μετανοεῖ. Τὸ σῶμα παίρνει μέρος στὴν προσευχὴ τῆς ψυχῆς καθὼς αὐτὴ προσεύχεται μέσα στὸ σῶμα καὶ διὰ τοῦ σώματος. Ἔτσι οἱ γονυκλισίες, τὰ «ψυχοσωματικὰ» δείγματα τῆς μετάνοιας, τῆς ταπεινοφροσύνης, τῆς λατρείας καὶ τῆς ὑπακοῆς, εἶναι μία ἱεροτελεστία κατ' ἔξοχὴν τῆς Μεγάλης Σαρακοστῆς.



Εἶναι θανάσιμο ἀμάρτημα νὰ κουραζόμεθα γιὰ τὸ Θεό, καὶ ὕστερα νὰ μετανιώνουμε καὶ νὰ γογγύζουμε. Κατάλαβέ το καλά. Χωρὶς σωματικὸ κόπο, δὲν κερδίζεται ἡ ἀρετὴ, ξάπλα στὸ κρεβάτι! Ὁ σωματικὸς κόπος εἶναι τὸ μεγαλύτερο δῶρο τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία μας. Γιὰ τὴν ἀπόκτηση τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ. Οἱ ἄλλοι με χαρὰ ἐδέχοντο ἐξευτελισμοὺς, κόπους, κι ἐσὺ ὑποφέρεις; Ἡ μεγαλύτερη ἀμαρτία εἶναι, ἐνῶ κοπιᾶζουμε γιὰ τὸ Χριστό, ὕστερα νὰ μετανιώνουμε καὶ νὰ ὑποφέρουμε.

Δὲν ὑπάρχει θάνατος, μὴ φοβᾶσαι τὸ θάνατο. Ὅποιος πέθανε γιὰ τὸ Χριστό, δὲν ὑπάρχει γι' αὐτὸν θάνατος. Κι ἂν δὲν πέθανες, νὰ πεθάνεις.

Ὅσιος Πορφύριος ὁ Κανσοκαλυβίτης (+1991)

Τὸ Ἀντιεκκλησιαστικὸ καὶ Ἀντιμοναχικὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς Δύσης

Ἀπόσπασμα ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο τοῦ Γερομονάχου Σάββα Ἀγιορείτου «Τὰ Ἀσκητικά τῆς Ἑνορίας».



Πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν αἵρε-
τικὴ ἐκτροπὴ,
στὸ Δυτικὸ Ρωμαϊκὸ
κράτος ἐπικρατοῦσε
ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία. Πρέ-
πει νὰ τονισθεῖ
ὅτι ἡ Παράδοση
τοῦ φωτισμοῦ μὲ
νοερὰ προσευχὴ
καὶ ἡ Παράδοση

τῆς θεώσεως ὑπῆρχε ἰσχυρῶς ριζωμένη στὴν Δυτικὴ Ρωμηοσύνη, ὅταν οἱ Γερμανικὲς φυλὲς τὴν κατέκτησαν. Παρὰ ταῦτα, ἡ Παράδοση ἐξαφανίστηκε ἀπὸ τὴν λεγομένη σχολαστικὴ θεολογία τῶν φυλῶν αὐτῶν. Ἡ ἀλλοίωση τῆς θεολογίας ἐπέφερε καὶ τὴν ἀλλοίωση τῆς ζωῆς.

Στὴν Δύση, μετὰ τὴν ἀποκρυστάλλωση τῆς αἵρεσης καὶ τὴν ἀποκοπὴ τῆς ἀπὸ τὴν Ὁρθόδοξο Ἐκκλησία, τὴν μόνη ἀληθινὴ Ἐκκλησία, ὁ δυτικὸς ἄνθρωπος ἔχασε τὴν Θεία Χάρη. Ὡς γνωστὸν ἡ Θεία Χάρη παρέχεται μόνο στὴν Ἐκκλησία στὴν Ὅποια ἐντάσσονται καὶ παραμένουν ὅσοι πιστεύουν ἀλλὰ καὶ ζοῦν Ὁρθόδοξα.

Ἡ ἀλλοίωση-ἀπώλεια τῆς δογματικῆς ἀλήθειας ὁδηγεῖ στὴν ἀπώλεια τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ ὁποῖος μᾶς εἶπε ὅτι «Ἐγὼ εἰμὶ ἡ Ἀλήθεια». Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι τὸ κατ' ἐξοχὴν Πρόσωπο καὶ Πρότυπο μᾶς. Ἡ Δύση, μὲ τὴν ἀλλοίωση τοῦ δόγματος (εἰσαγωγὴ τοῦ filioque καὶ πολλῶν ἄλλων αἰρέσεων), ἔχασε τὸ πρότυπο τοῦ αὐθεντικοῦ ἀνθρώπου, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ οἱ δυτικοὶ ἄνθρωποι ἀλλοτριώθηκαν. Ἡ Δύση ἔχασε τὸν Θεάνθρωπο.

«Ἐξω ἀπὸ Ἐκεῖνον» θὰ μᾶς πεῖ ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰουστίνος Πόποβιτς «ὁ ἄνθρωπος μετατρέπεται σὲ φάντασμα, σὲ σκιάχτρο, σὲ κάτι ἀνοημάτιστο. Ἔτσι, στὴ θέσι τοῦ... ἀνθρώπου θὰ βρεῖτε ὑπολείμματα ἀνθρώπου, ἀποσπάσματα ἀνθρώπου, τεμάχια ἀνθρώπου. Ἐνεκα τούτου καὶ ἡ ἀληθινὴ ἀνθρωπιὰ βρίσκεται μονάχα στὴν Θεανθρωπότητα».

Ἡ ζωὴ (τὸ ἦθος) στὴ Δύση ἀπομακρύνθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ ἦθος τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Λόγω τῆς δογματικῆς νόθευσης, μὲ τὴν σειρὰ τους νοθεύθηκαν καὶ ἀπαξιώθηκαν τόσο ἡ μοναχικὴ ὅσο καὶ ἡ ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ζωὴ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ θεολογία. Δὲν ἀνέπαυε πλέον τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἡ Δυτικὴ θεολογία καὶ ἡ σύστοιχη μ' αὐτὴν ζωὴ γι' αὐτὸ καὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι στὴν Δύση στράφηκαν ἐναντίον τῆς μὲ τὴν Μεταρρύθμιση καὶ τὸν Διαφωτισμό.

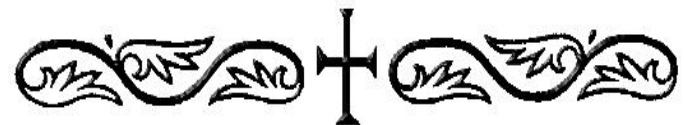
Τὸ ἀντιμοναχικὸ καὶ ἀντιεκκλησιαστικὸ (ἀντι-κληρικὸ) πνεῦμα κυριάρχησε στὸν Δυτικὸ κόσμον καὶ μὲσω τῶν νεοελλήνων διαφωτιστῶν ἦλθε καὶ στὴν Ρωμηοσύνη ποὺ πάλευε νά... ἐλευθερωθεῖ. Τελικὰ ἐλευθερώθηκε ἀπὸ τοὺς Τούρκους καὶ σκλαβώθηκε στοὺς ἀπογόνους τῶν Φράγκων!

Ἡ παιδεία, τὸ Πανεπιστήμιο ἀκόμη καὶ οἱ θεολογικὲς σχολὲς στὸ νέο Ἑλληνικὸ κράτος θεμελιώθηκαν μὲ βάση τὶς δυτικὲς ἀρχὲς τοῦ Διαφωτισμοῦ, τῆς αὐτονόμησης ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ καὶ τῆς ἀποθέωσης τῆς ἀνθρώπινης λογικῆς καὶ δύναμης.

Χαρακτηριστικὸς εἶναι ὁ εἰδωλολατρικὸς ὄρκος ποὺ δίνουν οἱ ἀπόφοιτοι τῶν ἀνωτάτων ἐκπαιδευτικῶν ἰδρυμάτων μας. Ὁ ἄλλοτε Ὁρθόδοξος λαὸς μας— μὲ τὴν συμβολὴ καὶ «συμβουλὴ» τῆς ἀντορθόδοξης παιδείας καὶ τῆς ἄθειας «διαφώτισης»—συνέλαβε τότε στὸ ὑποσυνειδητό του τὸ ἔκτρομα τῆς Δύσης: τὸ ἀντιμοναχικὸ-ἀντικληρικὸ πνεῦμα ποὺ διαπιστώνουμε νὰ ὑπάρχει σήμερον σὲ πάρα πολλοὺς νεοέλληνες.

Ὡστόσο, δόξα τῷ Θεῷ, ἀπὸ τότε μέχρι σήμερον δὲν ἔπαυσαν νὰ ὑπάρχουν καὶ οἱ ὑγιεῖς φωνές: οἱ Ἁγιοί μας, οἱ ὁποῖοι μὲ στεντορεία φωνὴ φανερώσαν καὶ φανερῶσαν αὐτὴν τὴν ἀλλοτριώση τοῦ Ὁρθό-δοξου ἠθους.

Ἡ ἐπιστροφή στὴν Ἱερὰ Ὁρθόδοξη Παράδοσή μας θὰ εἶναι ἡ ἔξοδος ἀπὸ τὸ ἀδιέξοδο τῆς Δυτικῆς ἀλλοτριώσης ποὺ βιώνουμε.



Ὁ Ἄμμοῦν, νέος κι ἀρχάριος, ἀκόμη μοναχός, πῆγε νὰ συμβουλευθῆ τὸν ὄσιο Ποιμένα:

—Ὅταν ἔρχεται κανένας ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀδελφούς στὸ κελλί μου ἢ ἐγὼ πηγαίνω στὸ δικό του γιὰ δουλειά, ἀποφεύγομε τὶς συζητήσεις ἀπὸ φόβο μὴ πέσωμε σ' ἀργολογία, τοῦ εἶπε.

—Καλὰ κάνετε, ἀποκρίθηκε ὁ Γέροντας. Ἡ νεότης ἔχει ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ πολλὴ προσοχή.

—Τί ἔκαναν οἱ Πατέρες σὲ τέτοια περίπτωσι; Ζήτησε νὰ μάθῃ ὁ Ἄμμοῦν.

—Ἐκεῖνοι παιδί μου, οὔτε στὸ στόμα οὔτε στὴν καρδιά εἶχαν τίποτε περιττό, γιὰ νὰ συζητήσουν. Ἔτσι δὲν εἶχαν φόβο νὰ πέσουν σ' ἀργολογία.

—Ὅταν βρεθῶ στὴν ἀνάγκη νὰ κουβεντιάσω μὲ κάποιον, ρώτησε πάλι ὁ νέος, τί εἶναι καλλίτερα νὰ πῶ; Λόγια τῆς Γραφῆς ἢ τῶν Πατέρων;

—Ἄν δὲν μπορῆς νὰ σωπάσης,—πράγμα ὀρθότερο γιὰ τοὺς νέους—προτίμησε τοὺς λόγους τῶν Πατέρων, ποὺ εἶναι πρακτικώτεροι, ἀποκρίθηκε ὁ Ὅσιος. Τὰ λόγια τῆς Γραφῆς, οὔτε εὐκόλα οὔτε ἀντιληπτά εἶναι ἀπὸ τοὺς πολλούς.

Ἀπὸ τὸ Γεροντικὸν

THE MYTH OF THE OCTOPUS

By Photios Kontoglou, originally published in 1949 (translated from Greek by the staff of "Orthodox Heritage").



In our days many new forms of "religions" have appeared; these religions are created by and often represent the unbelievers and the atheists. One of them is tourism; yes, tourism. Tourism was born out of the time-wasting, empty and void-of-any-value curiosity of men who want to "scratch and learn" without giving any credence or importance

to what they hear or see. Most tourists are indeed bored with their lives and want to spend their time neither contemplating about the ancient monuments nor the history lessons provided to them by their travel guides. The whole scene reminds one of a host who prepares a banquet, invites to a table, and cares for dinner guests who are suffering from anorexia. What the tourist guides tell them enters from one ear and exits from the other.

Who, however, has the courage to address with honesty and (apparent) disrespect this new goddess of our age, the tourist industry and her entertainment value; After all, she brings along with her a big dowry! This complete lack of courageous feedback is very characteristic of our age; our world sanctifies and eulogizes whatever brings in money. Who could possibly dare say anything against them? You have insulted Mohammad, you have insulted Mammon.

And as if it was not enough that tourism has filled the museums with a crowd of people of every race, who stare in space with a brochure in hand and with a camera hanging from their shoulders; and as if it was not enough that every isolated mountain that has two broken columns or a carved marble on it, has been stepped upon and trashed; and as if it was not enough that there has not been any hidden mystery of the ancient world left unbothered; nor tomb which has not been opened so that the sleepy sightseers could look in; nowadays they also enter into our churches and remote chapels, in which our people pray! They stand there, with complete indifference and reverence, without making the sign of the Cross, with their hands behind their backs; all these unfortunate people are fully indifferent, unconcerned and insensitive as to their whereabouts and the holy ground upon which they are standing and by which they are surrounded.

Tourism has taken over everything and commands all. In its royal presence all doors have been opened in order to be

welcomed, doors of castles which have never been conquered by warriors, doors of monasteries which have been locked a thousand times, cells, caves and hermitages where holy men once lived, hidden away from the world. Holy altars, baskets for the holy bread, Communion cups, and reliquaries with holy relics have unashamedly been taken out into the open in order that curious tourists can "see" them and snap photographs.

Lastly, the great fortress of Orthodoxy, Mount Athos, our Holy Mountain has surrendered to tourism as well. In this garden of the Virgin Mary, where in accordance with Her will, a feminine foot has never dared step upon it, either human or animal, now come and go thousands of men from all races. Men who arrive with pipes in their mouths, others with short pants, yet others half-naked, talking, laughing, and with complete lack of comprehension about the holiness of the ground upon which they are standing. They are there to "have fun," to get some rest, away from their tiring jobs, their businesses, machinery, trains, from planes, ships, cars, theaters, steam baths, hotels, and everything else that they are involved in back at their homelands. Unfortunately, their arrival brings along with them the stench of all these things and thus, unable to feel anything; they are non-contrite, and remain totally alien to the ancient miraculous mysteries which are concealed within the Holy Mountain.

And it all becomes too clear: there exists no way for anyone to convey and pass forward that spiritual fragrance to tourists who in their absolute majority are completely void of any spiritual awareness. How can they possibly feel what they see and hear since such feelings are the super-substantial fruits and the revelations of piety, of prayer, of compunction, of the mystery of divine *theoria*? And it is certainly not the fault of the visiting tourists; many of them are innocent and humble men and with the best intentions. But they are totally removed from the spiritual state that allows one to realize with absolute clarity that this place is not a place for recreation, walking, or fun and learning; instead, it is a place that is best described with the following inscription written all over it: *This is a place of frightful respect! For this is nothing else but the house of God and the gate of heaven.* These unfortunate people remain unaware of the spiritual reality of that what they see and hear, for such awareness is not comprehended through one's mind. How could they possibly achieve such a state, in such a short time, when even their local tourist guides remain foreign to these concepts? They are equally unable of comprehending the true significance and despite the knowledge they have acquired about the Holy Mountain and its holy contents, such knowledge remains superficial, mechanical, shallow and artificial, because *one's relationship with God can only be accomplished through spiritual awareness and the blessings of prayer and true sacrifice.*

This is not a place to find answers brought forth through ordinary and sinful human curiosity; it is instead a place where people have forsaken the world and where they are spiritually struggling, engaged in spiritual warfare. They subject their bodies to continuous suffering, turning themselves over completely to God's will with non-stop fasting, with their hands held up high towards the heavens, remaining speechless for years, with their hearts securely shut towards any outside worldly contact. It is by mistake that you tourists found your way here. You are looking to please your senses and your body, but here, where your travel guides have brought you, is a place of joyful mourning. All those who lived and still live here cannot and will not bring you the joy that you seek, because they live with the constant pain of the heart, and they are made warm only through their zeal towards the salvation of their souls. Why is it then that you have come here, as if you have arrived and sat at a wedding banquet table, while in reality this is a place whose inhabitants maintain the constant memory of death and their sighs are those of a sad calling out to God?

The current enemies of our religion are more dangerous than the old ones, because they deceive us with their peaceful mannerisms and thus seem innocent and unable of inflicting any harm upon us or our families. This is how the so called "goods of modern civilization" are, the many conveniences which make life easy. They are poisoned traps and they are many: the modern arts and cinemas, the many other forms of entertainment, tourism itself, etc. These enemies seem innocent and unable to harm us, because they are not savages and do not reveal their intentions but are surreptitious and do their harm without being noticed. From the first enemies you can protect yourself but from the latter you cannot, until it is too late and they have completely swallowed you in their modern ways. This is best exemplified by the following old sea legend:

There was a mother octopus resting with her little child octopus at the bottom of the sea. There, the little octopus is being caught with a fishing spear and is being taken up. The little octopus calls out to his mother:

--They have caught me mother! She replies to him: Do not be afraid my child! The little octopus calls out again:

--They are taking me out from the water mother! Do not be afraid my child!

--They are frizzling me mother! Do not be afraid my child!

--They are cutting me with a knife! Don't be afraid!

--They are boiling me in a pot! Don't be afraid!

--They are eating me, they are chewing me! Do not be afraid my child!

--They are swallowing me! Do not be afraid!

--They are drinking wine, mother! Oh! I lost you my child!...

The myth wants to say that all the hard ordeals which were

inflicted on the octopus, did not cause death: neither the catching, neither the frizzling, neither the cooking, neither the chewing. But when his mother heard that the people who caught and ate him were drinking wine in order to digest him, she called out: "I lost you, my child!" The wine, which seems to be the tamest thing when compared with the knife and the chewing, in reality becomes the biggest enemy for the octopus.

This is also how things are for us Greeks. Many devastating whirlwinds have passed from our land, all sorts of savages, murderers with swords, spears and every kind of weapon. The enemies were many: Persians, Germans, Franks, Arabs, Turks and so many others. They slaughtered us, they cut us in pieces, they hanged us, they have put us on stakes; but we did not die because our struggle made us solid as steel, we returned fire to fire, and we did so with all of our savage enemies which could be seen or realized, throughout our multi-thousands year history.

But now, in today's world, the enemies have changed appearance, they have become surreptitious, with a smile on their lips, deceiving friends, that seem harmless, and even pose as our benefactors and with many good intentions. These are the goods that we reaped through the many gifts of modern society, machinery and all other twentieth century conveniences, electric washers, airplanes, cinema, radio, nudity and others which stand to paralyze us and leave us without religion, without tradition, without family, without anything of ours.

One of these surreptitious goods of our world is tourism, which stands to serve as the innocent wine that kills the octopus, while neither the knife, nor the teeth managed to truly subdue him.



Our Lord calls blessed all those who are opposed to worldly possessions, saying: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Why to the words, *Blessed are the poor*, does He add, *in spirit*? So that by this would be shown that He considers blessedness to be the humility of the soul.

Why did He not say, "blessed are the poor-spirited"—and thus would be demonstrated the humility of thinking—but rather He says, *poor in spirit*? By this He wants to teach us that bodily poverty is also a blessedness, in that through this one can receive the kingdom of heaven, when it is done for the sake of the humility of the soul. This is the case when bodily poverty is united with the humility of the soul, and when it is for the person the principle of humility of the soul. Having called blessed *those poor in spirit*, He demonstrated in a wonderful way what are the root and cause of the visible poverty of the saints—that is, their spirit.

St. Gregory Palamas

THE WEDDING GARMENT

By Pope Saint Gregory the Great.

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, because who can enter this marriage feast without baptism or without faith? Because 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 enters without a wedding garment who is a member of our Holy Church by reason of his faith, but who lacks charity. It is so called with good reason because our Maker wore it when He came as a bridegroom to unite Himself to the Church. There was no other means than God's love by which the Only-begotten could unite the souls of the elect with Himself. This is why John tells us: *God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son* (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 loath 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 truly loves God who does not think of himself.

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?* 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 the king said to the waiters: Bind him hand and foot ... 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.*



He who busies himself with the sins of others or judges his brother on suspension has not yet even begun to repent or examine himself, so as to discover his own sins.

St. Maximos the Confessor

COUNT THE NUMBER OF THE BEAST: “666”

By Rassophore-monk Vsevolod, Holy Trinity Monastery, 1998.

From the Editor: *The subject article is, in our opinion, completely in line with other Orthodox commentaries (e.g., St. Andrew of Ceasarea). The author inserts his opinion relative to the “mark” as if it is fact; there exist several other interpretations, including the one, for example by St. Paisios the Athonite. St. Paisios, as well as many other 20th century Fathers of the Church, insisted that the mark of the beast shall be in line with current technological developments such as the well publicized RFID. In our next issue, we will include an article by St. Paisios so that a balanced view on this greatly important topic is presented. As far as the subject article, we agree with the author’s recommendation that the faithful avoid falling into fatal extremes on this matter and instead, focus upon spiritual growth, faith and readiness towards the great temptations that are ever-increasing all around us.*

† † †

I have an opinion as to this number [666], though I do not know

for certain, for many names have been found in this number when it is expressed in writing. Still we say that perhaps the inscription of this same seal will give us the word “I deny.” Of such kind, in the time of that hater of all good, will be the seal, the tenor of which will be this: “I deny the Maker

of heaven and earth, I deny the baptism, I deny my (former) service and attach myself to thee, and I believe in thee.” ... Truly those who are engrossed in the affairs of life, and with the lust of this world, will be easily brought over to the accuser [Antichrist] then, and sealed by him.

Saint Hippolytus of Rome, “Discourse on the End of the World and on Antichrist”

† † †

In the Apocalypse, the holy Apostle John the Theologian indicated the number of Antichrist in these words: *And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their forehead... Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred threescore and six.* (Rev 13:16, 18). Ever since then, there have been many interpretations of this number. In their exegeses, the Holy Fathers have proceeded from the fact that the number of the beast [i.e., Antichrist] is the number of his name, as it says in verse 17: *...the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.* During the time

of Antichrist, everyone will be offered to receive the mark of the beast, and therefore Christians ought to know the essence of what this means and just what this number signifies.

On this subject, a majority of Christians today fall into one of two basic categories. To the first belong those who are altogether indifferent to this question, who consider it to be of little import and who even laugh at those who are interested in it. It would appear that such apathy, such a lukewarm attitude, reflects a shallow, superficial faith. In the second group are those Christians who, possessing “zeal without knowledge,” are led astray by the enemy into overly literal interpretations, finding the number of Antichrist in trademarks, in documents and on currency—an extreme approach that frequently leads to the development of a pharisaical-sectarian spirit.

What is the genuinely Orthodox approach to this subject? We shall try to explain. The Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church allow various explanations of the number of the beast. Most often the name is sought in the correspondence between the number of the beast and the sum of letters of this or that name.

Thereby people have arrived at many descriptive and even proper names of Antichrist, and likewise his title. They have deduced such names as “Wicked Leader,” “Ancient Envier,” “Truly Malicious,” “Unrighteous Lamb,” and others.

Doubtless, any descriptive names corresponding to the number 666 can, of course, be applied to Antichrist. However, we must direct our attention not to an external search for names, but to ascertaining the inner meaning of the name of the beast. After all, the Apostle John the Theologian indicated specifically that in order to comprehend the name of the beast it was essential to have wisdom, i.e., Christian love of wisdom, and not simply an arithmetical formula.

We know that Divine names—as, for example, Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, and others—can contain a condensed form of the entire Christian confession. The hesychast fathers often point this out in speaking about the Jesus Prayer. Antichrist, in seeking to counterfeit Christ in all respects, will also have a name that expresses, in condensed form, his entire false teaching. The name of Antichrist will be a kind of brief but precise symbol of the antichristian faith. It will contain in itself all the fundamental theses of this false teaching. Only in this way can one explain how the acceptance of the inscription of this name, the mark of the beast, will be a denial of Christ and His Church.



It is this denial of true Christianity that constitutes the principal reason for setting the seal of Antichrist. Clearly, then, the acceptance of this seal is not connected to any trademarks or commercial marks on documents, money or even on the flesh (for example, prisoners in labor camps wear numbers on their clothing, and slaves used to be branded). This is not the seal of Antichrist. The acceptance of the mark must be joined with a conscious denial of Christ and the acceptance of the law of Antichrist.

It is interesting to trace how, over thousands of years, Satan has been preparing mankind to accept his religion. Many pagan cults confess some kind of divine triad. The ancient Romans had Jupiter, Juno and Minerva; the Hindus have Brahma, Siva and Visnu; in the Egyptian religion one finds the trinitarian group of Osiris, Isis, and Horus. The concept of a trinity also exists in Buddhism and among the ancient Slavs and Celts. In the Graeco-Roman religious cults this idea was reflected in the veneration of the three-bodied goddess Hecate, the three-headed Scylla, the triune divinities of the Cabiri. At the gate of Hades stood guard the fiendish, three-headed dog, Cerberus. Numerous divine triads have been revered by pagan tribes of the Americas and Africa. The cult of voodoo, which is related to modern Satanism believes in some anti-trinity.

These confessions may be said to contain fragments of true revelation. If Satan did not exist, one could say that these pagan peoples revered the true God-in-Trinity, even though their concepts of just Who this is were in many ways distorted. But because the world of dark spirituality is in fact a distorted representation of the Divine world, and the devil in his actions imitates God in a distorted fashion, it follows that the distorted divinity of the pagans is a false god, endeavoring to pass for the true God. Through the lips of the Prophet David, the Church warns us that *all the gods of the heathen are devils* (Pss 95:5). It is evident that, under the guise of these pagan “trinities,” Satan himself is concealed together with his minions. This is iconographically supported: In the Christian art of Europe and Abyssinia one finds three-headed, three-faced or three-horned depictions of Satan, symbols of the Satanic false trinity. Two thousand years ago, as Christianity spread throughout the world, it disarmed and bound the religion of Satan, as this was manifest in numerous pagan cults. In the time of Antichrist this religion of evil will again, in one form or another, come to dominate the world.

In what will the religion of Antichrist consist? It is enigmatically expressed for us by the Apostle as the number 666. As we see, this number is composed of three sixes: six hundreds, six tens and six ones. If we turn to Holy Scripture, we see that the number six rarely figures in either the Old or New Testaments, whereas the number seven is used in the Bible as a symbol of completeness, of fulfillment, of perfection, of wholeness (often in the sense of absolute perfection). In Christ, humanity is shown an example of *the fullness of the Godhead*

(Col 2:9). The Antichrist, by contrast, will unite in himself all incompleteness, all imperfection, and deficiency. The symbol of imperfection—that seeks to appear as perfection—is none other than the number six. In the number of the beast this imperfection is raised to its extreme: it is not merely six, but six hundred, sixty-six!

If the Son of God co-exists indivisibly and in unconfused union with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the son of perdition, Antichrist, exists in the closest possible union with Satan and his false prophet. The three of them together represent a false trinity, as it were: the spirit of malice—the beast—the second beast. These three deficient persons, one in their spiritual essence, are united in a single incompleteness, whose symbol is 666. And so, the number of the name of the beast contains in condensed form the entire diabolical confession of the false religion of the Antichrist. Herein lies the evil power of this bestial name.

The “moral” teaching of Satan can also be expressed as a type of triune evil: evil reasoning, evil feelings, and evil will. This anti-moral teaching can also be symbolically expressed by the name of the beast, more precisely, by the tripartite number of this name. For this reason, the acceptance of this name of Antichrist in the form of some seal will in fact be a denial of Christ and His Church.

The son of perdition, the Antichrist, inasmuch as he is a man, will give the devil the possibility—through him—to act openly in the world, and, with the help of the false prophet, to deceive and destroy people. The greater part of humanity will gladly accept this proud message of the man-god, whose principal postulates will be: “Man! Know that your ‘I’ is a part of the divinity. You are truly a god! You are a law unto yourself. No one has any authority over your ‘I.’ An example for you is your messiah [Antichrist], a great man, who knows that he is a god!” The false religion of Antichrist can be characterized as a humanist religion, in the sense that it is not divine; it is vain, transitory. This is why the number of the beast is called in the Apocalypse, *the number of a man* (Rev 13:18). The number of a man is the name of the man-Antichrist, who will reveal himself to be a god, but who in essence will be merely a pathetic slave of the fallen angel.

Let us say now a few words about that close unity of the three persons of the false-trinity. According to the teaching of the Orthodox Church, the whole life and activity of Antichrist will be connected in one way or another to Satan, to whom he will be in conscious and voluntary submission. Antichrist will be close to the devil as no other person in the history of the world. He will be a real instrument of Satan. In turn, the false prophet, who is called in the Scriptures the second beast, will be Antichrist’s closest ally. Through Antichrist, Satan will give enormous power and authority to the false prophet, who will act with all the authority of the first beast, and will compel all the earth and all those living upon the earth to bow down before him. Through the miracles that the beast will grant the

false prophet to perform, the latter will deceive many, telling them to *make an image to the beast* (13:14): *And he will be given power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should all be killed.* (Rev 13-15). From the second verse of the nineteenth chapter of the Book of Revelation, one can conclude that it is precisely thanks to the false prophet that many people will accept the mark of the beast. However, three and a half years later the reign of lawlessness will come to an end, for the Lord Jesus Christ will appear in glory and overwhelm all the enemies of God. *And the devil will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.* (Rev 20:10).

Many people think that the seal of the Antichrist will be something like a stamp or brand, or an electronic chip implanted under the skin. The basis for such thinking lies in the fantastically rapid development of science and technology in this direction. Most likely, however, this scientific development is designed to distract mankind's attention from the real mark of Antichrist, which will have nothing to do with the advances of science, technology or medicine. At a time when people's suspicions and anxieties are fixed upon some innovation of progress—the implantation of computer chips in humans, for example—the real seal of Antichrist will be imprinted quietly, without any particular commotion.

In a spiritual sense, this Satanic mystery—the imprinting of the mark of Antichrist—will be the antithesis of the Christian Mystery of Chrismation, which, we recall, is the placing of the seal of the Holy Spirit, while imitating its external form. Just as in the Mystery of Chrismation, the priest anoints the newly-illuminated on the forehead and hands, so, too, in the placing of the mark of Antichrist, his servants may well anoint people with some kind of “sacred” oil, which will symbolize the voluntary acceptance of Antichrist and his religion.

The iconographic tradition of the Orthodox Church supports this supposition. In the iconographic sketch, illustrating the

pouring out of God's wrath upon those bearing the mark of the beast—that is, *the seal of Antichrist* (Rev 16:1,2)—we see Satan wearing a fiery three-horned crown (symbolizing the trinity of evil); he is signing people on the forehead with the mark of the beast—the seal of Antichrist. Moreover, he is using a brush, dipping into a vial that he is holding in his other hand (The Illuminated Bible, 1914). Why is it that the illustration depicts Satan himself placing the mark? Because it symbolizes his spiritual presence among those numerous servants of the religion of Antichrist, who will actually place the mark upon the peoples of the earth.



Of course, the sign of Antichrist may be placed by means other than a brush—by some other “sacred” instrument or simply by the hand of a servant of the universal (Antichrist's) religion. Whatever the actual means, the aim is to induce people to renounce Christ.

Let us return now to the two groups of people whom we mentioned at the beginning of this article, and see how they will react to the mark of the beast. It is very likely that both those who are indifferent to the question of accepting the stamp and those who zealously study marks on currency, documents and manufactured goods, endeavoring to detect the mark of Antichrist, both groups will be found outside Christ's Church. The first because, even in accepting the mark of Antichrist, they will console themselves with the thought that this is merely some innocuous, ecumenical rite. And the second, because even before the placing of the marks (or even before the coming of Antichrist), they will accuse the earthly part of Christ's Church with having accepted the mark of Antichrist, although in fact this will be simply some credit card or new type of personal document. Furthermore, such zealots “not according to knowledge” will proclaim that their group alone—which has rejected these “marks” (cards, documents, products with certain symbols, etc.)—is the true Church. Clearly, this will be nothing but a new schism or sect. Already now we find many sad examples of such splinter groups, and they will only increase in the last times.

The salvific Royal Path consists in: first not accepting (only) those innovations of civilization that are clearly connected with the renunciation of Christ; secondly, not participating in any non-Orthodox rituals, for this path leads to Satan's principal ritual—the acceptance of the seal of Antichrist, i.e., the renunciation of Christ, under the guise of an outwardly innocuous, symbolical act. One must also remember that an important sign of the mark of Antichrist is that it will be made upon everyone throughout the whole world. This allows us to draw two conclusions: (1) Whatever registration methods are used by individual governments are not the actual mark of Antichrist (although they may be preparatory). (2) We must be very vigilant towards registration methods of a worldwide scale, if they in any way concern a confession of faith. Such an approach will guard us from falling into fatal extremes.

To some it may appear that keeping oneself from accepting the stamp of the Antichrist will be easy. We should not forget the warning in Scripture that in the last times even many of the chosen will be deceived, that is, many Orthodox Christians. How is this possible? It is important to understand that the principal danger lies not in the fact that this stamp will be masked and presented in the form of some technological innovation, but rather in the fact that modern, "civilized" man will be ashamed, he will be embarrassed not to accept it. This will be the greatest temptation to overcome—and many will not.

Just listen to the logic: "Why do you refuse to take part in this measure that involves all of humanity, that is being instituted worldwide? After all, it symbolizes unity and the brotherly love of all peoples. It is a symbol of our unity under the aegis of a lawful global authority that has been given to all men from above. Are you against peace and order? Do you want a reign of chaos and enmity? If you are people of good will, you must take part in these cultural enactments that concern all mankind."

Of course, it will turn out that one such "innocent" enactment will be, in fact, the rite of bowing down before the God-hating Antichrist. Only a discerning vigilance, illumined by the grace of God, will be able to preserve us from such subtle deception of the last times. What will be the consequences of accepting the mark of Antichrist? They will be truly horrific, destroying human souls. The fruit of denying God is always dreadful, for life without God is death.

Will one be able to repent after having accepted the mark of the beast? On the one hand, there is little hope that a person who does not have enough faith and spiritual strength to refuse the mark will be able to repudiate it once he has voluntarily accepted it. On the other hand, our attitude towards the mark of the beast must be free of all unorthodox fatalism and fetishism, for no seal or mark, in and of itself, can have any power over a man. The powers of evil behind this mark have power only over those who personally submit to them, who deny Christ. According to the Orthodox teaching, the power of Christian repentance is stronger than the power of evil. The history of the

Church knows numerous examples of people who accepted the spiritual seal of Satan himself, people who signed a pact with the devil, voluntarily entrusting their souls to him. And here we have a testimony of God's love for mankind: even some of these apostates repented and became saints. The Lord, by His authority, annulled their pact with Satan. We have only to recall the life of Saint Cyprian, a formidable Satanist who became a saint after repenting and turning to Christ.

The Orthodox Church teaches us that, up to the time of his physical death, each person, by God's mercy, has the possibility to repent. Therefore, we would deny God's mercy were we to say that people who accept the mark of Antichrist will have no further possibility of repentance. While they are still alive, this possibility will be available to them. Desiring their repentance, the Lord will send down upon them dreadful pestilences, as final, decisive measures for their spiritual restoration. (cf. Saint Andrew of Caesarea, Commentary on the Apocalypse). But, alas, **Sacred Scripture clearly states that those who consciously accept the mark of Antichrist will no longer have any desire to repent.** They will *bite their tongues from pain*, but even so *they will not cease blaspheming God and they will not repent of their deeds.* (Rev 16:10-11). If, among those who bow down before the beast, there should be some isolated cases of repentance, this conversion and repentance can be regarded only as a miracle of God.

The conscious acceptance of the soul-destroying stamp under the assumption that one can later repent is a terrible and unforgivable sin in the eyes of God. Therefore, while there is yet time, let us prepare ourselves for the coming trials. Such preparation consists in fulfilling all the soul-saving precepts and ordinances of our Mother, the Orthodox Church. While we still have the opportunity and spiritual strength, let us tirelessly entreat the Merciful God with the words of the Lord's Prayer, as the Saviour intentionally ordained: **Our Father ... lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.**



The goal of reading is the application, in our lives, of what we read—not to learn it by heart, but to take it to heart; not to practice using our tongues, but to be able to receive the tongues of fire and to live the mysteries of God. If one studies a great deal—in order to acquire knowledge and to teach others—without living the things he teaches, he does no more than fill his head with hot air. At most, he will manage to ascend to the moon using machines. The goal of the Christian is to rise to God without machines.

Saint Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

ST. PAISIOS THE ATHONITE ON ECUMENISM

With the canonization of one of the greatest saints of our days, we wish to publish an article of great interest for all Orthodox faithful.

Elder Paisios of the Holy Mount Athos has been canonized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate, during the session of the Holy Synod on Tuesday, January 13th, 2015. Saint Paisios had already been accepted as a Saint from the faithful and it was a matter of time for his canonization. His feast day has been established as July 12th, the day of his repose. God is wondrous among His Saints! May we have his blessing!

Apolytikion in the First Tone

The offspring of Farasa, and the adornment of Athos, and the imitator of the former righteous, equal in honor, O Paisios let us honor O faithful, the vessel full of graces, who hastens speedily to those who cry out: glory to Him Who gave you strength, glory to Him Who crowned you, glory to Him Who grants through you healings for all.

Kontakion in the Plagal of the Fourth Tone

The most-famed ascetic of the Holy Mountain, and the newly-enlightened light of the Church, let us praise him with hymns with all our heart, for he leads the faithful towards a perfect life, filling them with rivers of gifts, therefore we cry out: Hail, O Father Paisios.

Synaxarion

On this day (July 12th), the memory of our venerable Father Paisios the New, of the Holy Mountain, who reposed in peace in the year 1994.

Verses

Paisios, the tree of Mount Athos, You were shown to be full of fruit, O Most-venerable one. On the twelfth, Paisios reposed.

Megalynarion

Rejoice the communicant with the Venerable, the pride of Athos, the adornment of Monastics, Rejoice the new teacher of the Church, O godly-minded Paisios, our boast.

† † †

A PRIVATE LETTER CONCERNING ECUMENISM

This is the last known epistle sent by the Ever-memorable Elder Paisios. Archimandrite Haralambos Vasilopoulos was the Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Petraki, Athens, and founder of the Pan-Hellenic Orthodox Union and its organ "Orthodoxos Typos."

The Holy Mountain, January 23, 1969

Reverend Father Haralambos, In as much as I see the great uproar which is happening in our Church because of the various movements of groups in favor of unification [of churches], as well as the interaction of the Oecumenical Patriarch with the Pope, I was pained

as Her child, and considered it good, besides my prayers, to send a small thread (which I have as a poor monk), that it too may be used as a means of stitching together the multipart garment of our Mother. I know you will show love and share it only with your religious friends. Thank you.

First of all, I would like to ask forgiveness from everyone for being bold to write something when I am neither holy nor a theologian. I trust everyone will understand me, that my writing is nothing more than an expression of my deep pain for the unfortunate stance and worldly love of our father Patriarch Athenagoras.

It appears he loved another modern woman—which is called the Papist Church—because our Orthodox Mother has not made an impression on him at all, for She is so modest. This love, which was heard from Constantinople, caused a sensational impression of sorts among many Orthodox, who nowadays live in an environment of such meaningless love, in cities across

the entire world. Moreover, this love is of the spirit of our age: the family will lose its divine meaning from just such kinds of love, which have as their aim breakup and not union.

With just such a worldly love the Patriarch takes us to Rome. While he should have shown love first to us his children and to our Mother Church, he unfortunately sent his love very far away. The result, it's true, delighted the secular children who love the world—who have this worldly love—, but completely scandalized us, the children of Orthodoxy, young and old, who have fear of God.

With sadness I must write that among all the "unionists" I've met, never have I seen them to have either a drop or shred

of spirituality. Nevertheless, they know how to speak about love and union while they themselves are not united with God, for they have not loved Him.

I would like tenderly to beseech all our unionist brothers: Since the issue of the union of the Churches is something spiritual, and we have need of spiritual love, let's leave it to those who greatly love God and are [genuine] theologians, like the Fathers of the Church—not the legalists—who have offered up and continue to give themselves in service to the Church (instead of just buying big candles), and who were and are lit by the fire of love for God rather than by the lighter of the church sacristan (church caretaker).

We should recognize that there exist not only natural but also spiritual laws. Therefore, the future wrath of God is not averted by a convocation of sinners (for then we shall receive double the wrath), but by repentance and adherence to the commandments of the Lord.



Also, we should know well that our Orthodox Church does not have even one shortcoming. The only apparent insufficiency is the shortage of sober Hierarchs and Shepherds with a Patristic foundation. “Few are chosen.” This should not, however, be upsetting. The Church is Christ’s Church, and He governs Her. It is not a Temple built by the pious from rocks, sand and mortar, which is then destroyed by the fire of barbarians; the Church is Christ Himself. “And whosoever shall fall on this Stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.” (Matt. 21:44-45)

When He must, (e.g., at the right time) the Lord will bring forth the Mark of Ephesuses and Gregory Palamas, so as to bring together all our scandalized brethren, to confess the Orthodox Faith, to strengthen the Tradition, and to give great joy to our Mother, the Church.

In times past we see that many faithful children of our Church, monastics and laymen, have unfortunately broken away from Her on account of the unionists. In my opinion, separation from the Church each time the Patriarch makes a mistake is not good at all. From within, close to the Mother Church, it is the duty and obligation of each member to struggle in their own way. To cease commemoration of the Patriarch; to break away and create their own Church; and to continue to speak insultingly to the Patriarch: this I think, is senseless.

If, for this or that occasional deviation of the Patriarchs, we separate ourselves and make our own Churches—may God protect us!—we’ll pass up even the Protestants. It is easy for one to separate but difficult to return. Unfortunately we have many “churches” in our times, created either by big groups or even just one person. Because there happened to be a church in their kalyve (I am speaking about things happening on the Holy Mountain), they figured they could create their own independent Church.

If the unionists gave the Church the first wound, the aforementioned give the second.

Let’s pray that God will illumine all of us, including our Patriarch Athenagoras, that union of these “churches” will come about first; that tranquility would be realized within the scandalized Orthodox fold; so that peace and love would exist among the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Then let’s think about union with other “Confessions”—and only if they sincerely desire to embrace Orthodox Dogma.

I would further like to say that there does exist another, third group, within our Church. They are the brethren who remain as Her faithful children, but who don’t have spiritual

concord between themselves. They spend their time criticizing one another, and not for the general good of the struggle. The one monitors the other (more than himself) to see what he will say or write so as to ruthlessly nail him. However, if this person had said or written the same thing, he’d certainly have supported it with numerous passages from the Holy Scriptures and the Fathers.

Great harm comes of this; for while the one injures his neighbor, the other strikes him back before the eyes of all the faithful. Oftentimes, disbelief is sown in the souls of the weak, because they are scandalized by such people. Unfortunately, some from among us make senseless claims against the others. We want them to conform to our own spiritual character. In other words, when someone else doesn’t harmonize with our own character, or is only mildly tolerant—or even a little sharp—with us, immediately we jump to the conclusion that he is not a spiritual person.

We’re all needed within the Church. All the Fathers, both the mild and the austere, offered their services to Her. **Just as the sweet, sour, bitter and even pungent herbs are necessary for a man’s body (each has its own flavor and vitamins), the same is true of the Body of the Church. All are necessary.** The one fills up the spiritual character of the other, and all of us are duty bound to endure not only the particular spiritual character, but even the human weaknesses we each have.

Again, I come sincerely asking pardon from all for being so bold to write. I am only a simple monk, and my work is to strive, as much as I am able, to divest myself of the old man, and to help others and the Church, through God, by prayer. But because heart-breaking news regarding our Holy Orthodoxy has reached even my hermitage, I was greatly pained, and thus considered it good to write that which I felt. Let’s all pray that God grants His Grace, and may each of us help in his own way for the glory of our Church.

With much respect to all,

Monk Paisios



We must not compel others to follow the spiritual struggle. You can not compel him if he does not have the disposition. It is like what happens with food. If one is not disposed to eat and we give him food under compulsion, he will vomit it up.

St. Paisios the Athonite (+1994)



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† † †

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THE BEGINNING OF GREAT LENT

By St. John (Maximovitch) of Shanghai and San Francisco.



The doors of repentance are opening, Great Lent is beginning. Every year Great Lent is repeated, and each time it brings us great benefit if we spend it as we should. It is a preparation for the life to come and, more immediately, a preparation for the Bright Resurrection.

Just as a stairway is built into a tall building in order to enable one, by climbing the steps, to easily reach the top, so too, the various days in the year

serve as steps for our spiritual ascent. This is especially true of the days of Great Lent and Holy Pascha.

By means of Great Lent we cleanse ourselves of the filth of sin, and at Holy Pascha we experience the blessedness of Christ's Kingdom that is to come. In climbing a high mountain, one tries to eliminate all unnecessary weight. The less a person carries, the easier it is for him to climb and the higher he is able to climb. So, too, in order to ascend spiritually, it is necessary first of all to free oneself from the weight of sin. This weight is lifted from us through repentance, provided that we banish from ourselves all enmity and forgive each person whom we consider to be at fault before us. Once cleansed and forgiven by God, we then greet the Bright Resurrection of Christ.

And what a priceless gift of God we receive, at the culmination of our Lenten struggle. We already hear about this in the first hymns of the daily Lenten *stichera*: *Our food shall be the Lamb of God, on the holy and radiant night of His Awakening: the Victim offered for us, given in communion to the disciples on the evening of the Mystery. (Aposticha sticheron, Sunday of the Last Judgment).*

Communing of the Body and Blood of the Risen Christ, unto life eternal—this is the aim of the holy *Quadragesima* [Forty Days]. Not only on Pascha do we commune, but during Lent also. On Pascha those people should commune who have fasted, confessed and received the Holy Mysteries during Great Lent. Just before Pascha itself there is little opportunity for a proper and thorough confession; the priests are very busy and most of the time occupied with the Passion services. Rather one must prepare ahead of time.

Each time one receives the Mysteries of Christ, one is united with Christ Himself; each time it is a soul-saving act. Why, then, is such significance attached to receiving Holy Communion on the night of Holy Pascha, and why are we all called to do so?

Then, especially, we are given to experience the Kingdom of Christ. Then, especially, we are illumined with the Eternal Light and strengthened for the spiritual ascent.

This is an irreplaceable gift of Christ, an incomparable good. Let no one deprive himself of this joy and, instead of receiving Holy Communion on Pascha night, hasten to eat meat and other foods. Communing of the Holy Mysteries on that night prepares us for the banquet in the eternal Kingdom of God.

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

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

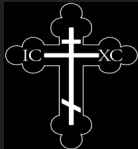
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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VICTORY OVER DEATH

By Metropolitan Philaret (Voznesensky) of New York (+1985).

The holy Church teaches us that of all of God's creation, man is the most exalted; he alone was created immortal. *God made not death*, the Holy Bible tells us (Wis 1:13). As God is possessed of immortality, in the words of the Apostle, so He created man, in His image and likeness, immortal, but warned him that if he violated the commandment of His Creator, he *would surely die*; that is, he would lose immortality and thus become mortal.

Ever since the first-created people broke the commandment and heard the dread pronouncement of God, *Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return*, death has stood as an ominous specter before sinful humanity. *I weep and lament when I think of death*, says the Church in sending up prayer on behalf of a dead person and accompanying him to the grave. When confronted by the gloom and coldness of the grave, the horror of corruption and the disintegration of the human body, philosophy is powerless and all man's attempts to reconcile himself to the fact of death are in vain. Man turns from it in terror and tries to forget about it, despite its alarming inevitability. For thousands of years there was no relief, no comfort, until One came Who uttered the wondrous

words: *I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.*

What righteous, what boundless spiritual power and what infinite love fill these hallowed words! In these words of the Lord men are promised freedom from fear of death and its dominion, the triumph of life over death is promised. And behold! He Who gave these promises has sealed their truth through His own Resurrection from the dead! If,



in promising men resurrection and life everlasting, He Himself had remained in the grave, who would have believed His words? But He did arise, and thereby showed that He indeed has within Himself resurrection and life, and furthermore, as almighty Master and Lord, He has the power to bestow this resurrection and life upon the human race

which He fashioned.

The Resurrection of Christ is the victory of life over death, the triumph of righteousness over falsehood. And however weak, infirm and sinful a man may be, he cannot but rejoice in this victory. Therein he sees the triumph of a higher justice, the victory of the heavenly law of love over human vanity and error. Only the person who has utterly given himself over to evil and falsehood, like the devil—the father of lies, does not sense the joy of the radiant Resurrection of Christ. And the soul, even if sinful and flawed, if it still has not altogether

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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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extinguished within itself good principles and impulses, joyfully responds to the glorious news of the Resurrection, for it senses how the highest expectations and Christian truths quicken within it...

How splendid, how magnificent is the feast of the Resurrection of Christ. How joyously and solemnly the Church celebrates it! Can any other celebration in the world compare with the magnificence of the paschal service? His Beatitude, Metropolitan Anthony, in agreement with the Holy Fathers and teachers of the Church of old, points out that the special and particular joy of Pascha, which the soul of the believer experiences on that radiant night, is, as it were, a foretaste of that everlasting, unfading blessedness spoken of in the final words of the Symbol of Faith: *the life of the age to come...* Would that all children of the Orthodox Church might enter into that joy, that everlasting blessedness, of which the eternal and just Judge will say to His faithful: ***Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.***



It is the day of Resurrection, so let us be radiant for the festival, and let us embrace one another. Let us speak, brothers and sisters, also to those who hate us, and in the Resurrection let us forgive everything, and so let us cry: Christ is risen from the dead, trampling on death by death, and on those in the tombs bestowing life.

Stichera of the Paschal Service

WHAT DOST THOU BELIEVE

A quotation from a Paschal encyclical of Vladyka Anthony (Khrapovitsky), Metropolitan of Kiev and Galicia (1934)

The present age is rich not in ascetical feats of piety and confession of faith, but in cheating, lies, and deceits. It is noteworthy that several hierarchs and their flocks, have already fallen away from Ecumenical unity, and to the question: *What dost thou believe?*¹ reply with references to self-proclaimed heads of all sorts of schisms in Moscow, America, and Western Europe. It is clear that they have ceased to believe in the unity of the Church throughout the whole world and do not wish to admit it, attempting to bear calmly the refusal of the True Church to have relations with them, and imagining that one can supposedly save one's soul even without communion with Her... Those who have cut themselves off from Her deprive themselves of the hope of salvation, as the Fathers of the Sixth Ecumenical Council teach concerning this, having recognized the renegades as being totally devoid of grace, according to the word of Christ: *But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.* (Mt 18:17).

Unfortunately, some Orthodox laymen, even, alas, many priests (and hierarchs) have subjected themselves to this state of gracelessness, although still retaining the outward appearance of the church services and the apparent performance of the Mysteries.

† † †

¹ *The question solemnly posed to a bishop at his consecration, to which he must reply publicly, declaring his confession of the Orthodox Faith and pledging to uphold the canons and teachings of the Church.*

MAN'S FALL AND RESURRECTION

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos.

From the Author: The subject of the fall and resurrection is the basis of *soteriology* (the “art-science” of salvation, the study of religious doctrines of salvation; from σωτηρία—*salvation*, and λόγος—*word*, *Ed.*). If we do not examine it scientifically, we shall never be able to understand and live the life which the Church has. I ought to mention that the question of “what is the fall of man” has been analyzed in other books of mine, and I do not want to repeat it. I shall merely emphasize a few points. The reader can find an extensive analysis in my book “Orthodox Psychotherapy,” and in “Time to Act,” in the chapter “Traditional Catechism.”

† † †

We usually think of the fall in juridical terms, in meaning which have been taken from the law courts. We consider that Adam's sin was simply a transgression of a law, an external one, and that this transgression created great guilt in man, with the result that this guilt has been inherited in Adam's descendants.

But this view of sin is not Orthodox. In Orthodoxy we regard sin as an illness of man. Man fell ill and this illness had an effect on the whole human race. St. Cyril of Alexandria uses the image of the plant. When the root of the plant has become ill, then the branches also fall ill. We can interpret Adam's sin in this way as well.

St. Maximos, speaking of the fall of man and his restoration, puts them on a theological basis. He says that at the creation of the world and of man there were five divisions. The division between uncreated and created, noetic and tangible, Heaven and earth, Paradise and world, male and female. Adam, by the grace of God, but also by his personal struggle, an expression of his freedom, would have to overcome these divisions and reach communion and unity with the uncreated. To be sure, this last division, that between created and uncreated, could not be abolished, but the created would attain unity with the uncreated. Moreover, in the Church we say that there is no division between physical and metaphysical things, as philosophy claimed, but between created and uncreated. And further, we accept that the uncreated enters into the created, and thus man himself, as St. Maximos the Confessor says, also becomes uncreated by grace.



Adam failed to transcend these divisions. And not only did he fail to transcend the division which we mentioned, but he also lost the purity which existed between the two sexes, with the result that decay and mortality entered into nature, that he wore the coats of skin and decay and mortality. Therefore now man's way of conception, gestation, birth, etc., is a result of the fall, it is what the Fathers called coats of skin, which he wore after the fall.

The transcending of the five divisions took place in Christ. By His incarnation, by His birth from a Virgin, by the union of divine and human nature, he united the uncreated with the created, the heavenly with the earth, the noetic with the sensible, Paradise with the world, and he even transcended the division between male and female. Thus, man's restoration was successful and every person was given the possibility that in Christ he too could transcend all the divisions and achieve his salvation.

If we want to look more concretely at the matter of the fall we will say that, as St. John of Damaskos teaches, the fall in reality is darkness of the image, loss of the divine life and putting on the coats of skin. The darkness of the image is nothing else but the darkening of the nous. The nous was darkened and could not have communion and unity with God. Of course it must be said that according to the anthropology of the Fathers, man's soul is rational and noetic.

This means that man has two centers of functioning. One is the reasoning mind, which is connected with his nervous system, and the other his nous, which is connected with his heart. Adam's fall, then, is the darkening of his nous, the loss of its noetic function, confusion of the nous with the functions of reason and its enslavement to the passions and to the environment. Instead of moving according to nature and above nature, instead of moving towards God and being mindful of God, man's nous is turned towards the created things and the passions. That is why in the Church we speak of repentance, which is not simply a change in the head, as some theologians say, but a change of the nous. The nous must break away from the created and the passions and turn towards God.

A result of the darkening of his noetic energy is that man's relationship with God and his fellow man is upset. Because of his darkened nous, man does not find meaning in life, he turns his attention to the external things, with the result that he comes to blows with men, and he has no inner peace. This

is analyzed in a wonderful way by St. Gregory Palamas. Fallen man uses God to safeguard his individual security and regards his neighbor as an object for predatory exploitation. He cannot have selfless love, because all his expressions and all his love contain the element of self-seeking, which is to say that man is characterized by self-seeking love. So the darkening of the nous has drastic social consequences. Sociology cannot be regarded as independent of theology.

In this sense (and only in this sense) we can speak of inheritance of sin and of the ancestral sin, which man inherits at birth. In this sense too we can speak of the catholicity of the fall of man.

What Adam failed to do, Christ, who is called the new Adam, succeeded in doing. By His incarnation Christ deified human nature and became the strongest medicine for men, in the sense that He gave every man the possibility of achieving his *theosis* (*deification*). In this light we can interpret the phrase from the troparion that Christ raised up *Adam with the whole human race*.

At this point I would like to look at two passages in St. John of Damaskos which will help us to understand in some way the mystery of the incarnation of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. It must of course be emphasized that this too is a subject not of rational understanding but of spiritual experience, yet we can say something about the doctrine of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God.

St. John of Damaskos, repeating a passage from St. Gregory the Theologian whom he calls his spiritual father, says that Christ took on the whole human nature, because **what is not assumed is not cured**. St. John of Damaskos goes on to say that the ruling centre of the soul and the flesh is the nous, which is the purest part of the soul, but also that the ruling centre of the nous is God Himself. When God acts, then the nous manifests its own authority, and then *it is under the control of the stronger and follows it, doing those things which the divine will desires*. The Son and Word of God has united with the flesh *by means of the nous*, which is midway between the purity of God and the grossness of the flesh. So the nous became the place of its personal union with divinity. The saint writes characteristically: *The nous becomes the seat of the Divinity which has been hypostatically united to it*. This has great importance, because it shows that man's salvation begins and works in the nous and then extends to the whole body. Thus we understand **the great importance of the neptic tradition of our Church**.

The other point from the teaching of St. John of Damaskos which is useful to us here is that by His incarnation, the Word of God did not assume the human nature *that is understood in pure theory*, that is to say, he did not assume a simple nature, that which is seen externally, because then it would not have been incarnation, but an illusion and fiction of incarnation. Also He did not assume this nature *regarded as a species*, but

that which is seen in the individual, which at the same time belongs also to the species, because Christ assumed the whole mixture of what was our own from the beginning. This is important because, as St. John of Damaskos again says, human nature rose from the dead and sat at the right hand of the Father *not implying that all human persons arose and sat at the right hand of the Father, but that our entire nature did so in the Person of Christ*. That is to say that human nature has been deified in the Person of the *Logos*. So human nature has been deified in the hypostasis of the *Logos*, but our own human hypostases must be deified as well.

Therefore, the catholicity of Adam's fall has the meaning of the illness of human nature and the catholicity of the resurrection through the New Adam, Christ, it again has the meaning of the cure. Christ cured human nature, He Himself became the strongest medicine towards the cure, and he gives every man the possibility of being cured. Thus we can maintain that **Christ is both the physician as well as the medicine; He is man's cure and his health**.



Brethren and fathers, at Christ's resurrection creation too, putting away its winter gloom, like a deadness puts out fresh shoots and as it were comes to life again. And yes, we see the earth wearing green, the plants flourishing, the animals skipping around, the sea tamed and everything being changed for the better. But I must explain why I have said this. If inanimate and irrational creatures are made radiant and lovely by the resplendent resurrection, how much more ought we, who have been honored with reason and the image of God, make ourselves bright by our life and give off sweet fragrance by the spirit. For one who strives after virtue is truly the sweet fragrance of Christ, and the Apostle bears witness to this when he says, *For we are the sweet fragrance of Christ for God among those who are being saved and those who are perishing, for the latter a scent of death leading to death, for the former a scent of life leading to life*. 2 Cor 2,15-16.

St. Theodore the Studite



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GREAT AND HOLY FRIDAY: CHRIST ON THE CROSS

By Fr. Alexander Schmemmann (+1983).

From the light of Holy Thursday we enter into the darkness of Friday, the day of Christ's Passion, Death and Burial. In the early Church this day was called *Pascha of the Cross*, for it is indeed the beginning of that Passover or Passage whose whole meaning will be gradually revealed to us, first, in the wonderful quiet of the Great and blessed Sabbath, and, then, in the joy of the Resurrection day.

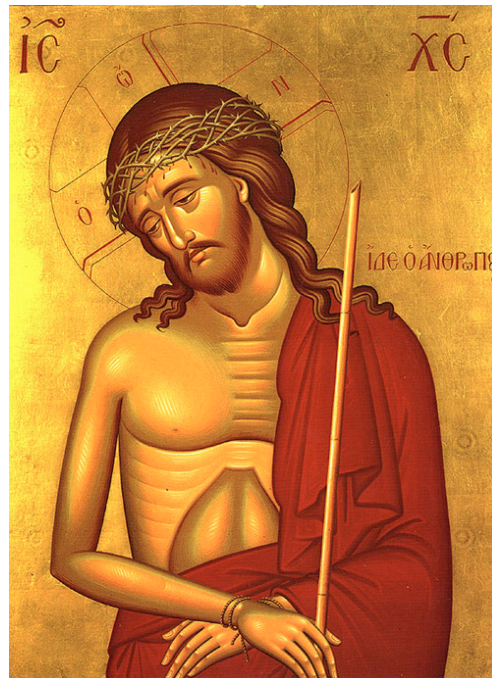
But, first, the Darkness. If only we could realize that on Good Friday darkness is not merely symbolical and commemorative. So often we watch the beautiful and solemn sadness of these services in the spirit of self-righteousness and self-justification. Two thousand years ago bad men killed Christ, but today we—the good Christian people—erect sumptuous Tombs in our Churches; is this not the sign of our goodness? Yet, Good Friday deals not with past alone. It is the day of sin, the day of evil, the day on which the Church invites us to realize their awful reality and power in “this world.” For sin and evil have not disappeared, but, on the contrary, still constitute the basic law of the world and of our life. And we, who call ourselves Christians, do we not also assume the same logic of evil which led the Jewish Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate, the Roman soldiers and the whole crowd of Jews to hate, torture and kill Christ? On what side, with whom would we have been, had we lived in Jerusalem under Pilate?

This is the question addressed to us in every word of Holy Friday services. It is, indeed, the day for this world, and it is real and not symbolical; it serves as a pragmatic, non-ritual condemnation and judgment on our life... It is the revelation of the true nature of the world which preferred then, and still prefers, darkness to light, evil to good, death to life. Having condemned Christ to death, “this world” has condemned itself to death and inasmuch as we accept its spirit, its sin, its betrayal of God—we are also condemned... Such is the first and dreadfully realistic meaning of Good Friday—a condemnation to death...

But this day of evil, of its ultimate manifestation and temporary triumph, is also the day of redemption. The death of Christ is revealed to us as the saving death for us and for our salvation.

It is a saving death because it is the full, perfect and supreme sacrifice. Christ gives His death to His Father and He gives His death to us. He gives His death to His Father because

as there is no other way to destroy death, and as such, save man from it; and it is the will of the Father that man be saved from death. And Christ gives His death to us because in reality Christ dies instead of us. Death is the natural fruit of sin, an imminent punishment. Man chose to be alienated from God, but having no life in himself and by himself, he dies. Yet there is no sin and, therefore, no death in Christ. He accepts to die only by and as the result of His immense love for us. He wants to assume and to share our human condition to its end. He accepts the punishment of our nature, as He assumed the whole burden of human predicament. He dies because He has truly identified Himself with us, has indeed taken upon Himself the tragedy of man's life. His death is the ultimate revelation of His compassion and love. And because His dying is love, compassion and co-suffering, in



His death the very nature of death is changed. From punishment it becomes the radiant act of love and forgiveness, the complete and absolute end of alienation and solitude. Condemnation is transformed into forgiveness...

And, finally, His death is a saving death because it destroys the very source of death: evil. By accepting it in love, by giving Himself to His murderers and permitting their apparent victory, Christ reveals that, in reality, this victory is the total and decisive defeat of evil itself. To be victorious, evil must annihilate the Good, it must prove itself to be the ultimate truth about life, discredit the Good and, in one word, show its own superiority. But throughout the whole Passion, it is Christ and He alone Who triumphs. Evil can do nothing against Him, for it cannot make Christ accept evil as truth. Hypocrisy is revealed as hypocrisy, murder as murder, fear as fear, and as Christ silently moves towards the Cross and the end, as the human tragedy reaches its climax, His triumph, His victory over the evil and His glorification become more and more obvious. And at each step this victory is acknowledged, confessed, proclaimed—by the wife of Pilate, by Joseph, by the crucified thief, by the centurion. And as He dies on the Cross having accepted the ultimate horror of death: absolute solitude (*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me!*?); nothing remains but to confess that *truly this was the Son of God!*... And, thus, it is this death, this love, this obedience, this fullness of Life that destroy what had made death the universal destiny. *And the graves were opened...* (Mt 27:52). Already the rays of resurrection appear...

Such is the double mystery of Holy Friday, and its services reveal it and make us participate in it. On the one hand there

is the constant emphasis on the Passion of Christ as the sin of all sins, the crime of all crimes. Throughout Matins during which the twelve Passion readings make us follow step by step the sufferings of Christ; at the Hours (which replace the Divine Liturgy: for the interdiction to celebrate Eucharist on this day means that the sacrament of Christ's Presence does not belong to "this world" of sin and darkness, but is the sacrament of the *world to come*); and finally, at Vespers, the service of Christ's burial the hymns and readings are full of solemn accusations of those, who willingly and freely decided to kill Christ, justifying this murder by their religion, their political loyalty, their practical considerations and their professional obedience.

But, on the other hand, the sacrifice of love which prepares the final victory is also present from the very beginning. From the first Gospel reading (Jn 13:31) which begins with the solemn announcement of Christ: *Now is the Son of Man glorified and in Him God is glorified* to the *stichera* at the end of Vespers—there is the increase of light, the slow growth of hope and certitude that *death will trample down death...*

*When Thou, the Redeemer of all,
hast been laid for all in the new tomb,
Hades, the respecter of none, saw Thee and crouched in fear.
The bars broke, the gates were shattered,
the graves were opened, the dead arose.
Then Adam, thankfully rejoicing, cried out to Thee:
Glory to Thy condescension, O Merciful Master.*

And when, at the end of Vespers, we place in the center of the Church the image of Christ in the tomb, when this long day comes to its end, we know that we are at the end of the long history of salvation and redemption. The Seventh Day, the day of rest, the blessed Sabbath comes and with it the revelation of the Life-giving Tomb!



Many indeed are the wondrous happenings of that time: God hanging from a Cross, the sun made dark, and again flaming out; for it was fitting that creation should mourn with its Creator. The Temple veil rent, blood and water flowing from His side: the one as from a man, the other as from What was above man; the earth was shaken, the rocks shattered because of the Rock; the dead risen to bear witness of the final and universal resurrection of the dead. The happenings at the Sepulchre, and after the Sepulchre, who can fittingly recount them? Yet not one of them can be compared to the miracle of my salvation. A few drops of Blood renew the whole world, and do for all men what the rennet does for milk: joining us and binding us together.

St. Gregory the Theologian

ON REPENTANCE

From the "Ladder of Divine Ascent."

Repentance is the renewal of baptism. Repentance is a contract with God for a second life. A penitent is a buyer of humility. Repentance is constant distrust of bodily comfort. Repentance is the daughter of hope and the renunciation of despair. Repentance is reconciliation with the Lord by the practice of good deeds contrary to the sins. Repentance is purification of conscience. Repentance is the voluntary endurance of all afflictions.

Do not be surprised that you fall every day; do not give up, but stand your ground courageously. And assuredly the angel who guards you will honor your patience. While a wound is still fresh and warm it is easy to heal, but old, neglected and festering ones are hard to cure, and require for their care much treatment, cutting, plastering and cauterization. Many from long neglect become incurable. But with God all things are possible.

We must carefully consider whether our conscience has ceased to accuse us, not as a result of purity, but because it is immersed in evil. A sign of deliverance from our falls is the continual acknowledgment of our indebtedness.

Nothing equals or excels God's mercies. Therefore he who despairs is committing suicide. A sign of true repentance is the acknowledgment that we deserve all the troubles, visible and invisible, that come to us, and even greater ones. Moses, after seeing God in the bush, returned again to Egypt, that is, to darkness and to the brick-making of Pharaoh, symbolical of the spiritual Pharaoh. But he went back again to the bush, and not only to the bush but also up the mountain. Whoever has known contemplation will never despair of himself. Job became a beggar, but he became twice as rich again.

The forgetting of wrongs is a sign of true repentance. But he who dwells on them and thinks that he is repenting is like a man who thinks he is running while he is really asleep...



A spiritual person is expected to face an injustice in a spiritual manner; he must face all things with divine justice, by looking to see what will benefit the other person. For when one is weak and makes a mistake, then he is somewhat entitled to a little leniency. But when one who is in a better spiritual condition doesn't display any understanding, then he will be at greater fault. What would happen if spiritual people faced things just like everybody else, in a worldly manner, with the worldly human justice? They would be constantly going to worldly courts. This is why people are tormented.

St. Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW CHRIST

St. Innocent of Alaska.

The first duty of a Christian, of a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ, is to deny oneself. To deny oneself means: to give up one's bad habits, to root out of the heart all that ties us to the world... to be dead to sin and the world, but alive to God.

A Christian's second duty is to take up one's cross. The word "cross" means sufferings, sorrows and adversities. To "take up one's cross" means to accept without complaint everything unpleasant, painful, sad, difficult and oppressive that may happen to us in life. In other words, to bear all laughter, scorn, weariness, sorrow and annoyance from others; to bear all poverty, misfortune, illness, without regarding yourself as offended. And if, when you are bearing your cross according to the will of God, a proud thought suggests to you that you are not weak like others, but that you are firm, pious and better, root out such thoughts as far as you can for they ruin all your virtues.

Now there are "external" crosses and "interior" crosses. All the above mentioned "crosses" are external and the Lord will not let the man perish who struggles to bear them wisely. The Holy Spirit will strengthen and guide him and lead him further. But in order to become holy and be like Jesus Christ, merely external crosses are not enough. Outward crosses without interior ones are of no more use than exterior prayer without interior prayer. Outward crosses are borne not only by Christians, but by everyone! There is not a man on earth who hasn't suffered in some way or another. But whoever wants to follow Jesus must bear interior crosses as well.

Interior crosses can be found at all times, and more easily than exterior ones. Direct your attention to yourself with a sense of penitence, and a thousand interior crosses will spring up! For instance, consider: How did you come to be in this world? Do you live as you ought to? Ask yourself these questions sincerely and you will see that you are the creation and work of God and that you exist solely in order to glorify Him with all your acts, your life, your whole being. But not only do you not glorify Him, but you anger and dishonor Him by your sinful life!

Then consider: What awaits you on the other side of your grave? On which side will you stand at the time of Christ's judgment, on the left or the right? Have you even thought of the eternal separation from God that is Hell? Have you

scarcely given one thought to Paradise which the Lord has prepared for you? Have you ever thought that you are depriving yourself of its eternal blessings through carelessness and stupidity? If you begin to reflect in this way, you will undoubtedly begin to be alarmed and disquieted. Don't try to drive away such thoughts through empty worldly diversions and entertainments for they are profitable for you. In fact, you will find still more crosses!

We can never see the state of our soul in all its nakedness without the special help and grace of God because the interior of our soul is always hidden from us by our own self-love, passions, worldly cares, and delusions. What little we see is only superficial and no more than what reason and conscience can show us. The enemy, Satan, tries to keep us blind to ourselves so that we will be prevented from running to God and seeking salvation. But if he cannot discourage us from seeking God, the devil tries another trick. He tries to show us our soul in all its weakness and sin in order to tempt us to despair, for he knows that few of us would stand firm if we saw the really extremely dangerous condition of our souls.

Now when the Lord leads us to knowledge of ourselves, we will certainly be filled with fear and sorrow because we have for so long stubbornly closed our ears to His gentle voice calling us to the Kingdom of God. But the Lord will not tempt us with despair, for any sin can be erased through repentance. But as the Lord reveals to us the state of our souls, what interior crosses we must bear!

Just as not all people have the same virtues and the same sins, so interior crosses are not the same for all. For some they are more oppressive, and for others less; for some they come in one way, and for others quite differently. Everything depends on the person's state of soul, just as the length and method of curing a physical illness depends on the patient's condition. It is not a doctor's fault if he must sometimes use very powerful medicine for a prolonged period to cure an illness which the patient himself may have irritated and increased. Whoever wants to be well will consent to bear everything!

Such interior crosses sometimes seem so heavy that no consolation can be found anywhere. Should you find yourself in such a state, or whatever sufferings of the soul you may feel, do not despair or think that the Lord has abandoned you. No! He will always be with you and strengthen you even when it seems to you that you are on the very brink of perdition. He will never allow you to be tempted more than He sees fit. Don't be afraid, but with full submission surrender to Him,



have patience and pray. For He is always our Father, and a very loving Father. And if He leads a person into sufferings or lays crosses upon him, it is in order to make him realize his own weakness and to teach him never to trust in himself and that no one can do anything good without God. It is only to heal his soul, to make him like Jesus Christ, to purify his heart, so that it will be a fit dwelling for the Holy Spirit.

Blessed, a hundred times blessed, is the person whom the Lord grants to bear interior crosses because they are the true healing of soul, a special favor of God, and they show His care for our salvation. Blessed is that man, for he has attained a state of grace impossible to attain without God's assistance, and which we, to our harm, do not even consider necessary!

If you bear your sufferings with submission and surrender to the will of God, He will not abandon you and will not leave you without consolation. And if the Lord grants you such peace and consolation, allowing you to experience the sweetness of His grace, do not think this is given because you have attained sanctity. Such thoughts come from pride and can make their appearance even when a person has the power to work miracles! These consolations are the mercy and grace of God alone, Who grants you to taste what He has prepared for those who love Him. And it is so that you will be strengthened for fresh troubles and sufferings and so that you will seek Him with greater zeal.

The third duty of a disciple of Christ is to follow Him. To follow Jesus means to act and live as He did upon the earth.

Jesus always gave thanks and praise to God, His Father, and prayed to Him. We, too, must praise Him and love Him both openly and privately.

Jesus honored His immaculate Mother and His foster-father. In the same way we should honor and obey our parents and teachers, not irritating them or grieving them by our behavior.

Jesus loved everyone and was kind to all. So too, we should love our neighbor and endeavor, as far as possible, to be on good terms with all (without compromising our faith) and do good to them by word, deed, or thought.

Jesus willingly surrendered Himself to suffering and death. So too, we should not avoid the sufferings of life, or allow them to drive us to despondency, but we should bear them with humility and surrender to God.

Jesus forgave His enemies all that they did to Him. He did them every kind of good and prayed for their salvation. By bearing wrongs without complaint, without revenge and with love you will act as a true Christian. (Mt. 5:44).

Being humble in heart, Jesus never sought or desired praise from others. And we should never pride ourselves on anything at all. For example, if you do good to others, give alms, if you are more pious than others, more intelligent, wealthier, etc., this has absolutely nothing to do with you, but has come as

a gift of God—only sins and weaknesses are your own, and all the rest is God's.

To follow Jesus means to obey the word of Jesus Christ. We must listen to, believe and practice what we hear in the Gospel without pretense and in simplicity of heart. Only if we listen intently to His word and struggle to carry its directives in our lives will we become true disciples of Jesus Christ.

And so this is what it means to deny oneself, to take up one's cross and follow Jesus Christ. This is the true straight way into the Kingdom of Heaven. It is the way by which Jesus Himself went while He lived on earth, and by which we Christians must go. **There never was and never will be another way.**

Certainly this way is rough, narrow and thorny, and seems especially so at the beginning. But on the other hand, it leads straight to Paradise, to the Heavenly Kingdom, to God Who is the Source of all true life. Sorrowful in this way, yet for every step we take along it thousands of spiritual rewards lie ahead, of which the world knows nothing. The sufferings on this way are not eternal, and one can say that they are even no more than momentary, whereas the rewards for them are unending and eternal, like God Himself. The suffering will become less and lighter from day to day, while grace will increase from hour to hour, throughout infinite eternity.

And so, do not be afraid to follow Jesus Christ. Follow Him, hasten and do not delay! Go while the doors of the heavenly Kingdom remain open to you. And even while you are still a long way off, our heavenly Father will come to meet you on the way, will kiss you, will put on you the best garment, and will lead you into His Bridal Chamber where He Himself dwells with all the holy Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, and all the Saints, and where you will rejoice with true and eternal joy. Amen!



Without a constant and conscious spiritual struggle even the best Orthodox life or community can become a "hothouse," an artificial Orthodox atmosphere in which the outward manifestations of Orthodox life are merely "enjoyed" or taken for granted, while the soul remains unchanged, being relaxed and comfortable instead of tense in the struggle for salvation. How often a community, when it becomes prosperous and renowned, loses the precious fervor and oneness of soul of its early days of hard struggles! There is no "formula" for the truly God-pleasing Orthodox life; anything outward can become a counterfeit; everything depends on the state of the soul, which must be trembling before God, having the law of God before it in every area of life, every moment keeping what is God's in honor, in the first place in life.

Hieromonk Seraphim (Rose) of Platina (+1982)

HOLY WEEK

By the Protopresbyter Andrew Morbey.



From palms and branches, as we pass from divine Feast to divine Feast, let us believers make haste together to the solemn and saving celebration of the Sufferings of Christ. Let us look upon

Him as He undergoes voluntary suffering for our sake and let us raise a fitting hymn of thanksgiving to Him crying out, *Source of compassion and harbour of salvation, O Lord, glory to Thee!* (From the *aposticha* at Vespers on the Leave-taking of the Feast of Palms).

This verse marks the transition in our journey from the celebration of Palm Sunday to the gathering darkness of Holy Week. The Great Fast came to an end on Friday. On Saturday we recalled our Lord Jesus Christ weeping at the tomb of Lazarus, how He raised Lazarus from the dead. Today we have joined the children of the Hebrews in their joy, acclaiming Him as He enters Jerusalem. We held high our palms and pussy-willows: *Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord!*

And yet this feast is ephemeral, this celebration lasts but a day. Some terrible darkness descends. The Lord is abandoned, condemned and vilified. In the course of this week things move inexorably to betrayal, abuse, crucifixion.

For Orthodox Christians, Holy Week is an extraordinary time. We can hardly bear to be at work or at school. We want to be in the church following the Gospel accounts and the hymns and prayers that provide the teaching and commentary we need to hear. In our homes we try to create a certain quiet, a reverence and respect. Holy Week is the Big Thing and all else is distraction. It is something we participate in. It is as if we enter *into* Holy Week, stepping out of time as we usually experience it, and are ourselves caught up in the sacred drama.

Of course, it can be difficult to make the time to attend to Holy Week with the full attention it calls for. Each person will do his or her best to participate in the mystery of the week and honour this most special time of the year.

On Holy Thursday we hear the Lord say to His disciples in the garden at Gethsemane, *Wait with me*. Is it so much to ask?

On the one hand, it seems we do a lot of waiting in life. On the other, we are always in a hurry. And so waiting infuriates us, for we are busy people, the centre of our universe.

The disciples could not wait and watch with the Lord, and they were not even in a rush. They just fell asleep. Perhaps they were exhausted. Perhaps they needed to give themselves some “me-time.” But was it so much for the Lord to ask them to wait with Him on this night?

When someone we love is dying everything seems to be in a rush—this appointment, that appointment, these things to be picked up, those things to be scheduled—but then..., then there is the waiting. And when we have done everything there really is nothing left to do but wait. Death comes on its own time-table. Our beloved says to us: *please, will you stay with me?* Of course we will! How could we do otherwise? Or?

To wait, to keep vigil, is not easy. It is hard. We are so busy, we have so much to do... But why is it that the slumber of the disciples—their inability to wait with the distressed and suffering Lord, even though He asks them repeatedly, pointedly—why do we find this moment in the garden so sad, so charged with emotion? Why do we want to shake them and even shame them—*can't you even watch with Him for a little while?* Is it our conscience that recognizes something of ourselves in them?

Can't we spare some time from our busy lives on this of all weeks to be with Him?



He gave not up His life by compulsion, nor was He put to death by murderous violence, but of His own accord. Hear what He says: *I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again: I yield it of My own choice to My enemies; for unless I chose, this could not be.* He came therefore of His own set purpose to His passion, rejoicing in His noble deed, smiling at the crown, cheered by the salvation of mankind; not ashamed of the Cross, for it was to save the world.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem

For what principle did the Blood of His Only-Begotten Son delight the Father, Who would not receive even Isaac, when he was being offered by his father, but changed the sacrifice, putting a ram in the place of the human victim? Is it not evident that the Father accepts Him, but neither asked for Him nor demanded of Him; but on account of the Incarnation, and because humanity must be sanctified by the Humanity of God, that He might deliver us Himself, and overcome the tyrant, and draw us to Himself by the mediation of His Son, Who also arranged this to the honor of the Father, Whom it is manifest that He obeys in all things? So much we have said of Christ; the greatest part of what we might say shall be revered with silence.

St. Gregory the Theologian

THE LORD DESCENDS INTO HELL

An Ancient Homily on Holy Saturday, from the Synaxarion of the Lenten Triodion and Pentecostarion, Fr. David and Mother Gabriela, editors, HDM Press, Rives Junction, MI, 1999 pp. 160-161.



Something strange is happening—there is a great silence on earth today, a great silence and stillness. The whole earth keeps silence because the King is asleep. The earth trembled and is still because God has fallen asleep in the flesh and he has raised

up all who have slept ever since the world began. God has died in the flesh and hell trembles with fear.

He has gone to search for our first parent, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, he has gone to free from sorrow the captives Adam and Eve, he who is both God and the son of Eve. The Lord approached them bearing the cross, the weapon that had won him the victory. At the sight of him Adam, the first man he had created, struck his breast in terror and cried out to everyone: *My Lord be with you all.* Christ answered him: *And with your spirit.* He took him by the hand and raised him up, saying: *Awake, O sleeper, and rise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.*

I am your God, who for your sake have become your son. Out of love for you and for your descendants I now by my own authority command all who are held in bondage to come forth, all who are in darkness to be enlightened, all who are sleeping to arise. I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be held a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead. Rise up, work of my hands, you who were created in my image. Rise, let us leave this place, for you are in me and I am in you; together we form only one person and we cannot be separated.

For your sake I, your God, became your son; I, the Lord, took the form of a slave; I, whose home is above the heavens, descended to the earth and beneath the earth. For your sake, for the sake of man, I became like a man without help, free among the dead. For the sake of you, who left a garden, I was betrayed to the Jews in a garden, and I was crucified in a garden.

See on my face the spittle I received in order to restore to you the life I once breathed into you. See there the marks of the blows I received in order to refashion your warped nature in my image. On my back see the marks of the scourging I endured to remove the burden of sin that weighs upon your

back. See my hands, nailed firmly to a tree, for you who once wickedly stretched out your hand to a tree.

I slept on the cross and a sword pierced my side for you who slept in paradise and brought forth Eve from your side. My side has healed the pain in yours. My sleep will rouse you from your sleep in hell. The sword that pierced me has sheathed the sword that was turned against you.

Rise, let us leave this place. The enemy led you out of the earthly paradise. I will not restore you to that paradise, but I will enthrone you in heaven. I forbade you the tree that was only a symbol of life, but see, I who am life itself am now one with you. I appointed cherubim to guard you as slaves are guarded, but now I make them worship you as God. The throne formed by cherubim awaits you, its bearers swift and eager. The bridal chamber is adorned, the banquet is ready, the eternal dwelling places are prepared, the treasure houses of all good things lie open. The kingdom of heaven has been prepared for you from all eternity.



The candles burning on the altar represent the non-created Light of the Trinity, for the Lord dwells in an unapproachable light. They also represent the fire of Divinity which destroys our ungodliness and sins.

The candles lit before the icons of the Saviour signify that He is the *True Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world* (Jn 1:9); at the same time, He is a Fire which engulfs and revives our souls and bodies.

The candles lit before the icons of the Theotokos are a symbol of the fact that She is the Mother of the Unapproachable Light, and also of Her most pure and burning love for God and Her love for mankind.

The candles lit before icons of saints reflect their ardent love for God for Whose sake they gave up everything that man prizes in life, including their very lives, as did the holy apostles, martyrs and others. These candles also mean that these saints are lamps burning for us and providing light for us by their own saintly living, their virtues and their ardent intercession for us before God through their constant prayers by day and night. The burning candles also stand for our ardent zeal and the sincere sacrifice we make out of reverence and gratitude to them for their solicitude on our behalf before God.

St. John of Kronstadt

ON THE END TIMES

From a Letter of the Optina Elder [and New Martyr] St. Anatoly the Younger (+1922).

Heresies will spread everywhere and deceive many people. The enemy of the human race will act with cunning in order to draw into heresy, if possible, even the elect.

He will not begin by crudely rejecting the dogmas of the Holy Trinity, the divinity of Jesus Christ and the virtue of the Theotokos, but he will begin imperceptibly to distort the teachings and statutes of the Church and their very spirit, handed down to us by the Holy Fathers through the Holy Spirit. Few will notice these wiles of the enemy, only those more experienced in the spiritual life. Heretics will seize power over the Church and will place their servants everywhere; the pious will be regarded with contempt. He (the Lord) said, *by their fruits ye shall know them*, and so, by their fruits, as well as by the actions of the heretics, strive to distinguish them from the true pastors. These are spiritual thieves, plundering the spiritual flock, and they will enter the sheepfold (the Church), climbing up some other way, using force and trampling upon the divine statutes.

The Lord calls them *robbers* (cf. St. John 10:1). Indeed, their first task will be the persecution of the true pastors, their imprisonment and exile, for without this it will be impossible for them to plunder the sheep.

Therefore, my son, when you see the violation of patristic tradition and the divine order in the Church, the order established by God, know that the heretics have already appeared, although for the time being they may conceal their impiety, or they will distort the Divine Faith imperceptibly, in order to succeed better in seducing and enticing the inexperienced into the net. The persecution will be directed against not only pastors but against all servants of God, for all those ruled by heresy will not endure piety.

Recognize these wolves in sheep's clothing by their proud dispositions and love of power. They will be slanderers, traitors, everywhere sowing enmity and malice; therefore the Lord said that by their fruits you will know them. True servants of God are humble, love their neighbor and are obedient to the Church.

Monastics will be greatly oppressed by the heretics and monastic life will be scorned. Monasteries will become scarce, the number of monastics will decline, and those who remain will endure violence. These haters of monastic life, however, having only the appearance of piety, will strive to attract the monks to their side promising them protection and worldly goods, and threatening those who oppose them with expulsion. These threats will cause great despair among the fainthearted, but you, my son rejoice that you have lived until that time, for then the faithful who have

not shown any other virtues, will receive crowns merely for standing firm in the faith, according to the word of the Lord (cf. St. Mt 10:32).

Fear the Lord my son. Fear to lose the crown prepared (for you), fear to be cast by Christ into the outer darkness and eternal torment. Stand bravely in the faith, and if necessary, endure persecution and other sorrows, for the Lord will be with you... And the holy martyrs and confessors, they will look upon you and your struggle with joy.

But woe to the monks in those days who will be bound with possessions and riches, who because of love of peace will be ready to submit to the heretics. They will lull to sleep their conscience, saying, "We are preserving and saving the monastery and the Lord will forgive us." The unfortunate and blind ones do not at all consider that through heresy the demons will enter the monastery and then it will no longer be a holy monastery, but merely walls from which grace will depart. God, however, is more mighty than the enemy, and He will never leave His servants. True Christians will remain until the end of this age, only they will choose to live in secluded, deserted places. Do not fear sorrows, rather fear pernicious heresy, for it strips us of grace and separates us from Christ.

This is why the Lord commanded us to consider the heretic as a pagan and a publican. And so my son, strengthen yourself in the grace of Jesus Christ. Hasten to confess the faith, to endure suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 Tim 2:13), Who has said, *Be faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.* (Rev 2:10). To Him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be honor, glory and dominion unto the ages of ages. Amen.



Humble yourself and reproach yourself. Do not justify yourself, even if you are absolutely right, for self-justification is not conducive to the healing of our spiritual illness.

My daughter, try to please the Eldress, and the spirit of God will overshadow you. Become a humble bride of Christ. The egotist is abominable to the most beautiful Bridegroom Christ. The Bridegroom is humble and meek; will the bride be a proud, ill-tempered soul?

If you want to be fragrant, embrace a humble, simple, obedient, and meek spirit. Despise egotism as a stench and stupidity. You do very well to reproach yourself in everything. This path is most true to the Fathers. Yes, my child, implant this manner of life deeply within your dear little soul and you will benefit enormously.

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

UNLOCKING THE MYSTERIES

By St. Nikolaj (Velimirovic), Pascha, 1934; Ochrid, Yugoslavia.



Each Christian feast raises hundreds of questions and gives hundreds of answers. The questions are from men, the answers come from God through the feasts. This is especially true with the feast of Christ's Resurrection. Here He opens for us, with His keys, hundreds of locked doors. For God has more answers than man has questions; He has more

keys than man has mysteries. Let us, then, consider a few such questions.

Here is a mystery: Why did Christ rise from the dead?

The key: Because Life could not remain in the grave. A thousand years before, the Prophet foretold concerning Christ: *...nor wilt Thou suffer Thy Holy One to see corruption* (Pss 15:10). Christ revealed the living God, the Father, to the world; He revealed the heavens, the living realm of angelic hosts; He revealed life after death and the eternal heavenly kingdom. Would, then, the Restorer of life remain in the darkness of the grave and the embrace of death? Christ raised Jairus' daughter and the son of the widow of Nain and Lazarus of Bethany. Would He Who raised others not raise up Himself? Truly He arose; He could not do otherwise by virtue of His essence, His power, His greatness. Weak is the force of death that aspired to hold down the Giver of Life in its abyss. Small is the mouth of death that aspired to strangle the Bestower of resurrection. Only in the light of the Resurrection can one comprehend Christ's deeds on earth, His love for men and His divinity.

Here is another mystery: How has the belief in the Resurrection of Christ been preserved through so many centuries?

The key: In the same way that a well rooted tree withstands the winds, as light is preserved in darkness and as truth is preserved amidst lies.

A third mystery: Is the Resurrection of Christ still felt today?

The key: It is powerfully felt, throughout the entire world. Gazing with the eyes of the spirit at the resurrected Lord, the weak are strengthened, the sorrowful are comforted, the sad rejoice, sinners repent, the wicked are corrected, the impure are cleansed, the persecuted are encouraged, the despondent hope, sufferers pray, and those on their deathbeds no longer fear death: *Today the Master spoiled hell and*

raised the prisoners from all ages whom it had held in bitter bondage. (From the Paschal canon).

A fourth mystery: What are the conditions for our own resurrection?

The key: To imitate here on earth Christ and His Apostles and all the righteous ones who pleased God, according to one's strength and God-given talents. To be humble, modest, compassionate, merciful, just, peace loving and persistent in every virtue. To pray to God, to repent of our sins, to constantly correct ourselves. To read and listen to the joyous news, that is the Gospel of Christ, to accept every word of the Lord as sacred and to treasure it as a pearl, every word, every word. To believe all that Christ said, confessed or promised. And so we cannot but have hope that we will rise up in this life from spiritual death, and in the life to come from eternal death. Thus spoke the resurrected Lord: *I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.* (John 11:25-26)

Let us, therefore, believe in Him, for in Him we shall find all the conditions for our resurrection. And so, let us fervently say: *I believe, O Lord, help my weak faith.* And with joy let us greet one another, brother to brother: **Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!**



Why do we not see miracles? Let him who can, answer otherwise, but to me it seems that we are of necessity brought to this answer: We do not see miracles, or we see them rarely, either because they are invisible to us as unworthy of trust, or because they are not even accomplished, through unbelief or want of faith.

How can miracles be accomplished in us by prayer, when our prayer is short, cold, inattentive, and offered up, not so much in faith and filial love to God, as in a sort of involuntary submission to His law?

How can a spiritual word work miracles in us, when our heart, like a field wild with tares, is thickly sown with idle words, and overgrown by carnal desires and unlawful thoughts?

How can the Holy Mysteries work miracles in us, if we approach them but from absolute necessity, without a careful previous purification, without an ardent aspiration to be united to God?

Let us, my brethren, call upon the Lord Who is unceasingly working miracles unto our salvation, and both each for all and all for each, let us cry to Him with the Apostles, *Lord, increase our faith.* (Lk 17:5).

St. Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow (+1867)

Ὁ Βασανιστικός Θάνατος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

Συνέντευξη τοῦ γνωστοῦ ἱατροδικαστῆ Φίλιππου Κουτσάφτη στὸν δημοσιογράφο Δημήτρη Ριζούλη.

Ὁ Φίλιππος Κουτσάφτης περιγράφει βῆμα βῆμα τὶς ἐπιπτώσεις τῶν Παθῶν (μὲ ἕξι ἀνακρίσεις καὶ τέσσερις βασανισμούς) καὶ ἐξηγεῖ πῶς προήλθε ὁ θάνατος τοῦ Χριστοῦ στὸν Σταυρό.

Ὁ Φίλιππος Κουτσάφτης εἶναι ὁ προϊστάμενος τῆς Ἱατροδικαστικῆς Ὑπηρεσίας Ἀθηνῶν καὶ ἴσως ὁ πιὸ διάσημος ἱατροδικαστὴς τῶν τελευταίων δεκαετιῶν. Ἔχει κληθεῖ νὰ μελετήσει καὶ νὰ ἀποφανθεῖ γιὰ τὰ μεγαλύτερα σύγχρονα ἐγκλήματα καὶ οἱ ἐκθέσεις του προσέφεραν πολὺτιμα στοιχεῖα στὶς Ἀρχές. Αὐτὴ τὴ φορὰ ὅμως ἐκλήθη νὰ κάνει μία διαφορετικὴ «νεκροψία» καὶ «ἐκθεση», γιὰ τὸ μαρτύριο καὶ τὸν θάνατο τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ὁ κ. Κουτσάφτης ἔχει κάνει μία βαθιὰ μελέτη (συστηματικὰ ἐδῶ καὶ καιρὸ) γιὰ τὸ θέμα, ἐξετάζοντας ὅλες τὶς πηγές καὶ ἀναλύοντας τὰ πάθη καὶ τὸν θάνατο τοῦ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ μὲ ἐπιστημονικὸ τρόπο. Σήμερα ἀναλύει τὰ αἷτια θανάτου τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, τὴν ἐπίπτωση κάθε βασανιστηρίου ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν ψυχοσωματικὴ κατάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Τέλος, ἀπαντᾷ γιὰ τὴν καταρρίπτονται ὅλες οἱ θεωρίες ποὺ ἀμφισβητοῦν ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς πέθανε πάνω στὸν Σταυρὸ, μὲ τελικὸ σκοπὸ νὰ ἀμφισβητηθεῖ ἡ Ἀνάστασή Του.

† † †

- Κύριε Κουτσάφτη, τὰ στοιχεῖα ποὺ ἔχουμε στὰ χέρια μας ἀπὸ τὶς Γραφές, τὴν παράδοση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ τὶς ἱστορικὲς πηγές μᾶς δίνουν μία πλήρη εἰκόνα γιὰ τὰ μαρτύρια τοῦ Χριστοῦ;

- Βεβαίωτα. Ξέρουμε πάρα πολλὰ στοιχεῖα καὶ θὰ ἔλεγε κανεὶς ὅτι μπορούμε νὰ βγάλουμε ἓνα πόρισμα. Ἐλπίζω νὰ μὴν ἀκούγεται ἀσεβὲς αὐτὸ τὸ τόλμημα σὲ ὀρισμένους, γιὰ τὸ τόλμημα εἶναι. Πρέπει νὰ γίνει κατανοητὸ ὅτι τὸ Θεῖο πάθος εἶναι ἐκούσιο. Ὁ Κύριος μὲ τὴ δική Του θέληση δέχτηκε τὰ πάντα, γι' αὐτὸ ἀκόμα καὶ τὴν ὥρα ποὺ τὰ καρφιά ἔσκιζαν τὶς σάρκες του καὶ τρυποῦσαν τὰ ὀστά Του Αὐτὸς προσευχόταν γιὰ τοὺς σταυρωτὲς Του, πράγμα πρωτοφανές.

- Ποιὰ ἦταν λοιπὸν ἡ ἐπίπτωση τῶν Παθῶν;

- Αὐτὸ ποὺ πρέπει ὅλοι νὰ γνωρίζουν εἶναι ὅτι τὰ Πάθη εἶναι ψυχοσωματικά. Ὁ Χριστὸς, ὅταν φεύγει ἀπὸ τὸν Μυστικὸ Δεῖπνο καὶ πορεύεται γιὰ νὰ προσευχηθεῖ, ἀφήνοντας λίγο πιὸ μακριὰ τοὺς τρεῖς μαθητὲς (Πέτρο, Ἰάκωβο καὶ Ἰωάννη), ἐμφανίζεται μὲ βάση τὶς Γραφές ἐκστατικὸς σὰν κάτι δυσάρεστο νὰ περιμένει. Στὸ τέλος (ἐνῶ οἱ μαθητὲς δὲν ἔχουν ἀντιληφθεῖ τί συμβαίνει) ὁ Ἰησοῦς προσεύχεται γιὰ τρίτη φορὰ καὶ τρέχει ἀπὸ τὸ μέτωπό του ἰδρώτας καὶ αἷμα.

Αὐτὸ τὸ σημεῖο τῆς διήγησης περὶ «αἱματηροῦ ἰδρώτα» ἀμφισβητήθηκε πολὺ ἔντονα γιὰ αἰῶνες. Ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς ὅμως γράφει κάτι ποὺ ἦταν ἀδιανόητο καὶ πρωτοφανές, χωρὶς νὰ τὸν νοιάζει ἂν θὰ τὸν ἀμφισβητήσουν ἢ ἂν θὰ ποῦν ὅτι γράφει φανταστικὰ πράγματα. Πράγματι, λοιπὸν, τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο 2000 χρόνια μετὰ δικαιώθηκε, καθὼς ἡ Ἱατρικὴ πρόσφατα ἀποφάνθηκε ὅτι ὑπάρχει ἓνα σπάνιο συνδρόμο συμπτώμα τοῦ ὄργανισμοῦ μὲ αὐτὰ τὰ χαρακτηριστικὰ ὅταν κάποιος βρεθεῖ σὲ μεγάλη ψυχοσωματικὴ ἔνταση. Ξέρουμε πλέον ἀπὸ τὴ σύγχρονη ἐπιστήμη ὅτι οἱ ἰδρωτοποιοὶ ἀδένες εἶναι διάσπαρτοι στὸ σῶμα, ἀλλὰ οἱ πολυπληθέστεροι βρίσκονται στὶς παλάμες, στὰ πέλματα, στὸν ἀγκύνα, στὶς παρειές καὶ στὸ μέτωπο. Ὅταν ὁ ἄνθρωπος βρεθεῖ σὲ μεγάλη ἔνταση, εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ γίνει αὐτόματη ρήξη μεγάλου ἀριθμοῦ τριχοειδῶν ἀγγείων στὸ σπείραμα τῶν ἀδένων. Τὸ αἷμα ποὺ ἀπελευθερώνεται ἀναμειγνύεται μὲ τὸν ἰδρώτα, τὸν βάφει κόκκινο καὶ στὴ συνέχεια τὸ παραχθὲν μείγμα ἀναβλύζει στὸ δέρμα.

Δηλαδή ὁ Εὐαγγελιστὴς Λουκᾶς ἔγραψε τὴν ἀλήθεια. Καταλαβαίνει, ὅμως, κανεὶς σὲ πόσο μεγάλο βαθμὸ ἔντασης βρισκόταν ὁ Ἰησοῦς πρὶν ἀκόμα ἀπὸ τὴ σύλληψή Του. Τὴν ἄλλη μέρα ἤξερε ὅτι θὰ ἀναλάβει τὴν ἀνθρώπινη ἁμαρτία ὡς ἀντικαταστάτης τοῦ πεσόντος ἀνθρώπου καὶ θὰ ἀντιμετωπίσει πάνω στὸν Σταυρὸ τὴ Θεῖα δικαιοσύνη. Δὲν ἤθελε νὰ χάσει τὸ βλέμμα τοῦ πατέρα Του ποὺ ἦταν στραμμένο πάνω Του. Δὲν ἦταν ἡ ἀγωνία Του οὔτε γιὰ τὴ μαστίγωση οὔτε γιὰ τὰ καρφιά.

- Τὰ μαρτύρια πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴ Σταύρωση ποῖα ἦταν καὶ ποῖα ἐπίπτωση εἶχαν;

- Μετὰ τὴ σύλληψη ὁ Ἰησοῦς πέρασε ἀπὸ ἕξι ἐξαντλητικὲς καὶ κακόπιστες ἀνακρίσεις. Ἀπὸ τὸν Ἄννα, τὸν Καϊάφα, τὸ Συνέδριο, τὸν Πιλάτο, τὸν Ἡρώδη καὶ ξανὰ ἀπὸ τὸν Πιλάτο. Στὰ μεσοδιαστήματα κακοποιήθηκε μὲ τέσσερις πολὺωρους καὶ βάρβαρους βασανισμούς. Μεταξὺ τῶν ἀνακρίσεων καὶ τῶν βασανισμῶν σύρθηκε ἀλυσσοδεμένος καὶ δερόμενος ἕξι φορές. Ἡ ἀπόσταση ποὺ διήνυσε μὲ τὶς ἀλυσίδες ἦταν περίπου ἕξι χιλιόμετρα. Καὶ ὅλα αὐτὰ νησιτικὸς, διψασμένος καὶ ἄπνους.

- Οἱ πιέσεις τὴ ρόλο ἔπαιξαν;

- Τοῦ ἀσκήθηκε ἔντονη ψυχοσωματικὴ βία, Τὸν ἔγδυσαν τρεῖς φορές, Τὸν ἔντυσαν ἄλλες τόσες, Τὸν μαστίγωσαν, Τοῦ φόρεσαν τὸ ἀκάνθινο στεφάνι καὶ Τοῦ φόρτωσαν τὸν βαρὺ Σταυρὸ. Στὶς ἀνακρίσεις Τὸν διέσυραν καὶ Τὸν ἐξευτέλισαν. Ἦθελαν μὲ κάθε τρόπο νὰ Τὸν κάνουν νὰ λυγίσει.

- Μεταξὺ ἄλλων, μαστιγώθηκε.

- Ναί. Ἡ μαστίγωση γινόταν μὲ φραγγέλιο, ποὺ εἶχε λουριὰ μὲ ἀπολήξεις σφαιρίδια καὶ ἄκρες ἀπὸ

κόκκαλα. Κάθε φορά που έπεφτε στο σώμα το μαστίγιο αυτά τα αντικείμενα έμπαιναν μέσα στις σάρκες και όταν το τραβούσε ο βασανιστής για να ξαναχτυπήσει έσκιζαν το δέρμα. Οι πληγές που προκάλεσαν ήταν φοβερές σε όλη την οπίσθια επιφάνεια και την πλάγια κοιλιακή και θωρακική χώρα, που πρέπει να ήταν καταματωμένη. Πρέπει να έχασε πολύ μεγάλη ποσότητα αίματος ο Χριστός μόνο από αυτό.

- Ός προς τον Σταυρό που κουβάλησε;

- Όταν ο Κύριος φορτώθηκε τον Σταυρό έπρεπε να κουβαλήσει ένα ξύλο που δεν ήταν πλανισμένο (όπως το βλέπουμε στις άγιογραφίες). Ήταν δύο κορμοί γεμάτοι σκληρό φλοιό και ρόζους και καταλαβαίνετε τι έγινε όταν πέταξαν πάνω στην πλάτη Του το όριζόντιο τμήμα. Την ήδη καταματωμένη πλάτη από τη μαστίγωση. Αυτός ο βαρύς κορμός μπήκε μέσα στις πληγές προκαλώντας άφορητο πόνο. Στη συνέχεια ο Ήσους κυριολεκτικά σέρνει τα βήματά Του και

μπορούν να συγκρατήσουν το βάρος.

Άν, πάντως, το καρφί μπήκε ανάμεσα στα δύο κόκκαλα, κερκίδα και ώλένη, έχουμε τραγικό πόνο γιατί τραυματίστηκε το μέσο νεύρο. Σκεφτείτε ότι αν άκουμπήσουμε ελάχιστα το νεύρο του άγκώνα νιώθουμε έντονο πόνο. Φανταστείτε να περάσει καρφί από αυτό το νεύρο. Ός προς το κάρφωμα των ποδιών οι δύο έκδοχές είναι ότι σταύρωναν τα πόδια και το καρφί περνούσε από το ένα πόδι στο άλλο ή ότι καρφώθηκαν παράλληλα. Εύρηματα του 1968 σε τάφους στην Ανατολική Ιερουσαλήμ μάς δείχνουν ότι υπήρχαν και άλλοι που σταυρώθηκαν στα πόδια με τον πρώτο τρόπο.

- Ο θάνατος τελικά από τι επήλθε; Γνωρίζουμε;

- Μπορούμε να πούμε ότι ήταν ένας θάνατος άργος και λίαν βασανιστικός. Με την ανύψωση του Σταυρού ο Χριστός αντιμετωπίζει μια σειρά από δυσμενείς παράγοντες:



υποφέρει. Πλέον δεν έχει ανάσες και άρκετο όξινο. Το αίμα Του λιγοστεύει και κάποια στιγμή λυγίζουν τα γόνατά Του και είναι αδύνατον να προχωρήσει.

- Περιγράψτε μια κατάσταση που σχεδόν δεν αντέχεται με βάση τα ανθρώπινα μέτρα.

- Ναί. Πιστεύω, αν δεν ήταν ο συγκεκριμένος εκεί θα είχε πεθάνει. Κανονικά, με βάση τη λογική, εκεί (στην πορεία προς τον Γολγοθά) θα έπρεπε να είναι το τέλος.

- Όστόσο, ο Χριστός φτάνει τελικά μέχρι τη Σταύρωση. Εκεί τι ακριβώς γίνεται;

- Εκεί οι σταυρωτές ξαπλώνουν τον Ήσους πάνω στον Σταυρό και Του καρφώνουν τα χέρια και τα πόδια. Για το ακριβές σημείο του καρφώματος υπάρχουν δύο έκδοχές: το έσωτερικό της παλάμης, που φαίνεται και σε πολλές εικόνες, ή το κέντρο της έσω επιφάνειας των καρπών. Η πρώτη έκδοχή είναι για μένα ή πιό προσιτή. Η παλάμη έχει μικρό πάχος, μεγάλη επιφάνεια και λόγω των τενόντων και των περιτονιών δεν σκίζεται το δέρμα. Υπάρχουν και τα μετακάρπια όστια, που

Υποχρεωτική όρθοστασία, που Του δημιουργεί όρθοστατική υπόταση.

Υποχρεωτική άκνησία, που δεν δίνει τη δυνατότητα στο φλεβικό αίμα να επιστρέψει στην καρδιά.

Ειδική στάση του θώρακα, με το βάρος του σώματος να είναι σε μόνιμη έκπτυξη και να δυσκολεύει φοβερά την αναπνοή. Δεν μπορεί να κάνει έκπνοη παρά μόνο εισπνοή. Αυτό συντόμευσε τον θάνατό Του.

Επιπλέον αντιμετωπίζει επιπλοκές τραυμάτων, αιμορραγία, αφυδάτωση, πείνα, δίψα και έξάντληση.

- Το τελικό «πόρισμα»;

- Επρόκειτο για πολυπαραγοντικό θάνατο. Πολλά πράγματα έδρασαν για την κατάληξη, με τελικό αίτιο την άσφυξία μαζί με την κυκλοφορική ανεπάρκεια. Μία σημαντική λεπτομέρεια είναι και η επιδρομή των σαρκοφάγων έντόμων. Το αίμα φέρνει από πολύ μακριά έντομα που κόβουν κομμάτια από τις πληγές ενός άκνητου ανθρώπου! Οι πιό φοβερές στιγμές για Τον Κύριο ήταν μετά το κάρφωμα στον Σταυρό.

- Πώς ἐξηγεῖτε τὴν ἀντοχὴ πὺν ἔδειξε;

- Ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν πέθανε πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴ Σταύρωση γιὰτὶ ὑπῆρχε λόγος. Ὑπερέβη τὰ ἀνθρώπινα μέτρα καὶ γιὰ μένα τὸ ὅτι ἄντεξε καὶ ἀνέβηκε στὸν Σταυρὸ εἶναι ἀκόμα ἓνα δείγμα τῆς Θεότητάς Του.

- Μπορεῖτε νὰ μᾶς περιγράψετε τὶ αἰσθανόταν ὁ Ἰησοῦς φορώντας τὸ ἀκάνθινο στεφάνι;

- Πρῶτα πρῶτα, νὰ σᾶς πῶ ὅτι εἶναι πρωτοφανῆς τρόπος ἀντιμετώπισης. Ποτὲ πρὶν δὲν εἶχε γίνει κάτι τέτοιο καὶ ποτὲ ξανὰ δὲν ἐπαναλήφθηκε. Ἐπρόκειτο γιὰ φρίκη! Τὸ κατασκεύασαν ἀπὸ μιὰ τζιτζιφιά, εὐλύγιστο φυτὸ πὺν εὐδοκμεῖ στὴν περιοχὴ, μὲ πολὺν μέγαρα καὶ σκληρὰ ἀγκάθια. Μέχρι τότε τὰ στεφάνια τῶν καταδίκων ἦταν σιδερένια καὶ προσαρμόζονταν μὲ βάση τὴ διάμετρο τοῦ κρανίου. Ἐδῶ ἦταν βασανιστήριο. Τὸ τριχωτὸ τῆς κεφαλῆς εἶναι ἀγγειοβριθέστατο. Ἐχει πολὺν καλὴ αἰμάτωση καὶ εἰδικὴ νεύρωση. Ἡ αἰμορραγία, λοιπόν, ἦταν μεγάλη καὶ ἀφόρητος ὁ πόνος ἀπὸ τὰ ἀγκάθια στὰ νεῦρα.

- Κατὰ καιροὺς ἔχουν ἀκουστῆ θεωρίες ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν εἶχε πεθάνει στὸν Σταυρὸ καὶ ὅτι ἔτσι δικαιολογεῖται (λογικὰ) ἡ Ἀνάστασή του. Κατὰ τὴ γνώμη σας, αὐτὸ μπορεῖ νὰ στέκει;

- Τυχαία ἔγινε, νομίζετε, ὁ λογισμὸς τῆς πλευράς; Καθόλου τυχαία. Αὐτὸ τὸ γεγονὸς εἶναι τὸ πιστοποιητικὸ τοῦ θανάτου. Ἡ λόγχη τρύπησε τὴν πλευρὰ καὶ βγήκε «αἷμα καὶ ὕδωρ». Ἀπὸ ὅποια πλευρὰ καὶ νὰ ἔγινε ὁ λογισμὸς, μὲ αὐτὸ τὸ βαρὺ ὄπλο τῶν δυόμισι μέτρων, δὲν ὑπάρχει περίπτωση ὁ ὁποιοσδήποτε νὰ μείνει ζωντανός. Μὲ τίποτα!

- Ἄρα καταρρίπτονται ὅλα;

- Φυσικά. Οἱ ἀρνητῆς βέβαια λένε ὅ,τι θέλουν, ἀλλὰ δὲν καταλαβαίνω γιὰτὶ ἀσχολοῦνται μὲ Τὸν Χριστὸ ἀφοῦ γι' αὐτοὺς δὲν ὑπάρχει.



Ὅταν κάποιος πρόκειται νὰ οἰκοδομήσῃ ἓνα σπίτι, πὺν χάλασε, βγάζει πρῶτον τοὺς ἐνοίκους. Μετὰ γκρεμίζει τὸ σπίτι καὶ στὴν συνέχεια χτίζει λαμπρότερο... Ὁ Θεὸς θέλει νὰ κατασκευάσῃ νέα οἰκοδομή. Διαλύει τὸ σῶμα μας καὶ τὴν ψυχὴ, πὺν κατοικεῖ μέσα στὸ σῶμα, τὴν βγάζει πρῶτα ἔξω (τὴν στιγμὴ τοῦ θανάτου) καὶ ὕστερα κατασκευάζει λαμπρότερο σπίτι (μὲ τὴν ἀνάσταση τῶν σωμάτων) καὶ ξαναβάσει μέσα τὴν ψυχὴ, μὲ ἀπείρως τώρα πὺν μεγαλύτερη ἄνεση καὶ δόξα. Ἄς μὴ προσέχουμε, λοιπόν, τὸ γκρέμισμα, ἀλλὰ τὴν μελλοντικὴ λαμπρότητά μας.

Ἀγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου

Τὸ Οἰκουμενικὸ Μήνυμα τοῦ 1821

Κωνσταντῖνος Χολέβας, Πολιτικὸς Ἐπιστήμων.

Καθὼς ἐορτάζουμε τὴ διπλὴ ἐορτὴ, τὸν Εὐαγγελισμὸ τῆς Θεοτόκου καὶ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ Ἐπανάσταση, εἶναι χρήσιμο νὰ συνειδητοποιήσουμε ὅτι τὸ 1821 ἦταν ταυτοχρόνως μιὰ ἐθνικὴ καὶ μιὰ οἰκουμενικὴ, πανανθρώπινη ἐπανάσταση. Ἦταν πρωτίστως ἐθνικὴ ἐξέγερση μὲ σύνθημα «γὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴν Πίστη τὴν ἀγία καὶ τῆς Πατρίδος τὴν Ἐλευθερία». Ὁρθόδοξη Πίστη, ἀντιστασιακὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ, κοινοτικὴ αὐτοδιοίκηση, κρυφὰ καὶ φανερὰ σχολεῖα, ἡ ἱκανότητα τοῦ ἔθνους μας στὸ ἐμπόριο καὶ στὴ ναυτιλία, αὐτὰ ἦσαν τὰ κυριώτερα θεμέλια τῆς ἐθνικῆς ἀνεξαρτησίας. Ὑπάρχει, ὅμως, καὶ ἡ οἰκουμενικὴ διάσταση τοῦ Ἀγῶνος. Τὸ 1821 ξεπέρασε τὰ σύνορα καὶ συγκίνησε πολλὰ ἔθνη ἀνὰ τὴν Ὑφήλιο.

Ἀραβόφωνοι Ὁρθόδοξοι Χριστιανοί, οἱ Ροῦμ Ὁρτοντόξ τοῦ Λιβάνου, ξεσηκώθηκαν μαζί μας κατὰ τῶν Τούρκων. Ὁ Χατζημιχάλης Νταλιάνης κατέβηκε ἀπὸ τὴ Βόρειο Ἡπειρο γιὰ νὰ τοὺς ἐνσωματώσει στὴν κοινὴ προσπάθεια. Ἀκόμη καὶ σήμερα στὰ σπίτια τῶν Ρωμῶν Ὁρθόδοξων τοῦ Λιβάνου καὶ τῆς Συρίας βρίσκεις εἰκόνες τοῦ Ἁγίου Κοσμᾶ τοῦ Αἰτωλοῦ, ἂν καὶ ὁ ἴδιος οὐδέποτε ἐπισκέφθηκε τὴν περιοχὴ αὐτὴ.

Κατὰ τὸ Α΄ Ἐπιστημονικὸ Συνέδριο τῆς Ἱερᾶς Συνόδου γιὰ τὶς ἱστορικὲς πηγὲς τοῦ 1821 (κυκλοφορεῖται ἤδη ὁ σχετικὸς τόμος) κατατέθηκαν μαρτυρίες γιὰ τὴ συμβολὴ τοῦ 1821 στὴν ἐπαναστατικὴ διάθεση τῶν Ἰταλῶν τοῦ 19^{ου} αἰῶνος καὶ στὴν ἐνοποίηση τῆς Ἰταλίας. Ἀντιθέτως μὲ ὅσα διαδίδουν ὀρισμένοι ξενομανεῖς, ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ Ἐπανάσταση ἀφύπνισε τοὺς Ἰταλοὺς ἐπαναστάτες καὶ δὲν συνέβη τὸ ἀντίθετο.

Οἱ Ἠνωμένες Πολιτεῖες συγκινήθηκαν ἀπὸ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ ἐξέγερση καὶ ἔστειλαν πολλοὺς φιλέλληνες ὅπως ὁ ἱατρὸς Σάμουελ Γκρίντλεν Χάου. Ὁ Διονύσιος Σολωμὸς στὸν Ὑμνον εἰς τὴν Ἐλευθερίαν τονίζει ὅτι μὲ τὴν Ἐθνεγερσία τῶν Ἑλλήνων «γκαρδιακὰ ἐχαροποιήθη καὶ τοῦ Βάσιγκτον ἡ γῆ», ἡ χώρα τοῦ Τζῶρτζ Οὐάσιγκτων, δηλ. οἱ ΗΠΑ. Στὴ Λατινικὴ Ἀμερικὴ πολλὲς ἐξεγέρσεις ἐντοπίων κατὰ τῶν ἀποικιοκρατῶν ἐμπνεύσθηκαν ἀπὸ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴ Ἐπανάσταση.

Στὴ Δυτικὴ Εὐρώπη ὁ Φιλελληνισμὸς ἐπηρέασε τὸν λαὸ καὶ τοὺς διανοητῆς. Ὁ Γάλλος ζωγράφος Ντελακρουὰ ἀπεικόνισε συγκλονιστικὰ τὴ σφαγὴ τῆς Χίου, ἐνῶ γιὰ τὸ ἴδιο γεγονὸς ὁ Βίκτωρ Οὐγκῶ ἔγραψε τὸ περίφημο ποίημα «Τὸ Ἑλληνόπουλο». Στὴ Ρωσία ἐξ ἄλλου ὁ Πούσκιν ἔγραψε ἔργα σχετικὰ μὲ τὸ 1821. Ἡ Ἐξοδος τοῦ Μεσολογγίου προκάλεσε διαδηλώσεις φοιτητῶν στὸ Παρίσι καὶ στὸ Λονδίνο.

Ἀθάνατο 1821, Ἑλληνικὸ καὶ πανανθρώπινο!

Σήμερον Κρεμάται ἐπὶ Ξύλου, Ὁ ἐν Ὑδασι τὴν Γῆν Κρεμάσας

Δημοτικό μοιρολόγι γιὰ τὰ Πάθη τοῦ Χριστοῦ.



Σήμερα μαῦρος Οὐρανός, σήμερα μαύρη μέρα,
σήμερα ὅλοι θλίβονται καὶ τὰ βουνὰ λυποῦνται,
σήμερα ἔβαλαν βουλή οἱ ἄνομοι Ὅβραῖοι,
οἱ ἄνομοι καὶ τὰ σκυλιὰ κι' οἱ τρισκαταραμένοι
γιὰ νὰ σταυρώσουν Τὸ Χριστό, Τὸν Ἀφέντη Βασιλέα.

Ὁ Κύριος ἠθέλησε νὰ μπεῖ σὲ περιβόλι
νὰ λάβει Δεῖπνον Μυστικὸν γιὰ νὰ τὸν λάβουν ὅλοι.
Κι' ἡ Παναγιὰ ἡ Δέσποινα καθόταν μοναχὴ της,
τὰς προσευχὰς της ἔκανε γιὰ Τὸ Μονογενὴ της.

Φωνὴ τοὺς ἦρθ' ἐξ Οὐρανοῦ ἀπ' Ἀρχαγγέλου στόμα:
-Φτάνουν κυρά μου οἱ προσευχές, φτάνουν κι' οἱ μετάνοιες,
Τὸ Γυιό σου Τὸν ἐπιάσανε καὶ στὸ φονιά Τὸν πάνε
καὶ στοῦ Πιλάτου τὴν αὐλὴ ἐκεῖ Τὸν τυραγνᾶνε.

-Χαλιὰ-χαλιὰ, φτιάσε καρφιά, φτιάσε τρία περόνια.
Καὶ κείνος ὁ παράνομος βαρεῖ καὶ φτάχνει πέντε.

-Σὺ Φαραεῖ, ποὺ τὰ «φτιασες πρέπει νὰ μᾶς διδάξεις.
-Βάλε τὰ δυὸ στὰ χέρια Του καὶ τ' ἄλλα δυὸ στὰ πόδια,
τὸ πέμπτο το φαρμακερὸ βάλε το στὴν καρδιά Του,
νὰ στάξει αἷμα καὶ νερὸ νὰ λιγωθεῖ ἡ καρδιά Του.

Κι' ἡ Παναγιὰ σὰν τάκουσε ἔπεσε καὶ λιγώθη,
σταμνὶ νερὸ τῆς ρίξανε, τρία κανάτια μόσχο
γιὰ νὰ τῆς ἔρθ' ὁ λογισμός, γιὰ νὰ τῆς ἔρθει ὁ νοῦς της.
Κι' ὅταν τῆς ἦρθ' ὁ λογισμός, κι' ὅταν τῆς ἦρθ' ὁ νοῦς της,
ζητᾶ μαχαίρι νὰ σφαγεῖ, ζητᾶ φωτιὰ νὰ πέσει,
ζητᾶ γκρεμὸ νὰ γκρεμιστεῖ γιὰ Τὸ Μονογενὴ της.

-Μὴν σφάζεσαι, Μανούλα μου, δὲν σφάζονται οἱ μανάδες
Μὴν καίγεσαι, Μανούλα μου, δὲν καίγονται οἱ μανάδες.
Λάβε, κυρὰ μ' ὑπομονή, λάβε, κύρα μ' ἀνέση.

-Καὶ πῶς νὰ λάβω ὑπομονή καὶ πῶς νὰ λάβω ἀνέση,
ποῦ ἔχω Γυιὸ Μονογενὴ καὶ κείνον Σταυρωμένον.

Κι' ἡ Μάρθα κι' ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ καὶ τοῦ Λαζάρου ἡ μάνα
καὶ τοῦ Ἰακώβου ἡ ἀδερφή, κι' οἱ τέσσερες ἀντάμα,
ἐπῆραν τὸ στρατὶ-στρατί, στρατὶ τὸ μονοπάτι
καὶ τὸ στρατὶ τοὺς ἔβγαλε μὲς του ληστῆ τὴν πόρτα.
-Ἄνοιξε πόρτα τοῦ ληστῆ καὶ πόρτα τοῦ Πιλάτου.

Κι' ἡ πόρτα ἀπὸ τὸ φόβο της ἀνοίγει μοναχὴ της.
Τηράει δεξιὰ, τηράει ζερβά, κανέναν δὲν γνωρίζει,
τηράει δεξιώτερα βλέπει τὸν Ἀϊγιάννη,
Ἄγιέ μου Γιάννη Πρόδρομε καὶ βαπτιστῆ Τοῦ Γυιοῦ μου,
μὴν εἶδες τὸν Ὑγιόκα μου καὶ Τὸν Διδάσκαλόν σου;

-Δὲν ἔχω στόμα νὰ σοῦ πῶ, γλώσσα νὰ σοῦ μιλήσω,
δὲν ἔχω χεροπάλαμα γιὰ νὰ σοῦ Τόνε δεῖξω.
Βλέπεις Ἐκείνον Τὸ Γυμνὸ, Τὸν Παραπονεμένο,
ὅπου φορεῖ πονκάμισο στὸ αἷμα βουτηγμένο,
ὅπου φορεῖ στὴν Κεφαλὴ ἀγκάθινο στεφάνι;
Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ Γυιόκας σου καὶ μὲ ὁ Δάσκαλός μου!

Κι' ἡ Παναγιὰ πλησίασε γλυκὰ τὸν ἀγκαλιάζει.
-Δὲ μοῦ μιλᾶς Παιδάκι μου, δὲ μοῦ μιλᾶς Παιδί μου;
-Τὶ νὰ σοῦ πῶ, Μανούλα μου, ποῦ διάφορο δὲν ἔχεις
μόνο τὸ μέγα-Σάββατο κατὰ τὸ μεσονύχτι,
ποῦ θὰ λαλήσει ὁ πετεινὸς καὶ σημάνουν οἱ καμπάνες,
τότε καὶ σύ, Μανούλα μου, θάχεις χαρὰ μεγάλη!

Σημαίνει ὁ Θεός, σημαίνει ἡ γῆ, σημαίνουν τὰ Οὐράνια,
σημαίνει κι' ἡ Ἅγια Σοφία μὲ τὶς πολλὲς καμπάνες.
Ὅποιος τ' ἀκούει σώζεται κι' ὅλποιος τὸ λέει ἀγιάζει,
κι' ὅποιος τὸ καλοφουγκραστεῖ Παράδεισο θὰ λάβει,
Παράδεισο καὶ λίβανο ἀπ' τὸν Ἅγιο Τάφο!

Πρώτη ή Θεοτόκος Είδε τὸν Ἀναστάντα Κύριο

Ἀπόσπασμα ὁμιλίας τοῦ Ἁγίου Γρηγορίου Παλαμᾶ.

Μυροφόρες εἶναι οἱ γυναῖκες ποὺ ἀκολουθοῦσαν τὸν Κύριο μαζί με τὴ Μητέρα Του, ἔμειναν μαζί της κατὰ τὴν ὥρα τοῦ σωτηριώδους Πάθους καὶ φρόντισαν νὰ ἀλείψουν με μύρα τὸ Σῶμα τοῦ Κυρίου.

Ὅταν δηλαδὴ ὁ Ἰωσήφ καὶ ὁ Νικόδημος ζήτησαν κι' ἔλαβαν ἀπὸ τὸ Πιλάτο τὸ Δεσποτικὸ Σῶμα, τὸ κατέβασαν ἀπὸ τὸ Σταυρό, τὸ περιέβαλαν σὲ σινδόνια μαζί με ἐκλεκτὰ ἀρώματα, τὸ τοποθέτησαν σὲ λαξευτὸ μνημεῖο κι' ἔβαλαν μεγάλη πέτρα πάνω στὴ θύρα τοῦ μνημείου, παρευρίσκονταν θεωρώντας κατὰ τὸν εὐαγγελιστὴ Μάρκο ἢ Μαρία ἢ Μαγδαληνὴ καὶ ἡ ἄλλη Μαρία ποὺ καθόταν ἀπέναντι τοῦ τάφου. Ἄλλη Μαρία ἐννοοῦσε ὅπωςδήποτε τὴ Θεομήτορα. Δὲν παρευρίσκονταν μόνο αὐτές, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλὲς ἄλλες γυναῖκες, ὅπως ἀναφέρει καὶ ὁ Λουκᾶς.

Ἡ Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Κυρίου εἶναι ἀνανέωση τῆς ἀνθρώπινης φύσεως καὶ ἀνάπλαση καὶ ἐπάνοδος πρὸς τὴν ἀθάνατη ζωὴ τοῦ πρώτου Ἀδάμ ποὺ καταβροχθίσθηκε ἀπὸ τὸ θάνατο λόγω τῆς ἁμαρτίας καὶ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου ἐπανήλθε πρὸς τὴ γῆ ἀπὸ τὴν ὁποία πλάσθηκε.

Ὅπως λοιπὸν ἐκείνον στὴν ἀρχὴ δὲν εἶδε τὸν Ἀδάμ κανεὶς ἄνθρωπος νὰ πλάττεται καὶ νὰ παίρνει ζωὴ, ἀφοῦ δὲν ὑπῆρχε κανεὶς ἄνθρωπος ἐκείνη τὴν ὥρα, μετὰ δὲ τὴ λήψη τῆς πνοῆς ζωῆς με θεῖο ἐμφύσημα πρώτη ἀπὸ ὅλους τὸν εἶδε μία γυναῖκα, γιατί μετὰ ἀπὸ αὐτὸν πρῶτος ἄνθρωπος ἦταν ἡ Εὐά. Ἐτσι τὸν δεύτερο Ἀδάμ, δηλαδὴ τὸν Κύριο, ὅταν ἀναστήθηκε ἀπὸ τοὺς νεκρούς, κανεὶς ἄνθρωπος δὲν τὸν εἶδε, ἀφοῦ δὲν παρευρισκόταν κανεὶς δικός Του καὶ οἱ στρατιῶτες ποὺ φύλαγαν τὸ μνήμα ταραγμένοι ἀπὸ τὸ φόβο, εἶχαν γίνε σὰν νεκροί μετὰ δὲ τὴν Ἀνάσταση, πρώτη ἀπ' ὅλους τὸν εἶδε μία γυναῖκα.

Ἐπάρχει κάτι συνεσκιασμένο ἀπὸ τοὺς εὐαγγελιστές, τὸ ὁποῖο θὰ ἀποκαλύψω στὴν ἀγάπη σας. Πραγματικὰ πρώτη ἀπ' ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ὅπως ἦταν σωστὸ καὶ δίκαιο, εἶδε τὸν Ἀναστάντα καὶ ἀπόλαυσε τὴν ὁμιλία Του καὶ ἄγγισε τὰ Ἄχραντα Πόδια Του, ἔστω καὶ ἂν οἱ εὐαγγελιστές δὲν τὸ λέγουν φανερά, μὴ θέλοντας νὰ φέρουν ὡς μάρτυρες τὴ μητέρα, γιὰ νὰ μὴ δώσουν ἀφορμὴ ὑποψίας στοὺς ἀπίστους. Ἐπειδὴ τώρα ὁμιλῶ πρὸς πιστοὺς θὰ διευκρινίσω τὰ σχετικὰ.

Ἀφοῦ λοιπὸν οἱ μυροφόρες ἐτοίμασαν τὰ μύρα καὶ τὰ ἀρώματα, κατὰ τὴν ἐντολή, τὸ Σάββατο ἠσύχασαν. Ὁ Λουκᾶς ἀναφέρει: «*Τὴ πρώτη τῆς ἐβδομάδος, ὄρθρο βαθύ, ἦρθαν στὸ μνήμα ἢ Μαρία Μαγδαληνὴ, ἢ τοῦ*

Ἰακώβου, ἢ Ἰωάννα καὶ ἄλλες μαζί τους.» Ὁ Ματθαῖος λέγει: «*Ἀργὰ τὸ Σάββατο, ξημερώνοντας τὴν πρώτη τῆς ἐβδομάδος καὶ δυὸ μυροφόρες προσήλθαν.*» Ὁ Ἰωάννης λέγει: «*Τὸ πρωὶ, ἐνῶ ἦταν σκοτεινὰ καὶ ἦταν μόνο ἢ Μαρία Μαγδαληνὴ.*» Ἐνῶ ὁ Μάρκος ἀναφέρει: «*Πολὺν πρωὶ τῆς πρώτης ἐβδομάδος καὶ ἦταν τρεῖς οἱ προσερχόμενες μυροφόρες.*»

Πρῶτη τῆς ἐβδομάδος ποὺ ἀναφέρουν ὅλοι οἱ εὐαγγελιστές εἶναι ἡ Κυριακὴ. Ἀργὰ τὸ βράδυ, ὄρθρο βαθύ, πολὺν πρωὶ καὶ πρωὶ ἰσκοτεινὰ ἀκόμη, ὀνομάζουν τὸ χρόνο γύρω ἀπὸ τὸν ὄρθρο, ἀναμικτὸ ἀπὸ φῶς καὶ σκοτάδι. Φαίνονται βέβαια νὰ διαφωνοῦν κάπως οἱ εὐαγγελιστές μεταξὺ τους, τόσο γιὰ τὴν ὥρα, ὅσο καὶ γιὰ τὸν ἀριθμὸ τῶν γυναικῶν.

Οἱ μυροφόρες ἦταν πολλὲς καὶ ἦλθαν στὸν τάφο ὄχι μία φορὰ, ἀλλὰ καὶ δυὸ καὶ τρεῖς φορές, συντροφιά μὲν, ἀλλ' ὄχι οἱ ἴδιες. Κατὰ τὸν ὄρθρο μὲν ὄλες, ἀλλ' ὄχι τὸν ἴδιο χρόνο ἀκριβῶς.

Ὅπως ἐγὼ ὑπολογίζω καὶ συνάγω ἀπὸ ὅλους τοὺς εὐαγγελιστές, πρώτη ἀπ' ὅλους ἦλθε στὸν τάφο τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἢ Θεοτόκος, ἔχοντας μαζί της τὴ Μαγδαληνὴ Μαρία. Τὸ συμπεραίνω ἀπὸ τὸν εὐαγγελιστὴ Ματθαῖο. Γιατὶ λέγει, «*ἦλθε ἢ Μαγδαληνὴ Μαρία καὶ ἡ ἄλλη Μαρία*», ποὺ ἦταν ὅπωςδήποτε ἢ Θεομήτωρ, «*γιὰ νὰ δοῦν τὸν τάφο. Καὶ ἔγινε μεγάλος σεισμός, γιατί ἄγγελος Κυρίου ἦλθε, σήκωσε τὴ μεγάλη πέτρα ἀπὸ τὸ μνημεῖο καὶ κάθησε πάνω της. Ἦταν ἢ μορφὴ του σὰν ἀστραπὴ καὶ τὸ ἐνδυμά του λευκὸ σὰν χιόνι καὶ ἀπὸ τὸ φόβο τοὺς ταράχθηκαν οἱ φύλακες καὶ ἔγιναν σὰν νεκροί.*»

Νομίζω ὅτι γιὰ τὴ Θεοτόκο ἀνοίχθηκε ὁ ζωηφόρος τάφος (γιατὶ γι' αὐτὴ πρώτη καὶ μέσω αὐτῆς ἔχουν ἀνοιχθεῖ σ' ἐμᾶς ὅλα, εἴτε στὸν οὐρανὸ εἴτε στὴ γῆ)· γι' αὐτὴν ἄστραψε ὁ ἄγγελος νὰ δεῖ τὸν ἄδειο τάφο καὶ τὸ μέγα θαῦμα τῶν ἐνταφίων χωρὶς τὸν Ἀναστάντα Κύριο. Καὶ προφανῶς ὁ εὐαγγελιστὴς αὐτὸς ἄγγελος ἦταν ὁ Ἀρχάγγελος Γαβριήλ, ποὺ ἀνάφερε τὴν Ἀνάσταση δείχνοντας τὸ κενὸ μνημεῖο καὶ λέγοντας στὶς μυροφόρες νὰ τὴν ἀναγγείλουν στοὺς μαθητές. Καὶ τότε «*ἐξήλθαν με φόβο καὶ χαρὰ μεγάλη*».

Ἐγὼ νομίζω καὶ πάλι ὅτι τὸν φόβο ἔχει ἀκόμη ἢ Μαρία Μαγδαληνὴ καὶ οἱ ἄλλες γυναῖκες, ἐνῶ ἢ Θεομήτωρ ἀπέκτησε τὴ μεγάλη χαρὰ, γιατί κατενόησε τὰ χαρμόσυνα λόγια τοῦ Ἀρχαγγέλου τὰ ὁποῖα πίστευσε καὶ ἀπὸ τὰ τόσα ἀξιόπιστα γεγονότα, τοῦ σεισμοῦ, τῆς μετάθεσης τοῦ λίθου, τοῦ ἄδειου τάφου, τῶν ἄλυτων ἐνταφίων, ἀδειανῶν ἀπὸ τὸ Σῶμα.

Καὶ τέλος πρώτη ἢ Θεοτόκος ἀναγνώρισε τὸν Ἀναστάντα καὶ προσέπεσε στὰ Πόδια Του καὶ ἔγινε ἀπόστολος πρὸς τοὺς Ἀποστόλους, ὅταν ἐπιστρέφοντας ἐμφανίσθηκε ὁ Ἰησοῦς στὶς μυροφόρες, λέγοντας τὸ: «**Χαίρετε**».

Τὸ Ἀμφισβητούμενον Κρυφὸ Σχολεῖο

Τάσου Γριτσόπουλου, Ἱστορικοῦ – Συγγραφέως.

**Φεγγαράκι μου λαμπρό,
φέγγε μου νὰ περπατῶ,
νὰ πηγαίνω στὸ Σχολεῖο,
νὰ μαθαίνω γράμματα,
γράμματα σπουδάγματα,
τοῦ Θεοῦ τὰ πράγματα...**

Ορθῶς ἀμφισβητεῖται λειτουργία Κρυφοῦ Σχολείου. Διότι δὲν μαρτυρεῖται στὶς πηγές, ἀφοῦ μάλιστα οἱ Τοῦρκοι δὲν ἀπαγόρευαν τὴν λειτουργία σχολείων μετὰ τὴν Ἄλωσιν. Ἀλλὰ καὶ φανερῶν σχολείων λειτουργία κατὰ τὸν 15^{ον} καὶ 16^{ον} αἰῶνα, ἐκτὸς τῆς Πατριαρχικῆς Σχολῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως δὲν μαρτυρεῖται.

Ἄν λειτούργησε Κρυφὸ Σχολεῖο, ποῦ, ἀπὸ πότε καὶ ἀκόμη ποιὸς ἦταν ὁ φορέας λειτουργίας σχολείων κατὰ τὴν περίοδο τῆς δουλείας τοῦ Ἑθνους, εἶναι προβλήματα, ποὺ συνεξετάζονται καὶ κακῶς ἀπομονώνεται καὶ καταδικάζεται ἀμειλικτα τὸ Κρυφὸ Σχολεῖο.

Αἰφνιδιάσθη τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν Ἑθνος τὸ 1453 καὶ μὲ τὰ γεγονότα ποὺ ἀκολούθησαν σχεδὸν διελύθη. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία στήριξε τὸ Ἑθνος. Ἡ ἀπάνθρωπη βία τῶν κατακτητῶν καὶ ὁ πανικὸς τῶν ὑπόδουλων μὲ τὴν ἀναστάτωση τῆς ζωῆς δημιούργησαν κῦμα φυγῆς. Τὸ ὀλιγότερο ποὺ εἶχαν νὰ σκεφτοῦν οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἦταν

λειτουργία σχολείων. Οἱ κατακτητὰι παρεχώρησαν Προνόμιον, Ἑθνάρχης ὁ πρῶτος Πατριάρχης Γεννάδιος Σχολάριος, ἴδρυσεν τὴν Πατριαρχικὴ Σχολή. Στὶς Ἐπαρχίες σιωπή, φόβος, ἀπελπισία. Συνοψίζει ὁ Ἐθνικὸς Ποιητῆς, ὅλα τὰ ἴσχυε ἢ φοβέρεα καὶ τὰ πλάκωσε ἢ σκλαβιά.

Ἐνῶ συνεπληρώνοντο 50 χρόνια ὑποταγῆς, ἡ Ἐκκλησία ἔλαβε μίαν μεγάλη ἀπόφαση. Εἶναι γνωστὴ ἡ Τοπικὴ Συνόδος Κωνσταντινουπόλεως 1593. Παρόντες οἱ Πατριάρχες Ἱερεμίας Β΄ ὁ Τρανός, Ἱεροσολύμων Σωφρόνιος Καρκαλᾶς, Δημητσανίτης, τρῶφιμος τῆς Μονῆς Φιλοσόφου, Ἀλεξανδρείας Μελέτιος ὁ Πηγᾶς, Ἀντιοχείας Ἰωακείμ, πλῆθος ἀρχιερέων. Ἄν ὅλοι αὐτοὶ ἦσαν σπουδασμένοι καὶ ἐφοίτησαν σὲ διάφορα σχολεῖα φανερά, δὲν παραδίδεται, πάντως γράμματα ἐγνώριζαν καὶ τοῦτο ποιὸς μπορεῖ ν' ἀμφισβητήσει;

Στὸν ζ' κανόνα αὐτῆς τῆς Συνόδου περιέχεται ἡ ἀπόφασις. Κάθε ἐπίσκοπος στὴν ἐπαρχία του ὄφειλε νὰ

φροντίζει καὶ ν' ἀναλαμβάνη τὴν ἀπαιτούμενη δαπάνη, γιὰ νὰ διδάσκονται τὰ θεῖα καὶ ἱερὰ γράμματα, Ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ παρακινῶνται ὅσοι ἐπιθυμοῦν νὰ μαθαίνουν καὶ δὲν ἔχουν τὰ μέσα.

Ἀσφαλῶς, τὴν ἐπομένη τῆς ἀποφάσεως δὲν ἦταν στὶς ἐπαρχίες ἔτοιμα διδασκῆριο, διδάσκαλοι, μαθηταί, βιβλία, κλπ. Δὲν ὑπῆρχαν προφανῶς αὐτὰ προηγουμένως, ἄλλως τε πρὸς τὴν ἀπόφασιν, ἂν ὑπῆρχαν. Ἀλλὰ δὲν ὑπῆρχαν καὶ προηγουμένως, πρὸ τῆς συμφορᾶς, κοινὰ καὶ δημόσια καὶ φανερὰ σχολεῖα, γιὰ τὴν Παιδείαν κατοικοῦσε στὰ μοναστήρια καὶ ἐκεῖ λειτουργοῦσαν πάσης κατηγορίας παιδευτήρια καὶ ἐργαστήρια καὶ φιλανθρωπίας ἰδρύματα.

Τὸ 1593 ἐδόθη σύνθημα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας πρὸς τοὺς ἐπισκόπους. Μέχρι τότε τί ἐγίνετο καὶ τί ἀκόμη ἐγίνετο καὶ μετὰ τὴν ἀπόφασιν μέχρις ὅτου φέρη ἢ ἔρουναι στοιχεῖα λειτουργίας φανερῶν σχολείων;

Ἀνατρέχοντας στὰ διάφορα δεδομένα τῆς ὑπόδουλης



ζωῆς, ἅς ποῦμε μετὰ τὴν πρώτη εἰκοσαετία ἀπὸ τὴν ἐθνικὴν συμφορὰ καὶ μὲ πλήρη ἐγκαθίδρυση τοῦ Ὀθωμανικοῦ κράτους, θὰ διαπιστώσωμε—ὅτι ἐφ' ὅσον παρέμενε στὴν ζωὴ ἡ παλαιὰ λογία φρουρὰ ἀνὰ τὴν ὑπόδουλη Ἑλλάδα καὶ ναοὶ λειτουργοῦσαν καὶ συνήθειες συναλλαγῆς καὶ γραπτὴ ἐπικοινωνία δὲν ἔλειψαν. Ὑστερα τί ἐγίνε, δὲν ὑπῆρχε κανεὶς ἀγράμματος; Οἱ Ἱερεῖς λειτουργοῦσαν

ἐμπειρικῶς. Τὰ σωζόμενα δικαιопρακτικὰ ἔγγραφα, ἤδη πρὸ τοῦ τέλους τοῦ 15^{ου} αἰῶνος καὶ μετὰ ἀπ' αὐτὸν ποιὸς τὰ συνέτασσε καὶ οἱ μάρτυρες ποῦ θέτουν τὴν ὑπογραφή τῶν πῶς τὸ κατόρθωναν;

Ὅμολογουμένως ἡ περίοδος ἦταν ἢ χειρότερα ἀπὸ ὅσες ἐτέρασε τὸ Ἑθνος μας.

Ἐν τούτοις ἀπὸ καταβολῆς Βυζαντίου τὰ μοναστήρια ἦσαν ἐστῆς μελετῶν καὶ φιλανθρωπίας. Ἐκεῖ ἀνεδείχθησαν κωδικογράφοι καὶ ἀγιογράφοι καὶ σχεδιασταί. Ὑπέστησαν τὴν βίαιαν θύελλα τοῦ κατακτητοῦ. Μερικὰ ἐσώθησαν καὶ ἄλλα ἐγκαίρως ἀναδιωργανώθησαν. Ἦταν πολλὸ φυσικόν νὰ προστρέξουν οἱ ταλαιπωρούμενοι Χριστιανοὶ γιὰ παρηγοριά. Καὶ τὰ παιδιὰ γιὰ νὰ γλυτώσουν ἀπὸ τὸ φοβερὸν παιδομάζωμα. Καὶ ὅσοι ἤθελαν νὰ γίνουν ἱερεῖς. Καὶ ὅσοι ἤθελαν νὰ τοὺς διαβάσῃ ἓνας μοναχὸς γράμμα ξενιτεμένου. Καὶ Ἀκολουθίαι παρακολουθοῦσαν καὶ τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα συλ-

λάβριζαν και ἀπεστήθιζαν και λέξεις, φράσεις, περιόδους ἐμάθαιναν νὰ διαβάξουν, ἀλλὰ και νὰ γράφουν. Αὐτὰ ποίος μπορεῖ νὰ τ' ἀμφισβήτηση;

Γιὰ τὴν ἴδρυση και λειτουργία Κρυφῶν Σχολείων ἐξεδόθησαν τόσο σουλτανικά διατάγματα ὅσα ἐξεδόθησαν και γιὰ τὰ φανερά Σχολεῖα. Κανείς δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ ἰσχυρισθῆ ὅτι ἰδρύθησαν ἢ ἐλειτούργησαν οἰουδήποτε τύπου σχολεῖα στὰ μοναστήρια και ἔφεραν τὸν τίτλο Κρυφὰ Σχολεῖα.

Ἀλλὰ κανείς δὲν δικαιούται ν' ἀμφισβήτηση ὅτι μοναχοὶ αὐτὴν τὴν ἐξεταζόμενη χρονικὴ περίοδο ἦταν λόγιοι και κατέλαβαν ἀρχιερατικὲς ἔδρες και ἔγιναν Πατριάρχες. Βασικὸ και κλασσικὸ παράδειγμα ἢ μονὴ Φιλοσόφου τῆς Δημητσάνας, ἢ ὁποία ἔδωκε ἀπὸ τοὺς κόλπους τῆς σειράς Πατριαρχῶν ἀκριβῶς αὐτὴν τὴν ἐποχὴ και σειρά ἀνωτάτων κληρικῶν σὲ καταπληκτικὴ συνέχεια ἀπὸ τὰ μέσα τοῦ 16^{ου} αἰῶνος και ὕστερα, μετὰ τὸν πρῶτον μαρτυρούμενον Οἰκουμενικὸν Πατριάρχην Διονύσιον Α' (1466-1472). Ὁ λαός, ποὺ ἔβλεπε ἢ ἐμάθαινε πὼς σ' αὐτὸ τὸ μοναστήρι συνεχίζετο ἢ μακρὰ πρότερα παιδευτικὴ παράδοσις, κάποια στιγμὴ ὠνόμασε αὐτὸ τὸν μοναστηριακὸν χώρον Κρυφὸ Σχολεῖο. Δὲν μπορεῖ κανείς νὰ βεβαίωση ὅτι τὸ τοπωνύμιον ἐγεννήθη στοῦ Φιλοσόφου, στὸ Κρυφὸ Σχολεῖο. Ἀλλὰ τὸ πράγμα ἐπανελήφθη και σ' ἄλλα μὲ παρόμοια περίπτωσι μοναστήρια. Ἴσως κάτὶ ἤξερε ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς λαός. Πάντως κατὰ τὴν μετεπαναστατικὴν περίοδο ἴσως τὸ τοπωνύμιον ὑπῆρχε.

Εἶναι βέβαιον, ὅτι ἀπὸ τοὺς λογάδες τοῦ ἐλευθέρου Ἑθνους ἐδημιουργήθη και μᾶλλον ἐκαλλιεργήθη ἢ Ἑθνικὴ Παράδοσις σὲ πανελλήνια ἔκτασι, ὅτι τὸ Ἑθνος δὲν ἔμεινε ἀναλφάβητο κατὰ τὰ δύσκολα χρόνια χάρις στὰ Κρυφὰ Σχολεῖα, ποὺ δὲν ἐνεφανίσθησαν ποτὲ μὲ συγκεκρωμένη λειτουργικὴ μορφή. Βέβαιον εἶναι, ὅτι κατὰ τὴν ἐναντίον τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἐχθρικὴ ἐπίθεσι τοῦ Γερμανοῦ Φαλμεράνερ, εἶχε ἐκσλαβισθῆ, ἐξηγέρθη ἢ Ἑλληνικὴ—και ἢ ξένη ἀκολουθῶς—ἐπιστήμη, γιὰ ν' ἀποδείξῃ τὴν συνεχὴ και ἀδιάκοπη παρουσία τῆς Ἑλλάδος στὴν Ἱστορία μὲ ἀδιάσειστα ἐπιχειρήματα. Ἀπόηχος τῆς δικαιολογημένης ἐκείνης ἀντεπιθέσεως τῆς διανοούμενης Ἑλλάδος φαίνεται πὼς ὑπῆρξε και τὸ γνωστὸν ποίημα τοῦ Πολέμη «Κρυφὸ Σχολεῖο» και ὁ περίφημος πίναξ τοῦ Γκύζη «Κρυφὸ Σχολεῖο». Ἄν ἢ ἐμφάνισις ἐνὸς Ποιητοῦ και ἐνὸς Ζωγράφου στὸν γενικώτερον συναγεμῶ ἐπιστήμης και λαοῦ, ἔγινε κατὰ παραγγελίαν τῶν κατασκευαστῶν λειτουργίας Κρυφοῦ Σχολεῖοῦ, ὅπως ὑποστηρίζεται δὲν ἀποδεικνύεται ὅσον πιστοῦται ὅτι ὁ ποιητὴς και ὁ καλλιτέχνης ἀπηχεῖ ζωντανὴ Παράδοσι τοῦ Ἑθνους.

Τὰ γεννώμενα προβλήματα δὲν ἐξιχνιάζονται μὲ δογματικὲς καταδίκες και μὲ ἐνθουσιώδεις θαυμασμούς. Τὸ γιὰ αὐτὰ τὰ ἄτυπα σχολεῖα τῆς πρώτης περιόδου δουλείας ἀποκαλοῦνται Κρυφὰ δὲν ἔχει ἀνάγκην ἀποδείξε-

ως, γιὰτὶ δὲν λογοδοτεῖ ὁ Λαός, δημιουργὸς ἐνὸς τοπωνυμίου. Ὡστόσο ὅμως αὐτὴ ἢ ψυχολογικὴ φοβία ἐνὸς καταποντισμένου λαοῦ μετὰ τὴν ὑποταγὴν τοῦ στοὺς βαρβάρους ἔχει τὸν λόγο τῆς και ὡς πραγματικὴ κατὰστασις ἐναντι τρομοκρατῶν και ὡς ποιητικὴ ἔκφρασις, ὁποτεδήποτε και ἂν ἔγινε ἔκφρασις.

Δυὸ λόγοι ὑπάρχουν. Πρῶτον ὅτι σὲ μεγάλον βαθμὸ οἱ κάποιοις ἐλευθερίες τοῦ Προνομίου Μωάμεθ τοῦ Πορθητοῦ πρὸς τὸ ὑπόδουλον Ἑθνος μὲ τρομερὰ ἀνταλλάγματα εἶχαν κατὰ τὸ πλεῖστον θεωρητικὸν χαρακτήρα, συνωδεύτο μάλιστα ἀπὸ τόσους περιορισμούς, ὥστε ἐξεμηδενίζοντο. Νὰ λειτουργοῦν οἱ ναοί, ἀλλὰ νὰ μὴ ψάλλουν μεγαλοφώνως, νὰ μὴ κτυποῦν δυνατὰ καμπάνες, νὰ μὴ ἀνάβουν ζωηρὰ φῶτα και τὰ παράθυρα νὰ εἶναι πολὺ μικρὰ. Οἱ ἄδειες ἐπισκευῆς ναῶν δὲν εἶχαν ἰσχὺν χωρὶς ἐξαγορὰ τῶν περιφερειακῶν ὀργάνων (ἀργυρώνητοι οἱ Τοῦρκοι, τοῦτο ἦτο κανὼν). Τὸ Προνόμιον δὲν ὑπάρχει ἐνδείξεις ὅτι περιελάμβανε δικαίωμα λειτουργίας σχολείων. Ἴσως τὸ δικαίωμα ἢ Ἐκκλησία τὸ ἀπέκτησε μετὰ τὴν ἀπόφασιν τοῦ 1593 μόνῃ τῆς.

Ὁ ἄλλος λόγος χαρακτηρίζει τὴν ἠθικὴ πλευρὰ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς ζωῆς. Κάποια στιγμὴ ἢ λαϊκὴ εὐαισθησία παρήγαγε ἓνα τρυφερὸ ποιημάτιον, πασίγνωστον, τὸ «Φεγγαράκι», πρὸς τὸ ὁποῖον στρέφεται ὁ νέος νὰ φέγγῃ, γιὰ νὰ περπατᾶ, νὰ πηγαίνῃ στὸ σχολεῖο, νὰ μαθαίνει γράμματα. Σύλληψις τοῦ στιχοῦργοῦ εἶναι κίνησις σχεδὸν συνωμοτικὴ, νυκτερινή, ἃς ποῦμε Κρυφή. Τὸ γιὰτὶ νύκτα, δὲν σχολιάζεται. Σχολιάζεται ὅμως τὸ ὅτι τὸ «Φεγγαράκι» δὲν εἶναι δημιούργημα λογίου, εἶναι λαϊκὸ, δὴλ. **προῖον πολλῶν**, ὅπως ὅλα τὰ λαϊκὰ πνευματικὰ δημιουργήματα ὁμαδικὰ και κατὰ παράδοσιν. Δὲν βάλλεται τὸ «Φεγγαράκι» ἀπὸ τοὺς διῶκτες τοῦ Κρυφοῦ Σχολεῖοῦ, γιὰτὶ τὸ παραδίδει ξένος φιλέλλην συλογεύς, ὁ Πάσσωβ. **Καὶ φαίνεται πὼς ἔχει κάποια σπουδαία—καὶ ἴσως ἄκρως στενὴ—σχέσι τὸ «Φεγγαράκι» μὲ τὸ Κρυφὸ Σχολεῖο...**



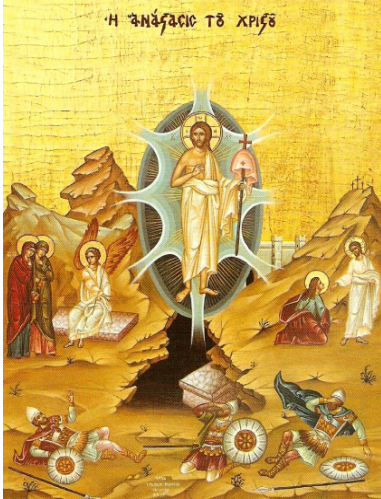
Μὴ ἀναβάλλῃς ποτὲ τὸν καιρὸν εἰς τὴν ἀπόκτησιν τῶν ἀρετῶν οὔτε ἡμέρας οὔτε ἐβδομάδας οὔτε μῆνας οὔτε χρόνους. Ἀλλὰ σχεδόν, πάντοτε ἀγωνίζου, ὡσὰν νὰ ἐγεννήθῃς τώρα, και ὡς νέος στρατιώτης, πολέμα διηνεκῶς και περιπάτει εἰς τὸ ὕψος τῆς τελειότητος τῶν ἀρετῶν. Καὶ μὴ σταθῆς κἂν μηδεμίαν στιγμὴν. Διότι, τὸ νὰ σταθῆς εἰς τὸν δρόμον τῶν ἀρετῶν και τῆς τελειότητος, δὲν εἶναι τὸ νὰ λάβῃς ἀναπνοὴν και δύναμιν, ἀλλὰ τὸ νὰ στραφῆς ὀπίσω ἢ νὰ ἀδυνατήσῃς περισσότερον.

Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Σιναΐτου

Νὰ «Σκιρτᾶς» ἀπὸ Χαρά!

Σοὺ εὐχομαί νὰ «σκιρτᾶς» ἀπὸ χαρά, κοπάζοντας πίσω σου τὸ χάος ἀπὸ τὸ ὁποῖο μᾶς πέρασε ὁ Ἀναστάς Κύριος...

Λόγοι Ἁγίου Γέροντος Πορφυρίου, ἀπὸ τὸν Γεώργιο Παπαζάχο, καθηγητὴ Ἱατρικῆς, ἀναδημοσίευση ἀπὸ τὸ περιοδικὸ «Σύναξη», Πάσχα 1994.



Ἀντὶ ἄλλης Πασχάλιας εὐχῆς θα σᾶς μεταφέρω τὰ χαρμόσυνα ἀναστάσιμα βιώματα τοῦ μακαριστοῦ μου Γέροντα Πορφύριου, ὅπως τὰ ἔζησα μία Τρίτη τῆς Διακαινησίμου στὸ κελᾶκι του.

Πῆγα νὰ τὸν δῶ σὰν γιατρός. Μετὰ τὴν καρδιολογικὴ ἐξέταση καὶ τὸ συνηθισμένο καρδιογράφημα, μὲ

παρακάλεσε νὰ μὴν φύγω. Κάθισα στὸ σκαμνάκι κοντὰ στὸ κρεβάτι του. Ἔλαμπε ἀπὸ χαρὰ τὸ πρόσωπό του. Μὲ ρώτησε:

-Ἐρεῖς τὸ τροπᾶριο ποὺ λέει «Θανάτου ἐορτάζομεν νέκρωσιν...»;

-Ναὶ Γέροντα, τὸ ξέρω.

-Πές το.

Ἄρχισα γρήγορα-γρήγορα. «Θανάτου ἐορτάζομεν νέκρωσιν, Ἄδου τὴν καθαίρεσιν, ἄλλης βιοτῆς, τῆς αἰωνίου, ἀπαρχὴν καὶ σκιρτῶντες ὑμνοῦμεν τὸν αἴτιο, τὸν μόνον εὐλογητὸν τῶν πατέρων Θεὸν καὶ ὑπερένδοξον».

-Τὸ κατάλαβες;

-Ἀσφαλῶς τὸ κατάλαβα. Νόμισα πὼς μὲ ρωτᾷει γιὰ τὴν ἐρμηνεία του. Ἔκανε μία ἀπότομη κίνηση τοῦ χεριοῦ του καὶ μοῦ εἶπε:

-Τίποτε δὲν κατάλαβες βρὲ Γιωργάκη! Ἐσὺ τὸ εἶπες σὰν βιαστικὸς ψάλτης... Ἄκου τὶ φοβερὰ πράγματα λέει αὐτὸ τὸ τροπᾶριο. Ὁ Χριστὸς μὲ τὴν Ἀνάστασή Του δὲν μᾶς πέρασε ἀπέναντι ἀπὸ ἓνα ποτάμι, ἀπὸ ἓνα ῥῆγμα γῆς, ἀπὸ μία διώρυγα, ἀπὸ μία λίμνη ἢ ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐρυθρὰ θάλασσα. Μᾶς πέρασε ἀπέναντι ἀπὸ ἓνα χάος, ἀπὸ μία ἄβυσσο, ποὺ ἦταν ἀδύνατο νὰ τὴν περάσει ὁ ἄνθρωπος μόνος. Αἰῶνες περιμένε αὐτὸ τὸ πέρασμα, αὐτὸ τὸ Πάσχα. Ὁ Χριστὸς μᾶς πέρασε ἀπὸ... τὸν θάνατο, στὴ Ζωή. Γι' αὐτὸ σήμερα «Θανάτου ἐορτάζομεν νέκρωσιν, ἄδου τὴν καθαίρεσιν». Χάθηκε ὁ θάνατος. Τὸ κατάλαβες; Σήμερα γιορτάζουμε τὴν «ἀπαρχὴν» τῆς «ἄλλης βιοτῆς, τῆς αἰωνίου» ζωῆς κοντὰ Του.

Μίλαγε μὲ ἐνθουσιασμὸ καὶ βεβαιότητα. Συγκινήθηκε. Σιώπησε λίγο καὶ συνέχισε πὶδ δυνατὰ:

-Τώρα δὲν ὑπάρχει χάος, θάνατος καὶ νέκρωση, Ἄδης. Τώρα ὅλα χαρὰ, χάρις καὶ Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας.

Ἀναστήθηκε μαζί Του ἡ ἀνθρώπινη φύση. Τώρα μποροῦμε καὶ μεῖς νὰ ἀναστηθοῦμε, νὰ ζήσουμε αἰῶνια κοντὰ Του... Τὶ εὐτυχία ἡ Ἀνάσταση! «Καὶ σκιρτῶντες ὑμνοῦμεν τὸν αἴτιον». Ἔχεις δεῖ τὰ κατσικάκια τώρα τὴν ἄνοιξη νὰ χοροπηδοῦν πάνω στὸ γρασίδι, νὰ τρῶνε λίγο ἀπὸ τὴ μάνα τους καὶ νὰ χοροπηδοῦν ξανά; Αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ σκίρτημα, τὸ χοροπήδημα.

Ἔτσι ἔπρεπε κι ἐμεῖς νὰ χοροπηδοῦμε ἀπὸ χαρὰ ἀνείπωτη γιὰ τὴν Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Κυρίου καὶ τὴν δική μας. Διέκοψε πάλι τὸ λόγο του. Ἀνέπνεα μία εὐφρόσυνη ἀτμόσφαιρα.

-Μπορῶ νὰ σοῦ δώσω μία συμβουλή; συνέχισε. Σὲ κάθε θλίψη σου, σὲ κάθε ἀποτυχία σου νὰ συγκεντρώνεσαι μισὸ λεπτὸ στὸν ἑαυτό σου καὶ νὰ λές ἀργά-ἀργά αὐτὸ τὸ τροπᾶριο. Θὰ βλέπεις ὅτι τὸ μεγαλύτερο πρᾶγμα στὴ ζωὴ σου—καὶ στὴ ζωὴ τοῦ κόσμου ὅλου—ἔγινε. Ἡ Ἀνάσταση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἡ σωτηρία μας. Καὶ θὰ συνειδητοποιεῖς ὅτι ἡ ἀναποδιὰ ποὺ σοῦ συμβαίνει εἶναι πολὺ μικρὴ γιὰ νὰ χαλάσει τὴ διάθεσή σου.

Μοῦ ἔσφιξε τὸ χέρι λέγοντας:

-Σοὺ εὐχομαί νὰ «σκιρτᾶς» ἀπὸ χαρὰ, κοιτάζοντας πίσω σου τὸ χάος ἀπὸ τὸ ὁποῖο μᾶς πέρασε ὁ Ἀναστάς Κύριος, «ὁ μόνος εὐλογητὸς τῶν Πατέρων»... Ψάλλε τώρα καὶ τὸ «Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη».



Ἐκεῖνος «κατέλυσε τῷ Σταυρῷ Του τὸν θάνατον», ἔκατεπάτησε διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τὸν θάνατον «χαρισάμενος ζωὴν τοῖς ἐν τοῖς μνήμασι» ἀνοιξας ταυτοχρόνως τὴν ὁδὸν πρὸς τὴν αἰωνιότητα καὶ γεφυρώσας τὸ χάσμα μεταξὺ Θεοῦ καὶ ἀνθρώπων. Ἐκτοτε ὁ θάνατος δὲν ἀποτελεῖ τὸ τρομερὸν προ-χριστιανικὸν γεγονός, οὔτε ὁ τάφος τὸ ἀνήλιον καὶ σκοτεινὸν ὑπόγειον, ἀλλὰ ἀποτελοῦν τὴν παρενθεσιν τῆς ζωῆς. Ἀποτελοῦν τὴν σύραγγα εἰς τὴν ὁποίαν θὰ καταδυθῆ μὲν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὄχι διὰ νὰ παραμείνη ἐντὸς αὐτῆς, ἀλλὰ διὰ νὰ ἐξέλθῃ δι' αὐτῆς εἰς μίαν παραδεισιακὴν κοιλάδα, ὅπου ἡ ζωὴ συνεχίζεται πολὺ καλύτερα καὶ ἀνώτερα. Δικαίως, λοιπόν, οἱ πιστοὶ κατὰ τὴν νύκταν τῆς Ἀναστάσεως, ἀναφωνοῦν ὅτι «ὁ Ἄδης ἐπικράνθη» καὶ «ποῦ σοῦ θάνατε τὸ κέντρον, ποῦ σοῦ ἄδη τὸ νίκος;». Δικαίως οἱ ἄνθρωποι περιμένουν μὲ κάποιαν ἀνυπομονησίαν τὸν ἐρχομὸν τῆς ἐορτῆς τοῦ Πάσχα, διότι κατὰ τὴν ἡμέραν αὐτὴν ἔγινε «ἡ ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων» καὶ ἐδόθη εἰς τὸ ἀνθρώπινον γένος ἡ μεγάλη ὑπόσχεσις τῆς συμμετοχῆς του εἰς τὴν αἰώνιον ζωὴν καὶ τὴν μακαριότητα.

Ἐξ ἀωνύμου Πασχαλινῆς ὁμιλίας

ST. MARY OF EGYPT: AN EXAMPLE & INSPIRATION FOR ALL

Adapted from various sources and articles.

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

† † †

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

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

Praying fervently to the Virgin Mary, with her heart open and clear, Mary begged forgiveness and again sought entry at the church. Guided then by a vision of the Theotokos, Mary left at once for the desert beyond the Jordan River, for there, her vision told her that she would find rest. On the way, she stopped at a church built on the river banks; there

she was baptized and partook of Holy Communion. From there, she came to the desert, led still by the vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

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

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

She knew all about him—about his life as a priest and the monastery in which he lived, and she clearly understood it all better than himself. When she prayed she levitated. Although illiterate and unschooled in Christianity (she had, after all, fled to the desert as soon as she converted) she was able to quote scriptural proofs for her teachings. But most of all, there was the enormity of her story. Zosimas drew out of her (much against her will) the details of her former life and her conversion; and he questioned her closely on the hardships of her desert life through those many years. She described her harlotry openly, as well as her life in the desert; how hard it had been, the



suffering from cold and heat, hunger and thirst, temptation, longing for company and comfort; and yet her determination to live out her repentance in a manner suitable to her sin. She did not see, though Zosimas could, that she had attained a degree of sanctity that could only be measured by the degree of sinfulness she had known. For unlike him, she had no illusions about her accomplishments. She knew only the truth of God, and her love for Him.

Then she asked a favor, for she understood that the Lord had sent Zosimas for a purpose. She asked him to return to his monastery and tell no one about her, but in a year's time return to her on Holy Thursday, the night of the Last Supper, and bring her the Eucharist, of which she had not partaken of since her conversion many years ago. Reluctantly, Zosimas

left her presence in the desert for the monastery. At last he returned at the appointed time, yearning for her presence. She came to him, walking on water to cross the Jordan while he again gave way to awe. As he knelt to reverence her she reproved him saying, “What are you doing, Father Zosimas, you who are a priest of God and carrying the holy mysteries?” And at once he obeyed her, resuming to his priestly duties with fumbling fervor.

Mary received the life-giving gifts of the sacrament, groaning and weeping with her hands held up to heaven, and she cried out, “Lord now let your servant depart in peace, according to your word: for my eyes have seen your salvation.” Again she sent him away, to return again the following year at the same time. But when the time came and Zosimas hastened on his journey, he found his beloved guide dead, with a letter to him written in the sand beside her body. From this he learned that she had died within an hour of receiving the sacrament the previous year—the fulfillment of her hope. He learned, also, for the first time her name: she signed it as “Mary the sinner.” Grieving and marveling, Zosimas buried the holy woman helped by a lion who came to venerate the body of the saint. Then, he went back to the world to give the gift of her story to others, just as she had given it to him.

Today we see indeed, that this state of spirituality can indeed prevail to any of us, **as long as true prayer, humility, fasting and labor are applied.** We see this because we have before us this great example, this *spectacle*, our holy mother St. Mary of Egypt. She knew who Zosimas was from afar, and she also knew God’s will for Zosimas: to fulfill one last wish of hers that she would have the Mysteries the following year. St. Mary had become a woman who, when she prayed, stood in the air. We can’t even lift up our eyes to heaven, and she was standing in the heavens when she prayed. She walked upon water as if on dry land. And she called herself a miserable sinner...

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

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

He is in the home of the Pharisee and a prostitute comes in, and she begins to anoint his feet with her tears, and with ointment. Why? Because of love. Because previously she had been forgiven. She knew this in her soul. It *changed* her. She lived with this reality. And she was thankful in the depths of her being. That’s what made her anoint His feet. Love. But this anointing, this coming to the house—is *labor!* **Without labor you can’t be saved.** Without demeaning yourself and remembering what God has done for you, you won’t be saved.

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

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

We can take this two ways. If you have very little forgiven, then you don’t have much *to be* thankful for. We have little forgiven if we do not repent and strive to learn the commandments, and live the Christian life. But when you *realize* what’s been done for you, then you realize that you have had *much* forgiven. For really everyone, *everyone*—has had much forgiven them. And so he should love much. He should turn to His Savior. But a man who doesn’t turn to our Savior is *not* a Christian whether he calls himself a Christian or not. I don’t care about all the “trappings”—I don’t care how many hymns you know—I don’t care about any of that. It’s all part and parcel of the life of the church. It’s critical for our salvation—but the *knowledge* of things doesn’t save. **Action based on knowledge: that is what saves.**

So when a man knows what Christ has done for him, he loves much. When a man doesn’t care, when he’s all filled up with pride, or filled up with the life that he’s living, or filled up with lust or avarice or whatever else, then how can he love? He has no *room* in his heart to love. He’s already chosen the object of his love. And he will have his reward, right here, such as it is (cf. Mt 5:46). And even the richest man is a pauper, compared to the lowest in the kingdom of heaven.

This woman and St. Mary sealed their repentance by *action*, by *activity.* We read the great canon during Lent. (The complete Great Canon, and the Life of St. Mary of Egypt, is always read in the matins service for 5th Thursday of Great

Lent. This service is usually served Wednesday evening. Furthermore, St. Andrew compares Leah and Rachel to activity and contemplation. (St Andrew makes a reference to Gen 29:16-30,31:31-40: *Because of his crying need the Patriarch endured the scorching heat of the day, and he bore the frost of the night, daily making gains, shepherding, struggling, slaving, in order to win two wives By the two wives understand action and direct knowledge in contemplation: Leah as action, for she had many children, and Rachel as knowledge, which is obtained by much labor. For without labors, my soul, neither action nor contemplation will achieve success*—Clean Monday or the 5th Thursday of Great Lent: The Great Canon, Ode 4 Troparia 7, 8). He said, without these two you cannot be saved. This woman who anointed our Lord's feet, contemplated what our Lord had done for her; He had forgiven her. Perhaps she was the one who had been caught in adultery and was about to be stoned (cf. Jn 8:4-11). Perhaps she was just another nameless, faceless prostitute that saw Divinity and cleaved to it and changed. And when she contemplated what He had done, her heart was filled, and this is what caused the activity, action, desire, longing to be with her Savior, to caress Him, to kiss His feet, to be close to Him, to be in His presence.

Do we have this longing? If we don't then we should fear greatly for our souls. The church presents us *extravagance* here, extravagant repentance, and without it we can't be saved. *Without it we cannot be saved.* Not partial repentance. If you have something that ails you, then you must lament it, you must pound your breast about it. You must prostrate with tears over it. You must do whatever you have to do, labor in order to eradicate it, and in the process of doing that, at the same time, you must renew yourself with Who God is.

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

The Christian life is simple. If you know that which you've been forgiven of, you should love much, but the only way to know is to open your eyes and to pray with your heart. God will fill you. He will show you. You will be overwhelmed by it. You won't want anything but ... Christ. This is indeed the key to the Christian life: contemplating what God has done for you, and acting upon it.

These women are the examples we have before us today. But what does the world tell us? It tells us all manner of garbage. Probably all of us have had this secular saying said to us, when one or the other of our parents said, "I don't care what the other kids do. You don't do it that way." The world tells you so many things, and the church says, "I don't care what the world tells you. God your Savior tells you to do something else."

In fact, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ said this to His apostles, didn't he, when they had been jousting about who would be greatest? (cf. Mk 9:33) They had forgotten Who He was. He tells them a very important saying: *He who will be greatest must be the servant.* But before then what did He say? He described the way the world is, how the greatest among people are the ones who grind people in the mud, and lord things over people, and the boastful pride of life in the extravagance of power and authority. And then He said that it *shall not be so among you.* (Mt 20:25-27). *But Jesus called them unto Him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant Instead, the church gives us the example of the formerly sinful woman.*

Two formally sinful women: the unnamed woman who is great among the saints, and Mary, who is great among the saints. Don't listen to the world. Listen to what the church says. **Be renewed.**



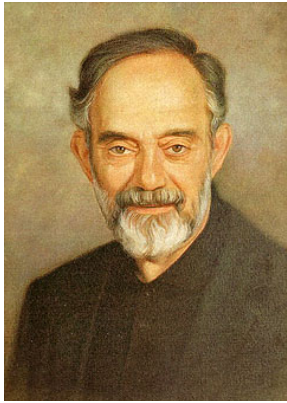
It's only in our voluntary crucifixion, denial, constraining that we come therefore to know in depth the unity of the God-Man, the Incarnation, and the Mystery and His bond to us, our unity to Him.

To know yourself is **much greater** than to see angels. But you will come to know yourself through suffering, through the Cross, and death on the Cross, by crucifixion. That which you come to know through suffering and crucifixion for the sake of the Kingdom (of God), for the sake of the love of our Saviour, that which you come to know on Golgotha, **never** will be obliterated. In the worst of sins, that experience and knowledge is right in the marrow of the bone. Therefore, it is so necessary to deny ourselves in a heroic spirit. We are to be crucified through the cutting (off) of the will, obedience, struggles, love of God, patience and long-suffering.

Holy Elder Joseph the Hesychast (+1959)

ON DIVINE INSPIRATION

Source: "Patristic Theology," the University Lectures of Fr. John Romanides.



Today Protestants and Roman Catholics are under the impression that *God* gave Holy Scripture to the Church. This idea has so greatly influenced modern Orthodox thought that the Orthodox even agree with Protestants and Roman Catholics on this point. Moreover, Orthodox and Roman Catholics agree that God also gave Sacred Tradition to the Church. With respect

to Tradition, the Protestants are showing some signs that they are reconsidering their position.

But now the Orthodox Church has to face a certain paradox. When you read the Old Testament, the New Testament, and even writings from Tradition, you will run across opinions that science proved to be false at least 150 years ago, especially on account of the breakthroughs in research made by the exact sciences. Naturally, this creates a serious problem for someone who does not fully grasp what the Fathers mean when they speak about divine inspiration. This problem mainly applies to the study of the Bible.

In their tradition, the Franks (Roman Catholics, *Ed.*) followed Augustine in identifying revelation with the revelation by God of concepts to man. In fact, they identified revelation not only with concepts, but also with the expressions, that is, terms and words, that conveyed these concepts. But if you accept this opinion, then you have already subscribed to the so-called literal divine inspiration of the Bible. This means that God manifests Himself in order to dictate, as it were, expressions and concepts to the writers of the Bible. Once you adopt this train of thought, however, you inevitably reach the conclusion that God is really the author of the Bible rather than the prophets and evangelists. Since Western theology followed this way of thinking, the appearance of modern science created a serious problem when it overturned certain positions found in the Bible. It was as if science were proving that God is a liar, since He Himself had earlier dictated or said something else.

It is now a commonly held opinion that the work of divine inspiration is restricted exclusively to what is documented in the Bible. When we say *divine inspiration*, the Bible, the prophets, and the Apostles immediately come to mind. Now if you are also a conservative, you will bring to mind some ecumenical council outside of Holy Scripture, since a conservative Orthodox Christian believes that the decisions of the ecumenical councils are also divinely inspired.

If you are even more conservative, you will bring up the Church Fathers. If you are even more conservative still, you will point to canon law, the liturgical life, and even priestly robes and head coverings. In the last case, you are completely conservative. On a scale from 50 to 100, you have hit 100. You are one hundred percent conservative.

But what is important in all of this is that most believers suppose that divine inspiration extends over large segments and many facets of life in the Church, if not over the entirety of life in the Church. Contemporary Orthodox theology is quite confused on this point. There is confusion as to what divine inspiration is, what it means, and where it is found.

All Christians, Orthodox and heterodox alike, can agree that the Bible is divinely inspired. Of course, we are not looking at any definitions for divine inspiration or making any qualifications about which portions of the Bible are really divinely inspired. For the time being, we simply assert that Holy Scripture is divinely inspired.

Since Holy Scripture is divinely inspired, what Holy Scripture says holds true, including Christ's promise to His Apostles that He would send the Holy Spirit Who would guide them into *all truth*. (Jn 16:3). So it is the person of Christ Who sends the Holy Spirit and it is the Holy Spirit Who guides into *all truth*. Nevertheless, the question is raised: to whom in particular does Christ give the Holy Spirit and whom in particular does the Holy Spirit guide into *the fullness of truth*?

The Roman Catholic answer to this question is that the Holy Spirit was originally given to the Apostles and that when they consecrated the bishops, the bishops also received the Holy Spirit. As for the priests, they also participate in the Holy Spirit after a fashion. This conviction of the Roman Catholics can be clearly seen in their service for the consecration of a bishop when the consecrating bishops say to the candidate being consecrated, "Receive the Holy Spirit." This gives the impression that the person being consecrated has lived his entire life until this time without the Holy Spirit Whom he now receives at the moment of his consecration.

There is no doubt that the act of interpreting the Bible is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit Who guides interpreters to interpret Holy Scripture correctly. But how does this guidance take place?

When medical scientists claim that a given drug treats a particular disease, they usually know from previous studies how that drug acts therapeutically within the human body. In every science, when we observe a specific phenomenon and say that something happens or takes place, we can usually determine what that something is. In our case, the question is: how does the Holy Spirit lead someone, whom does He lead, and of what does this leading consist.

Furthermore, some people say that when an ecumenical council decides something, that decision is infallible, because ecumenical councils are divinely inspired, and so forth. It is as though they want to force us to accept as an infallible teaching whatever an ecumenical council has decided and proclaimed. Of course, they are right. An ecumenical council is infallible. Yes, it teaches infallibly and contributes to our faith. But how did it become infallible? What makes it infallible? Why is it infallible? Why are its decisions infallible?

Modern Orthodox theology speaks a great deal about divine inspiration. But as far as I can tell from what I have read, Orthodox theologians talk about divine inspiration, but I have not found any description of this divine inspiration that they are discussing. We have already noted that the Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and Protestants agree that the Bible is divinely inspired. But what does divine inspiration mean? What characterizes the state that can be described as divinely inspired? And if this state survives somewhere, where does it survive? Someone may well say, so were the prophets and the Apostles the only human beings who were divinely inspired? After the Apostles, are there no more divinely inspired people? Do we have no divinely inspired texts outside of Holy Scripture? Do we possess no divinely inspired writings by other writers who were likewise divinely inspired? If our answer is yes, who are these divinely inspired people? And if they exist, how do we know that they are divinely inspired? We know that the prophets were divinely inspired. We similarly know that the Apostles were divinely inspired. Leaving the prophets and Apostles aside, who else was or is divinely inspired? Moreover, what are the different stages of this divine inspiration and how can they be distinguished? How does God inspire someone? How do we know that someone is inspired by God and not by the devil or by hallucinations?

When Christ said that He would give us the Holy Spirit Who will guide us into *all truth*, He was not speaking about ecumenical councils. He did not say that this would take place in the Church's ecumenical councils. This new teaching about the infallibility of the ecumenical councils is not contained within Holy Scripture. Christ simply said that the Holy Spirit is the Person Who will guide us into the fullness of the truth. Before saying this, however, He said, *If you have love for each other, I and my Father will*

come and dwell in you. (Jesus answered and said unto him. If a man love me, 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). He also said, now you see Me, but later you will not see Me. But if you have love, you will see Me. And the Spirit will come and dwell in you and will guide you to all truth. A little while, and ye shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father. (Jn 16:16).

Christ made all these statements in those chapters from St. John's Gospel that are read by the priests on Great Thursday and are quite basic. But why are these chapters so basic? Why is Christ's high priestly prayer so very important? Why did Jesus pray for the unity of the Apostles? What kind of union was He praying for? Was He praying perhaps for the union of the churches? What is this union? When Christ says that the Spirit *will guide you into all truth*, He certainly means for it to be understood within a certain context. What is that context?



Chapters 14-17 of the Gospel according to St. John go into great detail on the relationship between love and the Apostles' spiritual state. They also refer to the outcome of love. However, the fullest expression of love is revealed in the experience of

theosis. *Theosis* is the fullest expression of love. This love that wells forth from the experience of *theosis* completely heals the human person.

When the Holy Spirit enters the human heart, this love is awakened and the believer becomes a dwelling place or temple of the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in man, He brings with Him both the Father and the Son. Then, the entire Holy Trinity dwells in the believer. But how does the believer know that he has become *a temple of the Holy Spirit*? How is this determined? A genuine spiritual father can recognize when his spiritual child has received the Holy Spirit and become *a temple of the Holy Spirit* because there are specific Patristic criteria on this subject. What are they?

When Christ speaks about the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Church and on the faithful, He is not speaking in the abstract. This outpouring does **not** imply that He will send the Spirit to the entire Church in general. It also does not mean that the entire Church as a whole will receive the Spirit because of apostolic succession in the ordination of bishops and priests. This outpouring also does not mean that the Holy Spirit is somehow guaranteed to dwell permanently within the hierarchy on account

of the consecration of bishops, because the presence of a bishop does not guarantee that the Holy Spirit will be active in the midst of a council. Proof of this is the existence of many bishops within the Church who have been condemned as heretics. If these bishops possessed the Holy Spirit, they would not have fallen into heresy. Therefore, consecration to the episcopacy neither proves nor guarantees that the Holy Spirit dwells in a particular bishop. Hence, the grace of the episcopacy is not what leads the Church into *all truth*.

In this passage from St. John, Christ is speaking about something else. The Fathers clearly teach that in this passage Christ is referring to two states. In one section, He refers to *illumination* while in another He refers to *theosis*. When Christ says, *that all may be one* to whom is He referring? Naturally, He is speaking about the Apostles. He asks the Father that the Apostles become *one as We are one*. Note that Christ does not use the masculine form of the word ‘one’ (*eis*), but the neuter form (*en*). So how are the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit one(*en*)?

The answer is that They are **united as one by glory** (energy) and **by essence**, but not in their Persons or *Hypostases*. They are not united through Their Persons, because the Fathers teach that with respect to each other, the Persons in the Holy Trinity are *akoinonita*—they cannot be merged or reduced to a common entity or person. What is common in the Holy Trinity is the essence and the natural energy of the essence or glory. How then can we become one(*en*) as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one (*en*)? What is this oneness (*en*) and what kind of oneness can we and the Holy Trinity share? What is this common trait? The answer is that we can also become one (*en*) in glory.

As the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one in glory, because They have glory in common, so we will likewise become one when we all participate in the glory of God. We will become one when all of us, or at least those of us who are accounted worthy, become partakers of the grace of the Holy Spirit and behold the uncreated Light. When someone is glorified, he becomes a communicant of the uncreated glory of the Holy Trinity. Then he is united with both the Holy Trinity and his fellow believers who are also united with the glory of God at that particular moment.

So at the mystical supper, Christ prays first of all for the purification of the believers, then for their *illumination*, and finally for their *theosis*. Consequently, when Christ says that the Holy Spirit will *guide you into all truth* He is not referring to all people in general, but specifically to those who will share in the experience of *theosis*. Only when a person reaches *theosis* will he be *guided into all truth*. Consequently, *all truth* (about God, but not about the created order) is known only in the experience of *theosis*.

All the Fathers have had this experience or similar experiences, since some of them were in a state of *illumination* while others were in a state of *theosis*. This is why they all approached Holy Scripture in precisely the same way and likewise interpreted fundamental passages in Holy Scripture and texts by the other Church Fathers in the same way.

What can we conclude from all of this? When the Fathers were in a state of *illumination* or *theosis*, were they or were they not divinely inspired? Naturally, they were divinely inspired. After all, what does divine inspiration mean? It means that someone is inspired by God in contrast to being inspired by the devil or demons. In the latter case, that person would be diabolically inspired or demonically inspired. In terms of divine inspiration, the highest form of revelation and the supreme illustration of *theosis* were experienced by the Apostles on the day of Pentecost. **Pentecost is the key to Orthodox theology regarding divine inspiration.** If you grasp the meaning of Pentecost in the Patristic tradition, at least you will know what theology is and what a theologian is, even if you are not a theologian. Just as you do not need to be a doctor to know what medicine is and what a doctor is, in the same way, you can know what theology is and what a theologian is and who is making theological remarks, without personally being a theologian or making theological remarks.



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 [empirical] Patristic theology with a textbook theology of dogmas that can be classified with Western [Papist] theology and that does not guide the soul to *purification* from the passions. We have driven out the hesychastic tradition and replaced it with [mere] dogmas and morality (or moralism).

Protopresbyter John Romanides (+2001)

LET US PURIFY OUR SENSES

From the Russian periodical "Kormchi," Moscow, April 13, 1913.

Let us purify our senses from everything earthly, and we shall behold Christ, radiant with the unapproachable light of the Resurrection, and we shall clearly hear Him say, Rejoice!, as we sing the hymn of victory.

[Paschal Troparion]

† † †

The mysterious stillness of the Paschal night... the heart is seized by a familiar joy in anticipation of *meeting Christ*. The air is cool, the streets deserted... A gentle light like the dawn descends upon the soul and a pleasant warmth embraces the heart. There, the candles grow brighter, illumining the faces. It seems as if one actually hears the distant song of the angels in heaven. Closer and closer their singing inclines towards the earth: *The angels in heaven O Christ our Saviour, sing of Thy Resurrection.*

Trembling with unearthly rapture, the soul strains to approach Christ... And then a new song loudly bursts forth, a song of victory: *Christ is risen from the dead...*

The angels in heaven sing and people on earth join their voices: *Grant that we, too, on earth may with pure hearts glorify Thee!*

All genuine, exalted and holy joy related to the glorification of God is possible only where the heart is pure. From a pure heart the angels glorify God; from the depths of a pure heart the Most Holy Theotokos cried out: *My soul doth rejoice in God my Saviour!* (Lk 1:47).

Do we have such purity of heart that we can rejoice in the Lord's Resurrection and fittingly glorify Him? Alas! At one time our soul was clothed in a divinely woven garment of absolute cleanliness and purity, but of our own free will we ripped, soiled and flung aside this bright vesture, and our soul was darkened, our heart became sullied with sins and passions, our vision became clouded; cast down, and no longer reflected that radiant joy.

It is true that deep within the soul, like a precious treasure, there remain traces of its pristine beauty and innocence; but even these are constantly being forfeited, scattered along the road of life. Set amidst the world's deceptions, our life is like a sea agitated by a storm; now our passions, now the evil spirits, rise over us like raging waves in a mighty effort to engulf our soul and deprive us of that precious treasure of the heart. It is a rare individual who has not suffered shipwreck in this world and whose "treasure" has not been destroyed.

But the unfailing love of the Heavenly Father for the sake of the Redeemer extends to us a helping hand; and, having granted us purity and innocence in the Mystery of Holy Baptism, restores them again and again in the Mysteries of Confession and Communion through which we are united in the most intimate way possible with Christ our Saviour.

The Divinely-wise Fathers of the Church also call the feast of Pascha *Mystery*. On this feast we spiritually and even bodily, as it were, partake of the joy of the Resurrected Christ; when the cleansing and renewing grace of God makes itself felt in the soul, awakening in us pure feelings and exalted actions from the heart; when we must make a special effort to glorify the Lord *from pure hearts*, i.e., to strive with angelic, childlike purity of heart to meet Him coming forth from the grave.

But again and again we ask ourselves: how is it possible to acquire that blessed purity of heart when we are constantly

sinning, constantly defiling ourselves, constantly faced with our moral corruption? *Who shall be pure from uncleanness?* asked the righteous Job, and then answered: *Not even one; if even his life should be but one day upon the earth.* (Job 14:4). *We are all unclean!* cries out the Prophet Isaiah. (Isa 64:6). The pure eye of the All-Holy God detects perverseness even in the pure and holy angels. (cf. Job 4:18). What then can we say about ourselves who *drink iniquity like water!* (Job 15:16). Where can we obtain purity of heart? How can



we acquire it here on earth when even the angels in heaven do not possess it in full measure? It cannot be that the Lord would demand from us what is impossible, when, for example, He says, *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.* (Mt 5:8). This means that to achieve purity of heart is possible for us.

In the Paschal troparion we sing: *Let us purify our senses and we shall behold Christ, radiant with the inaccessible light of the Resurrection,...*

It is difficult for us to thoroughly cleanse our heart and soul from all sinful impurity. Nevertheless, on this Bright Feast we can—we must—*purify our senses* in some measure, so as *to behold Christ*, to see Him in the glorious light of the Resurrection, to sense in our hearts that grace-filled brightness.

Let us purify our senses! Here we have in our hearts malice, pride, envy, vainglory and the like. Let us cast them out of our souls, at least during this Light-bearing Festival; let us forget about these dark feelings; let us unburden ourselves of

the heaviness that comes with the remembrance of wrongs; and let us feel how pleasant, how joyous and bright the soul becomes without them! Then Christ will be resurrected in our souls, and we shall hear His greeting, *Rejoice!* And then we shall truly behold Him in the wondrous light of His Resurrection.

Let us purify our senses! How easy it is to do this, especially now when the mysterious grace-filled power of the Feast and the wondrous enchantment of the Paschal service wholly embrace our souls, transport our hearts to heaven and raise us up to God. Who has not experienced this paschal feeling? Whose soul has not been carried far from earth into the ineffable paschal night? Whose heart has not been melted by the divine paschal service? Who has not forgiven his brother at the time of paschal greeting? It is not in vain that this Light-bearing Feast makes such a deep impression upon the soul during childhood, preserving itself through the period of youth and reviving in old age. And with the remembrance of this Feast, one is always seized with wonderment, as if the angels are singing in heaven, and a holy joy fills the heart.

Let us purify our senses! On the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ let us experience that grace-filled state, which comes with a pure heart, and let us try to recapture this feeling at other times in our life; let us chase away from our souls malice, cunning, jealousy, and other evils; and let us cleanse our hearts from movements of the passions. In so doing, we shall approach Christ—with each day, each hour, until, on that day when we depart from this earth, He greets us with the word, *Rejoice!* And later says to us, *Thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of the Lord.* (Mt 25:12). Amen.



“BECOMING THEOLOGY” BY LIVING THE TEACHINGS OF THE HOLY FATHERS

By Elder Vasileios, Abbot of the Iviron Monastery on Mount Athos.

The living patristic word is conveyed whole, full of life, as it passes from generation to generation through living organisms—altering them, creating “fathers” who make it their personal word, ... a wealth which increases as it is given away... Offering the words of the Fathers to others means that I myself live, that I am changed by them. And so my metabolism has the power to change [those words], so that they can be eaten and drunk by the person to whom I am offering them. This change of the word within man—and the change in himself resulting from it—preserves unchanged the mystery of personal and unrepeatable life, which is “patristically” taught and given. It is like the food the mother eats: it nourishes her and keeps her alive; and, at the same time,

becomes, within her, mother’s milk—the drink of life for the stomach of her baby.

How beautiful it is for a man to become theology. Then whatever he does—and, above all, whatever he does spontaneously, since only what is done spontaneously is true—bears witness and speaks of the fact: that the Son and Word of God was incarnate; that He was made man through the Holy Spirit and Ever-Virgin Mary. It speaks silently about the ineffable mysteries, which have been revealed in the last times.

This theological life and witness is a blessing which sweetens man’s life. It is a food which is cut up and given to others; and drink poured out and offered in abundance for man to consume and quench his thirst. In this state one does not talk life, one gives it. By contrast, scholastic theology and intellectual constructions do not resemble the Body of the Lord, the true food; nor His Blood, the true drink. Rather, they are like the stone one finds in one’s food. This is how indigestible—and inhumanly hard—the mass of scholasticism seems to the taste and mouth of one accustomed to the liturgy of the Church; and it is rejected as something foreign and unacceptable.

Our words are often untuned and weak. For the word to be passed on and give life, it has to be made flesh. When, along with your word, you give your flesh and blood to others, only then do your words mean something. Words without flesh—which do not spring from life and do not share out our flesh, which is broken, and our blood, which is shed—mean nothing. That is why, at the Mystical Supper, the Lord summarized the mystery of His preaching by saying: *Take, eat My Body, and drink My Blood.*

Fortunate is the man who is broken in pieces, who is poured out and given to others to drink. When his time of trial comes, he will not be afraid. He will have nothing to fear. He will have already understood that, in the celebration of love, by grace: man is *broken and not divided, eaten and never consumed.* By grace, he has become Christ, and so his life gives food and drink to his brother. That is to say, he nourishes the other’s very existence and makes it grow.



Never put any trust in suspicions, for a wrong premise leads right reasoning to a wrong conclusion. Suspicions are falsehood and blind your mind. Even if my thoughts suggested to me about the sun: this is the sun; or about darkness: this is the darkness, I would not believe them. Nothing is more serious than suspicion, nothing brings the mind so much blindness, because if we entertain them for a while they begin to persuade us, until we are convinced that we have seen things which do not exist and never could exist.

Abba Dorotheos of Gaza

THE ORTHODOX FAMILY

By Metropolitan Philaret (Voskresensky) of New York (+1985).

The basic task of Orthodox Christianity is to teach people to live according to God's will so that, through it, they will be brought to eternal blessedness. Some people vainly wish to reduce Christianity to a mere narrowly-individualized sphere of religious experiences. Christianity, however, is life; it is a new seal on all the vital relationships of people. No impartial person would doubt or contradict the fact of its influence on life. It is sufficient to point out that even though life and the behavior of people on earth have not strayed far from Christian ideals, nevertheless, their concepts and views were formulated on the Christian type. The work of many of the best artists and scientists bears a clearly Christian imprint upon them. Further, such consoling phenomena as the disappearance of slavery, the appearance of a whole series of institutions of charity and enlightenment, and much else, are undoubtedly obligated to Christianity for their beginnings. But perhaps the transforming and elevating influence of Christianity has been experienced most of all by the first cell of the order of social life—the family.

The great responsibility for an Orthodox Christian person is to choose a friend for life. God's word says of the Christian marriage, *be two in one flesh*, that is, in marriage two people form one organism, one common life. An Orthodox Christian wife thinks first of all about her husband, and then about herself. Likewise, the husband first cares for his wife, then for himself. The Lord tempered such a Christian marital union by His Divine word, *What God unites, let man not separate*. It is noteworthy that in such a Christian marriage, the love of the partners has that very same selfless, self-denying character by which purely Christian love is distinguished. With good reason, Apostle Paul compares the marital union with the union of Christ and the Church, and he says, *Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her*. In Christian marriage, the unification of loving personalities becomes so all-comprehensive and full, the mutual dedication of the spouses so deep and absolute, that they resemble each other in everything, and sometimes (in old age) they even come to resemble each other externally. And their life passes in full accord, in full dedication to the will of Christ the Savior and His Holy Church.

But it becomes so heavy in our own days to see the precipitous, thoughtlessly careless and completely un-Christian disposition of contemporary youth to this most serious question. One must now repeatedly observe how marriages are concluded not through a serious, deep, examined feeling of love, but through enamorousness, a feeling which is not deep, and is very low in moral relationship. Often, the content of such an enamoured state is, alas, in essence only animal passions, only an "agitation of young blood" (and sometimes not young, but old and dirty). Together with this, in the pre-wedding time of such marriages, one constantly observes deceit and self-embellishing of both body and soul, a hypocritical desire not to be, but to seem to be better and more beautiful. Life, however, can be built only on truth; it cannot survive on falsehood. From this, there ensues the disenchantment of spouses with each other and the aberration of divorces.

Christian marriage is a single life lived by two in unification. With the years, marital life only strengthens, becomes deeper, more spiritual. Of course, passionate love, connected with each person's natural sexual inclination and purely physical attraction, also enters into Christian marital love. In a truly Christian marriage, however, such passionate love enters into the attachment only incidentally, and never has such a significance and strength as in non-Christian marital unions.

In the lives of saints, we see a multitude of examples in which Christian spouses, through mutual agreement, renounced sexual life, either from the very beginning of the marriage or even after forty years. It is noteworthy that in such a marriage, when the ascetic-spouses live *as brother and sister*, their mutual love is distinguished by a special strength of devotion, all-embracing fidelity and mutual respect. Thus does Christianity consecrate, elevate and transform a marriage union.

In a Christian family, not only the relationship of husband and wife is considered, but also that of children and parents. Christianity again places its imprint on this inner relationship.

In each good family there must, without fail, be a single family life. "Our" must always take precedence to the personal "my" in such a relationship. It is not in vain that all members of the family bear one common surname, for they must live a common, cordial life. The head of the family is the husband. The well-being of the family is formed on



him and on his toils. The family is his first duty. Of those who do not look after their own family, Apostle Paul says bluntly and quite clearly. *If anyone does not care for his own, and especially for his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.* (1 Tim 5:8).

It often happens that, in directing their children to one or another path, parents act so strongly against the will of a child's inclinations and heart's desire that they are generally unjust. Apostle Paul speaks against this, pointedly saying: *Parents, do not anger your children so that they do not despair, but raise them in the Lord's teaching and instruction.* (Col 3:21; Eph 6:4). To demand of children what exceeds their strength only plunges them into despondency. There is an even greater injustice: for a child, the father is the highest authority, and woe if their authority betrays that feeling of trust, a feeling which is far stronger in a child than in an adult. This is followed by a situation which is simply inescapable for the child. It is even worse, however, when the parents spoil their children too much, are too condescending toward them and often leave them without supervision. The child can receive a great moral ruin from this; as we have seen, God's word orders parents to raise and instruct children in the Lord's law.

The matter of raising children falls primarily on the mother. This is natural, since no one else is so close to the soul and heart of the child as its mother. It is not without reason that a child runs directly to its mother, crying, "Mama" when it is hurt. There is a great task before the mother: to raise a son or daughter as a believing Christian, good, responsive, work-loving, useful to the Church and society, and to raise the child thus by word and example and love and strictness. This is the sanctuary of her service to the Lord; her work is no less important than the husband's work for the family. Shame and dishonor to those mothers who shirk from the raising of their children and give them over to be cared for by hired persons, forgetting that it is so easy to ruin or soil the child's soul. Moreover, can anyone really replace a child's mother?

But children must understand their responsibilities no less than the parents. Everyone knows the fifth commandment of God's law, about honoring the parents. Apostle Paul enjoins children to *submit to your parents in the Lord, for justice requires this.* And, of course, this requirement is brought forth precisely by justice. For, children are obligated in all things to their parents who take care of them, loving, toiling, denying themselves in much, raising their children by their own love, often helping them even when they have already become adults and independent people.

How often, though, is the fifth commandment violated among us! Even those children who are convinced that they sincerely and deeply love their parents, often do not heed them, which means that they do not honor them. Love

is always united with obedience. And the older children become, the more self-willed they become, alas, affronting their parents, reproaching them to their face for their "backwardness" and not considering their authority in anything. Is this respect for parents?

Thus, in its basic sense, the fifth commandment speaks of honoring parents. Nevertheless, it also speaks in consideration of all those who occupy similar positions for a Christian: teachers, educators, etc; and especially, the representatives of lawful authority who preserve the order of society. Apostle Paul directed us to pray: *for rulers and all those in authority,* and in many places in his epistles, he taught to submit to the authorities. More important, of course, for the Christian, is the honoring of Church authorities—the pastors of the Church, especially the bishops, and also the pastor who is his spiritual father and answers before God for his soul. Apostle Paul says, *Submit yourselves* (to your spiritual instructors,) *for they watch over your souls and must give account.* And the Lord Himself said to His apostles, and in their persons to the pastors of the Church, *Whoever listens to you, listens to Me, but whoever does not listen to you, does not listen to Me.*



Parents must teach their children from their earliest days. They must teach them the fear of God, must cut their bad impulses and faults, and they must not fawn upon them or satisfy their bad desires or appetites. The small child is like the soft candle that you shape as you like, and which accepts whatever seal you put upon it.

Whatever letters you write on a clean sheet of paper will remain imprinted. In the same way, whatever the small child learns when he is small will remain imprinted until old age.

When the tree is small, if the wind blows, it bends. If we put a pole next to it, then it becomes straight. If we don't put up a pole, and it becomes bent, it will always remain bent. If, when it is grown up and well rooted, we want to straighten it, it breaks and is cut down. It is the same with our children. Let us support them in the Faith and in the fear of God when they are small. Let us fence them in and surround them with walls of instruction and good examples, until they get rooted in virtue—when they won't fear any danger.

Blessed Elder Philotheos of Paros, (+1980)

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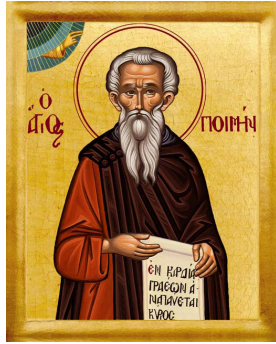
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PARENTAL COUNSEL

By St. Porphyrios Kafsokalyvites (+1991).



What saves and makes for good children is the life of the parents in the home. The parents need to devote themselves to the love of God. They need to become saints in their relation to their children through their mildness, patience and love. They need to make a new start every day, with a fresh outlook, renewed enthusiasm and love for their children. And the joy that

will come to them, the holiness that will visit them, will shower grace on their children.

Generally the parents are to blame for the bad behavior of the children. And their behavior is not improved by reprimands, disciplining, or strictness. If the parents do not pursue a life of holiness and if they don't engage in spiritual struggle, they make great mistakes and transmit the faults they have within them. If the parents do not live a holy life and do not display love towards each other, the devil torments the parents with the reactions of the children. Love, harmony and understanding between the parents are what are required for the children. This provides a great sense of security and certainty.

A psychological state is created in a child as a result of its parents that accompanies it throughout its life. Its later behavior and its relationships with others are directly connected with the experiences that it carries with it from its childhood years. The child grows up and develops, but in reality the change is not there. This is manifested even in the smallest expressions of life. For example, you get a craving for food and want to eat. You take something and eat it, then you see something else and you want that. You feel hungry and think that if you don't eat you'll feel faint and you'll start to tremble. You're afraid you'll lose weight. This is a psychological state that has its explanation. Perhaps you never knew your father or your mother, and you feel deprived and hungry, poor and weak. And this psychological reality is expressed byway of reflex as a weakness of the body.

Parents, especially the mother, often cause harm to a child for some act of misbehavior by scolding it excessively. The child is then wounded. Even if you don't scold the child outwardly but bristle with anger inwardly or look fiercely at the child, the child understands. The child believes that its mother doesn't love it and asks, "Do you love me, Mummy?" The mother answers, "Yes, dear," but the child is not convinced. It has been wounded. The mother loves it, she'll caress it later, but the child will pull its head away. It refuses to be caressed, regarding this as hypocrisy because it has been wounded.

Another thing that harms children is over-protectiveness, that is, excessive care or excessive anxiety and worry on the part of the parents.

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 OUR TIMES

St. Paisios of the Holy Mount Athos.

The spirit of lukewarmness reigns. There's no manliness at all. We've been spoiled for good. How does God still tolerate us? Today's generation is the generation of indifference. There are no warriors. The great majority are fit for parades and feasts only.

Godlessness and blasphemy are allowed to appear on television. And the Church is silent and doesn't excommunicate the blasphemers. And they need to be excommunicated. What are they waiting for? Let's not wait for someone else to pull the snake out from its hole so that we can live in peace.

They're silent out of indifference. What's bad is that even people who've got something inside have begun to grow cool, saying: "Can I really do anything to change the situation?" We have to witness our faith with boldness, because if we continue to be silent we'll have to answer in the end. In these difficult days each must do what's in their power. Leave what's out of their power to the will of God. In this way our conscience will be clear.

If we don't resist, then our ancestors will arise from their graves. They suffered so much for the Fatherland, and we? What are we doing for it? If Christians don't begin to witness their faith, to resist evil, then the destroyers will become even more insolent. But today's Christians are no warriors. If the Church keeps silent, to avoid conflict with the government, if the metropolitans are silent, if the monks hold their peace, then who will speak up?

† † †

A lukewarm clergy lulls the people to sleep, leaves them in their for-

mer condition so they won't be upset. "Look," they say, "by all means do not tell them that there will be a war, or the Second Coming, that one must prepare oneself for death. We must not make people alarmed!" And others speak with a false kindness, saying: "We mustn't expose heretics and their delusions, so as to show our love for them." Today's people are water-soluble. There's no leaven in them.

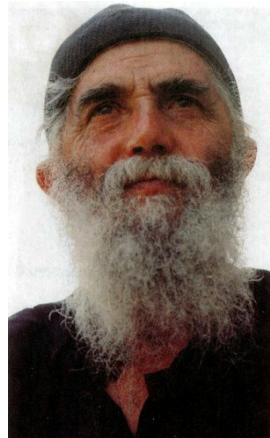
If I avoid upsetting myself to protect my fleshly comfort then I'm indifferent to holiness! Spiritual meekness is one thing, and softness and indifference are quite another. Some say: "I'm a Christian and therefore I have to be joyful and calm." But they're not Christian. They're simply indifferent. And their joy is only a worldly joy.

The person in whom these worldly seeds are present is not a spiritual person. A spiritual person consists of nothing but pain. In other words, he's in pain at what's going on, he's in pain for people's condition. And divine comfort is bestowed upon him for his pain.

† † †

Our goal is to live an Orthodox life, not just to speak or write Orthodox. If the preacher has no personal experience then his sermons won't go to the heart, won't change people. To think like an Orthodox is easy, but to live an Orthodox life requires effort.

Today God tolerates what's going on. Tolerates, so that evil people will be unable to justify themselves. God expects patience, prayer and struggle from us. If you anger when you yourself are offended, your anger is unclean. But if someone is offended in the service of holiness, that means the zeal of God is in him. Indignation can be righteous when



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it’s indignation for God’s sake. That’s the only justifiable kind of indignation in a person.

It’s unseemly to become angry in one’s own defense. Resisting evildoers is another matter, however, when it’s in defense of serious spiritual matters, when our holy faith, Orthodoxy, is concerned. Then it’s your duty. To think of others, to counter the blasphemers in order to defend one’s neighbor—this is pure, because it is carried out in love.

† † †

Evil lies within us. There is no love in us, so we don’t feel all people to be brothers and are tempted by [our knowledge of] their sinful ways. But it’s not right when moral failings become known to all. The injunction of the Gospels to “*tell it unto the church*” (Mt 18:17) doesn’t mean that everything has to become known to everyone. By exposing the moral failings of our brother we arm the enemies of the Church, give them another pretext to escalate the war against Her. And the faith of the weak is shaken in this way too.

If you want to help the Church, then try to mend your own ways, rather than others’. In straightening yourself out you straighten out a particle of the Church. If everyone were to do that then the Church would be in perfect order. But today’s people attend to everything under the sun, only not to themselves, because it’s easy to teach others, while mending one’s own ways requires effort.

† † †

If we expose someone out of love, with pain in our hearts, then a change will occur in his heart whether he understands us or not. But to expose without love, with partiality, only enrages the object of our exposure. Our hostility strikes against his egoism, producing sparks like flint against steel.

If we tolerate our brother out of love, he will feel it. But he also feels our hostility, even if we keep it inside and don’t

express it. Our hostility arouses alarm in him. We must always ask ourselves: “Why do I want to say what I’m about to say? What is motivating me? Do I really care about my neighbor or do I just want to show him how wonderful I am, to show off a bit?” If someone tries to solve ecclesiastical problems allegedly out of faith, but really thinking of his own advantage, then how can such a person win God’s blessing?

† † †

Sweet words and great truths have value when uttered by righteous lips. They take root only in people of good will and clean conscience.

Truth, when used without judgment, can commit a crime. And he who possesses sincerity without reason commits a twofold evil, first against himself, then against others, because there’s no empathy in his sincerity. A Christian must not be a fanatic but have love in his heart for all. He who throws words around carelessly, even true words, does evil.

Veneration is a good thing, and the predisposition for good is also good, but spiritual judgment and breadth are needed to guard against fanaticism, that false companion of reverence.

† † †

Wakefulness and sobriety are needed. All that a person does he must do for the sake of God. Christ must be at the source of every movement. Much attention is required, for when we do something with the aim of pleasing others we gain no benefit.

We ascend to the heavens not through earthly striving but by humbling ourselves spiritually. He who goes low goes sure and never falls. Ours is an age of sensationalism and hullabaloo. But the spiritual life is not noisy. Divine enlightenment is required and when it’s not there the person abides in darkness. He may act out of good intentions but create many problems in his confusion, both for the Church and for society.

There was a time when the Holy Spirit enlightened us and showed us the way. A grand business! Today it finds no reason to descend to us. Difficult years are ahead. The Old Testament Tower of Babel was child's play compared with our age.

† † †

It's possible that you'll live through much which is described in the Book of Revelations. Much is coming to the surface, little by little. The situation is horrible. Madness has gone beyond all bounds. Apostasy is upon us, and now the only thing left is for the *son of perdition* (2 Thess 2:3) to come.

The world has turned into a madhouse. A great confusion will reign, in which each government will begin to do whatever comes into its head. We'll see how the most unlikely, the most insane, events will happen. The only good thing is that these events will happen in very quick succession.

Ecumenism, common markets (European Union), a one-world government, a single made-to-order religion: such is the plan of these devils. The Zionists are already preparing their messiah. For them the false-messiah will be king, will rule here on earth.

A great discord will arise. In this discord everyone will clamor for a king to save them. At that moment they'll offer up their man, who'll say: "I'm the Imam, I'm the fifth Buddha, I'm the Christ whom Christians are awaiting. I'm the one whom the Jehovah's Witnesses have been waiting for. I'm the Jewish messiah."

† † †

Very difficult times are ahead for the faithful. Great trials await us. Christians will suffer great persecutions. Meanwhile, it's obvious that people don't understand that we're on the verge of the end times, that the seal of the Antichrist is becoming a reality. As if nothing's happening. That's why Holy Scripture says that even the chosen will be deceived.

The Zionists want to rule the earth. To achieve their ends they use black magic and satanism. They regard satan-worship as a means to gain the strength they need to carry out their plans. They want to rule the earth using satanic power. God is not something they take into account.

One sign that the fulfillment of prophecy is near will be the destruction of the Mosque of Omar in Jerusalem. They'll destroy it in order to restore the Temple of Solomon which used to be on the same place. In the end the Jews will pronounce the Antichrist messiah in this rebuilt temple.

The rabbis know that the true Messiah has already come and that they crucified Him. They know this, and yet they are blinded by egoism and fanaticism.

† † †

Two thousand years ago it was written in the Book of Revelations that people will be marked with the number "666." As Holy Scripture says, the ancient Hebrews laid a tax on the peoples they conquered in various wars. The yearly tax was equal to 666 talents of gold. (1 Kgs 10:14: *the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six talents of gold*; and 2 Chr 9:13: *the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred and threescore and six talents of gold*). Today, in order to subjugate the whole world they'll once again introduce the old tax number linked to their glorious past. That is, "666" is the number of mammon.

Everything is going as planned. They put the number a long time ago on credit cards. As a result, he who is not marked with the number "666" will be unable to buy, sell, get a loan, or find work.

† † †

Providence tells me that the Antichrist wants to subjugate the world using this system. It will be foisted upon people with the help of the mechanisms which control the world economy, for only those who receive the mark, an image with the number "666," will be able to take part in economic life.

The mark will be an image which will first be placed on all products, and then people will be compelled to wear it on their hand or forehead. Little by little, after the introduction of ID cards with the three sixes, after the creation of a personal dossier, they'll use cunning to introduce the mark.

In Brussels a whole palace with three sixes has been built to house a central computer. This computer can keep track of billions of people. And we Orthodox are resisting this because we don't want the Antichrist and we don't want dictatorship either.

† † †

The most we can suffer is martyrdom. There will be three and a half hard years. Those who don't agree with the system will have a rough time. They'll constantly be trying to imprison them, using any pretext they can find. They won't torture anyone, but without the mark it will simply be impossible for a person to live. "You're suffering without the mark," they'll say. "And if you had just accepted it you would have had no difficulties."

For this reason, by learning to live a simple, moderate life here and now you'll be able to get through those years. By getting a little bit of land, raising a little wheat and some



potatoes, planting some olive trees, and keeping animals of some sort, a goat or chickens, the Christian will be able to feed his family. Stockpiling is of little use: Food doesn't keep for long before spoiling.

But these oppressions will not last for long; three, three and a half years. For the sake of the chosen the days will be hastened. God won't leave a person without help. Tomorrow thunder will strike, and the brief dictatorship of the Antichrist-satan will come. Then Christ will intervene, will give the whole anti-Christian system a good shaking up. He'll trample upon evil and turn everything to good use in the end.

- And if someone receives the mark unknowingly?

It'd be better to say "uncaringly." How can one be unknowing, when everything is crystal clear? And if a person doesn't know, then he should become interested and find out. By accepting the mark, even unknowingly, a person loses Divine Grace and gives himself up to demonic influence.

When a priest immerses the infant in the baptismal font, the infant receives the Holy Spirit without knowing it, and Divine Grace begins to abide in him.

- Some people say: "What's destined by God to be will be. What business is it of ours?"

They can say whatever they want, but in reality it's not like that! Unfortunately, some modern priests diaper their flock like infants, to keep them from getting upset. "What's going on today isn't important," they say. "Don't be alarmed. All you need is to have faith in your hearts." Or they scold: "Don't speak on that topic, about ID cards or the mark of the beast. It will just upset people." If they were to say instead: "Let's try to live more spiritually, to be nearer to Christ and not to be afraid of anything. You see, the most we can suffer is martyrdom," then they'd at least be preparing their flock for the coming tribulations.

Knowing the truth, a person will begin to mull things over and shake himself out of his sleep. What's going on will begin to cause him pain. He'll begin to pray and to be on his guard, so as to not fall into that trap.

† † †

What do we see now? It's bad enough that cunning "interpreters of Scripture" are commenting prophecy after their own fashion. They're representatives of the clergy, but they're more cowardly than lay people. And it would behoove them to exhibit a healthy spiritual unease and help Christians

by sowing beneficial concern so they'll be strengthened in their faith and receive divine consolation.

I'm amazed: Doesn't what's happening give them any cause for concern? And why don't they at least add a question mark to the interpretations they come up with? And if they help the Antichrist and thus lead other souls to perdition?

No, behind the "perfected credit card system," behind "computerized security," lurks worldwide dictatorship and the yoke of the Antichrist: *And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads. And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred threescore and six.* (Rev 13:16-18).

† † †



The world has lost control of itself. Honor and self-sacrifice have abandoned people. The taste of sacrificial joy is unknown to today's people, and that's why they're so tortured. For only when you co-participate in the pain of another do miracles happen.

If a person doesn't cultivate in himself the spirit of self-sacrifice then he thinks only of himself and doesn't receive Divine Grace. The more a person forgets himself, the more God remembers him. Those who die heroically

don't really die. And where there's no heroism nothing worthwhile can be expected.

Our time is like a bubbling and steaming cauldron. One needs temperament, audacity, courage. Take care not to be caught unprepared, if something is to happen. Start getting ready now so that you'll be able to resist difficulties. Christ Himself tells us: *Therefore be ye also ready* (Mt 24:44), doesn't He? Today, living in such complicated times, we have to be not merely ready, but triply ready, at the minimum!

Possibly we may meet not only with sudden death, but with other dangers. So let's drive away the desire to arrange our lives comfortably! May love of honor and the spirit of self-sacrifice live in us.

† † †

I see that something is in the works, that something lies just around the corner, but it's constantly being put off. Little delays all the time. Who's creating the delays? God? Another month passes, then another couple of months!

That's how it all goes. But since we know what awaits us, let's develop love in ourselves, to the degree that we can. That's the main thing: for true brotherly love to exist between us. Kindness, love — that's strength! Guard the secret as well as you can and don't indulge in excessive frankness. If "he and I and the bell-ringer" are all in on the secret, then what will come of that?

Death in battle adds greatly to God's mercy, for a person who dies the death of the brave sacrifices himself to defend others. Those who give up their lives out of pure love in order to defend their neighbor are imitating Christ. These people are supreme heroes. They arouse fear in our enemies. Death herself trembles before them, because they scorn her due to their great love, and attain immortality in this fashion, finding the key to eternity under the gravestone. They enter into eternal blessedness without difficulty.

That's why I say to you: Cultivate self-sacrifice, brotherly love. May each of you attain a spiritual condition which will allow you to get out of difficult situations. Without a spiritual condition a person loses courage, because he loves himself. He can renounce Christ, betray Him.

You must be ready for death. We believe that nothing is in vain, that our sacrifice has meaning.

† † †

Remove your "I" from everything you do. The person who leaves his "I" rises above the earth, moves in another atmosphere. As long as he remains inside himself he cannot become a heavenly being.

There is no spiritual life without sacrifice. Try to remember, at least a little bit, that death exists. And since we'll die in any case, let's not take care of ourselves too much. Look after your health, but not to the degree where you begin to bow down before your peace and well-being. I'm not asking anyone to throw themselves headlong into dangerous adventures, but you have to have at least a bit of heroism, my brother!..

Feats are committed not by the tall in size but by the audacious, the heartfelt, and the self-sacrificing. There's no barbarity in spiritual audacity. Such people don't fire at the enemy, but over his head, forcing him to surrender. A kind man prefers being killed to killing. The harmonious person is prepared for accepting divine powers.

The mean, the cowardly, and the small of spirit, on the other hand, use impudence to hide their fear. They're afraid of themselves as well as others and shoot without stopping. Courage and audacity are one thing; criminality and malice quite another. In order to succeed at anything one needs a

wild streak, in the positive sense. He who lacks this wild streak can become neither a hero nor a saint. The heart must become uncalculating.

† † †

In our age audacity has become a rarity. Water, not blood, flows in people's veins. So if a war were to break out, God forbid, many would simply die of fright while others would lose heart, because they're used to an easy life. Fear is necessary when it helps a person turn to God. Fear from lack of faith, from lack of trust in God, on the other hand, is ruinous.

Such fear is driven out by audacity. We must remember: The more a person fears, the more he is tempted by the enemy. If a person refuses to strive to become courageous, and doesn't strive for real love, then when a difficult situation arises he'll become a laughingstock.

The warrior takes joy in the fact that he's dying so that others won't have to. If you dispose yourself this way then nothing will

be frightening. Courage is born from much love, kindness and self-sacrifice. Today people don't even want to hear about death. However, the person that does not maintain remembrance of death is living outside of reality. Those who fear death and love life's vanities are in a state of spiritual stagnation. Bold people, who always keep death before them and think about it constantly, on the other hand, conquer vanity and begin to live in eternity and heavenly joy while still here on earth.

May he who fights in the war for Faith and Fatherland cross himself and not fear, for God is his helper!

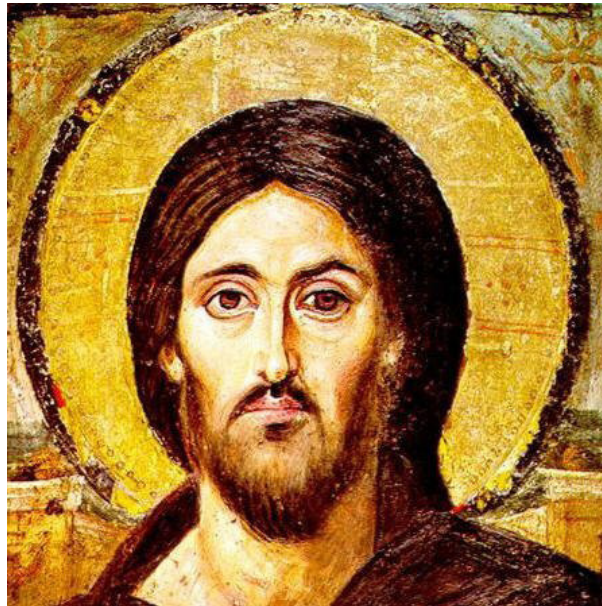
God Himself will decide whether he is to die or to live. One needs to trust God, not oneself.

† † †

Providence tells me that many events will happen: The Russians will take Turkey and Turkey will disappear from the world map because a third of the Turks will become Christians, another third will die in the war and another third will leave for Mesopotamia.

The Mid-East will become a theater of a war in which the Russians will take place. Much blood will be spilled. The Chinese, with an army of 200 million, will cross the Euphrates and go all the way to Jerusalem. The sign that this event is approaching will be the destruction of the Mosque of Omar, for its destruction will mark the beginning of work by the Jews to rebuild the Temple of Solomon, which was built on the same spot.

There will be a great war between Russians and Europeans, and much blood will be spilled. Greece won't play a leading role in that war, but they'll give her Constantinople. Not



because the Russians adore the Greeks, but because no better solution will be found. The city will be handed over before the army has a chance to get there.

The Jews, inasmuch as they'll have great power and the help of the European leadership, will become proud and insolent beyond measure and conduct themselves shamelessly. They'll try to rule Europe.

They'll play all sorts of tricks, but the resulting persecutions will lead Christians to unite completely. However, they won't unite in the way desired by those who are now engaging in various machinations to create a single church united under a single religious leadership. Christians will unite because the unfolding situation will naturally separate the sheep from the goats. Then the prophecy of *one flock and one shepherd* will actually come to pass.

† † †

Don't give in to panic. Cowards are of use to no one. God looks at a person's situation and helps him. We have to remain calm and use our brains. No matter what happens, we must continue to pray, think and act. It's best to always stand up to a difficult situation using spiritual means. However that spiritual boldness which is born of holiness and striving towards God is missing today, as is the natural boldness needed in order not to turn coward in the face of danger.

In order to hold back a great evil, great holiness is needed. A spiritual person can hold back evil and help others. In the spiritual life the biggest coward can attain great courage by entrusting himself to Christ and His divine help. He can go to the front lines, do battle with the enemy, and win! So therefore we will fear God alone, not people, no matter how evil they may be. The fear of God makes any coward into a hero! A person becomes fearless to the extent he unites with God.



In the second coming, the Holy Apostles and the Prophets will show the pains, the struggles of preaching, the persecutions, the exiles, the imprisonments, and the deaths they forbore for Christ. The Martyrs will show the blood they shed for Christ's love. The Monastic Saints will show their ascetical struggles, the prayers, the fasts, the deprivations and the tears of repentance. The just and charitable will show the righteousness and charities.

What will you show?...

Analogous to your love towards God and neighbor, analogous to the toils, sweats, struggles, fasts, vigils, prayers. Analogous to the contrition and the tears you will shed to purify your soul, and grace will be given to you from God.

Elder Philotheos Zervakos (+1980)

AN ANCIENT PRAYER TO THE THEOTOKOS

Source: The web pages of "Orthodox Matters," <http://orthodoxathemata.blogspot.com/>, December 2014 (translated by the staff of "Orthodox Heritage").



Egyptian archaeologists have discovered near the Alexandria area a 3rd century papyrus (scroll) with Coptic and Greek script. The scroll contains what is believed to possibly be the oldest written testimony of a Christian prayer to the Holy Virgin Mary.

Reading and translating the text of this ancient manuscript has been made possible; as the public announcement by the Patriarchate of Antioch indicates, it prayerfully invokes divine mercy for its reader and the protection of believers by the Holy Virgin.

Archaeologists stress that finding this manuscript constitutes an absolute refutation of the skeptics who bring into question the practice of praying to saints and the Virgin Mary in the early centuries of Christianity.



Great is our honor—though unworthy—to have been called by God to serve in the work of saving souls as His tools, bearing in mind that if others (Apostles, etc.) had not sacrificed their souls for our sake, we would not be children of God and heirs of heavenly blessings. Therefore, let us do whatever we can; the work will be completed by Him who has the power to perfect it.

Think about how the first Christians struggled during the times of the catacombs; with what self-sacrifice, with what love they sacrificed things dear to them when Christian duty called. And in the end, their sacrifices brought them eternal glory.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou
["Counsels from the Holy Mountain"]

ORTHODOX MODESTY IN DRESS AND GROOMING

From "Orthodox Tradition," vol. XVII (January, 2000), pp. 24-28. See also the sobering homily for women on Isaiah 3:24 by St. Nikolai Velimirovich in "The Prologue from Ochrid," Vol. III, pp. 183-185. This article is also posted in the web pages of the excellent site "Orthodox Christian Information Center," <http://orthodoxinfo.com/>.

Visiting a couple of your parishes, I noticed that the women cover their heads in church. I asked Father [name deleted] when I visited him. He explained that the women cover their heads in church, don't cut their hair short and don't wear pants or tight clothes even outside church...The men he said usually have moustaches and dress with long sleeves....I do not mean to be disrespectful, but what does this have to do with Orthodoxy? There aren't any church teachings about these matters of personal choice, as far as I know. I am a woman and have short hair and wear pants almost always (not in church). But this sounds a little fanatic and strange to me. My priest says that it is quaint and borrowed from Protestant fundamentalists, which surprised me. Perhaps you could say something about this in Orthodox Tradition. (M.I., CA)

† † †

This question is one which comes up very often in the Church. It is not easy to answer, since correct Christian behavior is predicated on the good intention of the Christian and his desire to adhere to and follow the precepts of the Fathers of the Church. Church rules never force a Christian to fulfill empty rules, but serve as guides to those who intuitively grasp the fullness of the Faith, which leads us to a way of life in which even the way that we eat, walk, speak, dress, and groom ourselves draws us and those around us to a loftier life, making us a peculiar people and *a people apart from the world* (Tit 2:14; Jn 15:19). Thus, for centuries Orthodox men and women have followed a style of dress and adornment that reflects the *ethos* of a Christianity lived *partly on earth and partly in Heaven*.

Women have traditionally avoided cutting their hair short, wearing male attire (pants and other clothes which emphasize the body),* or adorning themselves with excessive jewelry and make-up. Men, too, are called to dress modestly, to avoid wearing their hair in such a way as to appear effeminate, and to maintain at least a moustache, so as to avoid the same impression. Orthodox Christians have adhered to these traditions because they express a living Faith, not because faithfulness to such customs and traditions is demanded by the Church or because they constitute, as such, matters of confession. They are undertaken in that freedom which we all find in Christ, which is not a fetter which binds, but a light yoke which helps us move forward in rightly cultivating the seeds of the Christian life.

Having said this, there is, of course, a level at which the intentional defiance of Church customs and traditions sometimes reflects a wrong course in one's spiritual life and a worldly spirit that thwarts growth in Christ. This is especially true in an age when men and women, but especially women, purposely pit their personal preferences and perceived rights against ecclesiastical customs, somehow thinking that human rights (and especially those of women)—which the Church certainly respects and rightly defends—take precedence over submission to the Church and Her traditions. In voluntarily submitting to the Church, neither a man nor woman gives up his personal rights; rather, he brings them into focus in the realm of humility and obedience which the Church constitutes.

If human rights are sacred in the world, they are made sublime when they are freely relinquished in the ecclesiastical kingdom of humility. For our freedom in Christ makes submission victorious and self-elevating and self-assertion self-defeating. Moreover, when a turning-away from humility and modesty leads others into sin, as is often the case with immodest apparel and stylish dress (after all, "sex appeal" and style are not separate things, and most certainly so in the world of women's fashion), then, whatever one's intentions, he risks scandalizing others. Here intention becomes a secondary issue and the lack of discretion and prudence convict a violator of Church custom by the harm brought upon others.

If all of this seems to be simply a matter of hard-headed fanaticism on the part of traditionalist "fundamentalists," a popular accusation these days, let us point out that the Patristic and Canonical witness of the Church is unequivocal in setting forth rules that call both men and women to a strict standard of modesty, with special attention to women's attire, adornment, and grooming. And this witness would lead any prudent Christian to believe that the Church's proscription against immodest dress and grooming in women—whether in wearing pants, tight dresses, and otherwise revealing clothing, or in excessively cutting, styling, and adorning their hair—is anything but fundamentalistic.

Ecclesiastical teaching on this matter is wise, moderate, and commendable. Nor can one justly argue that the practice of a woman covering her head during prayer is demeaning or primitive. It is a part of tradition, binds her, once more, to the liberating submissiveness that is freedom in Christ, and brings her to a state of greater glory, to expand on the words of St. Paul (1 Cor 11:15), than even *the hair which adorns her head*. In this submission, she is one with the Christian man, who in his quiet obedience to the Church also learns from and draws on her exemplary witness. There follow, then, a few representative Patristic and Canonical passages on the matter of modesty in Christian dress and grooming, only several from the very many others that could be cited.

In his twenty-sixth Homily on I Corinthians (*Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. LXI, Cols. 219-220), St. John Chrysostomos, citing St. Paul's declaration, [*I*]f a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering (I Cor 11:15), pointedly notes that this understanding is *not unknown even to Barbarians*. He further observes that it is a shame for a woman to have cut hair or a shaved head. With regard to controversy arising from St. Paul's prescription that women cover their heads in Church, he writes: "And if...[her hair]...be given her for a covering," say you, "wherefore need she add another covering?" That not only nature, but also her own will may take part in her acknowledgment of subjection. In short, the Divine Chrysostomos, one of the greatest of the Church Fathers, supports St. Paul's desire that a Christian woman should not cut and shave her hair, while pointing out that the obedience of covering her head in prayer is an act of subjection to God and the Church. He further warns that to ignore these things is to *subvert the very laws of nature* and demonstrates a spirit of *most insolent rashness*.

In his eighth Homily on I Timothy (see *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. LXII, Cols. 540-542), St. John Chrysostomos also speaks to us about St. Paul's admonition that *women dress and adorn themselves modestly, avoiding excessive jewelry, decoration, and flamboyant dress* (I Timothy 2:9). Paul, however, requires something more of women.

He requires that "they adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided [coiffured] hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works."

Elaborating on this passage, he asks: *But what is this "modest apparel?" Such attire as covers them wholly and properly, not with superfluous ornaments, for the one is appropriate, while the other is not.* He directs to women who ignore these guidelines some sternly sobering words: *Do you approach God to pray with styled hair and gold jewelry? Have you come to a dance, a marriage, or some fancy parade? There such styling and costly clothing may be acceptable, but here [in Church] none of this is desirable. You come here to pray [and] to beg for the forgiveness of your sins... This is not the dress of a suppliant... She who weeps should not be wearing gold. This is nothing but acting and hypocrisy... Put away such hypocrisy! God is not mocked! This is the garb of actors and dancers... Nothing of this kind is appropriate to a modest woman, who should be adorned "with shamefacedness and sobriety."*



On these subjects the canonical witness of the Church is also not silent. The Ninety-Sixth Canon of the Synod in Trullo [*Penthekte*] reads: *Those who are by baptism clothed in Christ have professed that they will imitate His way of life in the flesh. Those, therefore, who style and trim the hairs of their head, to the ruin of onlookers, with inventive intertwinings, and thereby provide enticement for unstable souls, we paternally proffer an appropriate penance, so as to cure them, instructing and teaching them to live prudently, setting aside the deceit and vanity of materialism, that they might ever give over their minds to a blessed life without havoc, being fearful in their pure intercourse, thus approaching God to the extent possible through their purity of life; embellishing the inner man instead of the outer, so that, adorned with virtues and sweet and blameless ways, there might not be in them the remains of the coarseness of the adversary. But if any should act in opposition to the present Canon, let him be kept from communing.* (See *Pedalion*, or *The Rudder*,

Thessaloniki: B. Regopoulos, 1982, p. 305).

Commenting in his "Interpretation" of this Canon, St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite punctuates the fact that it provides excommunication (suspension from Holy Communion for a period of time, as specified by one's Confessor) for *those Christians who style the hair of their head, and comb it and wave it, and flaunt it as enticement to those souls who are of weak faith and easily led astray,*

pointing out that this admonition falls on both men and women. He emphasizes that Christians must conduct themselves in an innocent and pure manner, avoiding all vanity and falseness, adorning the soul with virtue and eschewing the marks of the Devil that the stylish adorning of the body entails. (*Ibid.*, pp. 304-306.)

The Canons of the Church are not meant to violate our freedom in Christ or to form our faith by dead rules that fail to acknowledge both the good intentions of those who at times err and the exceptions to rules that lie within the realm of pastoral discretion. St. Nicodemos' comments, nevertheless, should serve as a reminder to all of us that the customs and traditions of the Church are not things with which we are free to trifle; nor, indeed, should personal opinion, mere convenience, or an abuse of pastoral condescension lead us into a way of life that serves as a source of scandal to others and to violations of the standard of sobriety to which all Christians are called.

It goes without saying, of course, that, in upholding the traditional grooming customs and dress codes of the Church,

we should never judge or condemn anyone among the faithful who deviates from them. We should approach them with care and evaluate each individual by the quality of his or her Christian life. As for individuals who openly defy the customs and traditions in question out of tenacity, making *excuses in sins* (Pss 140, *Septuaginta*), and who refuse at the very least to acknowledge their weakness, let the Church leaders settle the matter. The faithful should not make such things a matter of rigid rules and division, lest they, too, become a source of scandal and act in a truly sectarian manner, rightly earning the condemnation improperly attributed to us traditionalists by overt innovators who would like to dismiss all that is difficult in the Faith as fundamentalistic.

† † †

(*) With regard to “cross-dressing,” or dress styles which downplay the distinction between men and women, the Old Testamental witness is worthy of mention here: *The apparel of a man shall not be on a woman, neither shall a man put on a woman’s dress; for every one that does these things is an abomination to the Lord thy God.* (Deut 22:5). This very proscription is also contained in the Canons of the Church; see Canon XIII of the Council of Gangra (340) and Canon LXII of the Sixth Œcumenical Synod (*Pedalion, op. cit.*, pp. 401, 275, respectively).



It is more to your advantage that, through means of movement of your thoughts and memory of the Divine, you raise your soul, deadened by sin, than it is to raise the dead. From history, we see that many have performed astonishing miracles—have raised the dead and have labored to return those who are erring to the straight path and the true Faith. They worked great miracles and, by their efforts, led many to knowledge of God. Later, however, those who gave life to others, fell into base passions and put themselves to death; and scandalized many when (from their daily behavior) their actions became known.”

This happened because they took no care for the health of their own souls, which were sick, but instead cast themselves into the sea of the world in order to heal the souls of others, while they themselves were still ailing. And they were lost, since they did not have—in their own souls—strong hope in God, in the aforementioned way. Their senses were still infirm and vulnerable, and, as such, they did not have the strength to deal with the flame of all those things that are wont to incite the passions, which are bridled with difficulty; nor were they able to bear the temptations (brought about by the passions).

Abba Isaac (from the Evergetinos)

ON THE FAIR VERDICT OF THE RIGHTEOUS JUDGE

From the Gerontikon.



The Blessed Archbishop Theophilus said: Indeed what fear and terror and what need the soul experiences when it departs from the body or, afterwards, when it has been completely separated from it. For then all of the principalities and powers

of darkness come upon it and make manifest all of the sins which it has committed, whether in knowledge or ignorance, from the time of a man’s birth until his last hours, when the soul is separated from the body. These powers brazenly draw near it and furiously accuse it.

Confronting these hostile powers of darkness are the holy powers, Angels, putting forth and calling attention to the good deeds that the departed soul occasioned to perform.

Think what agony and terror the soul will experience when it stands before such a tribunal and faces such a fearful and impartial judgment.

It is impossible for anyone to express in words or to conceive in his mind the fear that overtakes the soul up to the moment that the decision of the Judge is given and it is released from those who hold it. That moment precisely is the moment of the soul’s greatest torment, until it hears the verdict of the Righteous Judge.

If, then, by the verdict of the Righteous Judge, the soul is given its freedom, immediately the enemies scatter and the bright Angels seize the soul from them and, with no more obstructions, it is led by the Angels to that inexpressible joy and glory in which it will finally be restored.

If, however, the soul lived in carelessness, and is thus found unworthy of being freed, then it shall hear that most dreadful voice: *Let the ungodly be taken away, that he see not the glory of the Lord.* (Isa 26:10).

Henceforth begins for that soul the day of wrath, sorrow, and unceasing grief; it is given over to the outer darkness, hurled into Hell, and condemned to the eternal fire, in which it will remain damned unto the unfading ages.

What then do the luxuries and fanfare of this world benefit the soul? Where are the vainglory and the delights and the enjoyments of this vain and fleeting world? Where is the money? Of what benefit a high birth? Where are your father, mother, brothers and sisters, and friends?

What from all of this can free your wretched soul, as it is burned by the fire of Hell and tormented by indescribable punishment?

WILL THE HETERODOX BE SAVED?

By St. Philaret the New Confessor (+1985). This article originally published in "Orthodox Heritage," vol. 02, No. 10. It is being re-published due to the repeat questions that arise on the subject.



Question: If the Orthodox faith is the only true faith, can Christians of other confessions be saved? May a person who has led a perfectly righteous life on earth be saved on the strength of his ancestry, while not being baptized as Christian?

† † †

AnsWER: For he saith to AMoses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him

that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. (Rom 9:15-16). In the Orthodox Church we have the path of salvation indicated to us and we are given the means by which a person may be morally purified and have a direct promise of salvation.

In this sense St. Cyprian of Carthage says that outside the Church there is no salvation. In the Church is given that of which Apostle Peter writes to Christians (and only Christians): According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue. Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Pet 1:3-8).

And what should one say of those outside the Church, who do not belong to her? Another apostle provides us with an idea: For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. (1 Cor 5:12-13). God "will have mercy on whom He will have mercy" (Rom 9:18). It is necessary to mention only one thing: that to "lead a perfectly righteous life," as the questioner expressed it, means to live

according to the commandments of the Beatitudes—which is beyond the power of one outside the Orthodox Church without the help of grace which is concealed within it.

The question of whether the heterodox, i.e., those who do not belong to Orthodoxy—the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church—can be saved, has become particularly painful and acute in our days. In attempting to answer this question, it is necessary, first of all, to recall that in His Gospel the Lord Jesus Christ Himself mentions but one state of the human soul which unfailingly leads to perdition—i.e., blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mt 12:1-32). The Holy Spirit is, above all, the Spirit of Truth, as the Saviour loved to refer to Him. Accordingly, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is blasphemy against the Truth, conscious and persistent opposition to it. The same text makes it clear that even blasphemy against the Son of Man—i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God Himself, may be forgiven, as it may be uttered in error or in ignorance and, subsequently may be covered by conversion and repentance (an example of such a converted and repentant blasphemer is the Apostle Paul—see Acts 26:11 and 1 Tim 1:13.) If, however, a man opposes the Truth which he clearly apprehends by his reason and conscience, he becomes blind and commits spiritual suicide, for he thereby likens himself to the devil, who believes in God and dreads Him, yet hates, blasphemes, and opposes Him.

Thus, man's refusal to accept the Divine Truth and his opposition thereto make him a son of damnation. Accordingly, in sending His disciples to preach, the Lord told them: He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. (Mk 16:16), for the latter heard the Lord's Truth and was called upon to accept it, yet refused, thereby inheriting the damnation of those who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thes 2:12). The Holy Orthodox Church is the repository of the divinely revealed Truth in all its fullness and fidelity to apostolic Tradition. Hence, he who leaves the Church, who intentionally and consciously falls away from it, joins the ranks of its opponents and becomes a renegade apostolic Tradition. The Church dreadfully anathematized such renegades, in accordance with the words of the Saviour Himself (Mt 18:17—but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican) and of the Holy Apostle Paul (Gal 1:8-9—But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.). These words clearly threaten them with eternal damnation and calling them to return to the Orthodox fold.

It is self evident, however, that sincere Christians who are Roman Catholics, or Lutherans, or members of other

non-Orthodox confessions, cannot be termed renegades or heretics—i.e., those who knowingly pervert the truth...(*) They have been born and raised and are living according to the creed which they have inherited, just as do the majority of you who are Orthodox; in their lives there has not been a moment of personal and conscious renunciation of Orthodoxy. The Lord, Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4) and Who lighteth every man that cometh into the world (Jn 1:43), undoubtedly is leading them also towards salvation In His own way.

With reference to the above question, it is particularly instructive to recall the answer once given to an inquirer by the Blessed Theophan the Recluse. The blessed one replied more or less thus: You ask, will the heterodox be saved... Why do you worry about them? They have a Saviour Who desires the salvation of every human being. He will take care of them. You and I should not be burdened with such a concern. Study yourself and your own sins... I will tell you one thing, however: should you, being Orthodox and possessing the Truth in its fullness, betray Orthodoxy, and enter a different faith, you will lose your soul forever. We firmly believe the foregoing answer by the saintly ascetic to be the best that can be given in this matter.

† † †

(*) The Greek word for “heresy” is derived from the word for “choice” and hence inherently implies conscious, willful rejection or opposition to the Divine Truth manifest in the Orthodox Church.



True knowledge of God is noetic, not cerebral or speculative. This is where the difference lies between the scholasticism of the Papists and the Orthodox neptic tradition. According to scholasticism, the knowledge of God results from intellectual processes and conjecture [contemplation], whereas the Orthodox tradition, which has its roots in Divine revelation, has knowledge of God closely connected with experiencing God through the *theoria* of uncreated Light. As is well known, and according to the theology of the Church as expressed by St. Gregory Palamas, the vision of uncreated light is man's [true] communion with God, and such knowledge surpasses human knowledge and experience.

Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos

EVEN AFTER DEATH THE SOUL RETAINS ACTIVITY

By St. Maximos the Confessor (his letter to “John the Presbyter”).

I was comforted to read that you are in good health; since after God, you, my master, are the cause of every good thing [in my life]. So much has the Holy Spirit of God united Himself to you, that even when you are absent I behold you with my mind's eye alone. I order my life and my reason using what strength I possess, because when I remember you, it is as if I am seeing God before me, and I am filled with reverence.

I was not a little disturbed to learn that the [heretical] doctrine concerning the soul is shamelessly being preached in your parts with the same support and boldness as it is here. In fact, I am filled with grief, and a weight has settled on my mind like a cloud, because this novel doctrine about [the state of the soul after] the resurrection is being advocated by almost everyone here, in particular by the supposedly most distinguished monks. One would not be far off if he supposed that this was the first sign of the coming of the Antichrist. Indeed, anyone who is able to reason should affirm this to be the case, since he has as a witness to the great evil the absurdity of the things they say.

These people shamelessly sharpen their tongues against everything, and do not consider anything irreverently said or done to be terrible. Thus they claim that after the resurrection bodies will continue to subsist by means of phlegm, blood, yellow and black bile, breathing, and tangible food. They say that in the resurrection, nothing will be different from this present life, except that no one will die again.

I do not know how they can stop their ears and close the eyes of their souls so as not to understand everything written in Holy Scripture about the soul and the resurrection through the prophets and apostles, through the Word of God Himself speaking in the flesh, and especially through the divine Paul when he expounds on the resurrection to the Corinthians. These passages are crystal-clear and very well known. They do not require an exegete. Moreover the nature of reality itself, no less than the divine oracles, teaches about the resurrection and leads even barbarians to the knowledge of the truth. Nevertheless, [the heretics] feel no shame in ignoring these self-evident proofs.

Is there anyone who is not completely bereft of reason and yet does not know that every nature is essentially distinguished by its own characteristics? For the characteristics show the mode of the nature's own existence, as well as the difference which separates it from other natures. When a nature loses the component characteristics of its essence, it either ceases to exist or becomes what it was not, assuming one could stand to speak about removing natural characteristics at all. For every subject is dissolved when its natural characteristics are dissolved.

WE ARE NOT IDOLATERS

By Dr. Alexander Kalomiros, "The Six Dawns."



We Orthodox Christians know that according to our nature we are nothing, a zero that God brought into being from non-being. And rather than let it fall into nonexistence again from whence it came, He elevated it and made it the throne of God and more honorable than Cherubim and more glorious than the Seraphim. The glory we acquired is God's, not our own. We are Orthodox

Christians, we are not idolaters!

It was idolatry that made creation into a god. Ignorance about the Creator caused men to make a god of creation and to assign to it the properties of God. They thought creation was everlasting and beginningless, incorruptible and immortal. They explained the corruptibility and death they saw before them daily as localized phenomena in nature's cyclical changes that had no universal effect on it. They proclaimed the incorruptibility and immortality of matter and the divinity of the universal soul, of which each human soul is a part.

Because they were ignorant of God, they said man is god and so is his soul in particular, which is the quintessential man. They gave to man's soul divine properties: beginningless existence and immortality. They said death is nothing but a change of bodies along the way of the soul from one transmigration to another. The soul, in the final analysis, is a personless fragment of the universal soul in an ocean of such emanations of souls. They are swept up in a stream that is ever flowing in an eternal and endless cycle.

Idolatry is a faith of pridefulness, a seed of Lucifer in the minds of people who do not know God. Idolatry can have many forms and variations of the basic teaching, but at its core it always has creation as its god, that is, man as god, since he is the head of creation; we humans are by our nature gods since our soul is divine and immortal. Therefore what need do we have of God? What need do we have of the resurrection He gave us?

"We shall hear you on this again," they said politely to the Apostle Paul when he preached on the resurrection of the dead to the deeply pagan city of Athens. "What are you telling us, Jew? The resurrection of the dead? What use is it to us? We are gods. We may change bodies, we may lose our memory, but our immortal soul enters into another

body and our immortal existence is perpetuated. And if we are perfect, we remain in the Elysian fields as spirits liberated from the body's burdensome matter that we had been entangled in because of some carelessness. Why are you speaking to us about the resurrection of the dead? We can do without your Jewish teachings. Don't you understand you are in Greece, the land of the spirit, of knowledge and wisdom? Don't you realize you are speaking to intelligent and cultivated people?"

That is how idolaters speak and think. They believe in an immortal, that is divine, soul and in incorruptible and eternal matter. They believe in the divinity of the universe. Their gods are merely shapers of eternal, beginningless, uncreated matter.

But we Christians know the Maker and Creator of all things. We know Him Who brought all things into existence from nonexistence, from nothing. We know that He alone is the "One Who Is" (Ex. 3:14). He alone is true being, and anything that exists receives its existence from Him, from His love. We know that He alone is immortal by His own nature, while all creatures, even the most perfect angelic powers, came into being from nonexistence. Properly, by their own nature, they should return again to nonexistence, but the grace of God, out of love alone, eternally sustains their existence and being.



For the method of godliness consists of these two things, pious doctrines, and virtuous practice: and neither are the doctrines acceptable to God apart from good works, nor does God accept the works which are not perfected with pious doctrines. For what profit is it, to know well the doctrines concerning God, and yet to be a vile fornicator? And again, what profit is it, to be nobly temperate, and an impious blasphemer?

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (+386)



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.

Ὡς Πότε θὰ «Ἀνήκομεν» εἰς τὴν Διεφθαρμένη Πόρνη «Δύσιν»;

Γράφει ὁ Δημήτριος Νατσιός, Δάσκαλος.

«Τὸ χαράτσι, τὰ παιδιὰ
μοναχὸς νὰ κρίνεις
ἄλλο νὰ στὰ παίρνουνε
κι ἄλλο νὰ τὰ δίνεις»

[Κώστας Βάρναλης, 1884-1974, Ἑλλην λογοτέχνης]

† † †

Γύρω στὸ 970μ.Χ., ἓνα παπικὸ κάθαρμα, ὀνόματι Λιουιπράνδος, «ἐπίσκοπος» Κρεμόνας, ἀποστέλλεται στὴν Πόλη ἀπὸ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Ὁθωνα Α΄ τῆς Γερμανίας. Εἶναι ἡ δευτέρα ἀποστολή του. Εἴκοσι χρόνια πρὶν, τὸ 949, ἐγκωμιάζε μὲ ἐνθουσιώδεις μεγαλοστομίες τοὺς Βυζαντινοὺς. «Ξεπερνοῦν ὅλα τα ἔθνη σὲ πλοῦτο καὶ παιδεία», ἔγραφε τότε. Τὴν δευτέρα φορὰ, εὐρισκόμενος προφανῶς σὲ διατεταγμένη ὑπηρεσία ἐνίσχυσης τῆς παπικῆς προπαγάνδας καὶ διασυρμοῦ τῆς Ῥωμανίας (τοῦ Βυζαντίου) στὴ Δύση, γράφει μὲ πρωτοφανῆ μίσος κατὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων. Διβελλογραφεῖ, χυδαιολογεῖ, συκοφαντεῖ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Νικηφόρο Φωκά, ἐπιδίδεται σὲ ἀπύλωτο ὕβρεολόγιο. («Μοχθηρὸν καὶ κακόβουλον» τὸν χαρακτηρίζει ὁ Παπαρηγόπουλος, στὸν Ε΄ τόμο τῆς ἱστορίας του, σελ. 118-134). Ζήτησε, τὴν θυγατέρα τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα Ῥωμανοῦ καὶ τῆς Θεοφανοῦς νὰ δοθεῖ σύζυγος στὸ γιὸ τοῦ Ὁθωνα.

«Τί εἶναι αὐτὰ ποῦ λές» τοῦ ἀπαντᾷ ὁ αὐτοκράτορας. «Μία πορφυρογέννητη, κόρη πορφυρογέννητου, νὰ παντρευτεῖ βάρβαρο; Ποτέ!!!».

Σκύλιασε ὁ ἀρχεῖος. Στὸ τραπέζι ποὺ παρέθεσε ὁ Φωκάς τὸν ἔβαλε νὰ καθίσει στὴν ταπεινὴ 15^η θέση. Οἱ ὕβρεις καὶ οἱ γελοῖοι χλευασμοί, τοῦ κοπρόνου Φράγκου, κατὰ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορα, στίς ἐπιστολές του στὸν πάπα καὶ τὸν Ὁθωνα, καταλαμβάνουν ὀλόκληρες σελίδες. Τὸ κακὸ ὅμως ἔγινε. Τὰ πλούτη τῆς Πόλης ἔγιναν γνωστὰ καὶ θάμπωσαν τοὺς Φράγκους. Ἡ ἐξαθλιωμένη, βάρβαρη καὶ σὲ δημογραφικὴ ἔκρηξη τελοῦσα Εὐρώπη ἐπινοεῖ τὴν λύση: Σταυροφορίες, ἡ μεγαλύτερη ἀπάτη τῆς παγκόσμιας ἱστορίας, ἡ πρώτη ἀποικιοκρατικὴ ἐξόρμηση τῆς Δύσης. Κλέφτες, λωποδύτες, πειναλέες μάζες, ἄγρια θηρία—οἱ Σταυροφόροι—ξεχύνονται στὴν Ῥωμανία καὶ μὲ ἀποκορύφωμα τὸ 1204,

ληλατοῦν, βιάζουν, φονεύουν καὶ κακουροῦν κατὰ τῶν «σχισματικῶν» Ἑλλήνων.

Ὁ Παπαρηγόπουλος γράφει ὅτι μαζί μὲ τοὺς Φράγκους «συνέπραττον εἰς τὴν δῆωσιν καὶ τὴν ἀνηλεὴ καὶ κτηνώδη βιαιοπραγίαν Πισᾶται, Γεννουαῖοι, Σικελοί, Ἄπουλοι, Οὐγγροί, Ἴσπανοί, Γερμανοί», ὅλη ἡ σημερινὴ Εὐρωπαϊκὴ Ἑνωσι. Συγχρόνως, ὅσα ἀπ' αὐτὰ τὰ τρισάθλια ὑποκείμενα, τοὺς Σταυροφόρους, ἤξεραν πέντε γράμματα, ἔγραφαν καὶ τοὺς «ἄθλους» τους, κείμενα ἀπύθμενου μίσους κατὰ τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ. (Τὸ ὁποῖο καλλιεργοῦσε καὶ ὑποδαύλιζε—ποιὸς ἄλλος;—τὸ θηρίο τῆς Ῥώμης, ὁ πάπας).

Μεταξὺ τῶν ἐμετικῶν κειμένων, στὰ ὁποῖα ξεχειλίζει ὁ φθόνος, ἡ κακία καὶ ἡ παλιανθρωπιὰ τῶν συντακτῶν τους κατὰ τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ καί, κυρίως, κατὰ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Πίστεως, εἶναι καὶ κάποιου Γερμανοῦ «ιεραποστόλου» ὀνόματι Brocardus. Αὐτὸς ὑπέβαλε τὸ 1332 ὑπόμνημα—μνημόνιο στὸ Φίλιππο ΣΤ΄ τῆς Γαλλίας, στὸ ὁποῖο ἐξηγεῖ πῶς θὰ γίνε, ἡ τελειωτικὴ αὐτὴ τὴ φορὰ, διάλυση τῆς Ῥωμανίας (τοῦ Βυζαντίου) καὶ ὁ βίαιος ἐκλατινισμὸς τῶν Ἑλλήνων.

Ὁ ψευτοἱεραπόστολος προτείνει πέντε μέτρα, γιὰ νὰ παραμείνουν αἰώνια τα ἐδάφη τῆς Ῥωμηοσύνης στὴ Δύση καὶ γιὰ νὰ ὑποταχθοῦν ὀλοκληρωτικὰ οἱ Ἕλληνες. (Τὰ ἀποσπάσματα τὰ μετέφρασε ὁ Κυρ. Σιμόπουλος καὶ περιέχονται

στὸ βιβλίο του «Ξενοκρατία, Μισελληνισμὸς καὶ Ὑποτέλεια», σελ. 249-251).

Πρῶτον: Ἐγκαθάριση τοῦ «ἐσωτερικοῦ μετώπου». Ὅλοι οἱ Λατῖνοι ποὺ ἀπαρνήθηκαν τὴν «καθολικὴ πίστη» καὶ τὴν «ρωμαϊκὴ ἐκκλησία» μὲ λόγο ἢ ἔργο καὶ προσχώρησαν στὴ γραικικὴ ἀπιστία, θὰ καταγγέλονται ὡς αἰρετικοὶ καὶ ἢ θὰ θανατώνονται ἀπὸ τὴν ἱερὰ ἐξέταση ἢ θὰ ἐξορίζονται διὰ βίου.

Δεύτερον: Ὅλοι οἱ Ἕλληνες μοναχοί, οἱ ὀνομαζόμενοι καλόγεροι, θὰ ἐκδιωχθοῦν ἀπὸ τὰ κατακτημένα ἐδάφη καὶ θὰ διασκορπιστοῦν σὲ διάφορες χῶρες τῆς Δύσης, ἐκτὸς ἂν ἀποκηρύξουν δημόσια τὴν πλάνη τους καὶ δηλώσουν πίστη στὸν πάπα. Δοκάρι στὰ μάτια τῶν Δυτικῶν, καὶ τότε καὶ τώρα, ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος μοναχισμὸς.

Τρίτον: Γιὰ νὰ ἐπιστρέψουν ὅλοι οἱ «Γραικοί» (ἀπὸ τὸν λεγόμενο Καρλομάγνο καὶ ἐντεῦθεν ἔτσι μᾶς ὀνομάζουν περιφρονητικὰ οἱ Φράγκοι), στὴν «ὀρθὴ πίστη», στὸν καθολισμὸ, καὶ νὰ κοπεῖ ὀριστικὰ ὁ



δρομός ἐπιστροφῆς στὴ δογματικὴ πλάνη, πρέπει νὰ ξεχάσουν τὴν γλῶσσα τους. Νὰ μὴν μιλάνε καὶ νὰ μὴν καταλαβαίνουν Ἑλληνικά. (Γι' αὐτὸ ἀγωνιζόμαστε κατὰ τῶν γλωσσοκτόνων βιβλίων τάχα καὶ «Γλῶσσας τοῦ Δημοτικοῦ». Χωρὶς τὴν γλῶσσα, φραγεύουμε μέσα σὲ μία γενεά). Γιὰ τὴν ριζικὴ αὐτὴ λύση, συνεχίζει ὁ Γερμανός, θὰ ἀπαγορευτεῖ ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα καὶ θὰ ἐπιβληθεῖ ἡ διδασκαλία ἀποκλειστικὰ τῶν λατινικῶν (σ.σ. σήμερα τῶν ἀγγλικῶν). «Τὰ παιδιὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων πρέπει νὰ μαθαίνουν μόνο τὴν δική μας γλῶσσα, ὥστε νὰ διαβάζουν τὰ δικὰ μας μόνο βιβλία, νὰ μαθαίνουν τὶς πλάνες τους καὶ νὰ ἐνστερνίζονται τὴν ἀγία μας πίστη καὶ τὸ σωστὸ δόγμα».

Τέταρτον: Ὅλα τα βιβλία ποὺ ὑπερασπίζονται τὸ ἀνατολικὸ Ὁρθόδοξο Χριστιανικὸ δόγμα, πρέπει νὰ καοῦν. (Ὁ ἀπόγονός του, ὁ Ἀδόλφος, υἱοθέτησε τὴν συμβουλή του). Οἱ Ἕλληνες ἔχουν βιβλία σύγχρονα καὶ παλαιότερα, ποὺ περιέχουν πλάνες σχετικὰ μὲ τὴ «Ρωμαϊκὴ Ἐκκλησία» καὶ πολλὲς βλασφημίες εἰς βάρος τῶν τέκνων της. Ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ βιβλία θὰ ἀναζητηθοῦν μὲ ζήλο καὶ ἐπιμονὴ ἀπὸ εἰδικευμένα γι' αὐτὸ τὸ ἔργο ἄτομα, θὰ συγκεντρωθοῦν καὶ θὰ ριχτοῦν στὴν πυρὰ. Γιὰ τὴν συλλογὴ τους θὰ χρησιμοποιηθοῦν ὅλα τὰ μέσα, ἀπὸ τὴν τρομοκρατία ὡς τὸν ἀφορισμό.

Πέμπτον: Εἰδικὰ στὴν Κωνσταντινούπολη, θὰ συγκεντρωθεῖ βιαίως, στὴν Ἁγία Σοφία, ὁλόκληρος ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος κλήρος καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν λαὸ ἓνα τουλάχιστον ἄτομο ἀπὸ κάθε οἰκογένεια. «Καὶ μετὰ τὸ κήρυγμα θὰ κληθοῦν ὅλοι νὰ δηλώσουν διὰ βοῆς ὅτι προσχωροῦν στὸ δικό μας δόγμα, ὅτι συμφωνοῦν γιὰ τὴν ἔνωση τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν, καὶ ὅτι ὑποτάσσονται στὴ ρωμαϊκὴ ἐκκλησία καὶ τὸν πατέρα μας, τὸν πάπα...».

Ἄς τὰ διαβάζουν αὐτὰ οἱ ἡμῶν τῆς προοδομανίας, οἱ δωδεκαθεῖστες καὶ λοιποὶ ἐκκλησιομάχοι. Ἄς βλέπουν τὴν κατάντια τῶν Οὐκρανῶν, ποὺ ἐκλιπαροῦν τοὺς Φράγκους, καὶ τὴν ἀγερωχία καὶ λεβεντιά τῶν Ὁρθοδόξων Ρώσων. Ἡ Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ὄχι μόνο ἡ ἐλπίδα μας γιὰ ἀνάσταση τοῦ Γένους, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ ἀπαράθραυστος ἀσπίδα μας. Ἄν ὑποτασσομεθα τότε στὴν «λατινικὴν καλύπτραν»—πράγμα ποὺ καὶ σήμερα ἐπιχειρεῖται μὲ τὴν παναίρεση τοῦ Οἰκουμενισμοῦ καὶ μὲ τοὺς ἡμέτερους μεταπατερικοὺς λακέδες ποὺ τὸν δορυφοροῦν—τὸ ὄνομα τῶν Ἑλλήνων θὰ ἦταν καταχωνιασμένο στὰ σκονισμένα ράφια τῶν βιβλιοθηκῶν.

Ὁ Γερμανὸς «ἰεραπόστολος» εἶναι ὁ πρῶτος στὴν παγκόσμια ἱστορία, ποὺ εἰσηγεῖται συστηματικὴ, καὶ «ἐπιστημονικὴ» Γενοκτονία. Εἶναι ὁ πρῶτος ποὺ σχεδιάζει πνευματικὴ ἐκμηδένιση, ἐθνικὸ καὶ φυλετικὸ ἀφανισμό. Τὸ σχέδιο του ἐφαρμόσθηκε στὴν ἀμερικανικὴ ἡπειρο, στὴ νότια μέσω τῶν Ἰσπανῶν «κονκισταδόρων» (=κατακτητῶν) καὶ στὸν βορρᾶν μὲ τοὺς τυχοδιῶκτες κάου-μπόου.

Ἡ σφαγὴ καὶ ἡ πολιτιστικὴ καταστροφὴ τῶν ἰθαγενῶν της Ἀμερικῆς εἶναι ἓνα γεγονός ποὺ ἀποσιωπᾶται ἐπιμελῶς. Οἱ Ἰσπανοὶ καταχωνιάζουν τὰ ἐγκλήματά τους. Πέραν τῶν σφαγῶν, κατέφευγαν καὶ στὶς προγραμματισμένες διασταυρώσεις μὲ συστηματικὸ βιασμό τῶν ἰθαγενῶν γυναικῶν γιὰ τὴ δημιουργία μιᾶς φυλῆς μιγάδων, ποὺ ἐξαιτίας τῶν βιολογικῶν καὶ ἀνθρωπομορφικῶν της χαρακτηριστικῶν, ξέκοβε ἀπὸ τὶς ἐθνολογικὲς τῆς ρίζες καὶ δεχόταν τὴν ἐπιρροὴ τοῦ ξένου δυνάστη.

Οἱ ἐξ Εὐρώπης Ἀμερικανοί, ὄχι μόνο δὲν ἔνιωσαν τύψεις γιὰ τὴν Γενοκτονία, ἀλλὰ τὴν μεταμόρφωσαν σὲ πολιτιστικὸ κεφάλαιο, ἐντάσσοντάς τὴν στὶς ἡρωικὲς περιόδους τῆς ἱστορίας τῶν ΗΠΑ, ὅπως ἐκφράζεται στὰ γουέστερν. Τὰ ἴδια ἔκαναν οἱ Γάλλοι στὴν Ἀλγερία, οἱ Ἄγγλοι στὶς ἀποικίες τους ἀνὰ τὸν κόσμον, οἱ Ὀλλανδοί, Βέλγοι, Γερμανοὶ καὶ λοιποὶ «ἐταῖροι» μας στὴν Ἀφρική, ὁ Χίτλερ στὴν Ρωσία, στὴν Ἑλλάδα καὶ στὶς χώρες τῶν μὴ Ἀρείων ποὺ κατακτοῦσε. Τὰ ἴδια κάνουν καὶ πάλι μὲ τὰ μνημόνια στὴν πατρίδα μας, χρησιμοποιώντας βεβαίως τοὺς χρήσιμους «Κουίσλικ».

Τὸ ἐρώτημα ποὺ γεννιέται εἶναι: Τί δουλειὰ ἔχουμε ἐμεῖς οἱ Ἕλληνες στὴν Φραγκογερμανικὴ Ἐνωση; Γιατί παραμένουμε σ' αὐτὴν τὴν φειδοφωλιά; Ὡς πότε «θα ἀνήκομεν», δηλαδή θα σκύβουμε ταπεινωμένοι καὶ κατασυκοφαντημένοι τὸ κεφάλι, στὴν διεφθαρμένη πόρνη, «τὴν Δύσιν»;



Νὰ παρακαλᾶς τὸ Θεὸ νὰ συγχωρήσει τὶς ἁμαρτίες σου. Κι ὁ Θεός, ἐπειδὴ θὰ τὸν παρακαλᾶς πονεμένος καὶ ταπεινωμένος, θὰ σοῦ συγχωρήσει τὶς ἁμαρτίες σου καὶ θὰ σὲ κάνει καλὰ καὶ στὸ σῶμα. Ὅταν προσεύχεσαι, νὰ ξεχνᾶς τὴν σωματικὴ σου ἀρρώστια, νὰ τὴν ἀποδέχεσαι σὰν κανόνα, σὰν ἐπιτίμιο, γιὰ τὴν ἄφεση τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν σου. Γιὰ τὰ παραπέρα μὴν ἀνησυχεῖς, ἄφησέ τα στὸ Θεὸ κι ὁ Θεὸς ξέρει τὴ δουλειὰ Του. Οἱ ἀσθένειες μᾶς βγάζουν σὲ καλὸ, ὅταν τὶς ὑπομένομε ἀγόγγυστα, παρακαλώντας τὸ Θεὸ νὰ μᾶς συγχωρήσει τὶς ἁμαρτίες καὶ δοξάζοντας τὸ ὄνομά Του.

Ἡ μεγάλη λύπη καὶ ἡ στενοχώρια δὲν εἶναι ἀπὸ τὸ Θεό, εἶναι παγίδα τοῦ διαβόλου. Νὰ γεμίσεις τὴν ψυχὴ σου μὲ Χριστό, μὲ θεῖο ἔρωτα, μὲ χαρὰ. Ἡ χαρὰ τοῦ Χριστοῦ θὰ σὲ γιαιτρέψει. Ὁ Θεὸς φροντίζει ἀκόμη καὶ γιὰ τὶς πιδὸ μικρὲς λεπτομέρειες τῆς ζωῆς μας. Δὲν ἀδιαφορεῖ γιὰ μᾶς, δὲν εἴμαστε μόνοι στὸν κόσμο. Ὁ Θεὸς μᾶς ἀγαπάει πολὺ, μᾶς ἔχει στὸ νοῦ Του κάθε στιγμὴ καὶ μᾶς προστατεύει. Πρέπει νὰ τὸ καταλάβουμε αὐτὸ καὶ νὰ μὴ φοβούμεστε τίποτε.

Ἅγιος Πορφύριος ὁ Κανσοκαλυβίτης (+1991)

Ὁ Ἅγιος Παΐσιος ὑπὲρ τοῦ Γένους καὶ τῆς Πατρίδος

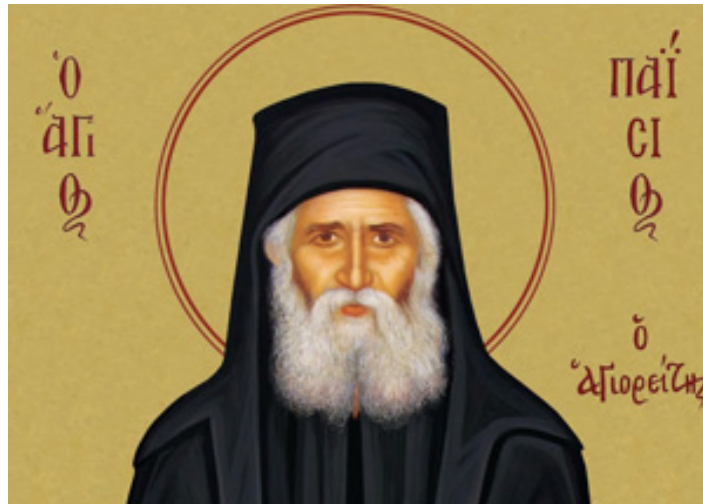
Κωνσταντῖνος Χολέβας, Πολιτικός Ἐπιστήμων, ἀπὸ τὸ βιβλίο του «Ἡ Ἑλληνορθόδοξη Πρόταση».

Τέτοια κληρονομιά ποὺ μᾶς ἔχει ἀφήσει ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν ἔχουμε δικαίωμα νὰ τὴν ἐξαφανίσουμε στὶς ἡμέρες μας.

† † †

Στις 13.1.2015 τὸ Οἰκουμενικὸν Πατριαρχεῖον ἀνέγραψε στὸ Ἁγιολόγιο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας τὸν Γέροντα Παΐσιο τὸν Ἁγιορείτη. Πιστεύω ὅτι ἡ ἀγιασμένη αὐτὴ μορφή με ὅσα ἔλεγε καὶ ὅσα ἔγραφε μπορεῖ νὰ βοηθήσει κάθε πιστὸ νὰ βρεῖ ἀπαντήσεις στὰ ἐρωτήματα: Ποιὰ ἡ στάση τοῦ Χριστιανοῦ ἀπέναντι στὴν Πατρίδα καὶ στὸν πατριωτισμό; Πρέπει ἐμεῖς οἱ Χριστιανοὶ Ὀρθόδοξοι νὰ ἀσχολούμαστε με τὰ Ἐθνικὰ Θέματα;

Ὁ Ἅγιος Παΐσιος συνήθιζε νὰ λέγει: **Καὶ ἡ Πατρίδα εἶναι μιὰ μεγάλη οἰκογένεια.** Ἐπανελάμβανε με τὰ δικά του λόγια τὴ σοφία τῶν Πατέρων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας. Θυμίζω ὅτι ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος στὴν 37^η Ἐπιστολή του ἔγραφε: **Μητέρα τιμῶν ὁσίων. Μήτηρ δὲ ἄλλη μὲν ἄλλου. Κοινὴ δὲ πάντων Πατρὶς.** Ἡ



Πατρίδα εἶναι ἡ κοινὴ μητέρα ὅλων μας γράφει ὁ Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος, ἄρα τὴν ἀγαποῦμε ὅπως τὴν μητέρα μας, ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ δὲν σημαίνει ὅτι μισοῦμε τὶς μητέρες τῶν ἄλλων. Ἔτσι καὶ ὁ Ἅγιος Παΐσιος τόνιζε ὅτι ἀγαποῦμε τὴν Πατρίδα, ὅπως ἀγαποῦμε καὶ τὴν οἰκογένειά μας. Θὰ κάνουμε ὅ,τι μποροῦμε γιὰ νὰ τὴν βοηθήσουμε καὶ σὲ δύσκολες καὶ σὲ εὐχάριστες στιγμές. Ὅλοι οἱ Ἅγιοι τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας καταφάσκουν τὸν ὑγιὴ πατριωτισμό, ἀλλὰ ἀπορρίπτουν τὸν ρατσισμό, τὸν ἐθνοφυλετισμό, τὴν ἐθνικὴ ἀλαζονεία.

Ἰδιαίτερη εὐαισθησία εἶχε ὁ Ἅγιος στὸ Μακεδονικὸ ζήτημα. Χάρηκε πολὺ ὅταν διάβασε τὸ βιβλίο τοῦ ἀεμινήστου Νικολάου Μάρτη γιὰ τὴν Ἑλληνικότητα τῆς Μακεδονίας καὶ ἔστειλε ἐπαινετικὸ ποιηματάκι στὸν συγγραφέα. Ἐπίσης, γιὰ νὰ δηλώσει τὴ σημασία ποὺ ἔδινε στὸ ζήτημα, εἶχε ἀναρτήσει στὸ κελλὶ του τὴν προφητεία τοῦ Δανιὴλ ἀπὸ τὴν Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη, ἡ ὁποία ἀναφέρει τὸν Μέγα Ἀλέξανδρο ὡς Βασιλέα τῶν Ἑλλήνων.

Γιὰ τὸ κράτος τῶν Σκοπίων προέβλεψε ὅτι θὰ διαλυθεῖ. Ἔλεγε ὅτι τὸ κράτος αὐτὸ εἶναι κτισμένο ἀπὸ

φαρσαλινούς χαλβᾶδες σὲ σχῆμα τούβλου καὶ ἀργὰ ἢ γρήγορα θὰ καταρρεύσει. Οἱ διπλωματικές ἐξελίξεις μέχρι σήμερα δικαιώνουν τὴν προφητεία του. Ἐπτὰ χρόνια μετὰ τὴν ὀσιακὴ κοίμησή του (12.7.1994) καὶ συγκεκριμένα τὸ 2001 ξέσπασε αἱματηρὴ σύγκρουση μεταξὺ τῶν Ἀλβανῶν, ποὺ ἀποτελοῦν τὸ 30% τοῦ κράτους τῶν ψευδομακεδόνων, καὶ τοῦ σλαβικοῦ πληθυσμοῦ. Ἡ ἐκεχειρία, ἡ ὁποία συνήφθη, εἶναι εὐθραυστη καὶ οἱ Ἀλβανοὶ πολιτικοὶ τῶν Σκοπίων δηλώνουν σαφῶς ὅτι ἀποτελοῦν κράτος ἐν κράτει καὶ ὅτι ὄνειρό τους εἶναι νὰ ἐνώσουν τὶς δυτικές ἐπαρχίες τοῦ κρατιδίου με τὸ Κοσσυφοπέδιο-Κόσσοβο γιὰ τὴ δημιουργία τῆς Μεγάλης Ἀλβανίας. Ἦδη πολλοὶ διεθνολόγοι παραδέχονται ὅτι τὸ κράτος τῶν Σκοπίων θὰ διαλυθεῖ μεταξὺ Βουλγάρων, Ἀλβανῶν καὶ Σέρβων. Κάτι ἤξερε, λοιπόν, ὁ Ἅγιος Παΐσιος! Φυσικὰ κατανοοῦμε ὅτι δὲν πρέπει νὰ παραδώσουμε τὸ ὄνομα καὶ τὴν κληρονομιά τῆς Μακεδονίας μας σὲ ἓνα θνησιγενὲς μόρφωμα, τὸ ὁποῖο σὲ λίγα χρόνια θὰ διαλυθεῖ!

Οἱ προφητείες του εἶναι πολλές, ἀλλὰ προτιμῶ νὰ μὴν τὶς σχολιάσω καὶ νὰ μὴν προβῶ σὲ ἐρμηνεία. Ὅταν μιλοῦν γιὰ μελλοντικὰ γεγονότα ἀγιασμένοι ἄνθρωποι, τότε μόνον οἱ ἄνθρωποι με ἀγιότητα καὶ πνεῦμα Θεοῦ μποροῦν νὰ τοὺς

ἐρμηνεύσουν σωστά. Ὁ Γέρον Παΐσιος εἶπε πολλὰ καὶ ἐνδιαφέροντα γιὰ τὸ μέλλον τῆς Τουρκίας. Ἀλλὰ ἄς ἀφήσουμε τὸν Θεὸ νὰ δώσει τὶς ἀπαντήσεις. Ὅσοι παραπέμπουν στὸν Ἅγιο γιὰ νὰ ἐρμηνεύσουν θέματα τῆς καθημερινότητος καὶ τῆς διεθνοῦς ἐπικαιρότητος, ἂν καὶ τὸ κάνουν καλοπροαίρετα, φοβοῦμαι ὅτι δὲν ὠφελοῦν τὸν λαὸν μας πνευματικά.

Ἀπὸ τοὺς λόγους του, τοὺς ὁποίους κατέγραψαν οἱ μοναχὲς στὴ Σουρωτὴ, στὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Ἁγίου Ἰωάννου τοῦ Θεολόγου καὶ Ἁγίου Ἀρσενίου τοῦ Καππαδόκου ὅπου εἶναι θαμμένος ὁ Ἅγιος, παραθέτω μερικὲς χαρακτηριστικὲς σκέψεις του γιὰ τὴν Ἑλλάδα καὶ τὴν εὐθύνη ποὺ ἔχουμε ὡς Ἕλληνες:

• **Τέτοια κληρονομιά ποὺ μᾶς ἔχει ἀφήσει ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν ἔχουμε δικαίωμα νὰ τὴν ἐξαφανίσουμε στὶς ἡμέρες μας.** Θὰ δώσουμε λόγο στὸν Θεό. Ἐμεῖς, τὸ μικρὸ αὐτὸ ἔθνος, πιστέψαμε στὸν Μεσσία, μᾶς δόθηκε ἡ εὐλογία νὰ διαφωτίσουμε ὅλον τὸν κόσμον. Ἡ Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη μεταφράσθηκε στὴν Ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα ἑκατὸ χρόνια πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν

έλευση τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Οἱ πρῶτοι Χριστιανοὶ τὴν τράβηξαν! Κινδύνευε συνέχεια ἡ ζωὴ τους. Τώρα τὴν ἀδιαφορία ὑπάρχει!... Ἐνῶ ἀνώδυνα σήμερα, χωρὶς νὰ κινδυνεύῃ ἡ ζωὴ μας, μπορούμε νὰ διαφωτίσουμε τὰ ἔθνη, νὰ γινόμαστε πιδ ἀδιάφοροι; Ἄν σήμερα ἔχουμε λιγάκι εἰρήνη, ξέρεις τὴν ἔχουν τραβήξει οἱ παλιοί; Ξέρεις πόσοι θυσιάστηκαν; Τώρα τίποτε δὲν θὰ εἶχαμε ἂν δὲν θυσιάζονταν ἐκεῖνοι. Καὶ κάνω μία σύγκριση: Πῶς τότε, ἐνῶ κινδύνευε ἡ ζωὴ τους, κρατοῦσαν τὴν πίστη τους, καὶ πῶς τώρα, χωρὶς καμμία πίεση, ὅλα τὰ ἰσοπεδώνουν!

• Ὅσοι δὲν ἔχουν χάσει τὴν ἐθνικὴν τους ἐλευθερίαν, δὲν καταλαβαίνουν. Τοὺς λέω: «Ὁ Θεὸς νὰ φυλάξῃ νὰ μὴν ἔρθουν οἱ βάρβαροι καὶ μᾶς ἀτιμάσουν!» Καὶ μοῦ λένε: «Καὶ τὴν θὰ πάθουμε;». Ἀκοῦς κουβέντα; Ἄντε νὰ λείψετε, χαμένοι ἄνθρωποι! Τέτοιοι εἶναι οἱ ἄνθρωποι σήμερα. Δῶσε τους χρήματα, αὐτοκίνητα, καὶ δὲν νοιάζονται οὔτε γιὰ τὴν πίστη οὔτε γιὰ τὴν τιμὴ οὔτε γιὰ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν.

• Τὴν Ὀρθοδοξίαν μας σάν Ἕλληνες τὴν ὀφείλουμε στὸν Χριστὸ καὶ τοὺς Ἁγίους Μάρτυρες καὶ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας. Καὶ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν μας τὴν ὀφείλουμε στοὺς ἥρωες τῆς Πατρίδας μας, ποὺ ἔχυσαν τὸ αἷμα τους γιὰ μᾶς. Αὐτὴν τὴν ἀγία κληρονομίαν ὀφείλουμε νὰ τὴν τιμήσουμε καὶ νὰ τὴν διατηρήσουμε καὶ ὄχι νὰ τὴν ἐξαφανίσουμε στὶς ἡμέρες μας. Εἶναι κρῖμα νὰ χαθῇ ἓνα τέτοιο ἔθνος! Καὶ βλέπουμε τώρα, ὅπως πρὶν ἀρχίσει ἓνας πόλεμος στέλνουν ἀτομικὲς προσκλήσεις, ἔτσι καὶ ὁ Θεὸς μὲ ἀτομικὲς προσκλήσεις μαζεύει ἄνθρώπους, γιὰ νὰ κρατηθῇ κάτι καὶ νὰ σωθῇ τὸ πλάσμα Του. Δὲν θὰ ἀφήσῃ ὁ Θεός, ἀλλὰ πρέπει καὶ ἐμεῖς νὰ κάνουμε ὅ,τι μπορούμε ἀνθρωπίνως καὶ γιὰ ὅ,τι δὲν μπορούμε νὰ κάνουμε ἀνθρωπίνως, νὰ κάνουμε προσευχὴ νὰ βοηθήσῃ ὁ Θεός.

Βεβαίως ὁ Γέρον Παισίος δίδασκε μὲ ἔμφαση ὅτι πρώτη προτεραιότητα πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ἡ πνευματικὴ μας προετοιμασία καὶ ἔτσι θὰ ἔχουμε μεγαλύτερη δύναμη γιὰ νὰ ἀγωνισθοῦμε ὑπὲρ τῆς Πατρίδος καὶ τῶν ἐθνικῶν θεμάτων. Ἡ διδαχὴ του πάντως εἶναι μιὰ σαφὴς ἀπάντηση σὲ ὀρισμένους παραπλανημένους Χριστιανούς, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἐν ὀνόματι μιᾶς παρερμηνευμένης οἰκουμενικότητος ἀρνοῦνται ἢ διστάζουν νὰ ἀγωνισθοῦν γιὰ τὴν Πατρίδα καὶ τὰ ἐθνικὰ θέματα.

Στὴν Ὀρθόδοξη Παράδοσή μας ἡ σωστὴ Οἰκουμενικότητα ἐναρμονίζεται καὶ δὲν συγκρούεται μὲ τὸν ὑγιὴ καὶ ἀφαντίστο πατριωτισμό. Ἄς ακούσουμε τὴ φωνὴν τοῦ Γέροντος Παισίου καὶ ἂς ἀπορρίψουμε διεθνισμοὺς καὶ πολυπολιτισμικότητες, δηλαδὴ ξενόφερτες ἰδεολογίες ποὺ ἐπιδιώκουν νὰ μᾶς ἀποκόψουν ἀπὸ τὶς ρίζες μας.

Οἰκουμενισμὸς καὶ Πανθησκεία

Ὁρθοδόξου Ἱεραποστολικοῦ Συνδέσμου Ἁγίων Κυρίλλου καὶ Μεθοδίου τῶν Θεσσαλονικέων.

Λέγουν μερικοὶ—ἴσως ἀπὸ ἄγνοια—πῶς δὲν ἔχει Ἰσημισία τὴν θρησκείαν πιστεύει κανεὶς, ἀρκεῖ μόνον νὰ πιστεύει καὶ ὅτι ὅλες οἱ θρησκείες εἶναι ἴδιες, ἦτοι: Ὁρθόδοξος Χριστιανισμὸς, αἰρέσεις, ἰνδουϊσμός, εἰδωλολατρία, μωαμεθανισμὸς, βουδισμὸς, διάφορες ἄλλες θρησκείες, ἀρκεῖ νὰ ὑπάρχει ἀγάπη. Δηλαδὴ πρεσβεύουν τὴν «πανθησκείαν», ποὺ στὶς ἡμέρες μας εἶναι τὸ ἐξευγενισμένο δόλωμα κατὰ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας. Προβάλλεται μάλιστα καὶ ἐπισήμως ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀρχηγούς τῶν ψευδοθρησκειῶν, τῶν αἰρέσεων, ἀκόμα—δυστυχῶς—καὶ ἀπὸ ὀρισμένους Ὁρθοδόξους, ὑπὸ τὸ ὄνομα «οἰκουμενισμὸς».

Ὅμως μὲ τὸν «οἰκουμενισμὸς», μὲ τὴν «πανθησκείαν» αὐτὴν, ἀποχρωματίζεται ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία, ἡ Θεία αὐτὴ Ἀποκάλυψις, ἐνῶ οἱ τυχόν ὑποχωρήσεις μας πρὸς πλάνες θὰ ὀδηγήσουν στὴν ἄρνηση τῆς ἀξίας τοῦ ἔρχομοῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ στὴ γῆ, στὴν ἄρνηση τῆς Θείας διδασκαλίας Του, στὴν ἄρνηση τῆς ζωηφόρου Ἀναστάσεώς Του καὶ ἂς φωνάζει ὁ Ἅγιος Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος (Α΄ Κορ. 15:14): «Ἐὰν ὁ Χριστὸς δὲν ἀνεστήθῃ, εἶναι μάταια καὶ κούφια ἀπὸ περιεχόμενον ἡ πίστις σας, εἶστε ἀκόμη βυθισμένοι στὶς ἁμαρτίες σας».

Θὰ ὀδηγήσουν στὴν ἄρνηση τῆς ἐκ τοῦ σταυροῦ Θείας χάριτος καὶ σωτηρίας, θὰ ὀδηγήσουν στὴν ἄρνηση τῆς Θεότητος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, στὴν ἄρνηση τῆς Ἁγίας Τριάδος. Καὶ γιὰ ὅλο αὐτὸ τὸ ἀνακάτεμα ὁ «οἰκουμενισμὸς» προβάλλει τὴν ἀγάπην.

Ἀγάπη! Λὲς καὶ τώρα πρωτοανακαλύφθηκε τὸ αἶσθημα αὐτό, ὥστε πλανῶντες καὶ πλανώμενοι νὰ χρησιμοποιοῦν κατὰ κόρον τὴν λέξιν αὐτή. Καὶ στὸ βάθος ἡ «ἀγάπη» τους αὐτὴ εἶναι ὑποκρισία. Μέσα στὸ Εὐαγγέλιον εἶναι διάχυτη ἡ πραγματικὴ ἀγάπη, ποὺ δίδαξε ὁ Χριστός, γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος Χριστιανὸς ἔχει εἰλικρινὴ ἀγάπην πρὸς ὅλον τὸν κόσμον.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Βασίλειος στὸ νοσοκομεῖο του στὴν Βασιλειάδα γιάτρευε τὸν κάθε ἓνα ἀνεξαιρέτως Χριστιανόν, Ἰσραηλίτην, εἰδωλολάτρη... Καὶ ὅμως, ὁ Ἅγιος Βασίλειος οὐδέποτε δέχτηκε αἰρέσεις καὶ πλάνες, ἀπεναντίας μάλιστα ἐπάλαψε σκληρὰ καὶ ἄτεγκτα κατὰ τῶν αἰρέσεων καὶ κατὰ τῶν τότε ἰσχυρῶν, ὅταν αὐτοὶ πολεμοῦσαν τὴν ὀρθόδοξον χριστιανικὴν πίστιν.

Ἄς κρατηθεῖ στερεὰ ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία μας. Ὅπου κίνδυνος ἐκεῖ καὶ ἱερὸς ζῆλος. Φθάσαμε στὸ κρίσιμο σημεῖον νὰ κινδυνεύουμε ἀπὸ τὶς ἀόρατες σκοτεινὲς δυνάμεις, ποὺ ἐπιβουλεύονται τὴν ἀκεραιότητα Πατρίδος καὶ Πιστεως. Ἄς ἀγαπήσουμε τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα. Ἄς ἐπιστρέψουν οἱ πλανημένοι στὴν Ὁρθοδοξίαν, στὴ μόνην ἀληθινὴν πίστιν τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Καλὴ φώτιση σὲ ὅλο τὸν κόσμον.

Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία, τὸ Μεγάλο Ἰδανικό μας!

Ἐπισκόπου Φλωρίνης Ἀύγουστίνου Καντιώτου (+2010), ἀποσπάσματα ἀπὸ τὰ βιβλία «Ἐθνικά Προβλήματα» (1961), καὶ σὲ μεταγλώττιση «Προφητικοὶ Λόγοι Ἀφηνίσεως γιὰ τὴν Ἀνόρθωση τῆς Ἐκκλησίας καὶ Κοινωνίας».

«Οὐκ ἀρνησόμεθά σε, φίλη Ὁρθοδοξία· οὐ ψευδόμεθά σοι, πατροπαράδοτον σέβας· ἐν σοὶ ἐγεννήθημεν, ἐν σοὶ ζῶμεν, καὶ ἐν σοὶ κοιμηθησόμεθα· εἰ δὲ καλέσοι καιρός, καὶ μυριάκις ὑπὲρ σοῦ τεθνηξόμεθα.»

[Ἰωσήφ Βρυέννιος, λόγιος μοναχὸς τοῦ 15ου αἰώνα]

† † †



Τὶ θὰ πῆ ἰδανικό; Μέσα σὲ κάθε ἄνθρωπο, ἀγαπητοί μου, καὶ στὸν πιὸ ἀτελή, ὑπάρχει κάποια εἰκόνα εὐτυχίας, ἓνα ὄραμα ζωῆς, ἓνας σκοπὸς πρὸς τὸν ὁποῖο συγκλίνουν ὅλες οἱ σκέψεις καὶ ἐνέργειές του· καὶ σκοπὸς εἶναι ἡ ἰδέα ἐκεῖνη ποὺ κυριαρχεῖ ἐπάνω σὲ ὅλες τὶς ἄλλες ιδέες καὶ συναισθήματα καὶ ἀποτελεῖ τρόπον τινὰ

τὸν κεντρικὸ ἄξονα γύρω ἀπ' τὸν ὁποῖο στρέφεται ἡ ζωὴ του. Καὶ ὅπως ἡ ἀξία μιᾶς λεπτεπίλεπτης μηχανῆς, π.χ. ἐνὸς ρολογιοῦ, ἐξαρτᾶται κυρίως ἀπὸ τὴν ἀντοχὴ τοῦ ἄξονά του, κάπως ἔτσι καὶ ἡ ἀξία τῆς ζωῆς ἐξαρτᾶται κυρίως ἀπὸ τὴν ἰδέα ἐκεῖνη ἡ ὁποία κυριαρχεῖ καὶ ὀρθομετρεῖ τὴν ζωὴν. Καὶ ὅπως ὑπάρχουν ἄξονες ἀπὸ φτηνὸ ὕλικὸ καὶ μὲ μικρὴ ἀντοχὴ, ποὺ εὐκόλα σπάζουν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄξονες ἀπὸ ἀνθεκτικὴ ὕλη, ἀδαμάντινοι, ἄθραυστοι, ἔτσι ὑπάρχουν καὶ ἰδανικά μικρὰ καὶ μεγάλα, ἀδύνατα καὶ ἰσχυρά, εὐθραυστα καὶ ἄθραυστα, γήινα καὶ οὐράνια, θνητὰ καὶ ἀθάνατα.

Καὶ ποῖο εἶναι τὸ ἰδανικὸ τῆς Ἑλλάδος; Θὰ ρωτήση κάποιος. Στὰ τρεῖς χιλιάδες χρόνια τοῦ ἐθνικοῦ της βίου παρελαύνει μπροστὰ μας μεγάλη σειρά: Τρωϊκὸς πόλεμος, Περσικά, Μέγας Ἀλέξανδρος, Βυζάντιο καὶ ἀκρίτες, Παλιγγενεσία, Μακεδονικὸς ἀγῶνας, Βαλκανικοὶ πόλεμοι, Ἀλβανικὸ ἔπος. Πάνω ὅμως ἀπὸ τὰ ἐθνικά εἶναι τὰ πανανθρώπινα, καὶ πάνω ἀπὸ τὰ ἀνθρώπινα εἶναι τὰ θεῖα, καὶ πάνω ἀπὸ τὰ ἐγκόσμια εἶναι τὰ οὐράνια καὶ ἀθάνατα. Ἀπ' τὰ Ὀμηρικὰ χρόνια μέχρι τὴ Μεγάλῃ Ἰδέα, ποὺ ἐδόνησε καὶ τὴ γενεὰ τῶν πατέρων μας μὲ τὸ «Πάλι μὲ χρόνια μὲ καιροῦς, πάλι δικὰ μας θάνατοι», ἀναζητοῦμε τὸ τέλειο. Ποῦ λοιπὸν καταλήγουμε; Ἀπὸ ὅλα ὅσα προβάλλονται ὡς ἰδανικά, ἐκεῖνο ποὺ ἀξίζει νὰ γίνῃ

τὸ ἰδανικὸ τῆς Ἑλλάδος, ὁ πολικὸς της ἀστέρας, εἶναι ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία.

Αὐτὴ ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία, ποὺ τόσο ὑποτιμᾶται σήμερον ἀπὸ κάποιους «μορφωμένους», συγκεντρώνει ὅλα τὰ γνωρίσματα τοῦ ὑψίστου ἀγαθοῦ καὶ ἀνταποκρίνεται στὰ βαθύτερα αἰτήματα τοῦ λαοῦ μας. Αὐτὴ ἔχει τὸ ἀληθινὸ νέκταρ καὶ τὴν ἀμβροσία. Αὐτὴ κρατᾶει τὸν Ἄρτο ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ θρέψῃ καὶ νὰ χορτάσῃ τὸν ἄνθρωπο ὕλικὰ καὶ πνευματικά, σὲ ἀντίθεσι μὲ τὰ «κεράτια» (Λουκ. 15:16), μὲ τὰ ὁποῖα προσπαθοῦν ἄλλοι νὰ χορτάσουν τὴν πεινασμένη ἀνθρωπότητα. Αὐτὴ δείχνει τὸν οὐρανὸ ὡς τὴν αἰώνια πατρίδα καὶ αὐτὴ πάλι μὲ τὰ ὑπέροχα διδάγματα της γιὰ ἐλευθερία, ἀδελφότητα, ἀγάπη καὶ δικαιοσύνη μπορεῖ νὰ βοηθήσῃ τὸν ἄνθρωπο νὰ στήσῃ τὴν ἰδανικὴ πολιτεία. Στὴν πολιτεία αὐτὴ τὸ ἐλατήριον τῆς ἰδιοτελείας θ' ἀντικατασταθῇ μὲ τὸ ἐλατήριον τῆς ἀγάπης ποὺ θυσιάζεται γιὰ τοὺς ἄλλους, μὲ πρότυπο τὸν Θεάνθρωπο, ὁ ὁποῖος «οὐκ ἤλθε διακονηθῆναι, ἀλλὰ διακονῆσαι καὶ δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν» (Ματθ. 20:28).

Ζωηρὴ εἰκόνα τῆς πολιτείας αὐτῆς μᾶς ἔδωσαν οἱ πρῶτοι Χριστιανοί· μιᾶς πολιτείας στὴν ὁποία, ὅπως λέει ὁ ἀθάνατος Χρυσόστομος, ὁ ἰδιοτελής καὶ καταραμένος λόγος «αὐτὸ εἶναι δικό μου» καὶ «αὐτὸ δικό σου» εἶχε καταργηθῇ καὶ ἀντικατασταθῇ μὲ τὸ «ἅπαντα κοινά» (Πράξ. 4:32). Naί, μόνο ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία, ἡ ὁποία στὴν ἰδεώδη ζωὴ τῶν μοναχικῶν ἀδελφοτήτων τῶν πρώτων αἰώνων πραγματοποίησε τὸ κοινόβιο, τὸ ἐκούσιο κοινόβιο, καὶ ἐγκαθίδρυσε ἐπάνω στὴ γῆ ἀγγελικὸ πολίτευμα, αὐτὴ καὶ σήμερον, ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία ἡ «περιβεβλημένη τὸν ἥλιον» (Ἄπ. 12:1), ὡς πανανθρώπινο ἰδανικὸ, μπορεῖ νὰ συγκινήσῃ ὄχι μόνο τὸ δικό μας ἔθνος ἀλλὰ ὀλόκληρη τὴν ἀνθρωπότητα, καὶ νὰ νικήσῃ καὶ νὰ θριαμβεύσῃ πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα τὰ λεγόμενα διεθνή καὶ οἰκουμενικά συνθήματα.

Ἀλλὰ νὰ ἐξηγούμεθα, Ἕλληνες ἀδελφοί. Ὅταν λέμε ὅτι ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία πρέπει νὰ γίνῃ τὸ ἰδανικὸ τοῦ ἔθνους μας, δὲν ἐννοοῦμε νὰ τὴν κάνουμε μέσο τὸ ὁποῖο νὰ χρησιμοποιήσουμε ἐμεῖς οἱ Ἕλληνες γιὰ ἐθνικὴ καὶ πολιτικὴ ἐκμετάλλευσιν καὶ νὰ καταστήσουμε ὀρθοδοξοκάπηλοι ἀνάμεσα στὰ ἔθνη, ὅπως ἔγινε δυστυχῶς στὴν τσαρική Ῥωσία. Ἐχοντας ἐμεῖς οἱ Ἕλληνες ὡς ἰδανικὸ τοῦ ἔθνους τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, ὄχι ὡς μέσο ἀλλὰ ὡς σκοπὸ πρὸς τὸν ὁποῖο πρέπει νὰ συγκλίνουν ὅλες οἱ ἐνέργειές μας, πρέπει νὰ εἴμαστε ἀπέναντι στὰ ἄλλα ἔθνη εἰλικρινεῖς καὶ ἀνιδιοτελεῖς ἀπόστολοι τοῦ Ὁρθοδόξου Χριστιανισμοῦ. Εἰλικρινεῖς καὶ ἀνιδιοτελεῖς, ὅπως ἦταν οἱ ἀπόστολοι τοῦ Κυρίου, ποὺ δὲν πῆγαν στὰ ἔθνη γιὰ νὰ κηρύξουν τὸ μεγαλεῖο τῆς πατρίδας τους, τοῦ Ἰσραήλ, ἀλλὰ πῆγαν γιὰ νὰ κηρύξουν «Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, καὶ τοῦτον

ἐσταυρωμένον» (Α΄ Κορ. 2:2) και με τὸ καθαρὸ και ἀμιγῆς ἀπὸ κάθε ἐθνικιστικῆς ἰδέας κήρυγμα νὰ σώσουν ψυχές· διὰ τῆς σωτηρίας τῶν ψυχῶν προσέφεραν τὴν ὑψίστη ὑπηρεσία στὴν πάσχουσα ἀνθρωπότητα, μέσα στὴν ὁποία οἱ σφζόμενοι γίνονταν ἡ ζύμη τῆς ἀναμορφώσεως και ἀναπλάσεως τοῦ ἀρχαίου κόσμου.

Τὰ ἀμαρτωλὰ «ἐγώ», ἀτομικά και ὁμαδικά, πρέπει, κατὰ τὸ παράδειγμα τοῦ ἀποστόλου Παύλου, νὰ νικῶνται και νὰ ἐξαφανίζονται μπροστὰ στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, και αὐτὴ νὰ κυριαρχῆ στὶς σκέψεις και τὶς ἐνέργειές μας. Αὐτὴ και μόνη διὰ τῆς φωτεινῆς διδασκαλίας και τοῦ ὑποδειματικοῦ βίου μας νὰ προβάλλεται στὰ μάτια ὄλων πρὸς δόξαν Θεοῦ. Καὶ ὅταν τέτοιες εἶναι οἱ διαθέσεις τῆς καρδιάς μας ὑπὲρ τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, τότε θὰ χαιρώμαστε ὅταν και ἄλλα ἔθνη κηρύττουν με λόγια και με ἔργα τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία και σημειώνουν μεγαλύτερη κι ἀπὸ μᾶς ἐπίδοσι στὸ κήρυγμά της.

Γιατὶ ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία δὲν εἶναι εἶδος μονοπωλίου τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς φυλῆς· εἶναι οἰκουμενικὴ ἰδέα και ζωὴ, στὴν ὁποία καλοῦνται ὅλα τὰ ἔθνη νὰ συμμετάσχουν ἰσότημα γύρω ἀπὸ τὴν κοινὴ τράπεζα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ Πατρὸς. Στὸ μεγαλειῶδες σχέδιο τῆς Θείας Προνοίας νὰ κηρυχθῆ ἡ Χριστιανικὴ πίστι σὲ ὅλο τὸν κόσμο ὅπως αὐτὴ διατηρήθηκε ἀναλλοίωτη μέσα στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία, ἡ πατρίδα μας μπορεῖ νὰ προσφέρῃ μεγάλες ὑπηρεσίες. Ὅχι μόνο γιατί τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο εἶναι γραμμένο στὴν Ἑλληνικὴ γλῶσσα και ἀπ' αὐτὴν μεταφράστηκε σὲ χίλιες και πλέον γλῶσσες και διαλέκτους, ὄχι μόνο γιατί οἱ περισσότεροι ἀπὸ τοὺς μεγάλους πατέρες και διδασκάλους στὰ Ἑλληνικά ἔγραψαν τὰ ἀθάνατα συγγράμματά τους, ἀλλὰ και γιατί παιδιὰ τῆς Ἑλλάδος, στενοχωρούμενα ἀπὸ τὴ φτώχεια ποὺ συνοδεύει τὴν Ἑλλάδα, ἔχουν βγῆ ἀπὸ τὴν πατρίδα τους και βρίσκονται σκορπισμένα και στὶς πέντε ἡπείρους.

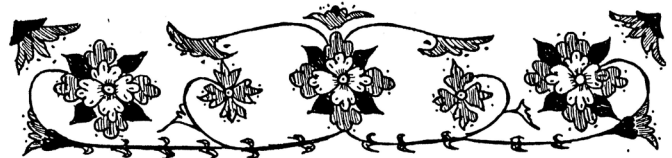
Ποῦ πάνω στὴ γῆ δὲν βρίσκεται Ἑλληνας; Γύρω στὰ δύο ἑκατομμύρια εἶναι οἱ Ἑλληνες τοῦ ἐξωτερικοῦ. Συμπαγεῖς Ἑλληνικὲς κοινότητες με ὠραίους ναοὺς βρίσκονται στὰ μεγαλύτερα ἀστικά κέντρα τοῦ νέου κόσμου. Ἑλληνες ὑπηρετοῦν στὰ ἱστορικὰ πατριαρχεῖα τῆς Ἀνατολῆς. Ἑλληνες και μέχρι τὴν Κορέα και τὴν Ἰαπωνία και τὴ Νότιο Ἀφρική και τὰ νησιά τῶν Φιλιππίνων. Ἄν στὶς καρδιές ὄλων αὐτῶν τῶν Ἑλλήνων τοῦ ἐξωτερικοῦ ἀνεξωογονεῖτο ἡ φλόγα τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, τότε ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία θὰ διαδιδόταν και θὰ δοξαζόταν στὸν κόσμο διὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων και ἂν δοξαζόταν, θ' ἀντιδόξαζε αὐτοὺς ποὺ τὴν δόξασαν με μιὰ δόξα ἀφθαρτὴ και αἰώνια. Ποιὰ δόξα μεγαλύτερη ἀπ' αὐτὴν θὰ μποροῦσε νὰ φιλοδοξῆ ἡ φυλὴ μας; Ἀπὸ μακρινὲς χώρες, στὶς ὁποῖες οἱ κάτοικοι ζοῦν «ἐν χώρᾳ και σκιᾷ θανάτου» (Ἠσ. 9:2, Ματθ. 4:16,

Λουκ. 1:79), ἔρχονται συγκινητικὰ μηνύματα ποὺ μᾶς προσκαλοῦν σὲ πνευματικὴ βοήθεια. Διότι και μέχρι σ' αὐτοὺς φτάνει ἡ φήμη τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας.

Ἄλλὰ ἐδῶ εἶναι τὸ σπουδαιότατο ἐρώτημα. Εἴμαστε ἕτοιμοι προετοιμασμένοι γιὰ μιὰ τέτοια παγκόσμια ἀποστολή; ἔχουμε κάνει τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία κανὸνα τῆς ζωῆς μας, ἰδανικὸ τοῦ ἔθνους μας; Μποροῦμε νὰ προβάλλουμε τὴν πατρίδα μας ὡς πρότυπο Ὁρθοδόξου κράτους, ἢ μήπως ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία μας ἐξαντλεῖται στὴν τήρησι μερικῶν ἐξωτερικῶν τύπων, σὲ ἐορτὲς και πανηγύρια κοσμικοῦ μᾶλλον παρὰ θρησκευτικοῦ χαρακτήρος;

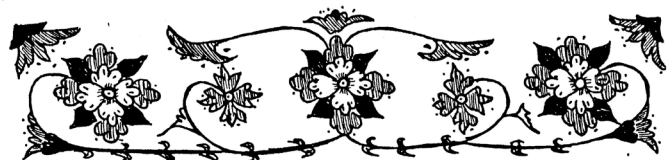
Ἀδελφοὶ Ἑλληνες! Ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία, νὰ ἢ ὄντως ΜΕΓΑΛΗ ἸΔΕΑ, ἀσυγκρίτως ἀνώτερη ἀπὸ τὴν ἐθνικὴ μας Μεγάλῃ Ἰδέα. Ἰδέα καθαυμένη ἀπὸ φθαρτὰ στοιχεῖα, ὑψηλὴ, καθολικὴ, αἰώνια, ποὺ εἶναι προωρισμένη νὰ βασιλεύσῃ. Αὐτῆς τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας ἄς γίνουμε ταπεινοὶ ὑπηρετές, φρουροί, ἀγωνισταὶ και στρατιῶτες, γιὰ νὰ συμβασιλεύσουμε δι' αὐτῆς ὄντως και ἐμεῖς. Σύνθημά μας ἄς εἶναι οἱ ἐμπνευσμένοι λόγοι τοῦ ἥρωα τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας σοφοῦ Ἰωσήφ Βρυεννίου: «Ὅτι ἀρνησόμεθά σε, φίλη Ὁρθοδοξία· οὐ ψευσόμεθά σοι, πατροπαράδοτον σέβας ἐν σοὶ ἐγεννήθημεν, ἐν σοὶ ζῶμεν, και ἐν σοὶ κοιμηθησόμεθα· εἰ δὲ καλέσοι καιρός, και μυριάκις ὑπὲρ σοῦ τεθνηξόμεθα.»

(†) Ἐπίσκοπος Ἀύγουστινός



Ἀπὸ τὶς ἀρετὲς ποὺ ἐξαρτῶνται ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς, οἱ σύμφωνες με τὴν δύνάμη μας εἶναι ἡ προσευχὴ και ἡ σιωπὴ. Ἀπὸ αὐτὲς ποὺ δὲν ἐξαρτῶνται ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς, ἀλλὰ κυρίως ἀπὸ τὴν κατάσταση τοῦ σώματος, εἶναι ἡ νηστεία και ἡ ἀγρυπνία. Ὅποιο ἀπὸ αὐτὰ τὰ ἔργα μπορεῖ νὰ κάνῃ εὐκολώτερα ὁ ἀγωνιστής, με ἐκεῖνο πρέπει νὰ καταπιάνεται.

Ἅγιος Ἡλίας ὁ Ἐκδικός



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 οικονομικὴ εὐχέρεια, ἄς συνδράμουν, ἂν θέλουν, στὴν ταπεινὴ προσπάθειά μας ἀποστέλλοντες κάτι περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὴν ἐτήσια συνδρομὴ τῶν 24 δολλαρίων πρὸς ἐνίσχυση τῆς ἀδελφότητος «Ὅσιος Ποιμῆν».

Τί είναι ή Νοερά Προσευχή και Πώς Πρέπει νά Γίνεται;

Αγίου Νικοδήμου Αγιορείτη.

Η νοερά και καρδιακή προσευχή, σύμφωνα με τούς Αγίους Πατέρες τούς καλουμένους Νηπτικούς, είναι ή συγκέντρωσις τού ανθρώπινου νοῦ στην καρδιά του κυρίως, και χωρίς νά όμιλη με τό στόμα, με μόνο τόν ένδιάθετο λόγο, ό όποιος όμιλείται μέσα στην καρδιά, νά λέγη αύτή τή σύντομη και μονολόγιστη προσευχή· δηλαδή τό «Κύριε, Ίησοῦ Χριστέ, Υιέ τού Θεοῦ, έλέησόν με», κρατώντας λίγο και τήν άναπνοή. Καταχρηστικά όμως και ευρύτερα νοερή προσευχή λέγεται και κάθε άλλη δέησις πού δέν θα γίνη με τό στόμα, αλλά με τόν ένδιάθετο λόγο τής καρδιάς πού άναφέρθηκε.

Άν, λοιπόν, άδελφέ, αγαπάς νά εισακουσθής πιό εύκολα από τόν Θεό και νά λάβης εκείνο πού Του ζητάς, αγωνίζου όσο μπορείς σ' αύτή τή νοερή προσευχή, παρακαλώντας τόν Θεό με όλο σου τόν νοῦ και τήν καρδιά για νά σε έλεήσει και νά σοῦ δώση εκείνα πού είναι άπαραίτητα και σέ συμφέρουν για τή σωτηρία σου. Διότι, όσο περισσότερο κόπο έχει αύτή ή νοερή προσευχή, από εκείνη πού λέγεται με τό στόμα προφορικά, τόσο περισσότερο τήν άκούει ό Θεός, ό όποιος άκούει καλύτερα τήν νοερή βοή τής καρδιάς, παρά τίς δυνατές φωνές τού στόματος. Γι' αυτό και έλεγε στον Μωυσή πού μόνο νοερά και με τήν καρδιά τόν παρακαλούσε για τούς Ίουδαίους: «Γιατί φωνάζεις δυνατά προς έμένα.» (Έξοδ. 14:15).

Γνώριζε άκόμη ότι, έπειδή και τό έλεος τού Θεοῦ, είναι καθολικό Όνομα και περιέχει όλες τίς χάρες, πού ζητάμε και έμείς από τόν Θεό, και ό Θεός μάς τίς δίνει, γι' αυτό για κάθε ύπόθεσι και χάρι πού ζητάς από τόν Θεό, μπορείς νά χρησιμοποιήσ τήν προορηθείσα σύντομη αύτήν προσευχή, τό «Κύριε, Ίησοῦ Χριστέ, Υιέ τού Θεοῦ, έλέησόν με». Γιατί και ό νοῦς συμμαζεύεται με αύτήν πιό εύκολα, ένῶ στίς άλλες προσευχές, στίς εκτενέστερες και πολλές, ό νοῦς διασκορπίζεται.

Έάν όμως και επιθυμής, κατά τίς διάφορες ύποθέσεις και χάριτες πού ζητάς, νά προσεύχεσαι, έδώ σοῦ παραθέτω μερικές προσευχές, για νά τίς έχης ως παράδειγμα. Για παράδειγμα, όταν ζητάς κάποια άρετή και χάρι, μπορείς

νά πής με τήν καρδιά σου τά έξής: «Κύριε, ό Θεός μου, δός μου αύτή τή χάρι και άρετή για δόξα και τιμή δική σου»· ή έτσι: «Κυριέ μου, έγώ πιστεύω ότι σοῦ άρέσει και είναι δόξα δική σου τό νά ζητήσω έγώ και νά λάβω αύτή τήν χάρι· εκπλήρωσέ μου λοιπόν αύτή τήν επιθυμία σύμφωνα με τό θέλημά σου».

Όταν έμπρακτα πολεμήσαι από τούς έχθρούς, θα προσευχηθής έτσι: «Τρέξε γρήγορα, Θεέ μου, νά με βοηθήσης, για νά μη νικηθώ από τούς έχθρούς μου»· ή «Θεέ μου, καταφυγή μου, δύναμις τής ψυχής μου, βοήθησέ με γρήγορα, για νά μὴν πέσω». Όταν ακολουθή ή μάχη, ακολουθήσε και έσύ αύτὸν τόν τρόπο τής προσευχής, άντιστεκόμενος γενναία σ' εκείνο πού σε πολεμεί.

Έπειτα, άφοῦ τελειώσει ή σκληρότητα τής μάχης, στρέψου προς τόν Θεό, παρουσίασε μπροστά του τόν έχθρο πού σε πολέμησε και τήν άδυναμία σου νά του άντισταθής λέγοντας: «Νά,

Κύριε, τό δημιούργημα τών χειρῶν τής αγαθότητός σου, τό έξαγορασμένο με τό Αίμα σου. Νά ό έχθρός σου πού ζητά νά τό έξαφανίση και νά τό καταφάγη σέ σένα προστρέχω σέ σένα μόνον έλπίζω πού είσαι αγαθός και παντοδύναμος και κύταξε τήν άδυναμία μου και τήν ταχύτητα (άν δέν με βοηθήσης έσύ) νά ύποταχθώ έκούσια· βοήθησέ με λοιπόν, έσύ πού είσαι ή έλπίδα και ή δύναμις τής ψυχής μου».

Σοῦ υπενθυμίζω και τό έξής: Όταν κουρασθής νά προσεύχεσαι νοερά και με τήν καρδιά, μπορείς νά λες και με τό στόμα και προφορικά τόσο τήν εύχή «Κύριε, Ίησοῦ Χριστέ, Υιέ τού Θεοῦ, έλέησόν με», όπως λέγουν οί Πατέρες, όσο και τίς άλλες προσευχές πού θα θελήσης. Φρόντιζε όμως και νά συμμαζεύης τόν νοῦ σου τότε για νά προσέχης στα λόγια τής προσευχής.

Μερικοί μάλιστα λέγουν ότι νοερά προσευχή λέγεται άκόμη και τό έξής: όταν ό άνθρωπος άφοῦ συμμαζέψη όλες τίς νοερές δυνάμεις τής ψυχής του μέσα στην καρδιά, χωρίς νά πη κανένα λόγο ούτε προφορικό, ούτε ένδιάθετο, με μόνο τό νοῦ του σκέπτεται και άμετάβατα αναλογίζεται ότι ό Θεός είναι παρὼν ένώπιόν του. Και ότι αύτὸς στέκεται μπροστά του πότε με φόβο και δέος σάν ένας κατάδικος πότε με ζωντανή πίστι για νά λάβη τήν βοήθειά του· και πότε με άγάπη και χαρὰ για νά τόν ύπηρετήση παντοτεινά. Και αύτὸ



είναι εκείνο πού έλεγε ό Δαβίδ: «Έβλεπα πάντοτε τόν Κύριό μου ένώπιόν μου» (Ψαλμ. 15:8).

Μπορεί ή προσευχή αυτή νά γίνη και μόνο με ένα άμετάβατο βλέμμα του νοϋ προς τόν Θεό, πενθικό και παρακαλεστικό, τó όποιο βλέμμα είναι σαν μία σιωπηλή ύπενθύμησι εκείνης τής χάριτος, πού του είχαμε ζητήσει προηγουμένως με τόν λόγο και με την καρδιακή προσευχή. Γι' αυτό, έπειδή ή προσευχή αυτή μπορεί νά γίνη εύκολα σε κάθε τόπο και για κάθε άφορμή και περίστασι, κράτησέ την στα χέρια σου σαν ένα όπλο δυνατό και εύκολομεταχείριστο, και θα ώφεληθής και θα βοηθηθής πολύ.

Πολλά και μεγάλα είναι τὰ χαρίσματα πού προκαλεί αυτή ή ιερή και νοερή προσευχή, τὰ όποια άπαριθμούν οί άγιοι και θεοφόροι Πατέρες. Έγώ όμως άναφέρω έδώ τó γενικώτερο και σπουδαιότερο άπό όλα τὰ άλλα. Ό άνθρωπος είναι και λέγεται κατ' εικόνα Θεού, έχοντας νοϋ, λόγο και ζωοποιοό πνεϋμα του σώματος, δηλαδή φυσική θέλησι και άγάπη. Έπειδή όμως ό Θεός είναι τρία και ένα, και ό άνθρωπος πού είναι κατ' εικόνα Θεού νά γίνη και τρία και ένα, για νά μοιάζει με τó πρωτότυπό του και στη συνέχεια νά ένωθι με αυτό. Αυτή ή ένωσις και όμοιότητα με τόν Θεό δέν γίνεται με άλλον τρόπο παρά μόνο με την προσευχή αυτή.

Όταν λοιπόν ό νοϋς έχη όλη του την προσοχή στραμένη στον ένδιάθετο λόγο, πού είναι μέσα στην καρδιά, και ό ένδιάθετος λόγος λέγη τó «Κύριε, Ίησοϋ Χριστέ, Υιέ του Θεού, έλέησόν με», ένω τó Πνεϋμα και ή φυσική θέλησις με όλη της την δύναμι άγαπᾶ και άφιερώνεται στα λόγια αυτά τής προσευχής, τότε αυτές οί τρεις δυνάμεις, μένοντας τρεις γίνονται ένα. Και ό ένας άνθρωπος γίνεται τρία, μένοντας ένα. Και αυτό σημαίνει εκείνο πού λέγει άμυδρά ό μέγας τής Θεσσαλονίκης Γρηγόριος, ό μεγάλος εκείνος εργάτης και διδάσκαλος τής Νοερᾶς Προσευχής: «Όταν τó ένιαίο του νοϋ γίνεται τρία, μένοντας ένα, τότε ένώνεται με την Θεαρχική Τριαδική Μονάδα, άποκλείοντας κάθε είσοδο πλάνης, και βρίσκεται πάνω άπό κάθε καθεστώς σάρκας κόσμου και κοσμοκράτορος». Και στη συνέχεια λέγει ό άγιος ότι, κι αν αυτή ή ένωσις των τριών, με την προσευχή αυτή, είναι πιό κοπιαστική άπό κάθε άλλο κόπο άρετής, όμως δίνει τὰ άπόρρητα μυστήρια και τις άποκαλύψεις του Θεού, όταν κανείς ύπομένη πολύ χρόνο στην εργασία και ένωσι αυτή.

Και γιατί νά πολυλογώ; Με άλλον τρόπο δέν μπορεί ό άνθρωπος νά φυλάξει την πρώτη έντολή, δηλαδή, τó «νά αγαπήσης τόν Κύριο τó Θεό σου με όλη σου την ψυχή...», όπως προστάσει ό Κύριος (Λουκ. 10:27), παρά με τó μέσο τής Νοερᾶς αυτής Προσευχής.

Σημειώνω δέ και τὰ έξής σε όσους είναι άντίθετοι στον τρόπο τής προσευχής αυτής, την άπόφασι πού

έχει ό Συνοδικός Τόμος, κατὰ του Βαρλαάμ και Άκινδύνου, επί Βασιλέως Άνδρονίκου Παλαιολόγου, ένώπιον τής Συγκλήτου και των Ρωμαίων κριτών. Έχει δέ ως έξής: «Φάνηκε άπό αυτά και έλέγχθηκε ό Βαρλαάμ ότι βλασφημεί και όμιλεί κακόδοξα για τó Θαβώρειο Φώς, και για εκείνους τους Μοναχούς και για την ιερή ενύχη πού προφέρουν αυτοί. Οί Μοναχοί άποδείχθηκαν άνώτεροι άπό την κατηγορία του, ως μένοντες στις έξηγήσεις και παραδόσεις των Άγίων Πατέρων... Γι' αυτό... ό ίδιος ό Βαρλαάμ... αλλά και όποιος άλλος αναφανή νά όμιλη βλάσφημα και κακόδοξα με βάσι εκείνα τὰ βλάσφημα πού είπε αυτός και στρέφονται κατὰ των Μοναχών, μάλλον κατὰ τής Έκκλησίας, ή όποιος φανή νά άσχολήται γενικά με τὰ παρόμοια, στην ίδια καταδικη άπό την δική μας Μετριότητα ύποβαλλόμενος, άποκηρυγμένος θα είναι και αυτός και άποκομμένος άπό την Καθολική Άνατολική Έκκλησία του Χριστού και του Όρθοδόξου συστήματος των Χριστιανών».

Τόσο ή χάρις, πού δίνει ό Θεός στην παρούσα ζωή, όσο και ή δόξα πού πρόκειται νά δώση στην άλλη, για τις όποιες είπε ό Δαβίδ «χάρι και δόξα θα δώση» (Ψαλμ. 83:12), και τὰ δυό όνομάζονται έλεος ή μὲν χάρις, γιατί όσοι χαριτώθηκαν άπό τόν Θεό, άπλά κατὰ τόν άπόστολο Πέτρο όνομάζονται έλεημένοι «Έσείς πού κάποτε δέν ήσασταν λαός, τώρα γίνετε λαός του Θεού έσείς πού άλλοτε δέν είχατε έλεηθι, τώρα βρήκατε έλεος» (Α' Πέτρο. 2:10).

Και ό θεϊός Παϋλος, αυτός πού έλεήθηκε τόσο πολύ όνομάζει τόν έαυτό του έλεημένο: «Έκφράζω τη γνώμη μου σαν άνθρωπος πού έχει έλεηθι» (Α' Κορ. 7:25) και άλλου λέγει: «Άλλά έλεήθηκα διότι τó έκανα άπό άγνοια» (Α' Τιμ. 1:13). Παρόμοια και ή δόξα των άγιων στους ούρανοϋς και ό στέφανος λέγεται έλεος και άπό έλεος δίνεται, όπως λέγει ό ψαλμωδός: «Αυτόν πού σε στεφανώνει με έλεος και οϊκτιρμούς» (Ψαλμ. 102:4). Έρμηνεύοντας αυτό ό ιερός Χρυσόστομος λέγει: «Λοιπόν ό στέφανος είναι άποτέλεσμα χάριτος και φιλανθρωπίας».



Αυτοί οί τρεις κανόνες ζωής είναι χρήσιμοι, τó νά φοβάσαι τόν Θεόν, τó νά προσεύχεσαι άδιάλειπτα και τó νά κάνης τó καλόν στον πλησίον σου.

Άββᾶς Ποιμὴν ό Μέγας

ON CULTURE WARS

By Fr. John Whiteford, a priest in the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad.



There are those in the Orthodox Church who say that we should have nothing to do with the culture wars that have been raging in our culture since the 60's. They accuse conservative converts of trying to bring those culture wars into the Orthodox Church. Ironically, those who talk like this are usually the very people who actually are bringing the culture wars into the Orthodox Church by their promotion of the acceptance of homosexuality, gay marriage, abortion, women's ordination, and various other liberal causes. It is not as if the Orthodox Church was full of people who thought gay marriage was a great idea until converts started showing up. In fact, the Orthodox in traditionally Orthodox countries are very conservative, and though, for example, there are not lots of Protestant converts to Orthodoxy in Russia, the Russian Church has taken a very strong and vocal position on these issues.

Patriarch Kirill of Moscow is not a convert from Protestantism, but he made these comments at the end of a recent concelebration with Metropolitan Tikhon of the OCA:

“The task of our Churches is to pray and work in order that the Lord would grant His mercy on the peoples of our countries, so that God's strength would make moral basics stronger, which originate in God's morals of the Bible, and so that the relations between our countries would strengthen based on common moral values.

That is why we endure the deviations from these God's moral standards so painfully. The deviations take place both in the United States and other Western countries at the present time. It is a great challenge for Christian Churches. Many of them, especially Protestant organizations, fail to overcome this challenge—they follow the path of the renunciation of their own identity, refuse from moral values of the Gospel in favor of political fashion.

But the Orthodox Churches cannot do this and therefore the Orthodox Churches encourage people to profess the faith. We have a right to speak about it like this, here at this cathedral, because our Church has gone through decades of suffering and profession, but it has not faltered or cheated on itself.

That is why we heartily wish that the Orthodox Church in America would preserve the fidelity to Christ, His Com-

mandments, and would be, if not very bright and strong, but still light for its people. We are aware that even the light of a small candle becomes a powerful point of reference and helps people find their way to salvation. (see “Orthodox Church is the Bridge that is Able to Unite Russian and American Peoples,” translated by Pravmir.ru).

This coming right on the heels of a controversy within the OCA, in which a senior priest has suggested that the Church needs to re-think its position on homosexuality, I can't help but suspect that these comments were made in reference to it.

It would be nice if we could ignore the culture wars, but the culture wars are coming after us, our Church, and our families. You can choose what you are prepared to defend, but you cannot choose who will attack what you wish to defend. Franklin Roosevelt was not “fixated” on militaristic fascism... but he spent quite a bit of his efforts and energy fighting it, because militaristic fascists were attacking the country that he, as president, was sworn to defend.

Today it is pro-abortionists, pro-homosexuals, and certain varieties of feminists that are attacking the Traditions of the Orthodox Church. We didn't pick them, they picked us. We have no choice but to defend the Church and its Tradition, or to raise the rainbow flag and surrender.

We do believe that the Orthodox Church is the True Church, and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it, but that does not mean that large parts of it, including our own, cannot fall into heresy and error, if we are not vigilant. It has happened more than once in Church history, and there is no reason to think that we are somehow immune today.

The people of God are the guardians of piety, as the Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs of 1848 (in reply to Pope Pius the IX) states. It is therefore not only permissible, but obligatory for all of the faithful, and even more so for the clergy, to oppose these attempts to infect our Church with the same heresies that have wreaked such havoc in mainline Protestant Churches, and are in the process of doing the same in the Roman Catholic Church.



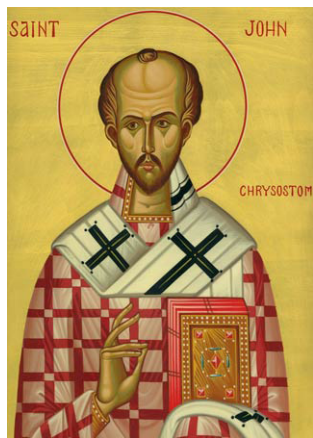
There is no other greater love than this: that a man lay down his soul for his neighbor. One is laying down his soul for his neighbor when he hears an evil word, a word that causes grief, and being able to say similar words he strives to say them not, or when injustice is made unto him and he endures and pays not back. A man like this is laying down his soul for his neighbor.

Abba Poimen the Great

RAISING CHILDREN ACCORDING TO SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

By Protopresbyter Theodoros Zisis, Professor Emeritus of the School of Theology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki.

A Classic Pedagogical Work



The Holy Chrysostom, the fruit of Antioch who once glorified the Patriarchal throne of the capital of Byzantium, is rightfully included amongst the greatest pedagogues of all time. Witnessing to this claim is not only his recognition as such in studies of his life and works, but also his association with education within Orthodox tradition. He is one of the three hierarchs whom we celebrate in

our schools on the 30th of January as patrons of learning, as models for pedagogues and teachers, and as conveyors and proponents of Helleno-Christian educational ideals.

Chrysostom is the most prolific writer amongst the Church Fathers and other ecclesiastical writers. In the French monk Migne's well-known series, the *Patrologia Graeca*—a series composed of 161 massive volumes—Chrysostom's writings occupy eighteen of them. Pedagogical counsels are scattered throughout this rich material. If these counsels were gathered together, they would compose an unparalleled handbook of Christian pedagogy. Such a work would be worth the effort, providing us with a presentation of sound pedagogical principles to guide the education of our youth.

Beyond these counsels scattered throughout the whole of his work, fortunately one excellent pedagogical treatise has been preserved which, from beginning to end, has as its aim to set forth principles concerning the proper upbringing of youth. Although the work in question has two titles, it is indeed only one text. In the manuscript tradition, it is called *On Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to Bring up their Children*. Generally, however, it is known by the more concise title, *On Vainglory and the Raising of Children*. Just how vainglory is related to the raising of children we will see further on in our analysis of this excellent work. Well-researched studies suggest that this work presents the ancient, full and perfect Christian teaching with regard to education. It is a systematic exposition of Christian education; one of the most enlightening fruits of the Greek Christian soul, based not only in the Holy Scriptures, but also in the psychological and pedagogical teachings of the ancient Greeks, as well as experience.

It was a great misfortune for the study of the teachings of Chrysostom, as well as for the Church's contribution to the formation of educational ideals and principles, that this book was not included in Migne's great work, and thus it remained

unused and unexploited. Although it had been published in 1656 in Paris by Combefis, who in the title of his edition described it as a "golden book" (*De educandis liberis, liber aureus*), questions surrounding the book's authenticity raised by other researchers caused Mountfaucon not to include it in his edition and so, later, neither did Migne. At the beginning of this century, however, the authenticity of the work was firmly re-established. Amongst the supporters of the work's authenticity we find the Greek academic, and professor of the University of Thessaloniki, Basilios Exarchos—one of the most dynamic and respected representatives of theological studies of our era. Exarchos supported his claim of the work's authenticity in an expert study, and he prepared a critical edition of the text which a German publishing house released in 1955. Earlier, in 1947, the Greek publisher "Astir" («Ἄστιρ») published a translation of the work in Modern Greek, also composed by Basilios Exarchos. In the prologue to this edition he writes the following:

As the attentive reader will notice at once, this book's contents have great worth pertaining to the raising of Greek Christian children. It was decided that in the Modern Greek Translation, it would be good and useful to extract all the critical apparatuses, so that the text might be published independently. This would allow Greek parents who want to raise their children as proper Greeks and proper Christians to be fed and taught from this book by the Great Teacher John Chrysostom. The whole book has its basis in a hidden experience, that is to say whatever Chrysostom experienced as an orphan in his upbringing by his mother Anthousa. Therefore the book reflects a lived reality, a successful trial, and proof of the power of a Christian upbringing. If it is taken into account that our era is an era of reconstruction for our Greek homeland, then the importance of the present book is even clearer. Whatever attempt is made at social and economic reconstruction is condemned to failure if it does not originate in ethical, spiritual restoration and reformation of the soul of the new generation. Parents and teachers ought to undertake this work with faith, and ask for advice and direction concerning its execution. The contents of the present book are just this advice and direction. And so, that this advice might be used by every genuine Greek Christian parent and educator of children, it is here in simple Modern Greek, so as to be more widely read.

The work has also circulated with a parallel French translation, extensive introduction and rich annotation in a critical edition of the highest level as part of the series *Sources Chrétiennes*, and with a parallel Modern Greek translation published in the well-known series *Ἑλληνες Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας*.

We will identify transcendent precepts within this exceptional pedagogical treatise, written by a great Orthodox Father, which apply in our own era as foundational educational principles. It is on account of this that we characterize the work as *classical*: because it is equally addressed to, and able

to guide, today's man. Moreover, in the conscience of the Church the Fathers are generally the classical teachers—the classical pedagogues—because with their rich educational armament, their outstanding spiritual gifts, and above all their expert vision (which comes from divine illumination—communion with God) they are able to penetrate the depths of human existence, pierce the mysterious and unknown realm of the human soul, and to find man's dark and light side. Thus, the Fathers aid the dispersal of the evil elements, in the wiping out of darkness and in the strengthening and encouragement of the bright ones.

Raising Children: “Then” and “Now”

To persuasively argue that the pedagogical ideas within Chrysostom's work are timeless, it is necessary to briefly observe the spiritual atmosphere with which he is occupied—the spiritual atmosphere of Antioch in his era. In other words, we must note what educational ideals he set out for the youth of Antioch. If these provisions are similar to those which we give to our youth today, then also the critiques which this

Holy Father presents are critiques of our own era and of our own pedagogical work as teachers and as parents. We will glean our knowledge of the atmosphere of Chrysostom's Antioch

from the work which we consider here, as well as from other works of the same author.

Parents' attitudes toward the spiritual formation of the youth, of their ethical refinement, were marked by indifference. Their plans for their children's futures were confined to professional success and prosperity. These goals are practical, materially-minded, and individualistic. Within this framework, parents were concerned to secure all material conveniences for their children. They paid no attention to the expenses, the toil and the sacrifices to find the right schools and the best teachers so that their children could acquire those provisions which would help them in their worldly life and career. The obsession with acquiring and enjoying material goods was the strongest motivating factor in the care for children. The youth were unilaterally treated as if they were bodily beings only, as if they had no soul in need of care. Children breathed of, and grew up in, this atmosphere of obsession with riches and worldly glory.

When, Saint John Chrysostom says, one hears parents advise their children to pursue education, their argumentation is as follows: Such-and-such with the education he received, while he came from a poor and ill-reputed family, managed to become great and powerful, to attain lofty positions, to become

rich, to marry a rich woman, to build a beautiful house and the like. Another, with the languages that he learned, took the best position in the palace and he administered all affairs. Parents set forth the successful in life as examples, “the blessed of the earth.” In this manner these parents introduced into the malleable and receptive souls of the youth two great vices, two tyrannical loves: the love of money and the love of worldly glory or social status as we would say today. By this the youth were perverted and became materially-minded and vain. The perversion of youth is owed exclusively to the obsession for earthly goods, the great pedagogue observes. “The loss of children comes about through no other way than the obsession their parents have with earthly things.”

Parents, he says, cared only to secure riches, and clothing, and servants and property. The only thing they cared nothing about was spiritual cultivation, the cultivation of virtue and devotion. They thought virtues to be flaws and weakness. A complete inversion of values reigned. Vices took the names of virtues and virtues, vices. They called the love of glory,



Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it. - Proverbs 22:6

magnanimity; of gain, freedom; insolence was called frankness; injustice, manliness. Conversely, prudence was considered rudeness; tolerance, fear; justice, cowardice; forgiving-

ness, weakness and humility, subservience.

Within this spiritual confusion nothing was clear and firm. The courts, the laws, nor even the schools were able to help. The rich bribed judges with money and teachers were only interested in their salaries. “There is no escape from this, neither with the judges, nor in the laws, not in teachers, or parents, nor in servants. Some can be bought off with money, while others care only for their salaries.” As many as were concerned about this state were either subdued by reassuring speeches, or they did not speak for fear of the power of the immoral.

According to Saint John Chrysostom, ethical wantonness and social unrest are owed to improper care for children, to neglect for their spiritual cultivation: “The downfall of society stems from this disregard for children. Many seek the preservation of their estates, but not the preservation of the souls of those in their care.” He does not hesitate to call this indifference toward the cultivation of virtue in the souls of children “criminal.” By their indifference, as many as infuse their children with tyrannizing passions, with vices which daily kill and their souls, commit infanticide—the murder of their own children.

Society does not suffer from a lack of shrewd businessmen or from a lack of the literate and educated. It suffers from a

lack of virtuous men. It suffers because it has been flooded by the shrewd, who want nothing other than to increase in riches and to live the comfortable life. It suffers because the power-hungry, in their attempt to ascend, overturn order. It suffers because the acquisition of extravagant homes and comforts has become the sole aim of men. To this the illness of society is owed, these things destroy the harmonic social life, not those who live in virtue and holiness. “Those things which are considered superfluous and unimportant are the very things required for the course of our life.” This necessary and cohesive “thing” is virtue, spiritual cultivation.

In addition to these two passions, another, equally or rather more dangerous for the easily-enflamed youth, dominated the educational climate. This is “sexual liberation” as we call it today, or in other words the excitement and gratification of the fleshly desires, the love of the flesh. The Holy Father hesitates to expound on this issue, on such a sacred element of human relations, which has been perverted, so perverted that fleshly relations between persons of the same sex were of fashion and yet did not provoke a reaction. Saint John, however, overcomes his wavering and his modesty to check and castigate the indifference of all responsible for education in the face of this reversal not only of ethical but also natural laws. Chrysostom wonders, together with many others, how God tolerates so much. He abides this degradation of man without having sent fire to burn the city of Antioch as once occurred in Sodom and Gomorrah.

Chrysostom places great responsibility for Antioch’s ethical wantonness in the hands of the theatre, whose programs and topics principally cover the matters of harlotry and adultery, pornographic themes. “For indeed both adulteries and stolen marriages are there, and there are women playing the harlot, men prostituting, youths corrupting themselves: all there is iniquity to the full, all sorcery, all shame,” he observes.

These three loves—of money, of glory and of the flesh—dominated the spiritual plane of Chrysostom’s era, and they shaped the principles by which the education of youth was approached. These elements are considered in the treatise *On Vainglory and the Raising of Children*, which gives direction for the correct way of education.

The Social Environment: Vainglory

In the first part of the work, concerning vainglory, Saint John shows that the education of youth is influenced deci-

sively from the prevailing manner of life, from the way of life and of thought of the members of the group, within which the youth developed. The youth breathed and developed within this group’s climate of life, and unavoidably, their ethical quality and spiritual existence are determined by it. Chrysostom localizes the sickness of vainglory in vanity; that is to say in erroneous perceptions concerning self-worth and in the related inclination for exhibitions of wealth, dress, homes, and furniture.

It is further exemplified in the continuous propensity which had prevailed amongst the wealthy to do displays of their economic power, financing theatrical performances or organizing games at the hippodrome. The motivation for these was applause, the acclaim of the people, of glory. This antagonism in displays of economic power had extended to such a degree that many of the upper class, purely so that they follow the “trend,” went as far as bankruptcy and all the way to poverty,

scattering their money incalculably on these displays, so that they are not out-paced by their peers. This, then, became a mob of men which resultantly died destitute and from hunger.

This inclination toward displays was not a feature of the few wealthy only. It had penetrated all levels of society. Even the poor cared to buy the best apparel, the best furniture and utensils, for the pure

purpose of exhibited wealth. They further extended their fallacious ways into employing even a servant in the house; they were truly led to believe that serving themselves detracted from their social status. Many, while they hungered, did not care for their nourishment above their social dignity, to show that that they are “something,” that they are well-to-do. The ideal social type, the successful, the admirable, was not the virtuous man, the prudent, the spiritually cultivated, but the rich, the economically settled.

Saint Chrysostom is angered by this situation. *All these things*, he says, *are external and of no benefit to the soul. These things do not define a person. The ideal man is measured by his virtue. Virtue is the source of human dignity, honor and glory.* He adds the need to *disregard of human values, embracing poverty and overcoming our nature by the virtue of our lives. It is these that constitute good status and reputation and honor.* The infusion of such vanity is what affects the children and is the cause of the continuation of this dreadful vice. It is at this point that Chrysostom, connecting vainglory with the raising of children, observes that the root of all vices lie in the fact



that children have grown up in an unhealthy environment and are influenced by it.

From the moment of his birth, parents are willing to do everything for their child. Sadly, this “everything” often only includes adorning him, dressing him up, and buying him trinkets; however, it does not include seeking out the proper way in which to raise him. Rather than extracting vices from the child’s soul, they introduce the love of money and the care for things that are completely unprofitable. The great shame in this is that it is the childhood years, the early years of development, which are the most suitable time to implant either virtue or vice. It should be concluded then that parents bear great responsibility when they neglect to form their children properly.

Timeliness and Education

Saint John says that the souls of children are soft and delicate like wax. If right teachings are impressed upon them from the beginning then, with time, these impressions harden as in the case of a waxen seal. None will be able to undo this good impression. Malleable things take the form of whatever they are impressed with because they have not yet taken a stable shape. They resemble boards prepared to receive paint, or material ready to be sculpted. Much attention is required on the part of the painter if he is to produce a beautiful painting. With great patience sculptors must pull away all that is superfluous and add what is needed in order to achieve the result they desire. There is no more wonderful material with which to work than the souls of children. Parents create ensouled icons of God, true living statues.

Further on in the treatise, Saint John likens the soul of the child to a newly-founded city and parents are likened to the ruler of this city. It is their task to put in place laws and to organize its citizens so that it is not destroyed by malevolent or anarchical factions. Many factions, both good and bad, struggle to gain foothold, securing their dominion over the child’s soul. The parental task is that of putting laws in place for the new city—an easy task in the childhood years because children are both inexperienced and submissive and therefore are made to conform much more easily. With age, however, the task of ordering, of forming his spiritual world, become much more difficult.

The Selection of Educational Influences

For the ordering of a child’s soul to be successful, it is important that particular care be taken to control what enters into it, what influences it is presented with. The selection of influences is vital. Chrysostom graphically represents this

control as follows: In the spiritual constitution of the child’s soul, the walls are the body and the gates are the five senses. All impressions and stimulants enter in from the outside world through the senses. If these gates are left unchecked, and all manner of impressions are allowed to pass through, havoc will be wrought because the child’s ability to resist is limited.

One might ask, then, how is it that each sense is to be guarded particularly? What should the child see, hear, say, taste and touch? This will be the topic of the remainder of this article. The presentation of all the possible recommendations would be an enormous task, so only a few will be presented here.

Strictness is an essential element of success in pedagogical work. It must, however, be measured and consistent so as not to end in sheer roughness but neither should it leave the impression that it is only an idle threat. Continual beating, then, is not the right way to impose punishment. The child gets used to being beaten, but is no wiser for it. The more appropriate method of imposing

punishment is to make use of the threat of punishment, occasionally putting it into practice, so that the child fears the punishment and does not think that the threat is empty words. Continual strictness cannot be permitted because man, by nature, needs forbearance and tolerance: *Yet when thou dost see that he has profited by fear, forbear, seeing that our*

human nature has need of some forbearance.

Particular care must be taken concerning what a child sees and hears. What Chrysostom says on this point is infinitely relevant in the raising of today’s children. All the mediums of communication and information—books, radio, and television—besiege the hearing and vision of children which are gates into the inner world of the child. These gates, left completely unchecked, will allow the entry of things of low quality or even ethically dangerous material.

As plants need more care when they are soft and delicate, says Chrysostom, so it is with children. We must be attentive to who they keep company with in order that we might control what is said in their presence and what they learn. We must not abandon them to just “anyone,” allowing that person to become the shaper of our children’s souls. They need not hear babbling and useless stories, for example, “This youth kissed that maiden. The king’s son and the younger daughter have done this.” There exist within the Holy Scriptures engaging narratives which, if offered in the correct way, will captivate a child’s interest and will teach him virtue. Saint Chrysostom himself offers examples of how one might properly offer these stories.



Sexual Education

What Saint John teaches about the youth's "sexual education" is also interesting, and is entirely at odds with today's liberal and unbridled philosophies regarding the matter. Fleshly desire begins to appear around the fifteenth year of age and it attacks forcefully. It is only restrained with great difficulty. Children must, therefore, be kept away from obscene sights and sounds, which serve to excite this desire. As a counterbalance, to replace the above types of entertainments, we must shift children's interests in other directions, toward trips and excursions, visits to cities and museums, and spending time with spiritual and saintly people.

In our era, the state of this problem is well out of control. If the shower of impressions and aggravations which our children are exposed to in the form of the prevailing shameless manner of dress, the provocative nudity of men and women which has developed into an institution, as well as the pornographic craze particularly of television channels, are not enough, the wise pedagogues of our times—the destroyers of youth, actually—introduced "sexual education" classes into schools. The wise pedagogical tradition of our Fathers advocates the control of irritants and impressions so that the youth, as calm and as undistracted as possible, can productively pursue their studies. This control also encourages that the enjoyment of the pleasures of this plane be left within the context of the blessed institution of marriage, which thus even on the natural plane remains a source of joy and delight.

Today's uneducated educators forsake their responsibility to instill stillness in children even in school, where temptations and provocations ought to be kept away so that education might function as a good outlet and a place of study and learning. How many amongst these educators are spiritually cultivated persons, so that they might undertake this work soberly and responsibly? And how many parents are willing to allow this, the most important, sacred and personal aspect of their children, to be abused and perverted by the lips and teaching of just any teacher, who approaches this theme with his own bad experiences and perversions? What will remain for young people to learn and to taste within marriage, when they learn and taste it outside? For this reason marriage and family have lost all allure and attraction in our days, after this holy, unique and personal bond between two heterosexual people has been reduced to one of many unions which they have already experienced. This new union may be comparatively considered as even worse than the others, once the married couple starts to experience the problems of "obligatory co-habitation" and the various worldly obligations and family stresses.

Children do not need to be taught about marriage by teachers or experience it ahead of time. Nature is a self-sufficient teacher. We do not need to learn how to eat, how to drink and how to sleep. All others are from the evil one. Generations

upon generations of men have married and made families, successful and stable ones at that, without "sexual education," which composes yet another torpedo to the foundation of education and the family. Finally, Saint John Chrysostom believes that marriage at a younger age is a very suitable medium not only for confronting the problems of sexual desire but also for success in marriage.

Conclusion

Gleaning only a few of the elements from Chrysostom's pedagogical treatise, which has no equal in its wonderfulness and usefulness, displays the great sensitivity of the Holy Father towards the theme of the education of youth and his deep knowledge of these problems. The influence of environment, the timeliness with which education is approached, the way punishment is laid down, the selection of what youth see and hear, and caution in his sexual education are themes which today's parents and teachers must also consider. The counsels of the illumined pedagogue are indeed useful for all of us.



It will be shown that God's holy Church, an image confirming to its Archetype, does God's work in us. The men, women, and children coming into the Church, reborn and recreated by her in the Spirit, are just about infinite in number; they are very different from each other in race and appearance, they are of all languages, life styles, and ages; there are great differences in their mentalities, customs, and interests, their social station, their skills and their professions; their fortunes, their characters, and their abilities are all very different, but the Church confers one and the same divine character and title equally on all: that they be, and be called, Christians; the Church bestows unity in that simple, indivisible relationship which comes from faith, and does not allow the many untold differences to stand out, even though they exist in every one.

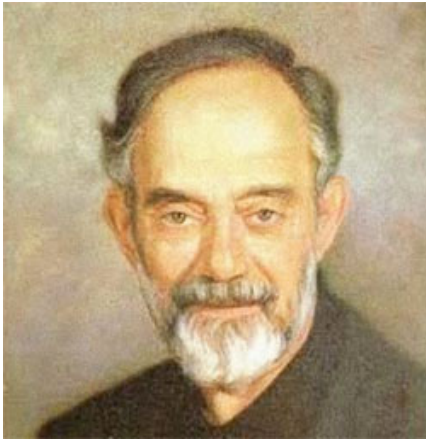
St. Maximos the Confessor

Wherefore, as children of light and truth, flee from division and wicked doctrines; but where the shepherd is, there do ye as sheep follow. For there are many wolves that appear worthy of credit, who, by means of a pernicious pleasure, carry captives those that are running towards God; but in your unity they shall have no place."

St. Ignatius of Antioch

THE CREATED, THE UNCREATED AND THE INCARNATION

Protopresbyter John S. Romanides (+2001), from his book "Patristic Theology," edited for length.



There is no similarity whatsoever between the uncreated glory of God and creation. The Fathers say that although we do not know God's essence, we do know some and only some of God's energies. When they say this, however, they are not

using the verb *to know* in the standard sense of the word; they are not making any analogy or contrast. In Orthodoxy, our knowledge of God's glory is not like the knowledge of nature's energies (for example, nuclear energy, thermal energy, solar energy, kinetic energy, the force of gravity, and so forth) studied by biologists, physicists, astronomers, archaeologists, and others; this is because when we say *we know* something in the sciences, it means that we have knowledge about some object or phenomenon that we can describe. The known object is describable; we know its description and are able to describe it. But what enables us to describe it? It is its resemblance to another object that we already know. A similarity exists between the object we want to describe and something else.

Another aspect of knowledge is difference. Similarity and difference form the basis of human created knowledge. When similarity and difference are present, an object can be described. Similarity and difference make an object susceptible to description and classification according to genus, species, etc. These categories of similarity and difference are the foundations of human knowledge.

But according to Aristotle's logic, the law of contradiction also applies in the sphere of human knowledge. This law states that it is impossible for a thing to be simultaneously its opposite. For example, it is impossible for an object to be totally white and totally black at the same time. It will either be white or it will be black. In a similar way, it is impossible for an object to be simultaneously big and small, heavy and light, existent and non-existent, good and bad, and so on.

The Holy Orthodox Fathers, however, do not observe this law of Aristotle when they speak about God. Although this law is invalid in Patristic theology, the heretics both accepted it and used it. But why don't the Fathers observe Aristotle's law of contradiction, this axiom from Aristotle's logic? Be-

cause there is no similarity whatsoever between the created and the Uncreated. And since no similarity whatsoever exists, no description of the Uncreated whatsoever can be made. Furthermore, since there is no similarity, there also cannot be any difference.

Created things are relatively similar and relatively different. But what makes up this similarity among created things? First of all, they are similar in substance. All created and material things are composed of the same essence or universal substance, including all visible and material substances such as the earth, clouds, mist, air, stars, stones, plants, animals, as well as the various forms of energy such as light, heat, and so forth. Einstein proved this with his law of mass-energy equivalence. In philosophy, the common name for this universal substance is matter. It is the dust, clay, and earth mentioned in theological texts. Secondly, material and visible things are similar in structure. All material bodies are made up of atoms and all atoms resemble each other to a certain degree. So from this point of view, all material things are relatively similar.

What makes material things different is the form of the universal substance and the structure of the atoms. That is, two objects may differ because one is in the form of energy and the other is in its condensed state as matter or because of differences in the composition of individual atoms and their collective arrangement within a lattice structure.

The same phenomenon is observed in the cells of living organisms. They are also relatively similar and relatively different. Irrational living organisms (plants and animals) and human beings are relatively similar insofar as they are structurally and materially made up of the same basic building blocks (that is, atoms and cells). They differ insofar as humans by nature have an immortal soul formed in the image of God and capable of noetic activity, while other living beings do not.

Angels and human beings are relatively similar in terms of immortality, the ability to reason, to be depicted, to be self-determining, and so forth. Yet they differ in terms of glory, immateriality, and the like. Angels and demons are relatively similar in nature, but differ in glory (angels are glorified by Grace, whereas demons are deprived of Divine Glory).

Now **God and creation have absolutely no similarity**. This means that when we say that the uncreated differs from the created, we are not using the concept of difference the way we would in science or philosophy (speaking about relative differences). We are talking about an absolute difference; and **Christ is the one and only bridge between the created and the uncreated**. In regard to the names which we apply to God, these reveal His energies which descend to us, *yet* do not draw us closer to his essence, which is *inaccessible*. For Saint Gregory of Nyssa, every concept relative to God is a *simulacrum*, a false likeness, an idol. The concepts, which we form in accordance with the judgment and understanding which are natural to us, basing ourselves on an intelligible

representation, create idols of God instead of revealing to us God Himself. There is only one name by which the divine nature can be expressed: the wonder which seizes the soul when it thinks of God.

St. Dionysios the Areopagite has written a very beautiful passage that is cited by the Fathers. It tells us that in the final analysis God is neither Unity nor Trinity; *It is not something, neither is it any kind of degree; it is not mind; it is not soul; it is not moved, nor again does it remain still; it is neither in space nor in time; it is in itself of one kind, or rather without kind being before all kind, before movement, before stillness, for all these things concern being and make it many.* God does not correspond to anything the human mind conceives or could possibly conceive. For example, we say that there is one God. Of course, when we say the word *one*, we visualize a number or a unit. We imagine that there is one God just like any isolated individual is one person. The same thing happens when we say that God is three Persons. But God is not three anything. He is not three subjects. He is not three objects. He is not one subject and He is not one object.

Whenever we think, we always think in terms of a subject and an object. The subject is what observes while the object is what is observed. But when we say that the Father loves the Son, we are not dealing with a subject-object relationship.

In this case, the Father is not the subject or the One Who loves and the Son is not the object or the One Who is loved. Since God is neither a subject nor an object, He cannot be construed as the subject of His love or the object of His love. So in God, there are not three Persons like three persons in a family.

Now there are certain Orthodox theologians who claim that God is a personal God. They claim that God is not the God of philosophy, a construction of human philosophical thought, but that He is a personal God. Western tradition makes similar statements. But in the Patristic tradition, God is not a personal God. God does not correspond to anything that we can conceive or would be able to conceive. The relationship between God and man is not a personal relationship and it is also not a subject-object relationship. So when we speak about a personal relationship between God and man, we are making a mistake. That kind of relationship between God and human beings does not exist. What we are talking about now has bearing on another error that some people make when they speak about a com-

munion of persons and try to develop a theology based on a communion of persons using the relations between the Persons in the Trinity as a model. The relations between God and man are not like the relations between fellow human beings. Why? Because we are not on the same level or in the same business with God.

What we have just said holds true until the Incarnation.

However, after the Incarnation of God the Word, we can have a personal relationship with God by means of and on account of the Incarnation. But this relationship is with God as the God-man (as the Son of God and the Son of man).

Since God became man, the Incarnation brought about a special relationship between God and man or Christ and man, a relationship that is nevertheless non-existent when we consider the Holy Trinity as a whole. We do not have a relationship with the Holy Trinity or with the uncreated

Divinity that is like our relationship with Christ. In other words, our relationship with the Father or with the Holy Spirit is not like our relationship with Christ. Only with Christ do we have a personal relationship. The Holy Trinity came into personal contact with man only through the Incarnation, only through Christ.

Being uncreated, God is accordingly not a human being. That is, in His uncreatedness God neither is nor does He

resemble a human being. So when God became man, He did not become something that He already resembled. Incarnation does not mean that God assumed a nature that was somehow similar to His own. There is absolutely no similarity whatsoever between human nature and divine nature.

This is the reason why the Fathers stress that man is not the image of God. Only the Word or Son is the exact image of God. The Word is the image of the Father. And since the Word is the image of the Father, Christ as the Word is also the image of the Father. But since there is an interchange of properties between the two natures in Christ the incarnate Word Who is also human, and as such, the very humanity of Christ is also the image of the Father. So **the human nature of Christ is the image of the Father on account of the Incarnation.**

Man is not the image of God. Although some people certainly refer to man as the image of God, it is improper to do so. Literally, *man is fashioned in the image of God*, but he is not the image of God. (Christ is the image of God and man is the image of Christ. In other words, man is the image of



the image, that of Christ.) Although the Bible relates that *in the image of God created He him*, precisely what is meant by this verse was fully revealed only in the Incarnation. In other words, in the Incarnation, it was finally revealed that man had been created in the image of Christ, his chronologically subsequent prototype. This is because from the very beginning, human destiny was to become like Christ, to become god by grace, and to attain the state of being *in the likeness*. A person actively becomes “in the image” when he becomes like Christ in compassion. So when someone manages to imitate Christ, he also begins to become an image of the Father by grace as he partakes of the glory of Christ. In this way, someone who attains to a state of *theosis*, in other words, a state of being “in the likeness” of Christ, becomes Christ by grace and god by grace. That is when he becomes like Christ and differs from Christ only in terms of nature.

Notwithstanding, Christ is God by nature and not by grace. When the Word became flesh, He became human by nature. The Incarnation does not imply a mere adoption of human nature. God the Father did not adopt a human being through the Incarnation in order to dwell within him and in so doing to make that human being God. Rather, through the Incarnation, the very Word and Son of God became human by nature.

In this way, divine and human natures were united in the person of Christ. The divine nature of the Word and human nature coexist in the person of Christ in a union without confusion, without alteration and without division. Christ is not merely a man. He is the God-man. He is simultaneously both God and man with the distinct properties of both natures. When we look upon Christ, we are gazing at the incarnate Son of God. After the Incarnation, the Word and Son of God is united once and for all with human nature in the person of Christ. (*He came forth then, as God, with that which He had assumed; one Person in two natures, flesh and Spirit, of which the latter deified the former*—St. Gregory the Theologian). Although the Apostles were eyewitnesses and servants of the Word, they did not recognize that the human nature He assumed was deified. And if they were scandalized by the human and blameless passions that they saw Him experience, how much more were most people unable to recognize this *theosis*.

St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite further explains: “When the Lord was transfigured, His countenance shone like the sun and His garments became as white as light. In this way, the inward *theosis* of His human nature by the hypostatic union of God the Word could be recognized by the outpouring of divine rays. Although His Holy Body always participated in and was made rich by the divine glory by virtue of the ultimate hypostatic union with the glory of the invisible Divinity, this glory was not obvious in the appearance of His body, for those who were not capable of beholding it.

It is not that He transfigured what He had not assumed or transformed, but what appeared to His familiar disciples was transfigured.

We must know that although the nature hypostatically united to God the Word was deified, it nevertheless remained unchanged and did not lose its natural characteristics—that is, being subject to suffering, corruption, mortality, and the other natural and so-called blameless passions. It continued to have these characteristics even after its *theosis* so that first of all they would make Christ’s Incarnation believable and people would not consider it to have been imaginary. Secondly, so that by these sufferings the Lord would heal what we suffer, irradiate the irrational passions by the natural ones, and, simply, so that He might be victorious as a man and grant the victory to us His relatives who share His human nature.”

Now when someone attains to a state of illumination, he becomes by grace *a temple of the Holy Spirit*. When he attains to a state of *theosis*, he becomes god by grace and like Christ by grace, but never by nature. This is why the union between all other human beings and God is not hypostatic, as it is in the case of Christ. There is only one hypostatic union between God and man and that takes place in the person of Christ through the union of the Son and Word of God with human nature.

Man is united only with the energy or grace of God. Man is never united with the essence of God or with the hypostasis of the Word. He is only united with the human nature of Christ during Holy Communion. In other words, man is united with the deified, resurrected, and glorified human nature of Christ and thereby he is united with the uncreated energy of the human nature of Christ or uncreated divine grace. **This grace from Christ’s humanity is what saves, resurrects and heals man, body and soul.**



The person advancing in the spiritual life studies three things: the commandments, doctrine, and faith in the Holy Trinity.”

St. Thalassios the Libyan (+662)

The pious confession of the believer is that, with a view to our salvation, the Creator of all things incorporated with Himself a rational soul and a sensible body from the all-holy Mary, ever-virgin, by an undefiled conception, without conversion, and was made man in nature, but separate from wickedness: the same was perfect God, and the same was perfect man; the same was in nature at once perfect God and man.

St. Hippolytus of Rome (+235)

BATTLING THE SENSES

St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite (+1809).

Why One Must Struggle to Control One's Senses



According to St. Gregory the Theologian we must struggle to block our senses and to control them, for they are the easy ways toward evil and entrances of sin. Let us not give in to the

easy ways of evil and to the easy entrances of sin. I say to you then, put all your strength forward to protect your senses. I also say to you to be attentive, to struggle, and I insist on this, by using various synonymous words.

I wish to prove to you that the devil is always standing before us, observing and studying the condition of our senses. Just as soon as we open even one sense to him, he enters into our soul directly and brings death to us, as St. Isaac has noted: *The enemy is standing and observing day and night directly against our eyes to detect which entrance of our senses will be opened to him to enter. Once he enters through one of our senses because of our lack of vigilance, then this devious shameless dog attacks us further with his own arrows.*

We must also struggle to protect our senses because it is not only through curious eyes that we fall into the sin of desire and commit fornication and adultery of the heart, as the Lord noted. There is also the fornication and the adultery of the sense of hearing, the sense of smell, the sense of taste, the sense of touch, and of all the senses together. Therefore, St. Gregory the Theologian has written in his heroic counsel to the virgin: *Virgin, be truly a virgin in the ears, in the eyes and in the tongue! Every sense that wanders with ease sins.* St. Gregory of Nyssa also said: *The Lord has spoken, I believe, about all the senses, so that the one who touches and the one who uses every inner power in us to serve pleasure has actually committed the sin in his heart.*

Those Who Live in the World Must Protect Their Senses More than Those Ascetics in the Desert

You who are in the world, dear friend, must guard yourself even more than those who are in the desert. St. Basil wrote to someone living in the world the following advice: *Do not relax your efforts because you are in the world. In fact you are in need of greater efforts and more vigilance to achieve salvation. After all you have chosen to live in the midst of all the pitfalls and in the very stronghold of the sinful powers. You have before you constantly the instigations of sins and day and night all of your senses are being attacked by their evil desires.*

If we are overcome by the desire for food or drink, we do not experience such a strong attack. Being in a desolate place where one does not see or hear anything out of place or experience the other causes of sin, we are thus surrounded by

a protective wall that helps to win our battles without wars, as St. Isaac said: *When one does not receive a sense perception, then he can have a victory without a struggle.*

In other words, the monks who have removed themselves from the world are fighting behind trenches, but you are fighting an arm-to-arm combat against the enemies. The attacks are coming from all directions. And the causes of sin are all around you. While they stand far off from the precipice, you are at its very edge. That great luminary of spiritual discretion, St. Poimen said: *Those who live far away from the world are like those who are far from a precipice and, whenever they are misled by the devil, before they reach the edge, they call upon God who comes to save them. Those who live in the world, however, are like those who are near the precipice and when the devil draws them toward it, they have no time to call upon God and be saved but fall directly into the abyss.*

Therefore, because you are so close to this abyss, you are in immediate danger just as soon as you neglect or open one of your senses. God forbid! This is the reason why you want to use all your energy to protect your senses from coming into contact with sin. As it is impossible for a house not to be darkened by smoke entering from the outside, it is similarly impossible for a man not to let them without restraint, allowing all manner of passionate images to enter the soul. The wise St. Syngletike said: *Even when we do not want it, the thieves will enter through the senses. For how is it possible for a house not to be darkened by the smoke entering from outside through the doors and windows that have been left opened?*

It is a Great Victory to Overcome Ourselves

Do not think for a moment that this victory is small and insignificant. In fact it is a greater victory to overcome one of your passions and a pleasure of your senses than to overcome one hundred of your enemies. It is a more glorious trophy of victory to shed willingly a few drops of perspiration and one drop of blood, for the love of God, in order to overcome one of your evil wills and to spite the devil, than to shed rivers of blood to subdue entire armies. Again it is a greater triumph to subdue your senses and your entire body to your hegemonious mind than to subdue large kingdoms.

Once, when King Alexander was praised for having conquered the whole ecumene, he responded with the prudent remark: *All of my victories will prove to be vain, if I do not succeed to conquer myself.* Many who have subdued their enemies, cities, and countries have later been subdued miserably by their own improper passions and have shamefully become slaves of their own passions. A certain Father was very correct when he said that *the first victory is the victory of self.* St. Isidore Pelousiotes also said: *The true victor is not he who subdues the foreign barbarians, but he who wages spiritual warfare against the evil passions. Many who have conquered barbarians have in turn been shamefully subdued by their own passions.*

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ON SUFFERING

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.



Only the foolish think that suffering is evil. A sensible man knows that suffering is not evil but only the manifestation of evil and healing from evil. Only sin in a man is a real evil, and there is no evil outside sin. Everything else that men generally call evil is not, but is a bitter medicine to heal

from evil. The sicker the man, the more bitter the medicine that the doctor prescribes for him.

At times, even, it seems to a sick man that the medicine is worse and more bitter than the sickness itself! And so it seems at times to the sinner: the suffering is harder and more bitter than the sin committed. But this is only an illusion, a very strong self-delusion. There is no suffering in the world that could be anywhere near as hard and destructive as sin is. All the suffering borne by men and nations is none other than the abundant healing that eternal Mercy offers to men and nations to save them from eternal death. Every sin, however small, would inevitably bring death if Mercy were not to allow suffering in order to sober men up from the inebriation of sin; for the healing that comes

through suffering is brought about by the grace-filled power of the Holy and Life-giving Spirit.

It is natural for a sensible man always to seek the causes of his suffering first in himself, and for the foolish constantly to accuse others. The sensible man remembers all his sins from childhood onwards; he remembers them with the fear of God and with the expectation of suffering for his sins; and so, when suffering does fall on him, through either his friends or his enemies, from men or from evil spirits, either sooner or later, he at once knows the causes of his suffering, for he knows and remembers his sins. The foolish man, though, is forgetful, and forgets all his unrighteousness; so, when suffering falls on him, he writhes in torment and asks in amazement why he has a headache, why he should lose all his money or why his children should die. And, in his foolishness and fury, he will point his finger at every being on earth and in heaven, as at the one responsible for his suffering, before pointing the finger at himself, the one really responsible for it.

Blessed is the man who uses his sufferings, knowing that all suffering in this brief life is loosed on men by God in His love for mankind, for the benefit and assistance of men. In His mercy, God looses suffering on men because of their sins – by His mercy and not His justice. For, if it were by His justice, every sin would inevitably bring death, as the Apostle says: *Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.* (Jas 1:15). In place of death, God gives healing through suffering. Suffering is God's way of healing the soul of its sinful leprosy and its death.

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

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

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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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REFLECTIONS ON THE FEAST OF THE DORMITION

By Elder Thaddeus (+2003), from "Our Thoughts Determine Our Lives," pp163-170.

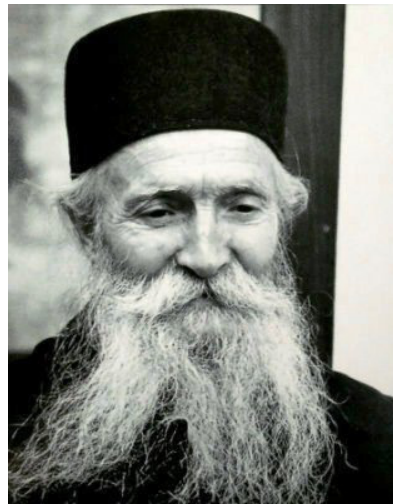
I thank the Lord and the Most Holy Mother of God that He has willed to embellish this feast day of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos through the angelic voices of the children who sang so beautifully. This reminds me of the days of my youth, before the war, when I was a monk in the holy Patriarchate of Pech, the Serbian Zion as some call it. The choir from Pech used to sing the responses at Holy Liturgy every feast day at the monastery. It was a mixed choir, very well organized, and the choir director was a remarkable person. I have heard many choirs from Belgrade and other places, but that choir from Pech was quite extraordinary. Today, when I said, *Blessed is the Kingdom ...*, the children responded with *Amen*. This reminded me of those days of my youth and it touched my heart.

When the chanting is as beautiful as this, we are freed from all our cares and our interest for earthly things and we ascend into eternity with the Lord, His angels, and the saints, where our true Fatherland and our Kingdom is. If our Fatherland were of this world, then we would live here in a state of wellbeing, peace, and joy. However, this life for us Christians is, so to say, an *epitimia*. ("Epitimia" is to be understood as an interdiction which, according to

Church canons, the priest as a spiritual physician may apply in certain cases in order to treat the moral diseases of his spiritual children. Similar to "penance," albeit not quite the same. *Ed.*) In this life we must prepare ourselves for life in the Heavenly Kingdom and we must attain divine peace. No one can give us that peace; only God can give peace to created beings and to us if we seek Him and long for Him with all our heart and if we desire to become one with Him. He wants our souls to be united with Him, with His divine will. He wants our entire being to become one

with Him in order that we may feel the joy of living. We, on the other hand, get very involved in this material life and we have no time to think about our soul, about our inner peace. We are always shattering our inner peace.

We have many examples by which we can learn. The Lord gave us first of all the Most Holy Theotokos. It was His will that the Most Holy Theotokos remain with the holy Apostles to comfort and encourage them after His Resurrection and Ascension. One of the God-bearing Fathers, a native of Athens, St. Dionysios the Areopagite, wished to see the Most Holy Mother of God. When he arrived in Jerusalem, they took him to the home of St. John the Theologian, where the Most Holy Theotokos lived. When he entered her chamber, he was at once free of all cares and worries and was overcome with ineffable joy and peace. This is how he describes his meeting with the Most Holy Theotokos: "Had I not learned



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in my youth about the True God, for me the Most Holy Theotokos would have been God."

See what peace, stillness, and joy radiate from the Most Holy Theotokos? God has allowed peace and joy to radiate from every soul that is one with Him. Divine peace and joy emanate from such a person and we feel good in his presence. Do you see what the Kingdom of Heaven means? The Kingdom of God is *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit*. (Rom 14: 17).

The Most Holy Mother of God prays for us ceaselessly. She is always visiting us. Whenever we turn to her in our heart, she is there. After the Lord, she is the greatest protection for mankind. We have dedicated a plethora of churches, throughout this world, to the Most Holy Mother of God. How many healing springs where people are cured of their ailments have sprung up in places where the Most Holy Theotokos appeared and blessed those springs to heal both the sick and the healthy! She is constantly by our side, and all too often we forget her.

You have seen that in this life anyone, even our closest of kin, can abandon us. We all have our weaknesses and often hurt the people closest to us. They can turn their backs on us because of our rudeness, or they can forgive us but still be hurt. But the Lord and His Most Holy Mother ... oh, how many times have we insulted God and the Most Holy Theotokos, but when we repent and turn to them in our hearts, they forgive us everything, never remembering our sins and evil deeds!

You have already realized how unbelievably quickly life goes by. One does not notice this as much in one's youth, but when the years bear down upon us, we see that a lot of time has passed and that very little is left of this life. Where

do we go when the end of our life comes? We know where we are going while we are still here, but what happens afterwards? Where are we going? Have we prepared for the Heavenly Kingdom, for our true homeland? Only the meek and those with pure hearts will enter it. Have we taken care to cleanse our heart while in this life, the heart that gives us such a hard time in this life? Have we said to ourselves, "Heart, you have caused me enough pain; humble yourself and be a patient, long-suffering heart!"

The Lord has said that we save our souls by patient long-suffering. We know that many misfortunes and sorrows come upon both the pious and the impious, both the righteous and the sinful. We all receive our share of misfortunes—this is a means of learning to accept everything in peace. On our own we have no strength, but God has strength. It is to Him that we must turn, deep down in our heart, and He will give us the strength to overcome all difficulties, for it is very important to rise above all those little things that take away our inner peace. We rarely pay any attention to this but allow the injustice that we come across everywhere in our lives to shatter our inner peace. Often we are the ones who do injustice to others. It may seem to us at the time that we are doing the right thing, but later it turns out that we were very wrong. We must learn to overcome all these little things with peace, united with the Lord, so that disquiet will not enter us from the outside, and so that we will always have our inner peace.

God is at the center of every person's life. He is in our heart whether we accept Him or not. He never separates Himself from us because He is the Giver of life Who gives life to every created being. We have buried Him with our worries and worldly cares, which destroy the peace within us,

and that is why we have no peace or rest. No one on earth can give us unshakable inner peace. Money cannot give us peace, neither can fame, honor, a high-ranking position, nor even our closest friends and family. The only Giver of peace and life is the Lord. He gives peace, stillness, and joy to the angels and the saints, to us and to every created thing. Therefore we must repent and turn to the Lord.

What is repentance? Repentance is a change of one's way of life; it is discarding the old man and all of his evil habits and turning toward God, toward the Truth. Repentance means becoming quiet, peaceful, humble, and meek. Everyone knows that it is very pleasing to be in the company of a person who is meek, peaceful, and kind. A person who has no peace generates restlessness and radiates it all around, so that in the company of such a person we feel unsettled, and we too become restless. This is because we have not united with the Lord through unceasing prayer. We have peace when we are with the Lord and His Most Holy Mother; she is always here to help whenever we call upon her. In her we have unshakable support, which remains the same for all ages and which will not change. We cannot find this support anywhere else on earth, not even among our family members, let alone in things like riches, earthly power, and honor. We can be left without all these things, but the Lord and His Most Holy Mother will never leave us.

And so, my children, as we celebrate the great feast day of the Most Holy Theotokos, let us prepare ourselves for the Heavenly life, let us teach our hearts to always long for God as the angels do, and for the Most Holy Theotokos, for she is our Intercessor and prays unceasingly for us weak ones before the throne of her Son. Whenever we turn to her in our hearts, she is always there to help. Countless are those on this earth whom she has comforted, and countless are the souls she has led from the depths of Hades to the Kingdom of Heaven. Let us, therefore, learn to become accustomed to the Heavenly Kingdom while we are still in this life. The Heavenly Kingdom is peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

We need to humble our hearts, which take insults so deeply, and also our so-called dignity, for we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven in pride, as when we take to heart each slander our neighbor casts. We must accept our lessons from everyday life, for each day brings us cares, worries, and insults. We must learn not to take insults to heart, for who knows what awaits us during the course of our earthly

lives? God is merciful to us and has concealed our future from us. Otherwise, not one among us would be able to go on, knowing what the future holds for him. We must live through many misfortunes and sorrows in order that we learn how to rise above all these problems that disturb our inner peace. We must learn to acquire the divine peace and joy of the angels and saints; **the Kingdom of Heaven is acquired while we are still in this life.**

In this life we are in Heaven one moment and in Hades the next. You can see this for yourself and learn from it. When our thoughts are quiet and kind, when we forgive every slander and insult, we have divine peace, joy, and stillness! But when we become angry because of someone's unkind words, we are at once in Hades! Everything collapses, and we lose all the joy of living that we had before. Can you see how terrible living in Hades is? Here, in this life, we are given the chance to taste both the Heavenly life and the life of Hades. We should choose that which gives us peace, the Heavenly Kingdom. We all desire this, without any exceptions, whether our lives are good or bad. All people long for peace and goodness, for ineffable love that never changes, and only God is this kind of love. He alone is unchangeable. He is always the same, and He is the basis of all things—preeminently of mankind. He is ever waiting for us to return to His embrace, but all we do is shy away from Him. He wants to



give us peace and to comfort us so that we may experience the joy of living, but all we ever see are the cares and worries of this world.

From the beginning of our lives, we have all sinned gravely. The Lord has warned us to be very careful lest we have a life of hardship and sorrow, and endure much pain until we humble ourselves and realize that we have sinned. For the Lord has said, *Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.* (Exod 20:12). That is the law. The Lord showed us how to honor our parents by His own example when, as His suffering on the Cross was nearing an end, He entrusted His Most Holy Mother to His beloved disciple, John. He said to His Mother, *Woman, behold thy son.* (Jn 19:26). And to His disciple He said, *Behold thy mother.* (Jn 19:27).

(In the Aramaic tongue in which our Lord spoke, the word “woman” implies greater honor than the word “mother.” Today it is difficult for us to understand how the Lord could have addressed His mother as “woman.” Likewise, when

the Lord was in Cana of Galilee, the Most Holy Theotokos turned to Him and said, *They have no wine* (Jn 2:3). And He said to Her, *Woman, what is that between Me and thee? Mine hour is not yet come* (Jn 2:4). (In our language, when we say “woman” this has a somewhat disrespectful meaning, but when we say “mother” it is much more intimate and affectionate. But in the Aramaic tongue, the word “woman” is much more respectful.)

See how the Lord took care of His Mother in His last hour upon the earth? What do we do with our parents? God forbid that we should continue to treat our parents the way we do. Even from our childhood we do not honor our parents, but we want to live long and well. How can we live well if we have disobeyed this God-given law from our childhood? The law of this world, which is ever changing, punishes every violation against it. How then do we expect not to be punished for disobeying the Heavenly Law—the Word of God, which never changes, but stays the same for all ages, for it is Spirit and Life?

We are the offspring of disobedient parents. When disobedience entered our forebearers Adam and Eve, our nature suddenly changed. It became corrupt, foul smelling, prone to decay, and mortal. Death entered us. Before the Fall our forebearers were immortal. Only God, our Creator, can bring us back to our original state, as He created us. It is for this reason that He Who is love came down to earth and was born of the Virgin as a child. It is for this reason that He lived for thirty three years among men. He wanted to teach us the truth and to show us that He is love. We need to look to the Lord, His Mother, the Apostles and the saints as examples and renew our life. We must repent and leave behind our former way of life with all our bad habits, and we must strive to learn obedience. If anyone has hurt us—our parents, our brother or sister, a neighbor—then we must forgive them all from the heart, and when we have done so, the Lord will know. Our forgiveness must not be confined to words only. The Lord wants us to forgive from the heart. Our neighbor will then feel our forgiveness and no words will be necessary. The person will know in his heart that we have forgiven him.

How does a person know in his heart that he has been forgiven? People have thoughts. We are like a fine thought apparatus. We are connected to each other by our thoughts. When we think of a person, he immediately receives our thoughts. But since we are distracted and our thoughts are scattered, we cannot discern who it is that is sending us thoughts or the kind of thoughts he is sending us. On the other hand, the person who has peaceful thoughts, who is united with the Lord and whom the Lord has freed from distractions, this person knows exactly which thoughts are his own, which ones come from the enemy and which ones are from friends. Feelings and thoughts coming from the

minds of our fellow men reach us. This is why I say to you that **when we forgive from the heart, our neighbor can feel this and the burden that has been oppressing his soul is no more.**

This is the way to learn about the Heavenly life and to acquire inner peace. Let us turn to the Most Holy Theotokos in our hearts and ask her to intercede for us, that the Lord might give us strength and that He might number us among His angels and saints who glorify God throughout all eternity. Amen.



A man takes a walk and sees something. His thoughts say to him, “Go over there and investigate,” and he says to his thoughts, “No! I won’t,” and he cuts off his desire. Again he finds someone gossiping, and his thoughts say to him, “You go and have a word with them,” and he cuts off his desire, and does not speak. Or again his thoughts say to him, “Go up and ask the cook what’s cooking?” and he does not go, but cuts off his desire. Then he sees something else, and his thoughts say to him, “Go down and ask, who brought it?” and he does not ask. A man denying himself in this way comes little by little to form a habit of it, so that from denying himself in little things, he begins to deny himself in great without the least trouble. Finally he comes not to have any of these extraneous desires, but whatever happens to him he is satisfied with it, as if it were the very thing he wanted. And so, not desiring to satisfy his own desires, he finds himself always doing what he wants to. For not having his own special fancies, he fancies every single thing that happens to him. Thus he is found to be without special attachments, and from this state of tranquility he comes to the state of holy indifference.

When God created man, He breathed into him something divine, as it were a hot and bright spark added to reason, which lit up the mind and showed him the difference between right and wrong. This is called the conscience, which is the law of his nature. This is compared to the well which Jacob dug and which the Philistines filled up (cf. Gen. 26:15). That is, to this law of conscience adhered the patriarchs and all the holy men of old before the written law, and they were pleasing to God. But when this law was buried and trodden underfoot by men through the onset of sin, we needed a written law, we needed the holy prophets, we needed the instruction of our master, Jesus Christ, to reveal it and raise it up and bring to life through the observance of the Commandments that buried spark. It is in our power either to bury it again or, if we obey it, to allow it to shine and illuminate us.

St. Dorotheos of Gaza

ROCOR STATEMENT ON SAME-SEX “MARRIAGE”

New York, July 11, 2015.

When our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ instructed His Apostles to *render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s, and unto God the things that are God’s* (Mt 22:21), He foretold of the future what was already true in the days in the Roman Empire: that a Christian would never be one who sat dismissively apart from the world and its governance, but neither would a Christian be one for whom the ever-changing whims of social governance would be the chief voice ruling his life. We are, as His followers, children of the *high calling of God in Christ Jesus* (Phil 3:14); we follow *the Shepherd Whose voice we know* (cf. Jn 10:4), trusting that His guidance will lead us out of all error into the haven of eternal life.

With the June 26th 2015 decision of the United States Supreme Court’s “*Obergefell v. Hodges*” case, every pious Christian has been given cause to consider anew these words of the Saviour. While our faithful living in the United States, and indeed all citizens of this country, are and shall remain thankful—both to God and to the founding ideals of the state—for the freedom in which they reside, which permits as one of its core values the free expression and practice of religion, **neither we nor they can accept principles, created by juridical fiat from an organ of the state, which so blatantly go against the Teaching, Will, Law and Love of God.** While the U.S. Supreme Court may have affirmed in law that a so-called “marriage” between two persons of the same sex is to be recognized, no pious Christian can see this as anything other than **an attempt by the state to render unto itself what rightly belongs to God;** for it is God, not the state, the courts or the electorate, Who fashioned male and female from the dust, Who blessed the *clinging of man and woman* together in marriage both *in Eden* and *in Cana* (cf. Genesis 2:18-25; John 2:1-11), and Who has sole claim over the fundamental nature of this bond. He *Who is the only Lawgiver and Judge* (Jas 4:12) is not bound by the determination of worldly judges, and He *Whose word is truth* (Jn 17:17), Who said to Thomas *I am the Way, the Truth and the Life* (Jn 14:6), is not subject to the redefinition of truth by any social or governmental body.

While we reaffirm today, as we have always done, the unchanging reality of repentance as a path open to all, without qualification, and abhor those who would react to any sin, or any sinner, other than in love and with the promise of new life that true repentance may bring, we nonetheless shall not succumb to the prevalent **social trend of our day, which equates recognition and acceptance of sin with love.** For the legalization of sin is precisely what this judicial act ac-

complishes, whatever may otherwise be its aims or intentions. Marriage has been from creation, is now and will always be a union of a man and a woman, and the Church shall recognize and bless nothing else in the stead of this sacred union that has been established by God Himself.

We deeply regret that the United States Supreme Court has taken a decision which, in so definitively spurning the revealed will of God, opens the peoples of this land to an increase of suffering and sorrow, and a further decrease of moral stability. That which societies from time immemorial have honored—the strong place of the traditional family, the need for children to be reared in the embrace of a father and a mother—has been dismissed through an act of overstepped judicial authority, and we lament the profound trials this act will inevitably bring, since the departure from God’s Will always results in suffering. Yet we are children of a sovereign and unchanging God Whose power is not thwarted by the acts of men, and we encourage the faithful of the Church *not to grow weary of doing good* (Gal 6:9) in the face of worldly trial. The Law of God is sure and steadfast, and against it nothing shall prevail. Our hearts remain calm and unshaken, and we fervently entreat the God of our Fathers to show His mercy upon this land, to guide its peoples and government aright. And to a world that has grown lukewarm to the truth, for which the choice between right and wrong is further greyed by political errors such as this, we exhort the same surety and confidence that has been borne by Christians through the ages, spoken firmly through the mouth of the prophet: *If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.* (Josh 24:15).



The goal of reading is the application, in our lives, of what we read—not to learn it by heart, but to take it to heart; not to practice using our tongues, but to be able to receive the tongues of fire and to live the mysteries of God. If one studies a great deal—in order to acquire knowledge and to teach others—without living the things he teaches, he does no more than fill his head with hot air. At most, he will manage to ascend to the moon using machines. The goal of the Christian is to rise to God without machines.

St. Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

BUILDING A LIFE WITH GOD

Hieroschemamonk Seraphim of Holy Mountain, Karoulia (+1981).

A man can live with God—or without God, as some people do. It is possible to live with God by reason of His good pleasure for man to do so, and also by reason of a man's own positive inclination. Here, the circumstances of the man's life appear either favorable or unfavorable; i.e., it becomes evident that what is essential is not outward circumstances, but the person's own predilection, his desire, his intent.

In order to live with God, to make this a reality, one must leave space for Him in one's daily activities—give Him room. The desire to live with God must be joined in the heart by the remembrance of God. A person is free to choose, according to his desire or lack of it, whether or not to incorporate the remembrance of God into his life. From this point, this choosing, the two paths increasingly diverge. One man desires it, another

does not give it a thought; he does not seek it. It may be that outwardly they live side by side, i.e., in similar circumstances, similar surroundings; but one lives with God, the other without God. Thus, the first thing is desire.

Next in order of importance is the extent to which a person is caught up in his external affairs, to what extent he is enslaved by them, how important and urgent he considers them; for exam-

ple the extent to which his work superior make demands of him: "Finish this," and, "Have it done by..." Perhaps he also has certain career needs or chooses ones requiring his attention. Whatever the case, it means being caught up in outward activities; this greatly hinders remembrance of God. And without remembrance of God, how is it possible to live with God? One must set a goal for oneself: to battle for liberation [from this enslavement] in order to maintain within oneself the remembrance of God—no matter what! This is a task which is both lawful for man, right before God, and possible within the conditions of man's earthly life. Try it and see yourself. The obstacles to this goal are only apparent and imaginary.

It is true, the beginning is difficult. But this is only because we are not accustomed to it and not because the remembrance of God actually disturbs whatever it is we are doing; not at all. He who so desires and looks into this matter will find the possibility of attaining it within himself. This will both amaze him and convince him that remembrance of

God is of great help in all his endeavors. It even makes him more peaceful and more successful in his undertakings. Life becomes more enjoyable; he is happier. Here calls the words of the Psalmist: *Those who remember God shall rejoice.* (Pss 20:5).

Once the soul's enslavement by outward affairs weakens, it becomes possible to "make room" for God in the midst of these affairs and thereby to live with Him. Man's life is occupied by human affairs, but if among them a place can be found for God, there, too, is life with God. But how, practically speaking, is this accomplished?

Remembrance of God is only the beginning. Next there are the feelings of the heart. These are the very life of a man. Think about it. Throughout a man's life, in all he does, his feelings (such a diversity) move in him; they live, change, accompany his every action, share in every part of his outward life. Pleasure, displeasure, irritation, joy, distress, jealousy,

striving towards or repulsion from something—these inner feelings accompany all the outward activities, his whole life. They exist. They are not imagined!

Among these feelings are those which are akin to the remembrance of God, conducive to it: fear of God, faith, piety, and gratitude towards God (how patient He is with us great sinners, He even showers gifts upon us!), love for Him, hope and trust in Him, a readiness to

entrust oneself to His care (He is good, mercifully kind, even like a tenderhearted mother: *Can a woman forget her sucking child...? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee* (Isa 49:15). These and similar feelings must be found in the heart, singled out from among other feelings, and nurtured. With their help the desired aim can truly be achieved—to live with God!

Together with remembrance of God, one must join these feelings, these good inclinations to one's actions, i.e., to one's outward activities which, like some kind of bubbles or vessels, can be filled (and they do indeed fill up) with these or other feelings from the heart. In remembering God while you work, concentrate also on those feelings which are akin to the remembrance of God. These feelings will be with you as you go about fulfilling your earthly tasks. Here already you have the beginning of your life with God. For this is just what it is!

The Lord desires to be with man: *My delights were with the sons of men* (Prov 8:31), and *they shall be My people and I*



will be their God (Jer 31:33), and *as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.* (Isa 62:5). Here is the basis of our hope to live with God. It remains for man to cooperate with this will of God. In his fallen state (and the Lord knows this; He takes it into account, humanly speaking) man can cooperate through remembrance of God, through his feelings towards Him—even though these are weak and confused. What is most important here is desire, and effort (both rest on faith). The Lord will fulfill and strengthen whatever else is necessary. Therefore, begin with confidence!

“Enslavement” comes from the influence of the external world upon a man. You must resist it. What is necessary is necessary, but these externals must never be allowed to control the heart. One can do what is necessary and the heart can be either at liberty or in bondage. Keep your heart at liberty, because a free heart can remember God and give attention to God even as you attend to your tasks. This opens up the possibility to live with God—and gives it a beginning.

The balance can shift: [spiritual] vigilance and a desire to be with God can become strong enough to outweigh the soul’s enslavement to mundane, outward activities. The activities themselves are not eliminated; they remain, but their power over the soul weakens altogether. A shift occurs in the inner life which attends the outward actions. Previously the latter fully occupied the person’s attention, while the inner life passed unnoticed; the person gave it no heed (how it was sustained was quite unknown— “by itself,” like abandoned children left to grow up by themselves.) But when the power of the external world over the man is weakened, there is a shifting of positions: external things become unimportant to the soul; they lose their former significance, while the inner life draws all the attention to itself and acquires preeminence. This allows for the very real possibility to live with God, when the thoughts and feelings of the heart are with Him.

In such a case one shouldn’t race about or overly focus upon one’s affairs, nor be overly concerned about them—all this is only a hindrance. It obstructs the effort to “live with God” while one is about one’s business. Previously the “doing” was everything, and the inner life was, by contrast, some kind of fog which was ignored; all attention focused upon the “doing.” But now these things, these activities, are but a covering, a covering beneath which is carried on the principal activity which is, in essence, life with God. This is a source of joy, happiness, light—here we can now say: *shining upon the world as the light of knowledge* (from the *Nativity Troparion*).

It appears, then, that without outward activity it is more difficult to “live with God”; there’s nothing to secure the attention, and feelings towards Him easily dissipate (after

all, they are weak in the beginner, just as his attention is scattered). Without outward activity a person is left like a plant pulled from the ground—its roots have no firm support, nor do they absorb strengthening juices. So, too, without any outward activity a person’s inner life weakens, and he loses the possibility of life with God.

The Lord established human life. Take heed! God gave men earthly cares so that they would not fall into something worse. “Vanities” are earthly activities undertaken without God, but they are preferable to the actions of irrational and destructive passions and sins to which fallen man is so prone. **And if these “vanities,” i.e., these earthly, human affairs, are undertaken with the thought of God, with the aim of salvation, they become a pathway leading to Heaven.**



THE CONTENTIOUS MAN

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 “Gerondikon”

CONVERSING AND LISTENING TO OUR GUARDIAN ANGEL

*From "Thoughts of a Christian Dedicated to the Guardian Angel,"
Jordanville, NY, 1962.*

*Sanctify my mind, O good one, and enlighten me, I pray
thee, O holy Angel, and teach me to think always posi-
tively and profitably.*

*Calm my heart from present disturbance, and strengthen
me to be vigilant in good, O my Guardian, and guide
me miraculously in quietness of life.*

*Have compassion on me, O holy Angel of the Lord, my
Guardian, and leave me not, impure as I am, but il-
lumine me with Divine Light, and make me worthy of
the Heavenly Kingdom.*

[From the Canon to the Guardian Angel]

† † †

I sense the greatest joy, says the Angel to my soul, when I see that you unswervingly follow the path leading to Heaven. Life is a brief arena; the earth is a dark cradle where a person—from the day of his birth until his death—suffers and lives on bread moistened with tears. How is that? You forget about Heaven and cling to earthly vanities? You are captivated by the present moment? You give no thought to eternity?

Let us suppose that Providence was pleased to grant you a hundred years of life. What does this number mean? In comparison with eternity it is a drop in a boundless ocean. And truly, your days pass rapidly and their end is soon to come. The last day is already not far off. But—what is saddest of all—you know neither the day nor the hour when the end of your earthly life will arrive. Death will come to you when you think not and will cut the thread of your life just as an arrow shoots down a bird playing in the air. Nothing is as sure as death; nothing is so concealed from man as the hour of its appearance.

How many more years do you hope to live? Thirty? Forty? You, of course, cannot say this with any certainty. But of the years remaining, one of them will be the year of your death. Death watches over you along the course of your life, at that place where you do not expect it, like a murderer lying in wait in a desolate forest to fall upon a passerby; you

will go by—and it will strike you in the heart. Why do you slumber and do not take any precautionary measures? Why do you not imitate the soldier who, although he does not see the enemy, does not slumber but stands guard at the gate to the city? He does not slumber so as not to be overtaken by a sudden attack on account of negligence. Don't you see with what frightful consequences this unknown threatens you for all your eternity?

We have often seen that a man's life ends with a light movement of the air, a breath of cold wind, the setting of a sun's ray, a single drop of water. Our days, like a shadow, disappear, and glory fades like a flower of the field. And in this fleeting life you want to secure your hope and your happiness! You hope to erect a strong building on a foundation as unstable as a river! What could so captivate and deceive you? The past grieves you with its memories; the present is heavy with misfortunes. Do you not see that those hopes which the future used to seduce you have disappeared like a

shadow, and just as you drew near to them they dissipated like nocturnal visions upon your awakening? Lies, deceit, vanity, grief, physical ills—this is the life you love to such an extent that you forget about eternity!

Unhappy is he who sacrifices the future to the present. Piti-able is that person who, instead of building himself a house in his homeland, builds it in a strange land and does not prepare anything for the homeland in which he is to dwell! How I suffer to see you earnestly busying yourself in seeking sensual and corruptible things, disdain- ing the good things of Heaven; not only do you subject yourself to the danger of losing these good things, but you willingly strive towards eternal torment!

So it is that a foolish man sells the Kingdom of Heaven, and he sells it for a momentary pleasure which the devil gives him, scoffing at his foolishness.

When the Almighty sent me to guard over you, He named me Guardian of the Royal infant, who is destined at some future time to rule together with his Father. I saw on this infant gold apparel adorned with precious stones, and on his head a brilliant crown. After all, are you not an heir of the Heavenly Father and a co-heir with Jesus Christ? But alas! What misfortune! Soon I saw that my young royal son threw his clothing and his crown into the dirt, broke



his scepter, offended his Father the King, and gave himself over to His enemy.

Son of the King Most High! Turn again your eyes to Heaven, gaze upon your Heavenly Father, bend your knee before the throne of the Mother of God, and look upon the glory of the Angels and that glory which is prepared for you. Cease, cease at last your foolish concerns over earthly vanities, and strive to be worthy of your high calling. You are called to reign—begin to reign over yourself, begin to govern your mind and your heart, show your firm authority over the devil, over the world, over your passions. Are your powers growing weak in the battle? Remember that in Heaven you will rest for all eternity. You ask: when will I take pleasure in this rest? Perhaps today, perhaps tomorrow; one thing alone is certain—it will be soon. Yet a little while and I shall accompany you to Heaven.

Thus does a Guardian Angel converse with the soul of a man, and blessed is he who listens and calls out to him in prayer: *Guardian Angel! Rouse my heart with that divine fervor which inflamed the saints who endured all manner of torment and suffering and even death itself with joy. For this, O my holy Angel, remind me constantly of eternity. Remembrance of eternity is true wisdom, higher than any human wisdom. It awakens holy desires, enlightens the mind and strengthens spiritual vigor. But the devil hinders it from penetrating my soul, and when it has penetrated, the enemy tries to darken it. O Angel of God! Grant that the thought of eternity should always occupy my mind; then the pleasures and treasures of this world will not seduce me. I prefer sorrows and downfalls which enlighten and strengthen the soul with grace-filled power. I shall choose a humble life, far removed from the vanities of the world, where, in silence, eternity will be the subject of my thoughts. Here I shall use every moment of my brief existence to acquire those riches in which, together with you, I shall delight for all eternity...*



For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Mt 6:14-15). What a simple and handy means of salvation! Your trespasses are forgiven under the condition that you forgive the trespasses of your neighbor against you. This means that you are in your own hands. Force yourself to pass from agitated feelings toward your brother to truly peaceful feelings—and that is all. Forgiveness day—what a great heavenly day of God this is! If all of us used it as we ought, this day would make Christian societies into heavenly societies, and the earth would merge with Heaven.

St. Theophan the Recluse

ABOUT FOOLS, WISER THAN THE WORLD

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

We are fools for Christ's sake.

[1 Cor 4:10]

† † †



Thus speaks the great Apostle Paul who in the beginning was guided by worldly wisdom, which is against Christ, until he recognized the falsehood and decay of the wisdom of the world and the light and stability of the wisdom of Christ. Then, the holy apostle did not become angry with the world because they called him “a fool for Christ's sake” neither did

he, in defiance of the world, hesitate to be called by this name.

It is not of any value to us how the world is going to regard or call us. However, it is important, and extremely important, how the holy angels in the Heavens will regard and call us when, after death, we meet with them. This is of crucial importance and everything else is nothing.

Either we are fools for the world because of Christ or we are fools for Christ because of the world. O how short-lived is the sound of a word of the world! If the world would say to us “fool,” the world will die and its word will die! What then is the value of its word? But if the heavenly, immortal ones say to us “fool,” that will neither die nor is it removed from us as eternal condemnation.

Whoever does not believe in the Living God, nor in eternal life, nor in the Incarnation of the Lord Christ, nor in Christ's Resurrection nor in the truth of the Gospel nor in God's eternal mercy and justice—is it any wonder if he considers that one a fool who does believe in all of this?

O, may every one of us who cross ourselves with the Sign of the Cross not only find it easy to endure but with satisfaction receive the name “fool” for Christ's sake! Let us rejoice and be glad if the non-believers call us such, for that means that we are close to Christ and far away from the non-believers. Let us rejoice and be glad and repeat with a powerful echo in the ears of the world: yes, yes, indeed we are fools for Christ's sake!

O Lord Most Wise, strengthen us by Your power that we not fear the non-believing world neither when they lash us with whips nor when they insult us with words for Your sake. Amen!

BLESS AND DO NOT CURSE

By Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona.

Bless them which persecute you; bless, and curse not.

[Rom 12:14]



My beloved Christians, The Apostle Paul, the mouth of Christ, has left us a paramount, wise, and life-saving commandment: *Bless and do not curse*. Our mouth should not utter bitter words, should not voice curses, should not emit thorns that wound our fellow man and our brother; it should only voice blessed words.

As we all know, a curse is an extremely harsh phrase. Just hearing the word “curse” makes us feel uneasy. Usually, curses are voiced by parents, particularly

mothers, toward their children. During a moment of anger, when they become annoyed, they thoughtlessly direct curses toward their children using a variety of expressions, thus rendering themselves terribly guilty before God. Of course, prior to this their children have been disobedient and defiant; at times, even rude and disrespectful. However, God does not give parents the right to react and respond this way when their children misbehave.

From life experience, we have observed that curses uttered by parents, especially by mothers, oftentimes transpire into a regrettable reality for their child. This occurs because, usually, their wrath is justified. A mother will never become angry with her child if he has not done something wrong. However, instead of becoming enraged, anathematizing, blaspheming, sending her child to the place where she has no right to send him, and expressing herself with harsh language that is unbecoming to a Christian mother, she should kneel frequently and pray fervently to God with tears, asking Him to grant prudence, enlightenment, respect, and obedience to her child.

Who can give a mother the right to send her child to the devil? In an instant, the enemy can fulfill the mother’s request and actually enter and take possession of her child. When a child is sent to Hell during a moment of anger and rage, it is quite natural for the devil to infuriate the child and make him behave even worse. This in turn will annoy the mother even more, and thus a chain reaction is initiated. As a result, the mother becomes guilty before God with her curses, while the child goes from bad to worse, bringing upon himself the consequential evil of the curse and anathema. Mothers, in particular, must realize that this

can often become a terrible habit, and they should implement the other method I mentioned. By doing so, they will fulfill their obligations to their children, in a manner befitting Christian mothers.

Accordingly, they should focus on advising their children with love, instructing them on how to pray, encouraging them to attend Church regularly, teaching them good manners, and edifying them with their own personal example. Thus, with less effort, their children will find the correct path leading to salvation, and later on in life they will be useful to themselves and to society on account of their refined spiritual state.

We have many examples of mothers’ curses that took hold and inflicted serious harm upon their children. I will relate one such incident.

Once, God led my footsteps to a certain island of our homeland Greece, in order to offer the Mystery of Holy Confession. There, in a certain village, I met a mother and her newlywed daughter-in-law, who were both dressed in black—both externally with their clothes, and internally within their souls. They were mourning because the mother’s son and husband of the young bride had been killed. What led to their particular tragedy? When the man who had been killed was still an insubordinate youth, he would secretly take his uncle’s rifle and go hunting. His mother constantly advised him: “My child, don’t go hunting because your uncle hasn’t given you permission ... something bad will happen to you ...” This boy, however, continued to disobey and secretly take the rifle. He would leave the house and take a long time to return. One day his mother completely lost her patience and snapped at him, “My child, since you don’t listen to me and always upset me, may you die by the rifle!” As these words came forth from her mouth, a seed was instantly planted.

Many years passed. The boy grew up and got married. One day, he went out to hunt as usual. He left quite early, but this time he never returned home. His mother, fearing the worst—because her conscience was eating away at her for what she had once said—got up at sunset that evening, and started scrambling through the mountains; however, her son was nowhere to be found. She returned home sorrowful and stayed up all night worrying about her son. At the crack of dawn she set out for the mountains once again. During her frantic search, she came across her son’s hunting dog, which led her to her dead son. Later, it was determined that her son had attempted to jump over a fence, at which time the rifle stock spun upside down, the trigger was accidentally engaged, and he shot himself.

From that very day, his mother and his bride dressed themselves in black, and amongst other things—as is common in villages on account of ignorance and demonic superstition—for six months or a year, I’m not quite certain, they

believed that they should not attend church. This is the methodology of the devil, who desires to deprive people in mourning from God's consolation. He locks them up in their home, isolates them from others, encircles them with a thousand and one destructive thoughts, and in the end, oftentimes, they commit suicide.

The conclusion: Even though these harsh words were sown while the lady's son was still a young lad, they materialized into a reality during his adulthood. This is what happens in many other cases as well. Therefore, we must be extremely careful when we speak. Oftentimes, a heavy word does not materialize the moment it is expressed; it is planted, nonetheless, and it can take root at a later time when God will appoint.

Cursing is an unbearably burdensome sin, which can inflict harm not only upon the person to whom it is directed, but, frequently, upon the person who is voicing it. We will see this clearly in the following story.

A certain bishop and his deacon were preparing to serve the Liturgy at a small village. They set out on their journey, and as they were walking along the road they encountered a poor man who was sitting somewhere off to the side. The bishop greeted him: "Good day, man of God." The pauper did not respond. The bishop repeated, "Good day, man of God." Still no response. The bishop greeted him a third time, and when the man did not reply, the bishop lost his patience and snapped: "May you have my curse!"

Perhaps he reacted this way because he took the pauper's silence as an insult. After this incident, the bishop and the deacon continued on with their journey. The bishop served the Liturgy, and at the conclusion of the service he felt indisposed and said to his deacon: "Deacon, I do not feel well. I think it's because of the heavy words I directed at that pauper."

The deacon replied, "May I tell you something, Your Eminence?"

"Yes my child, I am listening."

"When you cursed the pauper, I saw a crow come out of your mouth and fly in the direction of the pauper, but then it circled back and entered you again."

"Oh my! I must have cursed him unjustly! Who knows who that poor man was? Get ready, deacon! Quickly, let's go back."

They arose and returned to the spot where they had first met him. When they arrived, they discovered that this person was deaf—he had not heard the bishop's greeting.

A curse that comes forth and does not find fertile ground returns to the person who sent it. When a curse is unjust, the evil returns to the person who voiced it. For this reason, we must always bless; that is, good words must come out of our mouth. In this manner, we will not fall into this grave sin of cursing.

Prayer is the best remedy for this sin, which is so common and which especially burdens mothers, to come to an end. Of course, even if they have been driven into this unfortunate predicament by their children, God's compassion and mercy are infinite. He forgives everything when a person repents and returns.

May our good God pour His mercy and enlightenment upon us all, so that we repent and acquire His Kingdom. Amen.



The Mother of God is so much closer to God than others who draw near to Him, that she is able to intercede more powerfully than any of them; and by this I mean not just human beings, but even all the ranks of angels. Isaiah writes of the highest order of angels in Heaven, *and the Seraphim stood round about Him* (Isa 6:2), whereas David says of the Mother of God, *upon Thy right hand did stand the queen* (Pss 45:9). Do you notice the difference in their standing? You can also see from this the difference in honor between the Seraphim's rank and hers, for the Seraphim are *round about* God; but only the Queen of all stands beside Him. She is more brilliant than light, she blossoms more beautifully than the gardens of divine Paradise, and she is more delightfully adorned than the visible and invisible worlds. It is fitting that she stands not just beside God, but on His right hand; for where Christ sat in Heaven, namely *on the right hand of the majesty* (Heb. 1:3), there she now stands, having ascended from earth to Heaven. Nor is this solely because no one longs for Christ as she does, and no one is so longed for in return, which would be in accordance with the laws of nature, but because she is truly His throne; and where the King sits, there stands the throne.

The chaste Joakim departed to the wilderness and dwelt there, fasting and offering up prayer to God that he might become a father. And before he ceased praying or returning thence, he received full assurance that his request would be granted. Meanwhile, the like-minded Anna shut herself up in a nearby garden and cried to the Lord with pain in her heart, *Hear me, O God of my fathers, and bless me, as you blessed Sarah's womb*. And the Lord heard them and blessed them, and promised them a child. Now He has fulfilled that promise and has granted them a daughter more wonderful than all the wonders down through the ages, the Mother of the Creator of the universe, who made the human race divine, turned earth into Heaven, made God into the Son of man, and men into sons of God. For she conceived within herself without seed, and brought forth in a way past telling, the One Who brought everything that exists out of non-being.

St. Gregory Palamas

NEGLIGENCE, THE UNSLEEPING DANGER FOR THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN

From the "Plow" magazine, July 2003.

Negligence is a terrible conspirator against our lives and has wronged us many times, and we must never cease to regard it as our most implacable enemy. The Elder's fervour in protecting us from it and his profound experience of the crafty and intricate ways in which it confuses and entangles its victims makes it imperative for us to say something about this enemy of ours.

In the language of the Fathers this is called listlessness (*ἀκηδία—akethia*) as well as negligence and sloth, which all mean the same thing—spiritual death. We shall not go into what the Fathers have said about this pestilence, except that it is included among the eight evil thoughts as a comprehensive vice. We shall simply give helpful extracts from the Elder's experience, which are of particular use in our own generation.

When we asked about the chief cause of man's failure in his spiritual purpose, he would reply that it was negligence. On one occasion I asked him how it was that the Fathers give self-esteem as the reason, and he replied:

"Yes, that conspires against us too; but not all of us, only those it deceives. And again it affects only a few, because self-esteem corrupts treasures that have been amassed, while negligence does not even let you collect them. Negligence is like a drought in which nothing grows. Self-esteem damages those who have fruit, who have made some progress; whereas negligence harms everyone, because it impedes those who want to make a start, it stops those who have advanced, it does not allow the ignorant to learn, it prevents those who have gone astray from returning, it does not permit the fallen to get up; in general, negligence spells destruction for all those it holds captive."

"Using the pretext of physical needs and weariness from the struggle, this deceiver makes itself credible; and like a conductive material, listlessness transmits us and hands us over to self-love, the more general enemy. Only a courageous soul grounded in faith and hope in God can overthrow this conspiracy. Otherwise, it is difficult for someone inexperienced to escape from these nets. This is a great ordeal for those who live alone and for everyone who avoids a regu-

lated life, whereas it is unable to harm those who are under obedience and have tasks to perform."

"Listlessness begins with despondency and faintheartedness and the prolonged withdrawal of grace. It starts off with the application of economy towards some supposed infirmity or weakness, and ends in total disbelief and shamelessness and ingratitude. For those who live alone as hesychasts, it starts from neglect of the rule and order of their lives, and grows if not attended to in good time. But in those who live with others, it begins with idle talk and backbiting."

As a cure for negligence, the Elder recommended eschatological meditation in ascending and descending form: reward and punishment, the Kingdom of Heaven and hell; and also calling to mind the honorable memory of those who have taken part in the struggle. The means of grace against negligence are prayer, tears and faith. Again, the Elder would

recount many examples from the lives of earlier spiritual warriors who happened to be led astray by negligence and lost the record of spiritual progress which they had gained through great fervour and ascetic labour. The Elder would say:

"In my opinion, the other passions into which spiritual warriors are led astray are complications of indifference, because this erodes our atten-

tion and so opens the way to related and connected passions, and these take men captive."

To wake us up in the morning he would always shout to us, "Don't be negligent, boys, lest you fall into the hands of thieves." He even regarded a pointless occupation as negligence, because he believed that this too could lead to the same bondage.

As David says, *Let not thy foot be moved, and He who keeps thee will not slumber* (Pss 121:3); and again, *if Thy law had not been my meditation, I should have perished in my humiliation.* (Pss 119:92).



For a sheep that is sealed is not easily ensnared, whereas one which is unmarked is easy prey for the thieves.

St. Gregory the Theologian

Many ordinations do not proceed from the grace of God but are due to human ambition.

St. John Chrysostom

Περὶ τῆς Θεομήτορος

Τοῦ Ὁσίου καὶ θεοφόρου Πατρὸς ἡμῶν Σιλουανοῦ τοῦ Ἀθωνίτου.



θλίψεις. Ὄταν στεκόταν δίπλα στὸ Σταυρό, τότε ἦταν ἡ θλίψη Της ἀπέραντη σὰν τὸν ὠκεανὸ κι οἱ πόνοι τῆς ψυχῆς Της ἦταν ἀσύγκριτα μεγαλύτεροι ἀπὸ τὸν πόνο τοῦ Ἀδάμ μετὰ τὴν ἔξωση ἀπὸ τὸν Παράδεισο, γιατί κι ἡ ἀγάπη Της ἦταν ἀσύγκριτα μεγαλύτερη ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Ἀδάμ στὸν Παράδεισο. Κι ἂν ἐπέζησε, ἐπέζησε μόνο μὲ τὴ Θεία δύναμη, μὲ τὴν ἐνίσχυση τοῦ Κυρίου, γιατί ἦταν θέλημα Του νὰ δῆ τὴν Ἀνάσταση κι ὕστερα, μετὰ τὴν Ἀνάληψή Του, νὰ παραμείνῃ παρηγοριὰ καὶ χαρὰ τῶν Ἀποστόλων καὶ τοῦ νέου Χριστιανικοῦ λαοῦ.

Ἐμεῖς δὲν φτάνουμε στὴν πληρότητα τῆς ἀγάπης τῆς Θεοτόκου, καὶ γι' αὐτὸ δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ ἐννοήσωμε πλήρως τὸ βάθος τῆς θλίψεώς Της. Ἡ ἀγάπη Της ἦταν τέλεια. Ἀγαποῦσε ἅπειρα τὸ Θεὸ καὶ Υἱὸ Της, ἀλλ' ἀγαποῦσε καὶ τὸ λαὸ μὲ μεγάλη ἀγάπη. Καὶ τί αἰσθανόταν τάχα, ὅταν ἐκεῖνοι, ποὺ τόσο πολὺ ἀγαποῦσε ἡ Ἰδία καὶ ποὺ τόσο πολὺ ποθοῦσε τὴ σωτηρία τους, σταύρωναν τὸν ἀγαπημένο Υἱὸ Της;

Αὐτὸ δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ τὸ συλλάβωμε, γιατί ἡ ἀγάπη

Ὄταν ἡ ψυχὴ κατέχεται ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγάπη τοῦ Θεοῦ, τότε, ὦ, πῶς εἶναι ὅλα εὐχάριστα, ἀγαπημένα καὶ ἄκρως χαρούμενα. Αὐτὴ ἡ ἀγάπη ὅμως συνεπάγεται θλίψη κι ὅσο βαθύτερη εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη, τόσο μεγαλύτερη εἶναι κι ἡ θλίψη.

Ἡ Θεοτόκος δὲν ἀμάρτησε ποτέ, οὔτε κὰν μὲ τὸ λογισμό, καὶ δὲν ἔχασε ποτέ τὴ Χάρη, ἀλλὰ κι Αὐτὴ εἶχε μεγάλες

μας γιὰ τὸ Θεὸ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους εἶναι λίγη. Κι ὅμως ἡ ἀγάπη τῆς Παναγίας ὑπῆρξε ἀπέραντη καὶ ἀκατάληπτη, ἔτσι ἀπέραντος ἦταν κι ὁ πόνος Της ποὺ παραμένει ἀκατάληπτος γιὰ μᾶς.

Ἄσπιλε Παρθένε Θεοτόκε, πῆς σ' ἐμᾶς τὰ παιδιά Σου, πῶς ἀγαποῦσες τὸν Υἱὸ Σου καὶ Θεό, ὅταν ζοῦσες στὴ γῆ; Πῶς χαιρόταν τὸ πνεῦμα Σου γιὰ τὸ Θεὸ καὶ Σωτῆρα Σου; Πῶς ἀντίκριζες τὴν ὁμορφιὰ τοῦ προσώπου Του; Πῶς σκεφτόσουν ὅτι Αὐτὸς εἶναι Ἐκεῖνος, ποὺ Τὸν διακονοῦν μὲ φόβο καὶ ἀγάπη ὅλες οἱ Δυνάμεις τῶν οὐρανῶν;

Πῆς μας, τί ἐνοιωθε ἡ ψυχὴ Σου, ὅταν κρατοῦσες στὰ χέρια Σου τὸ Θαυμαστὸ Νήπιο; Πῶς τὸ ἀνέτρεφες; Πῶς πονοῦσε ἡ ψυχὴ Σου, ὅταν μαζί μὲ τὸν Ἰωσήφ Τὸν ἀναζητοῦσες τρεῖς μέρες στὴν Ἱερουσαλήμ; Ποιὰν ἀγωνία ἔζησες, ὅταν ὁ Κύριος παραδόθηκε στὴν σταύρωση καὶ πέθανε στὸ Σταυρό;

Πῆς μας, ποιὰ χαρὰ αἰσθάνθηκες γιὰ τὴν Ἀνάσταση ἢ πῶς σπαραγοῦσε ἡ ψυχὴ Σου ἀπὸ τὸν πόθο τοῦ Κυρίου μετὰ τὴν Ἀνάληψη;

Ὁ Αὐγουστος γιὰ τοὺς Ἑλληνορθόδοξους Χριστιανοὺς δὲν εἶναι μῆνας...

Εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη τῶν Ἑλλήνων γιὰ τὴν Παναγία...

Εἶναι ἡ δίψα τῶν πιστῶν γιὰ τὸ βλέμμα Της...

Εἶναι ἡ δοξολογία τῆς θάλασσας γιὰ τὸν ὠκεανὸ τῆς ταπεινώσεώς Της...

Εἶναι ἡ παράκληση τοῦ ἡλίου γιὰ τὴν φωτεινὴ σιωπὴ Της...

Εἶναι ἡ μέθη τῶν ἀστεριῶν ἀπὸ τὸ πέρασμά Της...

Ἔναι τὸ ἀντίο τοῦ καύσωνος μπροστὰ στὴν δροσιὰ τῆς παρουσίας Της...

Εἶναι ἡ εὐωδία τῶν προσευχῶν στὸ ὄνομά Της...

Εἶναι ἡ κοίμησις τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τὸ ξύπνημα τῆς ψυχῆς μας...

Εἶναι ἡ μελωδία τῶν μοναστηριῶν ποὺ ἀνυμνοῦν τὴν Προστάτιδά τους...

Ὁ Αὐγουστος εἶναι ἡ ἐνσάρκωση τῆς ἄδολης ἀγάπης τῶν ἀνθρώπων πρὸς τὴν Μητέρα τους...

Οἱ ψυχές μας λαχταροῦν νὰ γνωρίσουν τὴ ζωὴ Σου μὲ τὸν Κύριο στὴ γῆ· ἀλλὰ Σὺ δὲν εὐδόκησες νὰ τὰ παραδώσῃς ὅλ' αὐτὰ στὴ Γραφή, ἀλλὰ σκέπασες τὸ μυστήριό Σου μὲ σιγή.

Πολλὰ θαύματα καὶ ἐλέη εἶδα ἀπὸ τὸν Κύριο καὶ τὴ Θεοτόκο, ἀλλὰ μοῦ εἶναι τελείως ἀδύνατο ν' ἀνταποδώσω κάπως αὐτὴ τὴν ἀγάπη.

Τί ν' ἀναταποδώσω ἐγὼ στὴν Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκο, ποὺ δὲν μὲ περιφρόνησε ἐνῶ ἤμουν βυθισμένος στὴν ἁμαρτία, ἀλλὰ μ' ἐπισκέφθηκε σπλαγχνικὰ καὶ μὲ συνέτισε; Δὲν Τὴν εἶδα, ἀλλὰ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα μοῦ ἔδωσε νὰ Τὴν ἀναγνωρίσω ἀπὸ τὰ γεμάτα χάρις λόγια Της καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα μου χαίρεται κι

ἡ ψυχὴ μου παρασύρεται τόσο ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγάπη πρὸς Αὐτήν, ὥστε καὶ μόνη ἡ ἐπίκλησις τοῦ ὀνόματός Της γλυκαίνει τὴν καρδιά μου.

Ὄταν ἤμουν νεαρὸς ὑποτακτικὸς, προσευχόμουν μιὰ φορὰ μπροστὰ στὴν εἰκόνα τῆς Θεομήτορος καὶ μπῆκε τότε στὴν καρδιά μου ἡ προσευχὴ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ κι ἄρχισε ἀπὸ μόνη τῆς νὰ προφέρεται ἐκεῖ.

Μια άλλη φορά άκουγα στην εκκλησία την ανάγνωση των προφητειών του Ήσαϊα, και στις λέξεις «Λούσασθε και καθαροί γίνεσθε» (Ήσ. 1:16) σκέφτηκα: Μήπως ή Παναγία άμάρτησε ποτέ, έστω και με τὸ λογισμό; Καί, ὦ τοῦ θαύματος! Μέσα στην καρδιά μου μιὰ φωνή ένωμένη με την προσευχή πρόφερε ρητῶς: «**Η Θεοτόκος ποτέ δέν άμάρτησε, οὔτε καν με την σκέψη**». Έτσι τὸ Άγιο Πνεῦμα μαρτυροῦσε στην καρδιά μου για την άγνότητα Της.

Έν τούτοις κατὰ τὸν επίγειο βίο Της δέν είχε ακόμα την πληρότητα τῆς γνώσεως και υπέπεσε σ' ὀρισμένα άναμάρτητα λάθη άτέλειας. Αυτό φαίνεται από τὸ Εὐαγγέλιο: ὅταν επέστρεφε από την Ίερουσαλήμ, δέν ἤξερε πὸν είναι ὁ Υἱὸς Της και Τὸν άναζητοῦσε τρεῖς μέρες με τὸν Ίωσήφ (Λουκ. 2: 44-46).

Η ψυχή μου γεμίζει από φόβο και τρόμο, ὅταν αναλογίζομαι τὴ δόξα τῆς Θεομήτορος. Είναι ένδειξ ὁ νοῦς μου και φτωχή και άδύναμη ή καρδιά μου, αλλά ή ψυχή μου χαίρεται και παρασύρομαι στο να γράψω ἔστω και λίγα λόγια γι' Αὐτήν. Η ψυχή μου φοβάται να τὸ αποτολήμη, αλλά ή άγάπη με πιέζει να μὴν κρύψω τίς εὐεργεσίες τῆς εὐσπλαγχνίας Της.

Η Θεοτόκος δέν παρέδωσε στη Γραφή οὔτε τίς σκέψεις Της οὔτε την άγάπη Της για τὸν Υἱὸ και Θεὸ Της οὔτε τίς θλίψεις τῆς ψυχῆς Της, κατὰ την ὥρα τῆς σταυρώσεως, γιατί οὔτε και τότε θα μπορούσαμε να τὰ συλλάβουμε. Η άγάπη Της για τὸ Θεὸ ἦταν ισχυρότερη και φλογερότερη από την άγάπη τῶν Χερουβεὶμ και τῶν Σεραφεὶμ και ὅλες οἱ Δυνάμεις τῶν Ἀγγέλων και Ἀρχαγγέλων εκπλήσσονται μ' Αὐτήν.

Παρ' ὅλο ὅμως πὸν ή ζωή τῆς Θεοτόκου σκεπαζόταν, θα λέγαμε, από την άγια σιγή, ὁ Κύριος ὅμως φανέρωσε στην Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία μας πὸς ή Παναγία μας άγκαλιάζει με την άγάπη Της ὅλο τὸν κόσμο και βλέπει με τὸ Άγιο Πνεῦμα ὅλους τοὺς λαοὺς τῆς γῆς και, ὅπως και ὁ Υἱὸς Της, ἔτσι και Ἐκείνη σπλαγχνίζεται και ἔλεει τοὺς πάντες.

Ὡ, και να γνωρίζαμε πόσο άγαπᾶ ή Παναγία ὅλους, ὅσους τηροῦν τίς έντολές τοῦ Χριστοῦ, και πόσο λυπᾶται και στενοχωριέται για κείνους πὸν δέν μετανοοῦν! Αυτό τὸ δοκίμασα με την πείρα μου.

Δέν ψεύδομαι, λέγω την ἀλήθεια ένώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ, πὸς γνωρίζω πνευματικά την Ἀχραντη Παρθένο. Δέν Τὴν εἶδα, αλλά τὸ Άγιο Πνεῦμα μου ἔδωσε να γνωρίσω Αὐτήν και την άγάπη Της για μᾶς. Χωρίς την εὐσπλαγχνία Της ή ψυχή θα είχε χαθῆ από πολὺν καιρό. Ἐκείνη ὅμως εὐδόκησε να μ' ἐπισκεφθῆ και να με νουθετήση, για να μὴν άμαρτάνω. Μου εἶπε: «Δέν μ' άρέσει να βλέπω τὰ ἔργα σου». Τὰ λόγια Της ἦταν εὐχάριστα, ἤρεμα, με πραότητα και συγκίνησαν την ψυχή. Πέρασαν πάνω από σαράντα χρόνια, μα ή ψυχή μου δέν μπορεί να λησμονήση ἔκείνη τὴ γλυκειά

φωνή και δέν ξέρω πὸς να εὐχαριστήσω την άγαθὴ και σπλαγχνική Μητέρα τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Άληθινά, Αὐτὴ είναι ή βοήθειά μας ένώπιον τοῦ Θεοῦ και μόνο τ' ὄνομά Της χαροποιεῖ την ψυχή. Ἀλλά και ὅλος ὁ οὐρανὸς και ὅλη ή γῆ χαίρονται με την άγάπη Της.

Άξιοθαύμαστο και άκατανόητο πράγμα. Ζῆ στους οὐρανοὺς και βλέπει άδιάκοπα την δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ, αλλά δέν λησμονεῖ και ἑμᾶς τοὺς φτωχοὺς και άγκαλιάζει με την εὐσπλαγχνία Της ὅλη τὴ γῆ και ὅλους τοὺς λαοὺς.

Κι Αὐτὴ την Ἀχραντη Μητέρα Του ὁ Κύριος την ἔδωσε σ' ἑμᾶς. Αὐτὴ είναι ή χαρὰ και ή ἐλπίδα μας. Αὐτὴ είναι ή πνευματικὴ μας Μητέρα και βρῖσκεται κοντά μας κατὰ τὴ φύση σαν άνθρωπος και κάθε Χριστιανικὴ ψυχή ἐλκύεται από την άγάπη πρὸς Αὐτήν.



Παιδιά μου πολὺ σᾶς παρακαλῶ, ντυθεῖτε με την πανοπλία πὸν δίνει ὁ Θεός, για να μπορέσετε να αντιμετωπίσετε τὰ τεχνάσματα τοῦ διαβόλου. Δέν μπορείτε να φανταστεῖτε πόσο πονηρὸς είναι. Δέν ἔχουμε να παλαίψουμε με ανθρώπους, αλλά με «ἀρχές και ἐξουσίες» (Έφεσ. 6:12), δηλαδή με τὰ πονηρὰ πνεύματα. Προσέξτε! Τὸν διάβολο δέν τὸν συμφέρει να δεχθεῖ κάποιος την ὑπαρξή του, να σκέφτεται και να αισθάνεται ὅτι είναι κοντὰ στον άνθρωπο. Ένας κρυφὸς και άγνωστος ἐχθρὸς είναι πὸν επικίνδυνος από ἕναν ὁρατὸ ἐχθρὸ. Ὡ πόσο μεγάλος και τρομερὸς είναι ὁ στρατὸς τῶν δαιμόνων! Πόσο άμέτρητο είναι τὸ μαῦρο τους πλῆθος. Ἀμετάβλητα, ακούραστα, μέρα και νύχτα ἐπιδιώκουν να σπρώξουν ὅλους ἑμᾶς πὸν πιστεύουμε στο ὄνομα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, να μᾶς παρασύρουν στο δρόμο τῆς άπιστίας, τῆς κακίας και τῆς άσέβειας! Αὐτοὶ οἱ άμέτρητοι ἐχθροὶ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἔχουν βάλλει ὡς μοναδικὸ τους σκοπὸ, μέρα και νύχτα να ἐπιδιώκουν την καταστροφή μας. Ὅμως μὴ φοβάσθε! Πάρτε δύναμη από τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ.

Άγίου Λουκᾶ (+1961)

Από τὸ τελευταῖο κήρυγμα τοῦ άγίου και θαυματουργοῦ ιατροῦ, ἀρχιεπισκόπου Συμφερουπόλεως τῆς Κριμαίας

Τους Μισεῖ ὁ Κόσμος...

Ένα αείμνηστο κείμενο τοῦ κ. Φώτη Κόντογλου (+1965), ἔφημερῆς «ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑ», 16 Φεβρουαρίου, 1964.

Καὶ ἔσεσθε μισούμενοι ὑπὸ πάντων διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου. [Ματθ. 10:22]

Εἰ ὁ κόσμος ὑμᾶς μισεῖ, γινώσχετε ὅτι ἐμὲ πρῶτον ὑμῶν μεμίσηκεν. [Ἰωάν. 15:18]

† † †

Ἡ κίνηση ποὺ ἄρχισε νὰ γίνεται ἀνάμεσα στὸ Οἰκουμενικὸ Πατριαρχεῖο καὶ στὸ Βατικανό, μετὰ τὴ συνάντηση τοῦ Πατριάρχου Ἀθιναγόρα καὶ τοῦ πάπα Παύλου, ἔστρεψε κατὰ κεί τὴν προσοχὴ τοῦ κόσμου.

Ἡ ἐποχὴ μας εἶναι ὄλο θεαματικὲς σκηνοθεσίαι, γιατί ὁ κόσμος σήμερα ἔχει μανία μετὰ τὸ θέατρο, κι ὅλοι, εἴτε πολιτικοὶ εἶναι, εἴτε ἐπιστήμονες, εἴτε καλλιτέχνες, ἀκόμα καὶ κάποιοι παπάδες, παρουσιάζονται σὰν νὰ εἶναι ἡθοιοποιοί, καὶ τοὺς παίρνουνε φωτογραφίες καὶ κινηματογραφικὲς ταινίες, καὶ ποζάρουνε μέσα στὶς ἔφημερίδες, ποὺ τοὺς ιστορίζουνε μετὰ ὅλα τὰ καθέκαστα. Ἔτσι ἔγινε καὶ μετὰ τοὺς δύο μεγάλους ἀρχηγούς τοῦ Χριστιανισμοῦ, ποὺ πῆγαν μετὰ πομπή, σὰν ἄρχοντες, ἐκεῖ ποὺ γεννήθηκε ὁ Χριστός, πάμφτωχος μέσα σὲ ἓνα παχνί, σ' ἓνα φτωχικὸ μαντρί. Ἡ συνάντηση αὐτὴ ἔγινε ὕστερα ἀπὸ πολλὰς τυμπανοκρουσίαις, ἀληθινὰ μετὰ σεμνότητα ποὺ θύμιζε τὴν ταπείνωση τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Κι ὁ κόσμος «χειροκρότησε» τοὺς δύο ἀρχηγούς ποὺ διακηρύξανε, πὼς οἱ Χριστιανοὶ πρέπει νὰ ἐνωθοῦνε, καὶ πὼς αὐτοὶ δίνουνε τὸ σύνθημα, παραμερίζοντας κάθε... ἐχθρότητα ποὺ εἶχε φυτρῶσει ἀνάμεσά τους στα περασμένα χρόνια, καὶ πὼς «τὸ μεσότειχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ διαλέλυται». Ὁ κόσμος θέλει καὶ ποθεῖ τὴ συμφιλίωση ἀνάμεσα στοὺς Χριστιανούς, καὶ θαρρεῖ πὼς ἔχει δίκιο νὰ πιστεύῃ πὼς κάθε ἄνθρωπος ποὺ δὲ θέλει αὐτὴ τὴ συμφιλίωση, εἶναι κακὸς ἄνθρωπος, ἐχθρὸς τῆς εἰρήνης, ἔρημος ἀπὸ ἀγάπη, κι' ἂν λέγῃ μάλιστα πὼς εἶναι καὶ Χριστιανός, μ' αὐτὸ ποὺ κάνει δείχνει πὼς εἶναι ὑποκριτὴς καὶ θεομπαίχτης, ἀφοῦ δὲν ἔχει μέσα του τὴν ἀγάπη, ποὺ εἶναι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστός. Ἀλλὰ πόσο διαφορετικὰ εἶναι τὰ πράγματα! Πόσο ἄδικα κρίνουνε οἱ πολλοὶ ἐκείνους ποὺ δὲν ἐπικροτοῦνε αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἐναγκαλισμοὺς!

Ὁ πολὺς ὁ κόσμος κρίνει χωρὶς νὰ ξέρῃ, καταδικάζει χωρὶς νὰ ρωτήσῃ γιατί φέρονται ἔτσι σ' αὐτὸν τὸν

ὁποῖον καταδικάζει. Βέβαια, μετὰ τὴν πρώτη ματιὰ, δὲ μπορεῖ παρὰ νὰ παραδεχτῆ κανένας πὼς ὅλοι μας πρέπει νὰ ἐπικροτήσουμε μετὰ ἐνθουσιασμό αὐτὴ τὴν «εὐλογημένη» κίνηση, καὶ νὰ εὐχόμεσθε νὰ φτάξῃ στὸ ποθητὸ ἀδελφωμα ὅλων τῶν Χριστιανῶν. Ὡστόσο, οἱ πολλοὶ δὲν ξέρουνε ἂν ὑπάρχῃ κάποιο μεγάλο ἐμπόδιο στὸ νὰ γίνῃ αὐτὸ τὸ ἀδελφωμα, τὸ πιὸ μεγάλο ἐμπόδιο.

«Καὶ ποῖο ἐμπόδιο μπορεῖ νὰ ὑπάρχῃ, ἐκεῖ ποὺ ὑπάρχει ἡ ἀγάπη;», θὰ ποῦνε πολλοί, σχεδὸν ὅλοι. Μιλοῦνε ἔτσι, γιατί δὲν ξέρουνε πὼς αὐτὴ ἡ λεγόμενη συμφιλίωση γίνεται μετὰ τὴ θυσία τῆς ἀλήθειας τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἀπὸ μέρος τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, χωρὶς νὰ ὑπάρχῃ στὴ μέση καθόλου ἀγάπη. Ἀλλὰ κι' ἂν ὑπῆρχε ἀγάπη, ἡ ἀγάπη αὐτὴ θὰ ἦταν ἡ ἀπατηλὴ ἀγάπη τούτου τοῦ κόσμου, ποὺ δὲν ἔχει καμμιά σχέση μετὰ τὸν Χριστό.

Ὁ Χριστὸς ξεχώρισε τὴ μία ἀγάπη ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη, καθὼς ξεχώρισε καὶ τὴν εἰρήνη ποὺ νοιώθει ὁ κόσμος, ἀπὸ τὴν δική Του τὴν εἰρήνη. Καὶ ποῖα λοιπὸν εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ; Τὴν εἶπε ὁ ἴδιος μετὰ τὰ λόγια τούτα: «Ὁ ὅ ἔχων τὰς ἐντολάς μου καὶ τηρῶν αὐτάς, ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν ὁ ἀγαπῶν με... Ἐάν τις ἀγαπᾷ με, τὸν λόγον μου τηρήσει, καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ἀγαπήσει αὐτόν». (Ἰωάν. 14:21, 23). Καὶ φύλακας καὶ ἐρμηνευτὴς τοῦ λόγου τοῦ Χριστοῦ εἶναι ἡ Ἐκκλησία. Ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ἡ εἰρηὶ Κιβωτός, ποὺ μέσα σ' αὐτὴ φυλάχθηκε ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου.

Φυλάχθηκε ἀμίαντη ἀπὸ τὶς αἰρέσεις, καὶ θὰ φυλαχθῆ ἄσπιλη καὶ ἀναλλοίωτη ἕως τὴ συντέλεια τοῦ κόσμου. Κι' αὐτὴ ἡ Ἐκκλησία εἶναι ἡ Μία Ἁγία Καθολικὴ καὶ Ἀποστολικὴ Ἐκκλησία, ἡ λεγομένη Ὁρθόδοξη. Εἶναι αὐτὴ, γιατί μονάχα αὐτὴ διατήρησε ἀνόθευτο κι' ἀνάλλαχτο τὸν λόγο τοῦ Κυρίου, κράτησε ἀνεγγυχτα τὰ μυστήρια καὶ τὰ δόγματα, ἐπικυρώνοντας τὰ μετὰ τὶς ἑπτὰ Οἰκουμενικὰς Συνόδους, κάθε φορὰ ποὺ ἐπιχειροῦσαν οἱ αἵρετικοὶ νὰ τὰ ἐξηγήσουν κατὰ τὴν διαστρεμμένη διάνοιά τους.

Ἡ παπικὴ Ἐκκλησία τῆς Ρώμης δὲν τὰ κράτησε ἀδιάφθορα, ἀλλὰ κατάντησε αἵρετικὴ, γιατί ἄλλαξε καὶ μυστήρια καὶ δόγματα, σὲ σημεῖο ποὺ ἡ διδασκαλία τοῦ Χριστοῦ νὰ γίνῃ ἀγνώριστη. Τὸ κοσμικὸ πνεῦμα τῆς, νόθεψε τὸν λόγο τοῦ Κυρίου, κι' ἡ ἀλαζονεία τῆς τὴν ἀποξένωσε ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἀληθινῆς Ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποὺ τὸ θεμέλιό τῆς εἶναι ἡ ταπείνωση.

Λοιπὸν, καλὰ εἶναι τὰ ἔμορφα λόγια τῆς ἀγάπης, καὶ εὐχάριστα ἀκούγονται ἀπὸ τὰ ἀνύποπτα αὐτὰ



τῶν πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων, ποὺ ἀποροῦν πῶς ὑπάρχουνε ἄνθρωποι ποὺ δὲν ἐπικροτοῦν αὐτὴ τὴν ἀγάπη ἀνάμεσα στοὺς Χριστιανούς. Καὶ τοῦτο γίνεται ἐπειδὴ οἱ πολλοὶ εἶναι ἀδιάφοροι γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία, κι' ὅσοι πάλι δὲν εἶναι ἀδιάφοροι, δὲν εἶναι σὲ θέση νὰ νοιώσουνε ὅλοι μὲ ποιά πληρωμὴ θὰ γίνῃ αὐτὴ ἢ συμφιλίωση. Ἡ πληρωμὴ θὰ γίνῃ μὲ τὴ θυσία τοῦ λόγου τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποὺ εἶναι ἡ ἴδια ἡ ἀγάπη. Τί εἶδους λοιπὸν συναδέλφωση μπορεῖ νὰ εἶναι αὐτὴ ποὺ πληρώνεται μὲ τὴ θυσία τῆς ἀληθινῆς Ἀγάπης;

Ἡ Ἐκκλησία τοῦ Χριστοῦ χτίσθηκε μὲ τὸ τίμιο αἷμα Του, καὶ στερεώθηκε μὲ τὸ αἷμα τῶν μυριάδων μαρτύρων. Σὰν λείψανε οἱ ἀρχαῖοι τύραννοι, οἱ εἰδωλολάτρες ἐχθροὶ τῆς θρησκείας μας, οἱ Διοκλητιανοὶ κι' οἱ Μαξέντιοι, φανερωθήκανε οἱ αἰρετικοὶ κι' οἱ ἀποστάτες, ποὺ λεγότανε μὲν Χριστιανοί, μὰ χτυπούσανε τὴ θρησκεία μὲ πλέον ὑπουλον τρόπο, καὶ τότε λάμπανε οἱ νέοι μάρτυρες, οἱ λεγόμενοι ὁμολογηταί. Καὶ τοῦτο ἔγινε κατὰ θεία παραχώρηση, γιὰ νὰ βρισκεται ἡ Ἐκκλησία πάντα σὲ κίνδυνο, ὥστε νὰ εἶναι ἄγρυπνοι νύχτα καὶ μέρα οἱ κυβερνήτες της κι' ὅλοι οἱ Χριστιανοί, σὰν ἐκείνους τοὺς στρατιῶτες ποὺ φυλάγουν θησαυρὸ μέγαλον.

Γιὰ τοῦτο λέγει ὁ ἅγιος Ἰσαὰκ πὼς σὲ ὅσους κατοικεῖ μέσα τους τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα, δὲν τοὺς ἀφήνει νὰ συνηθίσουν στὴν ὀκνηρία καὶ νὰ νυστάξουν, ἀλλὰ τοὺς βάζει παντοτινὰ σὲ φροντίδες καὶ σὲ ἀγώνα σκληρόν. Τώρα ποὺ γίνεται αὐτὴ ἡ κίνηση νὰ ἐνωθοῦν οἱ Χριστιανοί, μὰ κι' ὅσοι δὲν εἶναι Χριστιανοί, κινημένοι ἀπὸ τὴν κοσμικὴ ἐπιθυμία τῆς καλοπέρασης καὶ τῆς πνευματικῆς ἀναισθησίας, κι' ὄχι ἀπὸ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ, οἱ πολλοὶ ποὺ εἶναι ἀδιάφοροι, καὶ ποὺ δὲν τοὺς μέλλει γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία, χειροκροτοῦνε αὐτὴ τὴν κίνηση, γιατί δὲν ἐνδιαφέρονται γιὰ ἄλλο τίποτα, παρὰ μονάχα γιὰ τὴν ὑλικὴ ζωὴ καὶ γιὰ τὴν ἐξασφάλισή της. Γι' αὐτούς, θρησκεία, δόγματα, μυστήρια, ἀλήθεια, μέλλουσα ζωὴ, εἶναι ἀνοησίες καὶ γελοῖες δεισιδαιμονίες, ποὺ πρέπει νὰ σαρωθοῦν μπροστὰ στὸ ὑψηλὸ καὶ κοσμοεπιθύμητο ιδεῶδες τῆς ψεύτικης συναδέλφωσης ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ἀνθρώπους.



Γι' αὐτοὺς μία ἀλήθεια ὑπάρχει, κι' εἶναι αὐτὴ ἡ ἀλήθεια τούτη ἡ σαρκικὴ ζωὴ ποὺ ζοῦμε, χωρὶς πίστη, χωρὶς ἐλπίδα πέρα ἀπὸ τὸν τάφο. Καὶ γι' αὐτὴ τὴ ζωὴ πρέπει νὰ θυσιαστοῦνε τὰ πάντα, καὶ πολὺ περισσότερο ἡ ἀλήθεια ποὺ μᾶς παρέδωσε ὁ Χριστός, καὶ ποὺ γι' αὐτοὺς εἶναι ἓνα ψέμα, μία ἀνοησία. Αὐτὸ τὸ πλῆθος ποὺ εἶναι ἀδιάφορο γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία, βογγάει φοβερικὰ καταπάνω σὲ κείνους ποὺ ἀγωνίζονται γιὰ νὰ φυλαχτῇ ὁ θησαυρὸς τῆς Ὁρθοδοξίας, καὶ νὰ μὴ θυσιαστῇ στὸ παζάρεμα ποὺ θὰ γίνῃ γιὰ τὴν κοσμικὴ συμφιλίωση ἀνάμεσα στοὺς ἀνθρώπους. Γι' αὐτὸ τὸ πλῆθος, εἶναι ἀκατανόητο τὸ πείσμα ποὺ φανερώνουν «οἱ φανατικοὶ θρησκόληπτοι, οἱ ἐχθροὶ τῆς προόδου, οἱ μισαλλόδοξοι, οἱ μνησίκακοι».

Πόσο εὐκόλο πράγμα εἶναι νὰ τὰ βλέπη κανένας ὅλα, καὶ θρησκεία, καὶ Χριστό, καὶ πίστη μὲ τέτοιο μακάριον τρόπο! Νὰ μὴ σκοτίζεσαι γιὰ τίποτα, καὶ ὅμως νὰ φαίνεσαι πὼς εἶσαι καὶ γεμάτος ἀγάπη, ταπεινὸς κι' ἀμνησίκακος περισσότερο ἀπὸ τοὺς ἁγίους! Σήμερα ποὺ ἤμαστε ἔτοιμοι νὰ σπαράξουμε ὁ ἓνας τὸν ἄλλον γιὰ τὸ συμφέρον, γέμισε ὁ κόσμος ἀπὸ ἀνθρώπους ποὺ περνοῦν γιὰ ψυχοπόνοι καὶ γιὰ κήρυκες τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς ταπεινώσης, ἐπειδὴ φωνάζουνε νὰ σαρωθοῦνε «τὰ μίση τοῦ παρελθόντος καὶ νὰ λησμονηθοῦν οἱ δογματικὲς ἀνοησίες ποὺ ἐμπόδιζαν ἐπὶ αἰῶνας τὴν προσέγγισιν τῆς Ἀνατολικῆς καὶ τῆς Δυτικῆς Ἐκκλησίας».

Γι' αὐτοὺς τοὺς καλοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ποὺ δὲν ἔχουνε ἀνάγκη ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία γιὰ νὰ εἶναι καλοὶ ἄνθρωποι, οἱ ὁμολογητὲς ποὺ βασανισθήκανε γιὰ τὴν πίστη μας ἀπὸ τοὺς αἰρετικούς, καὶ ποὺ προτιμήσανε νὰ θανατωθοῦνε παρὰ νὰ τὴν ἀρνηθοῦνε, ἦτανε κάποιοι στενόμυαλοι πεισματάρηδες, κακοὶ καὶ μοχθηροί, ποὺ δὲν εἶχανε καθόλου ἀγάπη μέσα τους, κι' ἄς τοὺς εἶπανε ἁγίους. Ἅγιοι εἶναι οἱ σημερινοὶ κράχτες τῆς συναδελφώσεως μὲ τοὺς αἰρετικούς, κι' ὄχι ὁ Ἀθανάσιος, ὁ Βασίλειος, ὁ Σπυριδών, ὁ Νικόλαος, ὁ Εὐστάθιος, ὁ Μάξιμος, ὁ Θεόδωρος Στουδίτης, ὁ Θεοφάνης ὁ Γραπτός, ὁ Γρηγόριος Παλαμᾶς, ὁ Μάρκος ὁ Εὐγενικός, ὁ Νικόδημος

Ἄγιορείτης, κ' οἱ ἄλλοι φανατικοὶ καλόγηροι. Μὰ γιὰ τοὺς ἔξυπνους ποὺ δὲν δίνουνε πεντάρα γιὰ τὴ θρησκεία, κ' οἱ μάρτυρες ἀκόμα ποὺ χύσανε τὸ αἷμα τους γιὰ νὰ στερεωθῇ ἡ Ἐκκλησία, καὶ κείνοι ἄδικα σφαχτήκανε καὶ κρεμασθήκανε καὶ χάσανε τὴ ζωὴ τους γιὰ ἓνα ἀνόητο πείσμα, ἐπειδὴ πιστέψανε σὲ κάποιον ψέμα ποὺ τὸ νομίσανε γιὰ ἀλήθεια. **Τὸ «πρακτικὸ μυαλὸ» τοῦ σημερινοῦ κόσμου τὰ περιπαίζει ὅλα, θρησκεία, πίστη, δόγματα, μυστήρια, σωτηρία, μέλλουσα ζωὴ.**

Πῶς νὰ θυσιάσης, λέγει, τούτη τὴ ζωὴ τὴ χειροπιαστή, γιὰ τὴν ἄλλη, ποὺ δὲν γύρισε κανένας ἀπὸ τὸν ἄδη γιὰ νὰ μᾶς πῆ πῶς ὑπάρχει! «Κάλιο πέντε καὶ στὸ χέρι, παρὰ δέκα καὶ καρτέρι». Ἔτσι συλλογίζεται ὁ φρόνιμος, ὁ πρακτικὸς ἄνθρωπος, καὶ πορεύεται ἀναλόγως. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ποὺ ἐνθουσιάσθηκε γιὰ τὴν Ἑνωσὴ τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν, «γιὰ νὰ πάψουν τέλος πάντων αὐτὲς οἱ ἀνοησίες μὲ τὰ σχίσματα, μὲ τὰ δόγματα καὶ τοὺς βυζαντινισμούς». Τί ὠραία! Τί καλά! Τὴ δουλειά μας νὰ κάνουμε. «Νὰ γίνουμε καὶ στὴ θρησκεία Εὐρωπαῖοι, ὅπως γινήκαμε Εὐρωπαῖοι σὲ ὅλα. Νὰ συγγενέψουμε μὲ τοὺς Εὐρωπαίους Χριστιανούς, νὰ παρατήσουμε πιά τούτη τὴ βλάχικη θρησκεία μὲ τοὺς λυγδιασμένους καλόγερους. Νὰ συγχρονισθοῦμε. Νὰ ἀποκτήσουμε ἰερωμένους εὐπαρουσίαστους, ὄχι τσελιγκάδες ἀχτένιστους, σὰν τὸν Κοσμά τὸν Αἰτωλὸ μὲ τὴν κλίτσα. Ἐκεῖ θὰ βρισκόμαστε αἰωνίως; Ὑπανάπτυκτοι θὰ μένουμε καὶ στὴ θρησκεία;».

Ὁ διάβολος πάντα τάξει πολλὰ σὲ κείνους ποὺ θέλει νὰ μπλέξῃ στὰ δίχτυά του. Στους πρωτόπλαστους εἶπε πῶς θὰ γίνουμε θεοί, ἂν τὸν ἀκούσουνε καὶ φᾶνε ἀπὸ τὸ Δένδρο τῆς Γνώσεως. Ἔτσι καὶ τώρα, σὲ ὅλους αὐτοὺς ποὺ ἐπικροτοῦνε τὴν «ἰερὴ συμμαχία» τοῦ πάπα μὲ τὸν Πατριάρχη, στοὺς ἀδιάφορους γιὰ τὰ θρησκευτικά, στοὺς ἄθεους καὶ στοὺς ψευτοχριστιανούς, λέγει γιὰ νὰ τοὺς σαγήνῃ, πῶς θὰ φανοῦνε στὰ μάτια τοῦ κόσμου φιλάδελφοι, ἀμνησίκακοι, ταπεινοί, μὰ καὶ προοδευτικοί, φιλελεύθεροι, χωρὶς φανατισμούς καὶ δεισιδαιμονίες. Καὶ πῶς, μὲ τὸ νὰ ἐγκρίνουνε ὅ,τι γίνεται γιὰ τὸ ἀδέρφωμα τῶν Χριστιανῶν, συνεργοῦνε στὸ καλὸ τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος, γιὰ νὰ ζήσῃ ἡσυχία καὶ ν' ἀπολάψῃ τὰ καλά τούτου τοῦ κόσμου, χωρὶς νὰ μωπιδίζεται ἀπὸ τὴ θρησκεία τοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ τὴν «καταραμένη διδασκαλία» του, ποὺ χωρίζει τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ τοὺς κάνει νὰ ἐχθρεύονται μεταξὺ τους.

Ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστὸς εἶπε πῶς ἦρθε στὸν κόσμον γιὰ νὰ τὸν κἀνῃ ἄνω-κάτω, νὰ χωρίσῃ γονιούς ἀπὸ τὰ τέκνα, ἀδελφὸ ἀπὸ ἀδελφός: «Μὴ νομίσητε, λέγει, ὅτι ἦλθον βαλεῖν εἰρήνην ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν. Οὐκ ἦλθον βαλεῖν εἰρήνην, ἀλλὰ μάχαιραν. Ἦλθον γὰρ διχᾶσαι

ἄνθρωπον παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ θυγατέρα κατὰ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτῆς καὶ νύμφην κατὰ τῆς πενθερᾶς αὐτῆς.» (Μάτθ.10, 24). Καὶ σὲ ἄλλο μέρος λέγει πάλι: «Πῦρ ἦλθον βαλεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν.» (Λούκ. 12, 49). Πῶς γίνεται, αὐτὸς ὁ Χριστὸς ποὺ μιλοῦσε ὁλοένα γιὰ εἰρήνη, καὶ χαιρετοῦσε λέγοντας «Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν», πῶς λέγει πάλι πῶς ἦρθε στὴ γῆ γιὰ νὰ βάλῃ φωτιὰ νὰ τὴν κάψῃ;

Καὶ λέγει ὁ διάβολος στ' αὐτὸ τοῦ κόσμου: «Λοιπόν, ἐσεῖς οἱ ἄνθρωποι πρέπει νὰ βάλετε ἓνα τέλος στὴ φαγομάρα ποὺ ἔρριξε ἀνάμεσά σας αὐτὸς ὁ ταραχοποιὸς ποὺ λέγεται Χριστὸς, γιὰ νὰ μπορέσετε νὰ ζήσετε ἡσυχία καὶ μονιασμένοι. Ἐκεῖνος εἶπε πῶς θὰ φέρῃ στὸν κόσμον τὴν ταραχὴ καὶ τὴ διχόνοια, καὶ τὴν ἔφερε. Ἐγὼ σᾶς φέρνω τὴν εἰρήνην καὶ τὴν ἀγάπη καὶ ἄς μὲ λένε διάβολο, σατανᾶ καὶ ἄνθρωποκτόνο. Ἦρθε ἡ ὥρα νὰ καταλάβετε ποιὸς εἶναι ὁ ἐχθρὸς σας καὶ ποιὸς ὁ εὐεργέτης σας. Εὐεργέτης σας εἶμαι ἐγὼ ὁ ἀδικοκατηγορημένος, ὅπως τὸ βλέπετε καθαρὰ σήμερον ποὺ καθάρισαν τὰ μάτια σας μὲ τὴν ἐπιστήμη καὶ μὲ τὴν ἀληθινὴ γνώση. Τόσους αἰῶνες σᾶς τύφλωνε ἐκεῖνος ὁ πλάνος ὁ Χριστὸς μὲ τὰ παραμύθια του.»

Ἀνάθεμά τον τὸν ἀρχιψεύτη καὶ ἀλήτη τὸν ἐώσφορο!



Στὴ γειτονιά μας ἦταν κάποιος Κύπριος καὶ εἶχε ἓναν ὑποτακτικὸ, ὁ ὁποῖος τοὺς γονεῖς του δὲν εἶχε ἀναπαύσει, νὰ ποῦμε. Ὅταν καλογέρευσε, καὶ τὸν Γέροντά του δὲν τὸν ἀνέπαυσε. Κι' ἐκεῖ ποὺ καθόμαστε στὴ Μικρὴ Ἁγία Ἄννα, τὸν ἔστειλε ὁ Γέροντάς του στὸν Γέροντα, τὸν γερο-Ἰωσήφ, νὰ πει τὸν λογισμό του καὶ ὅ,τι μπορεῖ νὰ τὸν βοηθήσει. Ὅταν ἦρθε ἐκεῖ, ἤμαστε γύρω ἔτσι μὲ τὸν Γέροντα, λέει: «Ἄντε ἐσύ, πήγαινε ἐσύ, πήγαινε στὰ δωματιά σας ἔλα ἴδω, πάτερ Ἰωάννη». Ἀνεβαίνει, πήγαινε στὸ δωμάτιό του.

- Γέροντα, λέει, ἡ ψυχὴ μου κλαίει, κλαίει, κλαίει σὰν μικρὸ παιδί.

- Γιατί, παιδί μου, ἡ ψυχὴ σου κλαίει;

- Διότι, λέει, δὲν ἀνέπαυσα τὸν Γέροντά μου.

- Ἔ, ποῦ καταλαμβάνεις ὅτι δὲν ἀνέπαυσε τὸν Γέροντα;

- Νά, λέει, ἔτσι στὴν ὑπακοή.

- Ἄκουσε, παιδί μου. Ἐκεῖ ποὺ γκρέμισες, ἐκεῖ νὰ διορθώσεις. Ἐχαλάρωσε τὸ «νά ἴναι εὐλογημένο», τὴν ταπεινὴν καὶ τὴν αὐταπάρησην στὸν Γέροντα. Μὴ ζητᾶς τώρα μὲ τὴν εὐχὴ ἢ μὲ τὴν Θεία Μετάληψη, πάτερ μου, νὰ διορθώσεις τὸ λάθος σου. Ἐκεῖ ἔσφαλες, ἐκεῖ νὰ βάλεις μετάνοια, ἐκεῖ νὰ διορθώσεις.

Γέρον Ἐφραίμ Κατουνακιώτης (+1998)

Σήμερα Ξεχάσαμε Τον Θεό, Τον Είρω-νευόμαστε, Τον Υβρίζουμε... και να Ποῦ Φτάσαμε!...

Μητροπολίτου Μεσογαίας Νικολάου, σέ ὁμιλία του πρὸς μαθητὰς ἐπὶ τῆς ἐνάρξεως νέου σχολικοῦ ἔτους.

Αγαπητά μου παιδιά,
Σὰς εὐχομαι ΚΑΛΗ ΣΧΟΛΙΚΗ ΧΡΟΝΙΑ μὲ πρόοδο στὸν ἀγῶνα τῆς μόρφωσής σας καὶ ὁμορφες ἐμπειρίες σχολικῆς ζωῆς! Μόλις πρὶν ἀπὸ λίγο ὀλοκληρώθηκε ὁ ἁγιασμός. Ἦλθε ὁ ἱερέας, ἰδιόμορφα ντυμένος, διάβασε μερικὰ λόγια ποῦ λίγοι τὰ κατάλαβαν, ἔκανε κάποιες κινήσεις στοὺς περισσότερους ἀκατανόητες καὶ τέλειωσε.

Ὅλο αὐτὸ μοιάζει μὲ κατάλοιπο ἄλλων παλαιότερων ἐποχῶν. Οἱ πολιτικοὶ μας δὲν τὸ πιστεύουν, ἀλλὰ διστάζουν νὰ τὸ καταργήσουν. Ἐσὰς δὲν σὰς ἐνδιαφέρει, γιατί σὲ λίγο θὰ τελειώσει καὶ μετὰ τοῦ χρόνου πάλι. Κάποιες Ἀνεξάρτητες Ἀρχές ἀντιδρῶν, ἀλλὰ πρὸς τὸ παρὸν ἄκαρπα. Κανείς δὲν τὸ καταλαβαίνει ὅπως γίνεται. Οὔτε καὶ ἡ Ἐκκλησία. Ἀπλῶς, αὐτὴ τὸ δέχεται ὡς κεκτημένο δικαίωμά της ποῦ δὲν θὰ ἤθελε νὰ τὸ χάσει. Δὲν ὑπάρχει κανένας λόγος νὰ συντηροῦμε στὴν οὐσία νὰ ἐξευτελιζοῦμε κάτι ἱερό, ποῦ ὅμως εἶτε δὲν καταλαβαίνουμε εἶτε δὲν θέλουμε εἶτε δὲν σεβόμαστε. Σκέφθηκα λοιπόν, ἔτσι ποῦ καταντήσαμε τὸν ἁγιασμό, φέτος νὰ μὴν τὸν κάνουμε. Νὰ πῶ στοὺς Ἱερεῖς νὰ καθίσουν στοὺς Ναοὺς καὶ ἀπὸ ἐκεῖ νὰ προσευχηθοῦν γιὰ σὰς. Ἴσως ἔτσι ὁ Θεὸς νὰ τοὺς ἀκούγε περισσότερο. Ὑποχώρησα, πρῶτον γιατί κάποιοι δὲν εἶναι ἔτοιμοι νὰ τὸ δεχθοῦν καὶ δὲν θέλησα ὡς Ἐπίσκοπος νὰ τοὺς λυπήσω, καὶ δεύτερον γιατί πρὶν τὸ κάνω ἔπρεπε νὰ σὰς εἰδοποιήσω.

Αὐτοὶ ὅμως ποῦ ἔβαλαν αὐτοὺς τοὺς ἁγιασμοὺς στὴ ζωὴ μας τὸ πίστευαν. Πίστευαν ὅτι μαζί μὲ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη προσπάθεια χρειάζεται καὶ ὁ φωτισμὸς καὶ ἡ βοήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ. Πίστευαν στὸν Θεό. Εἶχαν σχέση ζωντανὴ μαζί Του. Τὸν ἤθελαν στὴ ζωὴ τους ὡς ὅ,τι πολυτιμότερο ὑπάρχει. Ἦθελαν ὅλα νὰ τὰ ἀρχίζουν μὲ τὴν εὐλογία τοῦ Θεοῦ. Ἄν εἶναι ἔτσι, φυσικὰ νὰ γίνεται ὁ ἁγιασμός. Θὰ εἶναι ἡ πιὸ σημαντικὴ στιγμή τῆς χρονιάς.

Σήμερα ὅμως Τὸν ξεχάσαμε Τὸν Θεὸ καὶ ἀπλῶς Τὸν διατηροῦμε γιὰ νὰ Τὸν ἀμφισβητοῦμε, νὰ Τὸν εἰρωνευόμαστε ἢ δυστυχῶς καὶ νὰ Τὸν βρίζουμε. Καὶ νὰ ποῦ φτάσαμε! Νὰ μὴν θέλουμε οὔτε τὰ σύμβολά Του. Καὶ νὰ ποῦ καταντήσαμε! Χωρὶς Αὐτόν, ἡ ζωὴ μας νὰ χαρακτηρίζεται ἀπὸ κρίση, ἀδιέξοδα, σύγχυση, αὐτοκαταστροφικότητα, βία καὶ παραλογισμό.

Στὸ σχολεῖο ποῦ ἔρχεστε μπορεῖ νὰ γεμίσουν τὰ κεφάλια σας μὲ πληροφορίες ποῦ οἱ περισσότερες νὰ μὴν χρειάζονται μὲ γλώσσες ποῦ δὲν εἶναι δικές μας μὲ ἱστορία ποῦ δὲν εἶναι ἀληθινή μὲ θρησκευτικὰ

ποῦ δὲν πείθουν. Νὰ σὰς δώσουν βαθμοὺς χωρὶς ἀντίκρουσμα. Αὐτὸ ὅμως ποῦ τελικὰ χρειάζεστε εἶναι ἀξίες γιὰ νὰ πλημμυρίσουν τὴν καρδιά σας. Ἀλλὰ αὐτὸ δὲν τὸ δίνει ἡ ἐποχὴ.

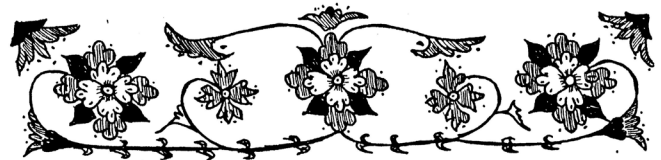
Ἡ κατάσταση στὸν τόπο μας εἶναι σὲ ἀδιέξοδο. Κάτι πρέπει νὰ γίνεαι ἄμεσα. Καὶ ἡ ἀλλαγὴ πρέπει νὰ ἀρχίσει ἀπὸ τὸ σχολεῖο. Ἄς ξεσηκωθοῦμε ὅλοι. Δάσκαλοι, γονεῖς καὶ παιδιά ἀρνηθεῖτε τὸ ψέμμα καὶ πολεμήστε τὸ σὰν τὸν μεγαλύτερο ἐχθρό. Χτυπήστε τὴ μετριότητα, τὸν συμβιβασμὸ καὶ τὴ μιζέρια σὰν τὴν χειρότερη ἀρρώστια. Μὰς κοροϊδεύει τὸ σύστημα, ποῦ αὐτὸ ὑπαίτιο γιὰ ὅλα, μὰς ὀδηγεῖ σὲ ὑπαρκτικὸ ἐκφυλισμὸ. Διεκδικήστε τὴν πνευματικὴ ἐλευθερία σας μὲ ὅποιο κόστος. Ξαναφέρετε τὴν ἱστορία καὶ παράδοσή μας, τὴ γλῶσσα καὶ τὰ ἥθη μας στὴ ζωὴ σας. Ἀγωνιστεῖτε γιὰ κοινωνία μὲ εἰλικρίνεια, ἡρωισμό, καθαρότητα καὶ ἐξυπνάδα. Ἀπαιτήστε πολιτικοὺς ποῦ νὰ ἀγαποῦν τὸν τόπο περισσότερο ἀπὸ τὰ στενὰ μυαλὰ καὶ συμφέροντά τους, ποῦ νὰ σέβονται τὴν ἱστορία περισσότερο ἀπὸ ὅσο προσδοκοῦν τὴν ψήφο, ποῦ νὰ πονοῦν γιὰ τὸ κατάντημά μας περισσότερο ἀπ' ὅσο ὑποτάσσονται σὲ ξένες σκοπιμότητες.

Ἄξιῶστε Ἐκκλησία ὄχι μὲ ἀδικαιολόγητους συντηρητισμοὺς, νεκροὺς συμβολισμοὺς καὶ πομπώδεις τελετουργίες, ὄχι Νομικὸ Πρόσωπο Δημοσίου Δικαίου μὲ δικαιώματα, περιουσίες καὶ διεκδικήσεις, ἀλλὰ Ἐκκλησία μὲ πονεμένο προφητικὸ λόγο, μὲ αὐθεντικὴ πίστη, μὲ θυσιαστικὴ μαρτυρία καὶ ἅγια ζωὴ Ἐκκλησία ποῦ νὰ ἐμπνέει καὶ νὰ ἔχει πρόταση ζωῆς. Τότε θὰ βρεῖτε τὸν Θεὸ ὀλοζώντανο μέσα σας. Τότε ὁ ἁγιασμός δὲν θὰ επιβάλλεται μὲ ἐγκύκλιο τοῦ Ὑπουργείου Παιδείας, ἀλλὰ θὰ ἀποτελεῖ δικὸ σας αἶτημα. Τότε τὸ σχολεῖο θὰ ξαναγίνει ἡ ἐλπίδα τῆς ἐθνικῆς καὶ πνευματικῆς ἐπιβίωσής μας. Τότε ἡ νέα χρονιά θὰ εἶναι καλὴ χρονιά. Σὰς τὸ εὐχομαι μὲ ὅλη μου τὴν καρδιά.

Ὁ Θεὸς μαζί σας, ἀγαπητά μας παιδιά.

Μὲ πατρικὲς εὐχὲς καὶ ὅλη μου τὴν ἀγάπη,

† Ὁ Μεσογαίας καὶ Λαυρεωτικῆς ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ



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 οικονομικὴ 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».

Πώς Πρέπει να Γίνεται Ὁ Σταυρὸς καὶ τί Σημαίνει

Τοῦ Ἀγγελοῦ Ἀσημινάκη, θεολόγου.

Πρὶν ἀπὸ εἴκοσι αἰῶνες ὁ σταυρὸς ἦταν ὄργανο ἀτιμωτικῆς τιμωρίας καὶ φρικτοῦ θανάτου. Οἱ Ρωμαῖοι καταδίκασαν στὴν ποινὴ τῆς σταυρώσεως τοὺς πιὸ μεγάλους ἐγκληματίες. Σήμερα ὁ σταυρὸς κυριαρχεῖ σ' ὀλόκληρη τὴ ζωὴ τῶν πιστῶν Χριστιανῶν, σ' ὀλόκληρη τὴ ζωὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, ὡς ὄργανο θυσίας, σωτηρίας, χαρᾶς, ἁγιασμοῦ καὶ χάριτος.

Μία ἐρμηνεύα, θεολογικὴ μας δίνει στὴν πέμπτη διδαχὴ τοῦ ὁ Ἱεραπόστολος Ἅγιος Κοσμάς ὁ Αἰτωλός:

«Ἀκούσατε, Χριστιανοί μου, πῶς πρέπει νὰ γίνεται ὁ σταυρὸς καὶ τί σημαίνει. Μᾶς λέγει τὸ ἅγιον Εὐαγγέλιον πῶς ἡ ἁγία Τριάς, ὁ Θεός, δοξάζεται εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν περισσότερο ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀγγέλους. Τί πρέπει νὰ κάμῃς καὶ ἐσύ;

Λοιπὸν, σμίγεις τὰ τρία σου δάκτυλα μὲ τὸ δεξιὸν το χέρι σου καί, μὴν ἠμπορώντας νὰ ἀνεβῆς εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν νὰ προσκύνῃς, βάνεις τὸ χέρι σου εἰς τὸ κεφάλι σου, διότι τὸ κεφάλι σου εἶναι στρογγυλὸ καὶ φανερώνει τὸν οὐρανόν, καὶ λέγεις μὲ τὸ στόμα: Καθὼς ἐσεῖς οἱ ἄγγελοι δοξάζετε τὴν ἁγίαν Τριάδα εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, ἔτσι καὶ ἐγώ, ὡς δοῦλος ἀνάξιος, δοξάζω καὶ προσκυνῶ τὴν ἁγίαν Τριάδα. Καὶ καθὼς αὐτὰ τὰ δάκτυλα εἶναι τρία—εἶναι ξεχωριστά, εἶναι καὶ μαζὶ—ἔτσι εἶναι καὶ ἡ ἁγία Τριάς, ὁ Θεός, τρία πρόσωπα καὶ ἓνας μόνος Θεός.

Κατεβάζεις τὸ χέρι σου ἀπὸ τὸ κεφάλι σου καὶ τὸ βάνεις εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν σου καὶ λέγεις: Σὲ προσκυνῶ καὶ σὲ λατρεύω, Κύριέ μου, ὅτι κατεδέχθης καὶ ἐσαρκώθης εἰς τὴν κοιλίαν τῆς Θεοτόκου διὰ τὰς ἁμαρτίας μας. Τὸ βάζεις πάλιν εἰς τὸν δεξιὸν σου ὦμον καὶ λέγεις: Σὲ παρακαλῶ, Θεέ μου, νὰ μὲ συγχωρήσης καὶ νὰ μὲ βάλῃς εἰς τὰ δεξιὰ μὲ τοὺς δικαίους. Βάνοντάς το πάλιν εἰς τὸν ἀριστερὸν ὦμον, λέγεις: Σὲ παρακαλῶ, Κύριέ μου, μὴ μὲ βάλῃς εἰς τὰ ἀριστερὰ μὲ τοὺς ἁμαρτωλοὺς.

Ἔπειτα, κύπτοντας κάτω εἰς τὴν γῆν: Σὲ δοξάζω, Θεέ μου, σὲ προσκυνῶ καὶ σὲ λατρεύω ὅτι, καθὼς ἐβάλλθης εἰς τὸν τάφον, ἔτσι θὰ βαλθῶ καὶ ἐγώ. Καὶ ὅταν σηκώνεσαι ὀρθός, φανερώνεις τὴν Ἀνάστασιν, καὶ λέγεις: Σὲ δοξάζω, Κύριέ μου, σὲ προσκυνῶ καὶ σὲ

λατρεύω, πῶς ἀναστήθης ἀπὸ τοὺς νεκρούς, διὰ νὰ μᾶς χαρίσης τὴν ζωὴν τὴν αἰώνιον. Αὐτὸ σημαίνει ὁ πανάγιος σταυρὸς.»

Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης Πατριάρχης Κωνσταντινουπόλεως ὁ Χρυσόστομος λέει: «Αὐτὸ τὸ καταραμένο καὶ ἀποτρόπαιο σύμβολο τῆς χειρότερης τιμωρίας τώρα ἔχει γίνει ποθητὸ καὶ ἀξιαγάπητο. Παντοῦ το βλέπεις. Στὴν ἁγία Τράπεζα, στὶς χειροτονίες τῶν ἱερέων, στὴ θεία λειτουργία. στὰ σπίτια, στὶς ἀγορές, στὶς ἐρημιές καὶ στοὺς δρόμους. στὶς θάλασσες, στὰ πλοῖα καὶ στὰ νησιά. στὰ κρεβάτια καὶ στὰ ἐνδύματα. στοὺς γάμους, στὰ συμπόσια, στὰ χρυσὰ καὶ τ' ἄσημνια σκεύη. στὰ κοσμήματα καὶ στὶς τοιχογραφίες... Τόσο περιπόθητο σ' ὅλους ἔγινε τὸ θαυμαστὸ αὐτὸ δῶρο, ἢ ἀνέκφραστη αὐτὴ χάρις.»

Τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ σταυροῦ εἶναι σημεῖο σωτήριο, σημεῖο ζωοποιό, σημεῖο ἁγιαστικό, «νικοποιὸν ὄπλον»

(Ἅγιος Σωφρόνιος Ἱεροσολύμων), «τῶν κακῶν ἀλεξιτήριον» (Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος Νύσσης), «κεφάλαιον τῶν ἀγαθῶν ἀπάντων» (ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος) γιὰ τοὺς Χριστιανούς.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Λουκάς ὁ ἰατρός καὶ Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Συμφερουπόλεως Κριμαίας ἀναφέρει ὅτι: «Γιὰ ὅλους ἐμᾶς κήρυγμα γιὰ τὸν Σταυρὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, κήρυγμα γιὰ τὸν

ἐσταυρωμένο Κύριο Ἰησοῦ εἶναι κήρυγμα γιὰ τὴν δύναμη τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὴν σοφία του. Ἄς μὴν ἔχουμε καμία κοινωνία μ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς δυστυχημένους ἀνθρώπους, ποὺ βλασφημοῦν τὸν Σταυρὸ τοῦ Κυρίου. Ἄς ἔχουμε πάντα μπροστὰ μας τὸν Σταυρὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ! Ἄς μὴν ὑπάρχει μεταξὺ μας κανεὶς ποὺ νὰ μὴν φορᾶει σταυρό.»

Ἄς προσέξουμε τί μᾶς συμβουλεύει ὁ Ἅγιος Κύριλλος Ἱεροσολύμων: «Μὴ ντρεπόμαστε τὸν σταυρὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Κι ἂν ἄλλος ντρέπεται καὶ τὸν κρύβει, ἐσὺ κᾶνε φανερὰ τὸν σταυρὸ σου, γιὰ νὰ δοῦν οἱ δαίμονες τὸ σημεῖο αὐτὸ τοῦ Βασιλέως Χριστοῦ, καὶ νὰ φύγουν μακριὰ, τρέμοντας. Κᾶνε μάλιστα τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ σταυροῦ συχνά, εἴτε τρῶς, εἴτε πίνεις, εἴτε κάθῃσαι, εἴτε ξαπλώνεις, εἴτε σηκώνῃσαι, εἴτε μιλάς, εἴτε περπατᾶς, δηλαδὴ σὲ κάθε περίστασι. Γιατί ὅποιος σταυρώνεται ἐδῶ στὴ γῆ, βρίσκεται νοερὰ πάνω στὸν οὐρανόν... Εἶναι μεγάλο το φυλακτήριο. Δωρεὰν τὸ παίρνουν οἱ φτωχοὶ καὶ ἄκοπα οἱ ἄρρωστοι, ἐπειδὴ ἡ χάρις τοῦ προέρχεται ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Σημάδι εἶναι τῶν πιστῶν καὶ φόβος τῶν δαιμόνων.»



Ὁ Ἅγιος Μακάριος Μόσχας ἀναφέρει ὅτι «πολλὲς φορὲς ἓνα καὶ μόνον σημεῖο τοῦ σταυροῦ, ποῦ γίνεται μὲ πίστη καὶ ἔντονα βιώματα, εἶναι ἰσχυρότερο ἀπὸ πολλὰ λόγια προσευχῆς μπροστὰ στὸν θρόνον τοῦ Ὑψίστου. Σ' αὐτὸ ὑπάρχει τὸ φῶς, ποῦ καταυγάζει τὴν ψυχὴ, ἡ ἱαματικὴ δύναμη, ποῦ θεραπεύει τὰ ἀσθενήματα τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ τῶν σωμάτων, ἡ μυστικὴ δύναμη, ποῦ ἀντιδρᾷ σὲ κάθε βλάβη. Ταράζουν τὴν ψυχὴ σου ἀκάθαρτοι λογισμοὶ καὶ ἐπιθυμίαι; Περιτειχίσου μὲ τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ σταυροῦ, διπλασίασε καὶ τριπλασίασε αὐτὸ τὸ τεῖχος, καὶ οἱ ἀκάθαρτοι λογισμοὶ θὰ δαμαστοῦν. Κατατυραννιέται ἡ καρδιά σου ἀπὸ τὴ μελαγχολία καὶ τὴ θλίψη; Σὲ κυριεύει ὁ φόβος ἢ σὲ περιοριζοῦν οἱ πειρασμοί; Αἰσθάνεσαι τὶς πονηρίες τῶν ἀοράτων ἐχθρῶν; Καταφύγε σ' αὐτὴ τὴ δύναμη τοῦ σταυροῦ, καὶ ἡ εἰρήνη τῆς ψυχῆς θὰ ξαναγυρίσει, οἱ πειρασμοὶ θὰ ἀπομακρυνθοῦν, ἡ παρηγορία τῆς χάριτος τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ ἡ πνευματικὴ εὐφροσύνη θὰ πλημμυρίσουν τὴν καρδιά σου.»

Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης τῆς Κρονστάνδης γράφει: «Ὁ σταυρὸς εἶναι εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐσταυρωμένου Χριστοῦ, τοῦ Υἱοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ τὸ σημεῖο του, καὶ ἡ σκιά του ἀκόμα μόνη, προκαλοῦν τρόπο στους δαίμονες, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἐπειδὴ εἶναι ἡ σκέπη τοῦ Ἐσταυρωμένου. Γι' αὐτὸ ἀρκεῖ νὰ βυθίσει κανεὶς τὸν σταυρὸ στὸ νερό, γιὰ νὰ τὸ ἀγιάσει. Μετὰ ἀπ' αὐτὸ τὸ νερὸ γίνεται ἱαματικὸ, καὶ διώχνει τὰ δαιμόνια.»

Γιὰ νὰ αἰτιολογηθεῖ μὲ περισσότερα στοιχεῖα ἡ τιμὴ, ποῦ ἀποδίδει στὸν Σταυρὸ ἡ Ἐκκλησία, καὶ γιὰ νὰ φανεῖ παραστατικὰ ἡ δύναμη τοῦ Σταυροῦ, ὡς σημείου τοῦ Χριστοῦ, θὰ διηγηθοῦμε παρακάτω μερικὰ σποραδικὰ θαύματα—τὰ πιὸ πολλὰ ἀπὸ τοὺς Βίους τῶν Ἁγίων—ποῦ ἔγιναν κατὰ καιροὺς μ' αὐτὸ τὸ πανίερο σύμβολο.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Θεολόγος θεράπευσε στὴν Πάτμο τὸν παράλυτο εἰδωλολάτρη ἱερέα τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνα, σφραγίζοντας τὸν μὲ τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ Σταυροῦ.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Ἀντώνιος ὁ Μέγας, θέλοντας νὰ καταισχύνει κάποιους εἰδωλολάτρες σοφούς, ποῦ πῆγαν νὰ τὸν πειράξουν, ἔφερε μπροστὰ τους μερικοὺς δαιμονισμένους καὶ εἶπε: «Ἡ καθαρῖστε τους ἐσεῖς μὲ τοὺς συλλογισμοὺς σας καὶ μ' ὅποιαδήποτε ἄλλη τέχνη ἢ μαγεία θέλετε, ἐπικαλούμενοι τὰ εἰδωλά σας· ἂν δὲν μπορεῖτε, παραιτηθεῖτε ἀπὸ τὴν πολεμικὴ ἐναντίον μας, καὶ θὰ δεῖτε τὴ δύναμη τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ!». Καὶ τὴν ἴδια ἀκριβῶς στιγμὴ ἐπικαλέστηκε τὸν Κύριο, σφραγίζοντας τοὺς δαιμονισμένους τρεῖς φορὲς μὲ τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ Σταυροῦ. Ἀμέσως ἐκεῖνοι ἐλευθερώθηκαν ἀπὸ τὰ δαιμόνια καὶ σηκώθηκαν θεραπευμένοι, ὅλοι τους δοξάζοντας τὸν Θεό.

Ὅταν ὁ Ἅγιος Ἐπιφάνιος, Ἐπίσκοπος Κύπρου ἦταν ἀκόμα μικρὸ δεκάχρονο παιδί, ἓνα ἀτίθασο μοσχάρι τὸν τραυμάτισε σοβαρὰ στὸν μηρὸ καὶ τὸν ἔριξε χάμω, ἀνίκανο πιά νὰ σηκωθεῖ. Τότε ἓνας εὐσεβὴς Χριστιανός, ὁ Κλεόβιος, τὸν σταύρωσε τρεῖς φορὲς στὸ χτυπημένο μέλος καὶ ἀμέσως ὁ μικρὸς Ἐπιφάνιος γιαιτρεύτηκε καὶ σηκώθηκε. Ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Ἅγιος, πολὺ ἀργότερα, σταύρωσε τρεῖς φορὲς ἐπίσης τὴ θυγατέρα τοῦ βασιλιᾶ τῆς Περσίας, καὶ τὴν ἀπάλλαξε αὐτοστιγμὴ ἀπὸ τὸ δαιμόνιο, ποῦ τὴ βασάνιζε.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Βασίλειος ὁ Μέγας, ὅταν ὁ ἀρειανὸς βασιλιᾶς Οὐάλης διέταξε νὰ παραδοθεῖ ὁ καθεδρικὸς ναὸς τῆς Νίκαιας στοὺς ἀρειανούς, ζήτησε ν' ἀφήσουν τὸν Θεὸ ν' ἀποφανθεῖ γιὰ τὸ ζήτημα. Πρότεινε νὰ κλείσουν τὸν ναό, κι ἔπειτα νὰ προσευχηθοῦν, τόσο οἱ ἀρειανοί, ὅσο καὶ οἱ Ὁρθόδοξοι. Κι ἂν ἀνοίξει μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ τῶν Ὁρθόδοξων, νὰ παραμείνει σ' αὐτοὺς. Ἀλλιῶς, ἂν δηλαδὴ ἀνοίξει μὲ τὴν προσευχὴ τῶν ἀρειανῶν ἢ ἀκόμα κι ἂν δὲν ἀνοίξει καθόλου, νὰ τὸν πάρουν οἱ Ἀρειανοί. Ἔτσι κι ἔγινε. Ἀλλὰ οἱ προσεχές των αἰρετικῶν δὲν καρποφόρησαν. Ἀντίθετα, μόλις ὁ Ἅγιος Βασίλειος σχημάτισε τρεῖς φορὲς τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ Σταυροῦ πάνω στὴν κλειστὴ πύλη τοῦ Ναοῦ, λέγοντας, «Εὐλογητὸς ὁ Θεὸς τῶν Χριστιανῶν εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων», ἀμέσως ἔσπασαν οἱ μοχλοὶ καὶ ἀνοίχθηκαν τὰ θυροφύλλα. Ἔτσι ἡ ἐκκλησία παρέμεινε στοὺς Ὁρθόδοξους.

Ἡ Ἁγία Βασίλισσα ὅταν ὁ ἡγεμόνας τῆς Νικομηδείας Ἀλέξανδρος τὴν ἔριξε μέσα σ' ἓνα καμίνι, σφραγίστηκε μὲ τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ Σταυροῦ, καὶ δὲν πειράχτηκε καθόλου ἀπὸ τὴ φωτιά.

Ὁ Ἅγιος Θαλλέλαιος μὲ τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ Σταυροῦ γιάτρευε ὅλους τοὺς ἀρρώστους, ποῦ ἔτρεχαν κοντὰ του, γιὰ νὰ βροῦν τὴν υἰεῖα τους.

Μὲ τὸ σημεῖο τοῦ Σταυροῦ ὁ Ὅσιος Ἀνδρέας ὁ διὰ Χριστὸν σαλὸς καὶ ὁ Ἅγιος Ζαχαρίας ὁ σκυτοτόμος ἄνοιγαν τὶς νύχτες τὶς κλειδωμένες πύλες τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως, ὅπου πῆγαιναν καὶ προσεύχονταν κρυφὰ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, καὶ μὲ τὸν ἴδιο τρόπο τὶς ἐκλείναν πάλι, φεύγοντας.

Ἀναφέρουμε τὶς Ἐορτὲς ἀφιερωμένες στὸν Τίμιον Σταυρό:

(α) Ἐορτὴ τῆς Ὑψώσεως τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ—14 Σεπτεμβρίου.

(β) Ἐορτὴ τῆς Σταυροπροσκυνήσεως—Κυριακὴ Γ' Νηστειῶν.

(γ) Μνήμη τοῦ ἐν Οὐρανῷ φανέντος σημείου τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ—στὶς 7 Μαΐου τὴν Ἐποχὴ τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου (337-361), Υἱοῦ τοῦ Μ. Κωνσταντίνου.

(δ) Ἡ Πρόοδος τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ—1 Αὐγούστου
(ε) Τέλος ἀφιερωμένες στὸν Τίμιον Σταυρὸ εἶναι δύο ἡμέρες τῆς ἐβδομάδας, ἡ Τετάρτη καὶ ἡ Παρασκευή.

THE SNAKES OF PANAGHIA

From the "Mystagogy" weblog, <http://www.johnsanidopoulos.com/>.

In the middle of the month a horde of non-venomous snakes, unknown to science, embellished with black crosses upon their heads and skin like velvet, had wriggled out of apparent nothingness at Markopoulo. They had filled the streets with their writhing and creeping, had approached the silver icon of the Virgin, had installed themselves upon the bishop's throne, and at the end of the service had disappeared as quietly and unaccountably as they had come.

[*Corelli's Mandolin*, ch. 12—a novel of 1994 by the British writer Louis de Bernières, set on the Greek island of Kephallonia]

† † †

Such is the description of the annual appearance of the Holy Virgin's snakes given by De Bernières. It is a common description, yet not entirely true on certain fine points. One case in point is that De Bernières chronicles this event to 1940, yet as was pointed out earlier, there was no such appearance in 1940. Another issue is whether or not these snakes are venomous; whether they are unknown to science or known; whether or not they appear only in Markopoulo or any place else on the island; and whether the crosses on the head and tongue of the snakes are black in color or, as reported by others, white. These are only a few of the typical contradictions and outdated information I encountered in my research that needed clarification.

As a sign posted on the bell tower written in both Greek and English informs the visitor, the snakes of the Holy Virgin make their annual appearance at Dormition Church between the Feasts of the Transfiguration of Christ and the Dormition of the Theotokos from August 6th to the 15th. As the days close in towards the Feast of the Dormition, so do the number of snakes increase, until finally they disappear at the close of the Feast not to be seen until the same time next year. Where they come from and where they go after the Feast is unknown. (One local priest relates how many people have searched the entire island for these snakes, but they cannot be found at any time of the year. Other snakes are found, but not these.)

Though Markopoulo is most famous for this phenomenon, it is not the only village in Kefallonia where this occurs. A little further up Mt. Ainos is another small village called Arginia. (A

fork off the main road of Markopoulo leads to Mt. Ainos. The road passes through the village of Kolaiti with its astonishing view of the sea, and, a little further up is Arginia. The road from Arginia leads to a plateau in Ainos where the charming Zoodochos Pege Monastery is located. Arginia is a popular stop due to the cooling moments offered by the tall plane trees that shade the village's natural water spring.) During this same time, from August 6th to the 15th, snakes appear in that village church as well with similar type festivities, since the church there is also dedicated to the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos. The church is built next to the village's natural water spring. In fact, many of the pictures of the snakes posted on the internet and circulated are the ones that make their appearance in Arginia. Scientists who have tried to unravel the mystery of the snake's appearance believe the wet damp route that runs from the fresh water spring in Arginia down the ravine to Markopoulo is a migratory path for the snakes, though there is no evidence for this. It could just be that they have their nests there year around.

The church of Markopoulo is built in the depths of a ravine. The bell tower on the other hand stands away from the church next to the street. It is very old with a strong foundation, grey in color and eroded by time, full of holes at its base. The style is Venetian, and the bells are unique to the island, jumping when they ring. It has been observed the snakes first emerge through the holes created for the bell ropes and those at its base. For this reason, some consider it a wonder the bell tower did not collapse during the great earthquake of 1953, being that

it is from where the snakes emerge. (Markopoulo suffered the most damage overall on Kefallonia in 1953.)

In olden times it used to be the snakes would enter the church during the service on their own and slither towards the wonderworking icon of Panagia Fidousa. On the way, faithful pilgrims would pick some up to venerate them and place them on their bodies for a blessing. Some would go to the bishop and crawl up his episcopal staff, and during the Gospel reading they would crawl up the arm of the clergyman, rest on the pages of the Gospel book, and even bow their head until the reading was over. As one local priest, Father Ioannis Messoloras has explained:

"Today you don't see as many snakes crawling around on the ground. The pilgrims simply pick them up before they reach the church, but in earlier days when there were more



snakes and less pilgrims they had plenty of time to crawl into the church and honor the icon. The snakes used to be more numerous than today, especially before the Second World War, I don't know why. Some years they did not appear at all. These were bad years, such as the year in which the Germans exterminated all the Italian soldiers that before had been their allies. It has always been a bad sign if the snakes do not appear." [Fr. Ioannis Messoloras was interviewed in the documentary *Holy Snakes of the Virgin Mary* (International Vision Production).]

The excited tourists prevent the full experience of the miracle from being realized these days. Today, it is common on the 6th of August to see the locals search for the snakes throughout the night with flashlights. Before the snakes even enter the church, the faithful take them and bring them to the icon and to the bishop as well. The locals say they do this to prevent them from being trampled on by the excited and numerous crowds that are unfamiliar with them, and also of course to receive a blessing. Whereas in the olden days the snakes preferred to stay in proximity to the icon, today the faithful prefer to handle them, since they are harmless and serene, and be photographed with them. When the service ends, it is customary that wherever the snakes are picked up from initially, there they are returned. (Also, a few snakes are usually placed in jars for the ten days to avoid anyone from taking, killing, or stepping on them.) This is repeated every day until the 15th.

Pilgrims are always amazed how friendly the snakes are and how at home they are in the church amidst the crowd. The snakes have no fear during these days. They are small in size (no more than three feet in length), adorable, calm, harmless, and bear four mysterious dots in the shape of a cross on their head as well as the tip of their narrow tongue. Some wrap around the wrists, shoulders and chest of young and old alike, where few even allow them to enter their sleeves and escape through the other side. Others decorate the icons of the church, the crucifix, and even the bread offerings used during the services, with their presence. And, as mentioned earlier, they climb up the bishop as well as the priest who reads the Gospel as if they also are participating in the celebration. The atmosphere is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, when the first formed man and woman lived peacefully with all the wild animals.

To prepare the visitors for this close interaction, the villagers say: "They will crawl to your chest, but by the Holy Virgin's power they will not harm you. You will hold them in your hand and they will lick you like cats." As it is also written in a famous verse sung by the villagers concerning a man who strongly desired to commit suicide because his heart was broken, but remembered the benevolence of the snakes: "I call upon the snakes from Markopoulo to eat me, but they are the Holy Virgin's and so they only caress me."

A PARABLE OF LIFE

By bestselling author Wayne W. Dyer.



In a mother's womb were two babies. One asked the other: "Do you believe in life after delivery?" The other replied, "Why, of course. There has to be some-

thing after delivery. Maybe we are here to prepare ourselves for what we will be later."

"Nonsense" said the first. "There is no life after delivery. What kind of life would that be?" The second said, "I don't know, but there will be more light than here. Maybe we will walk with our legs and eat from our mouths. Maybe we will have other senses that we can't understand now."

The first replied, "That is absurd. Walking is impossible. And eating with our mouths? Ridiculous! The umbilical cord supplies nutrition and everything we need. But the umbilical cord is so short. Life after delivery is to be logically excluded." The second insisted, "Well I think there is something and maybe it's different than it is here. Maybe we won't need this physical cord anymore."

The first replied, "Nonsense. And moreover if there is life, then why has no one ever come back from there? Delivery is the end of life, and in the after-delivery there is nothing but darkness and silence and oblivion. It takes us nowhere." "Well, I don't know," said the second, "but certainly we will meet Mother and she will take care of us."

The first replied "Mother? You actually believe in Mother? That's laughable. If Mother exists then where is She now?" The second said, "She is all around us. We are surrounded by her. We are of Her. It is in Her that we live. Without Her this world would not and could not exist."

Said the first: "Well I don't see Her, so it is only logical that She doesn't exist." To which the second replied, "Sometimes, when you're in silence and you focus and you really listen, you can perceive Her presence, and you can hear Her loving voice, calling down from above."



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

THE JESUS PRAYER

By Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh (+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 Thess 5:17). As the man whose experience is being related is a pilgrim, a great many of his psychological characteristics, and the way in which he learned and applied the prayer, were conditioned by the fact that he lived in a certain way, which makes the book less universally applicable than it could be; and yet it is 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, 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 45:3), 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, in the prophet of Israel, the incarnate Word of God, 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 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 of the same root as *elaion*, which means olive tree and the oil from it.

If we look up the Old and New Testament in search of the passages connected with this basic idea, we will

Pray with each breath, thus:
Lord Jesus Christ (breathing in),
Have mercy on me, (breathing out).
Elder Joseph the Hesychast

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 New Testament, 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 fulfill 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 fulfillment 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 of-

fended 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, even with references to the Sufi technique. 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 endeavor—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.*

UNIFORMITY IN CHURCH SERVICES

By St. John (Maximovitch) of San Francisco, *Orthodox Life*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (July-Aug 1991), pp. 42-45; explanations of various terms inserted by the Editors of "Orthodox Heritage."



The divine services and rites of the Orthodox Church, having as their foundation one *typikon* ("that of the prescribed form," as contained within Orthodox liturgical book, *Ed.*) and preserving commonality in all that is substantially important, are extremely different one from another in practice. Not only are the customs of different countries and local Churches

different, but even in the bounds of a single region, sometimes even in a single city, the customs vary greatly in churches located close to each other.

More than once the question has arisen regarding the introduction of a single common abbreviated *typikon* which would be mandatory for all churches. However, what may be only a theoretical decision may be in reality impossible to carry out and even harmful if attempted. The difference in the carrying out of the Church *typikon* comes about as a result of the strength of customs that have taken root. Sometimes these customs have deeply sensible meanings, but sometimes the meanings are quite nonsensical; thus, they remain because of the zeal and determination of those who carry them out.

Without a doubt, we must take into consideration that which has been accepted as sanctified custom; that is, what has been accepted from antiquity as having been established and which has entered into the consciousness, not only of the clergy that carry it out, but of the laity as well. However, we must give considerably less weight to that which is only common practice; that is, to that which is merely a habit of those who carry it out, not having an inner meaning and not having entered into the consciousness of the laity.

We must hold onto the first as long as they are of benefit to our activity, as long as they do not contradict the Church *typikon*. As for the latter, one may give only a common rule: the closer it is to the Church *typikon*, the better. Our Church *typikon* is not a compilation of dead rules and it is not the fruit of some abstract desk work; it was imprinted on the spiritual experience of holy ascetics who came to fully understand the depths of the human spirit and the laws of the spiritual life. The Holy Fathers themselves experienced the battle with the infirmities of soul and body, as well as the means for their healing; they came to understand very well the path of

prayerful *podvig* (usually defined as “spiritual struggle,” *Ed.*) and the power of prayer.

The Church *typikon* is a guidebook for training and schooling in prayer and the more it is adhered to the more benefit is derived from it. In the case of the inability to fulfill all that is laid out in the *typikon*, we must fulfill all that is in our power, preserving its general structure and main content. It is necessary, on the one hand, to fulfill the principal characteristics for a given service unchanged in its composition and that which maintains its identity separate from others. On the other hand, we must try as much as we can to fill in those parts of the service, which, changing according to the day, express the meaning and reason of the commemoration of the day’s event.

Divine Services combine in themselves prayer, which is lifted up to God by the faithful, the receiving of God’s grace in communion with Him, and the instruction of the faithful. The latter consists of teaching through reading in the divine services and hymns, catechism, and instruction in the Christian life. The divine services in their composition contain all the fullness of the dogmatic teaching of the Church and set forth the path to salvation. They present invaluable spiritual wealth. The more fully and precisely they are fulfilled, the more benefit the participants receive from them. Those who perform them carelessly and who shorten them by their laziness rob their flock, depriving them of their very daily bread, stealing from them a most valuable treasure. The shortening of the services which comes about through lack of strength must be done wisely and performed circumspectly in order not to touch that which should not be tampered with.

Specifically, at Vespers, Psalm 103 must be read in its entirety; if it is sung it is allowable to sing only a few verses, but with majesty. Preferably, the verses of Psalms 140, 141, 129, and 116, which begin with the words *Lord, I have cried*, will be always sung in full, all of the *stichera* absolutely (type of hymns used mainly in Vespers and Matins—Orthros, *Ed.*). On the prescribed days it is necessary to read the Old Testament readings and to perform the *Litya* (*artoclasia* in Gk, meaning “breaking of bread,” a service held at the end of Vespers and Matins, *Ed.*).

Matins must be served in the morning. Serving Matins in the evening, except for when the all-night Vigil service is held, is not allowable because, by doing this, essentially the morning service, which is very necessary for the faithful, is abolished; even a short church attendance in the morning has a beneficial effect on the soul, while sanctifying and giving direction to the whole day. The Six Psalms are not to be shortened; also it is necessary to read the Lauds psalms in their entirety. Reading should not take the place of singing except when there is absolutely no one who is able to sing, since the effect of singing is much stronger than reading and very seldom is reading able to substitute for singing. Do not dare

to leave out the *Theotokia* (hymns to the Theotokos, which are read or more likely chanted during the Divine Services, *Ed.*) after the *Troparia* and other hymns, for in them is given the foundation of our faith -- the teaching of the incarnation of the Son of God and of the Divine Economy.

The Hours must be served exactly without omissions, as they are already so short. All three psalms of each Hour must be read, as well as the assigned *Troparia* and other prayers. At the end of each Hour special attention must be given to the prayer, which expresses the meaning of the sacred event commemorated at the given hour.

Liturgy must be served, if impossible daily, then at least on all Sundays and on all Church Feast days, without taking into account the number of faithful that are able to attend the service. The Liturgy is the Unbloody Sacrifice for the whole world and it is the priest’s duty to serve it when required. It is positively forbidden to skip any part of the Service Book (*sluzhebnyk*—“book of the priest,” *Ed.*). It is also necessary to fulfill the given hymns for the Liturgy. Included therein are Psalms 103, 145, and 33. Psalm 33 is replaced only during Bright Week by the singing of *Christ is Risen*. As for the rest of the year, it is to be read or sung in view of its edification and there is no justification for its omission.

Those *troparia* which are appointed for each given Liturgy are to be sung and in their proper order, since they are the festive part of the Liturgy. The Church *typikon* also refers to preserving accurately the order of the Epistle and Gospel readings. If this is adhered to, then throughout the whole year, in those churches where the services are held daily, the Gospel, as well as Epistles, will be read in its entirety. That order requires that the cyclic reading be read necessarily; its replacement by the festive readings happens only on great feast days, but even then the cyclic reading is not omitted; it is read on the preceding day, together with the ordinary readings. On “medium rank” Feast days the consecutive and festive readings are read. The reading of only the festive readings, that is, with the omission of the ordinary, is called “irrationality” by the *typikon* because when this is done the whole meaning of the division of the readings in the specific order is transgressed and those who do this show their lack of understanding (of the meaning of the divisions).

The remaining Sacraments, as in all of the order of services in the Book of Needs, also must not be shortened except for dire need, and even then only by adhering to all that is essential and the order of the service, remembering one’s accountability before God for the damage done to the souls of the flock by one’s negligence. Everyone, while celebrating divine service, must fulfill it more precisely and with better execution so that, bringing spiritual benefit to others, he himself in the Day of Retribution may be likened to the servant who brought forth the ten talents and hear: *Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things.*

THE THREE LEVELS OF APOSTASY

By Fr. Damascene Christensen, from "One Man in the Face of Apostasy," *Orthodox Word Magazine*, #130, Sept. - Oct. 1986.

In studying Archbishop Averky's writings on the apostasy, one can discern three levels of which he spoke, these levels progressing from the most obvious to the most difficult to detect.

The First Level

At the first level is the loss of Christianity's "savour" by Christendom in general. The roots of this are found in the schism of East and West and in the medieval West's gradual formation of a "new Christianity," in which man's fallen reason—rather than divinely revealed tradition—became the criterion of truth. In essence, it was this change in perspective from the spiritual to the natural that led, through the Renaissance and "Enlightenment," to the blatant materialism of our own times—a materialism that has spiritually blinded modern man. "There can be discerned," wrote Archbishop Averky, "some kind of rationally acting black hand which is working to bind people as tightly as possible to this temporary, earthly life by forcing them to forget the future life, the eternal life assuredly awaiting us all."

Materialism, Archbishop Averky understood, corrupts the faith of Christians without their even knowing it. Even their ostensible stand "against worldliness" or their talk of Heaven may be filled with worldly conceptions if they have lost the right understanding of the "world" that is opposed by basic Christianity. Moreover, that which would, from an Orthodox viewpoint, be considered immoral, becomes permissible to a Christianity infected with worldliness. Wrote Archbishop Averky:

"Of what sort of genuine union of all Christians in the spirit of Christian love can we speak now when the Truth is denied by almost everyone, when deceit is in control almost everywhere, when a genuinely spiritual life among people who call themselves Christians has dried up and been replaced by a carnal life, an animal life which has nonetheless been placed on a pedestal and concealed by the idea of pretended charity which hypocritically justifies any sort of spiritual excess, any sort of moral anarchy. Indeed, it is from this that are derived all these numberless 'balls,' various kinds of 'games,' 'dances' and amusements, toward which, despite their immoral and anti-Christian

nature, even many modern clergymen have a tolerant attitude, sometimes even organizing them themselves and participating in them."

In losing touch with the essence of its faith—which is, in a word, *otherworldliness*—Christendom deprives believers of living contact with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Christians must therefore find substitutes for this grace by inducing, through self-persuasion, "spiritual experiences." At the same time they seek a substitute, in this world, for the other world that is no longer tangible to them. Of these "neo-Christians," Archbishop Averky wrote:

"They want blessedness here in this world, burdened with its multitude of sins and iniquities; and they await this blessedness with impatience. They consider one of the surest ways to attaining it to be the 'ecumenical movement,' the

union and unification of all peoples in one new 'church' which will comprise not only Roman Catholics and Protestants, but also Jews, Moslems and pagans, each retaining its own convictions and errors. This imaginary 'Christian' love, in the name of the future blessedness of men on earth, cannot but trample upon the Truth."

Archbishop Averky termed the belief in future blessedness on earth "neochiliasm"—chiliasm being the ancient heretical belief in a thousand-year reign of Christ as an earthly king. He foresaw that the outward "ecumenical unity" sought by the "neochiliasts" would be nothing else than an official unity supported and approved of by Antichrist.

For Archbishop Averky, the modern "ecumenical movement" was indicative of something else: the widespread disbelief in absolute Truth. Through this comes an unwillingness to take a stand for anything and a weak-willed acceptance or even justification of evil, all in the name of the most superficial ideas of "Christian love" and "peace." Archbishop Averky expressed it thus:

"In our times, when there are such strong doubts about even the existence of Truth, when every 'truth' is considered relative and it is considered legal for each person to hold to 'his own truth,' the struggle for the Truth acquires a particularly important meaning. And the person who does not sympathize with this struggle, who sees in it only a manifestation of 'phariseism' and suggests 'humbling oneself' before falsehood by falling away from the Truth, should naturally be recognized as a betrayer of the Truth, whoever he might be, whatever he might call or consider himself."



Those who place all their hope in this world must of necessity either give into despair or blind themselves to the rising degeneracy in all forms of public life. Their relativistic and irresolute attitude only helps to unleash the forces of Satan in the last times. As Archbishop Averky pointed out:

“The ‘ministers of Satan,’ or, which is the same thing, the servants of the coming Antichrist, make use of this spiritual blindness of the majority of modern people and stubbornly and insistently do their work with genuinely satanic energy. With special efforts and with all available means, with the aid of all the resources under their control, they bind forcibly to themselves adepts who are wittingly or unwittingly, willingly or unwillingly, cooperating with them in creating in the world circumstances and conditions appropriate for the very near appearance of the Antichrist as the ruler of the whole world and the master of all mankind.”

In another place, Archbishop Averky wrote more on this same theme:

“The fundamental task of the servants of the coming Antichrist is to destroy the old world with all its former concepts and ‘prejudices,’ in order to build in its place a new world suitable for receiving its approaching ‘new owner’ who will take the place of Christ for people and give them on earth that which Christ did not give them... One must be completely blind spiritually, completely alien to true Christianity, not to understand all this!”

The Second Level

At the second level of the apostasy described by Archbishop Averky, the Orthodox churches—in “keeping in step with the times”—leave behind some of the Church’s traditional forms and ecclesiological positions which they consider “outdated,” and thus they too cut themselves off from the tradition that retains the “savour” of basic Christianity. This is one of the ways in which Orthodoxy becomes a worldly “pseudo-Orthodoxy.” The essence of Orthodoxy cannot be transmitted when the very context of receiving it is all but gone.

Archbishop Averky explained why the Orthodox Church, as St. Athanasius the Great once said, *must not serve the times*:

“The Church never conforms to the world. Indeed not, for the Lord said to His disciples at the Last Supper, *You*

are not of this world. We must hold to these words if we are to remain faithful to true Christianity—the true Church of Christ has always been, is and will always be a stranger to this world. Separated from it, she is able to transmit the divine teachings of the Lord unchanged, because that separation has kept her unchanged, that is, *like the immutable God Himself.*”

Once in the early 1960’s, a seminarian heard Archbishop Averky pacing for a long time in the monastery corridor. Finally he went up to the bishop and asked him what was wrong. “Brother,” replied the righteous hierarch, contemplating, “the term ‘Orthodoxy’ has become meaningless because *unorthodoxy* is disguising itself behind the external

mask of Orthodoxy. Thus there is a need to coin a new phrase for that which we call Orthodoxy, just as there once had been a need to coin the term ‘Orthodox.’ And that is not so easy.”

Archbishop Averky perceived that, for whatever reason, Orthodox churches and church leaders have not treasured the other worldly basis of Orthodox tradition as passed on from father

to son uninterruptedly through the centuries. About this he wrote:

“Wherever the inherited spiritual link of grace going back to the Holy Apostles and their successors the Apostolic Men and Holy Fathers has been broken, wherever various innovations have been introduced in faith and morals with the aim of ‘keeping step with the times,’ of ‘progressing,’ of not getting out-of-date and of adapting to the demands and fashions of this world lying in evil—there can be no talk of the true Church.”

These “innovations” are sometimes introduced in order to make Orthodox life less of a struggle or to make it appear less “odd” in the eyes of the world. Archbishop Averky wrote that the very concept of doing this is heterodox, since “the Orthodox Faith teaches *how to construct life according to the demands of Christian perfection*, whereas heterodoxy takes from Christianity only those things which are, and to the degree to which they are, *compatible with the conditions of contemporary cultural life.*” To lower Orthodoxy’s standard of ascetic struggle is to deny Christians a means of self-purification, to deny them even the chance of soul-saving



The Three Pillars of Orthodoxy

repentance when they fall short of this standard—in spirit if not in letter. It is to weaken the very foundation of Orthodoxy, which, as Archbishop Averky stated, “is an *ascetic* faith that calls to ascetic labor in the name of the uprooting of sinful passions and the implanting of Christian virtues.”

In other cases, traditions are dissected and changed in order to feed the pride of contemporary “theologians” who, cut off from the direct, living transmission of tradition, strive to find “new ways of Orthodox theology,” to intellectually “master history” and “restore” Orthodox practice to some kind of artificial purism. They clamor, Archbishop Averky wrote, “about how essential it is to ‘renew the Orthodox Church,’ about some sort of ‘reforms in Orthodoxy,’ which allegedly has become ‘set in its ways’ and ‘moribund.’ These new breeds of ‘Orthodox’ are really no more than modern ‘scholastics.’” They “theologize” without the proper “feel” for the traditional church atmosphere in which saints have been raised.

By *their fruits ye shall know them* (Mt 7:20): Traditional Orthodoxy, with all its alleged “cultural accretions” and “impurities,” has nurtured saints even in our own times; “restored” or “rediscovered” Orthodoxy, with all its claims of being more pure and better informed, has produced, at best, clever men. The spiritual impotence of the latter is the result of its “theologians” “knowing better” than the modern, living repositories of Orthodox sanctity.

Churches, in “keeping step with the times,” can also lose the savour of Orthodoxy by being caught up in the spirit of the fashionable “ecumenical movement” which, as we have seen, is a manifestation of the process of world apostasy. Thus, Archbishop Averky stated in different places:

“The destructive spirit of Apostasy has already penetrated even our Orthodox Church, extremely prominent hierarchs of which openly are proclaiming the approach of some sort of ‘new era’ and cynically are proposing being done with all the past as they assemble to create some kind of completely ‘new Church’ in close ‘ecumenical’ contact and unanimity with all apostates from the true faith and Church. For a long time we have heard that they [Orthodox clergy] belong to this movement in order ‘to witness to the peoples of other confessions the truth of holy Orthodoxy,’ but it is difficult for us to believe that this statement is anything more than ‘throwing powder in our eyes.’ Their frequent theological declarations in the international press can lead us to no other conclusion than that they are traitors to the holy Truth.”

The Third Level

Finally, the third level of the apostasy that Archbishop Averky warned about is reached when Orthodox churches, even while preserving all the traditions of what they call “true Orthodoxy,” also lose the precious savour of their faith and become infected with a worldly spirit disguised as spirituality. This occurs through:

(1) The loss of basic Christian love, without which all the traditions become condemning rather than grace-bearing, and

(2) The use of outward forms and supports of faith (which are intended to evoke remembrance of the other world) for worldly ends.

Through these factors arises another form of “pseudo-Orthodoxy,” this time more subtle because it may be cloaked in all the right externals.

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From the Editor: The symptoms found within this apostatic state of “pseudo-Orthodoxy” will be presented in our next issue.



I see your struggle; I am counting the crowns; I envy your medallions; I plunge my mind into the age to come to hear the triumphant melodies that the angelic beings will compose; I am amazed and bemoan myself because I have not struggled as you struggle!

My children, just think about what the martyrs went through for our Christ! And the more martyrs were killed, the more did Christians flourish; our Church has been watered with the blood of martyrs. We are martyrs in this corrupt society of ours, for with our chaste—by God’s grace—lifestyle, we censure the immorality of mankind and its estrangement from the worship of God.

Abide, my children, in this chaste lifestyle; abide close to our Jesus, and may you resemble Him by enduring slander and false accusations. This is what our Lord endured from the Scribes and the Pharisees and the chief priests; unjustly did He suffer on the Cross. Therefore, those who want to be His followers will undergo similar trials.

Kneel at the holy feet of our Jesus and shed tears of love, follow Him with loyal dedication till death, and if the waves rise up to Heaven and descend to the abyss, so be it. Our Christ, the true God, with a dreadful, divine nod will calm all the waves, as long as we have faith. Believe truly and steadfastly in Him Who said, *I am with you always, even to the end of the age.* (Mt 28:20). Jesus is with us; do not lose heart. He will fight for us, throughout the intercessions of the invincible Theotokos, and grant us the victory.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou and Arizona

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

THE ORTHODOX THERAPIST

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos.

Rekindling the Spiritual Gift

The priesthood is a great gift given to those who have been healed of passions and are placed in the position of physicians to cure the passions of the people. Any physician, however, needs continual renewal. Otherwise he cannot cure men's diseases with new methods. The same applies to some degree in the case of priests. It requires vigilant attention and a great struggle to maintain this gift of the priesthood at all times. The priest bears within him the priesthood of Christ and must keep it undefiled. This has a deep meaning.

There are priests who have not been dethroned (deposed) and consequently can celebrate the Liturgy and perform the sacraments by the grace of God. Outwardly their priesthood is unhindered, because they have not been condemned by the Church. But their priesthood has no power because they defile it by their lives. They can consecrate the gifts, but they themselves cannot be sanctified by them, as Nicholas Cavasilas says.

Where does this spiritual powerlessness appear? It appears mainly in the fact that they cannot heal and do not know how to heal. To perform the sacraments is of God's grace which is given in the sacrament of the priesthood. But **to cure people's sicknesses is of God's grace which is given to that person who makes [synergistically] productive the gift of [his] baptism, who puts to use the kingly gift of grace.** This explains why many priests do not know how to heal men's passions and are unable to do it. They simply do not know what method to apply. They have no idea of what the *heart* and *nous* are, how the *nous* is taken captive or how the *heart* dies. They often regard these teachings as "referring only to monks." Thus they divide the teachings of Christ and the Fathers into monastic and secular. But no such distinction exists in the teaching of our Orthodox Church.

In what follows we would like to set forth the teaching of the Church, through the Holy Apostles and Fathers, on the necessity for the priest to nurture the gift of priesthood, to rekindle the grace received at the sacrament of ordination, for otherwise he cannot heal men's spiritual illnesses.

Basic Qualities of Priest-Therapists

St. Paul advised his disciple Timothy: *Do not neglect the gift that is in you.* (1 Tim 4:14). This exhortation is analogous to the exhortation to the Christians: *As a fellow-worker we urge you not to let the grace you received come to nothing.* (2 Cor 6:1). And the same apostle's words: *The grace he has shown me has not been without fruit.* (1 Cor 15:10). He also instructs the Apostle Timothy: *That is why I would remind you to fan the flame of that special grace which God kindled in you when my hands were laid upon you.* (2 Tim 1:6).

In the Pastoral Epistles the Holy Apostle Paul often refers to this subject. The bishop and the clergy in general must, through

their struggle to preserve the gift of the priesthood, serve God and men in a worthy manner and guard the sacred heritage.

We would like to cite a few of the many characteristic passages: *Train yourself for godliness.* (1 Tim 4:7). *You will be a good minister of Jesus Christ nourished in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.* (1 Tim 4:6). *Be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.* (1 Tim 4:12). He requests Timothy to fulfill his charge *without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing.* (1 Tim 6:14). He exhorts him to keep the tradition: *That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.* (2 Tim 1:14). This keeping of the tradition must be done through the Holy Spirit who dwells within Timothy. He exhorts him to have watchfulness, attentiveness, vigilant care to live up to the great calling of God: *Be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.* (2 Tim 4:5).

The patristic teachings refer to all the essential qualities which should adorn the priest in order for him to be able to live up to his great task and high calling. In what follows we shall try to make a selection from those teachings, mainly from St. John Chrysostom and St. Theognostos. The teaching of these two Fathers expresses that of the holy Orthodox Church.

According to St. Theognostos (*The Philokalia*, vol. 2), the priest must not only be filled with the human traditions but have the grace of God mystically hidden in him. *Make sure that you do not rely only on human traditions in celebrating the divine mysteries, but let God's grace inwardly and invisibly fill you with the knowledge of higher things. And, the priestly dignity, like the priestly vestments, is full of splendor, but only so long as it is illumined from within by purity of soul.* Therefore the priest must guard this divine gift *as he would the pupil of his eye* and keep its honor unsullied.

These things show that great watchfulness is required on the part of the priest. And this requires much suffering. The priest should celebrate the Divine Liturgy first of all on his own behalf *watchfully and diligently.*

St. John Chrysostomos ("On the Priesthood") insists on this constant attention to guarding the priestly grace. He says that a priest must be sober and clear-sighted and *possess a thousand eyes looking in every direction.* He should resemble the many-eyed Cherubim in order to worship the Lord of hosts in purity. He should be encircled with walls all round, and *have intense zeal and constant sobriety of life* in order not to be harmed. According to St. John Chrysostom, just as fire requires fuel, *so grace requires our alacrity that it may be ever fervent.* This grace is in our power to quench or kindle. The grace *for presiding over the Church* is quenched *by sloth and carelessness* but is kept alive *by watchfulness and diligence.*

Watchfulness is indispensable for keeping oneself pure and thus for the priestly grace and blessing to remain. According to St. Theognostos, the priesthood *requires of us an angelic*

purification, and a degree of discretion and self-restraint greater than in our previous life. According to St. John Chrysostom, the priest must be as pure as if he were standing in Heaven itself, in the midst of the angelic powers. The priest's soul must be purer than the rays of the sun, *in order that the Holy Spirit may never leave him desolate.*

Repentance is another spiritual quality indispensable for a priest. "With streams of tears" let him become whiter than snow, and then, with a clear conscience, let him "in holiness touch holy things".

The purity of a priest should shine and beam on the Christians. A priest should be pure from passions, *especially unchastity and rancor, and should keep his imagination passion-free.* Many Fathers emphasize that these two passions (unchastity and rancor) should not come near priests, because otherwise the grace of God does not work for the healing of his spiritual children. Then the priest is sick, as we have indicated. He must have committed himself *sacrificially to die to the passions and to sensual pleasure.* Besides, according to Abba Dorotheos, *everything which is offered as a sacrifice to God, whether it be a sheep or a cow or something of the sort is a Victim.* He must be wholly consecrated to God.

The Gospel, which describes the journey of the Christian struggling to reach communion with God should be applied first of all by his servant, the priest. The ascetic life of the Church which we describe in this book should be known to the pastors of the Church. And when we say "known," we do not mean that it should be known in the head through lectures or reading, but it should be their living experience. For what passes through the heart helps faithful Christians. One person offers his blood for another to be nourished. It is shared out and the people are filled.

However, in addition to his purification and repentance, sobriety and watchfulness, the priest must be filled with all the graces of the Spirit, all the virtues. The basic virtue is holy humility which, according to St. Isaac the Syrian, is the raiment of divinity, since Christ, in order to save man, *humbled himself,* as the Apostle says. Besides, the Eucharist which the priest celebrates shows us this humility of Christ. Through the Eucharist we may enter into holy humility and acquire that sacrificial way of life.

Therefore in celebrating the Divine Liturgy we are not simply looking for the bread and wine to be transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ but seeking to acquire Christ's way of life. And this is humility. We seek to clothe ourselves in the spirit of the Eucharist, which is self-emptying.

Within this perspective St. Theognostos advises: *Humble yourself like a sheep for the slaughter, truly regarding all men as your superiors.* Indeed the same Father exhorts characteristically: *Regard yourself as dust and ashes, or as refuse, or as some cur-like creature...* One should perform the priestly service *with fear and trembling,* and in this way rightly divide the

word of truth and work out one's salvation. However, the Fathers recognize the actual reality. They are not unaware of the existence of many unworthy priests who, without having these essential qualities, dare to minister the Holy Sacrament. According to St. John Chrysostom, the priesthood, far from covering over man's passions, exposes them, makes them manifest. As fire tests metals, *so the touchstone of the ministry distinguishes men's souls. If a man is hot-tempered or conceited or boastful or anything like that, it soon uncovers all his shortcomings and lays them bare. Not only does it lay them bare, but it also makes them more tough and intractable.*

On Unworthy Priests

St. John of the Ladder says that he has seen aged priests *mocked by demons.* (Step 14). Furthermore, the Fathers do not hesitate to expose the punishment of unworthy priests, those who practice this great office without the proper testing, preparation and life. This is because instead of healing the souls of the flock, they tempt them.

St. Isidore of Pelusium writes (quoted by St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain): *Let us not trifle with divine things.* St. John Chrysostom says: *The priestly office might well accuse us of not handling it rightly.* St. Theognostos addresses the incorrigible priest who does not renounce the sacred ministry: *Expect to fall into the hands of the living God and experience his wrath. God will not spare you out of compassion.* He informs us that *many unworthy priests have been snatched away by sudden death and sent to the halls of judgment.*

St. Theognostos has in mind two examples of unworthy priests with different consequences. There was one who seemed outwardly honorable among men but nevertheless *within he was licentious and defiled,* and so at the time of the cherubic hymn when he was reading *no one is worthy...*, he suddenly died. The other priest had fallen into the passion of unchastity. Therefore he became incurably sick and was near death. When he came to realize his unworthiness and took a vow that he would desist from celebrating the mysteries, *he recovered at once so that not even a trace of his illness remained.*

Conclusion

We emphasize again that the priesthood is a pastoral service to the people. The priest and bishop have this great honor of serving the people. Serving the people is healing first and foremost. The Church does not exist simply to do social work and to serve the social needs of the people, but to guide them to salvation, that is, to the healing of their souls. This work demands many qualities. The priest must be indwelt by the uncreated grace of God. He is not there simply to perform the sacraments, but also in order to be sanctified by them so that, being sanctified, he can sanctify men by his being. This work is very high, and therefore St. John Chrysostom declares: *I do not think that there are many of the priests who are saved but many more that perish; this is because the matter requires a great soul.*

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A MOTHER'S LOVE . . .

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.

Death has one characteristic in common with love: it, like love, works a profound change in many that experience it and go on living.

A mother after a funeral goes to the graves of her children. Who goes there? The children in the mother's soul, with the mother, go to their graves. In a mother's soul, the mother lives only in one little corner; all the rest is a palace for the souls of the children taken from her. So it is with Christ, though to an immeasurably greater extent. He submitted to the confines of the grave so that men, His children, should know the spaciousness of the limitless palace of Paradise.

A mother goes to the graves of her children, as though to raise them to life in her soul, to redeem them by her tears, to have compassion on them by her thoughts. A mother's love saves her children from disappearance and annihilation in this world, at least for a time. The Lord, humiliated and spat upon, succeeded, through bowing to His Cross and Tomb, in truly raising the whole human race by His love, and saving it forever from vanishing away and being annihilated. Christ's act is incomparably greater than the act of any lonely mother in the world, His love for the human race being immeasurably greater than the love of any mother in the world for her children.

Although a mother, out of her great love and sorrow, always has tears to shed, she takes her remaining tears with her when she herself goes down into the grave. The Lord Jesus, though, shed all His tears for His children, to the last drop—and all

His blood to the last drop. Never, O sinner, will more precious tears be shed for you, neither living nor dead. Never will a mother, or wife, or children, or homeland, pay more for you than Christ the Saviour paid.

O poor and lonely man—do not say: who will mourn for me when I die? Who will weep over my dead body? Lo, the Lord Christ has mourned for you and wept over you, both in life and in death, more whole-heartedly than your mother would for you. It is not fitting to call those dead for whom Christ, in His love, suffered and died. They are alive in the living Lord. We shall all know this clearly when the Lord visits the graveyard of this world for the last time, and the trumpets sound.

A mother's love cannot separate her dead children from those living. Still less can Christ's love. The Lord is more discerning than the sun: He sees the approaching end of those still alive on earth, and sees the beginning of life for those who have entered into rest. For Him who created the earth from nothing, and man's body from the earth, there is no difference between the earth's, or his body's, being a man's grave. Grain lying in the field or stored in a granary—what difference does this make to the householder, who is thinking in both cases of the grain, and not of the straw or the granary? Whether men are in the body or in the earth—what difference does this make to the Householder of men's souls?

Coming on earth, the Lord paid two visits to men: the first to those living in the grave of the body and the second to those in the grave of the earth. He died in order to visit His dead children. Ah, how very truly a mother dies when she goes to the graves of her children!

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

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

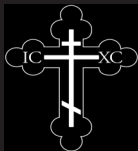
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AN INSIGHT TO "MONASTIC WISDOM: THE LETTERS OF ELDER JOSEPH THE HESYCHAST"

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos.

I often read the book *Monastic Wisdom*, which is a collection of letters Elder Joseph the Cave-Dweller and Hesychast of blessed memory sent to monks, hesychasts, hermits and lay people, and I find it of great spiritual benefit. This book is comparable to the classics of ascetic literature, and its repeated reprints in Greece show the interest it holds for those who love the monastic way of life, but also how beneficial it is for our fellow Christians, monks and lay people.

I did not have the special honor and blessing of knowing Elder Joseph of blessed memory, but I have come to know and love him through the texts published in *Monastic Wisdom*, through the life of his spiritual children and the stories I have heard about him from monks who knew him first hand. I also have the testimony of Archimandrite Sophrony Sakharov, the great Elder of blessed memory, who knew him on the Holy Mountain when he (Elder Sophrony) was living as an ascetic in *Karoulia* and Elder Joseph was an ascetic living in caves.

It is not easy to record in full my thoughts on reading this most spiritu-

al of books, *Monastic Wisdom*, because when we approach the writings of experienced holy Fathers we feel really helpless, as we are actually drawing near to a land of fire or a colossal nuclear reactor, in which all conventional thermometers shatter. We can only express ourselves appropriately if we share the same perspective as the ever-memorable Elder, hermit and hesychast, or if our life bears some resemblance to his own life in the Holy Spirit. I shall simply attempt, by the prayers of the Elder, to set down a few of my thoughts, while urging the reader not to be con-



tent with them, but to go on and read the wonderful letters of Elder Joseph of blessed memory. Elder Joseph as a Theologian

When we read the letters of Elder Joseph the Hesychast, we sense that they exude a fragrance of theology, and that they

are theological texts. Unfortunately we have formed the impression that theology means high-flown theories, academic theological analyses, comprehending theological terms, quoting historical theological events and so on. True Orthodox theology, however, is experience. It is the knowledge of God given to the person whose heart and nous have been purified and illuminated. Theologians, according to the teaching of St. Gregory the Theologian, are those who *are past masters in theoria*, and according to St Gregory Palamas they are primarily those who behold God. In the New Testament theology is identified with prophecy,

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and the theologian with the prophet who receives glorification and shares in the glory of God.

It is clear from the book we are considering that Elder Joseph of blessed memory is a theologian in this sense. He knows God by experience and unerringly leads people to this knowledge, which is also man’s communion with God. He says something particularly significant: When someone prays notetically, Grace comes in abundance, *like a subtle breeze, like a mighty gust of fragrant wind. It overflows throughout the body and the prayer* [i.e., the Jesus Prayer] *stops; the bodily members cease to move, and only the nous is in theoria within an extraordinary light. A union of God and man occurs. Man is unable to distinguish himself. It is just like iron; before it is thrown into the fire it is called iron, but once it ignites and becomes red-hot, it is one with the fire.*

Elder Joseph’s whole being is theological, as is evident from every word and phrase he uses. Having being reborn spiritually himself, he sees the renewal of the whole of creation. As the empirical theologian that he is, he sees even creation speaking theology, because with his pure heart he beholds the principles (*logoi*) of beings, their spiritual essences, the uncreated energy of God bestowing being and life on creation, as St Maximos the Confessor analyzes so wonderfully. A brief passage from one of Elder Joseph’s letters is typical: *Come now, even if for only one day, to talk about God*

and to theologize; to enjoy what you yearn for; to listen to the rough crags, those mystical and silent theologians, which expound deep thoughts and guide the heart and nous towards the Creator. After spring it is beautiful here—from Holy Pascha until the Panaghia’s day in August. The beautiful rocks theologize like voiceless theologians, as does all of nature. He sees the rugged rocks as mystical theologians, in the way an iconographer portrays them, showing them illuminated by Christ, Who is

at the centre of the icon.

Elder Joseph as an Experienced Teacher

A theological atmosphere, and the fact that his very existence speaks theology, permeate the letters of Elder Joseph the Hesychast from the great gift of Grace that he possesses: the gift of discerning spirits. Indeed, the principal characteristic of empirical theology is the ascetic’s ability to distinguish between what is created and what is uncreated, to tell the



difference between demonic energies and the energy of Divine Grace, and to test the spirits. Here we see a discerning monk, theologian and Father.

This is important on two accounts. Firstly, because theology is primarily prayer and the *theoria* of God. Someone who does not pray cannot theologize, even if he writes theological treatises. Secondly, because the spiritual father who is also a theologian is able to identify the spiritual illnesses of his spiritual children, and to cure them through his wise

and experienced guidance, with the Christian remaining, of course, within the sacramental and ascetic life of the Church. This discerning pastoral guidance offered by spiritual fathers who are also theologians is clearly evident in the *Gerontikon* (“Sayings of the Desert Fathers”). Every word uttered by the great Abbas was theological and healed the spiritual ailments of Christians, because their sayings were the energy of God.

There are many examples that we could use from the writings of the great Elder Joseph of blessed memory. In one letter he writes: *The Grace of the priesthood is one thing, the Grace of the great schema is another, the Grace of the Mysteries is different, and the action of Grace in ascesis is also different. They all spring from the same source, but each one differs from the other in eminence and glory.* He recognizes the differences between people, as *there are great differences from man to man and monk to monk*, so each one must be dealt with differently.

Elder Joseph of blessed memory knew personally all the subtle inner processes, so he is an experienced teacher of the spiritual life. He is very familiar with the changes that take place in the soul and body during the spiritual struggle. When the Elder analyzes the subject of delusion he makes the surprising statement that a person falls into delusion mainly by overemphasizing one spiritual gift, such as fasting, vigil, tears, prayer, *hesychia* or the monastic *schema*. He goes so far as to write: *If the Lord does not send the purifying waters of His Divine Grace, we remain without fruit, and our works become food for the demons...So then, above all we need spiritual discernment, and we must arduously seek it from God.*

Elder Joseph as a Neptic Father

The book of the great and ever-memorable Elder Joseph the Hesychast is an important and brilliant summary of the *Philokalia of the Holy Neptic Fathers of the Church*, and can be classified as *Philokalic* literature. It could be emphasized that it is the best introduction to interpreting the *Philokalia*. I remember that from the first times I read this book I realized how valuable it was for understanding the vocabulary of the patristic and *neptic* tradition. In his texts Elder Joseph explains terms with amazing aptitude and unusual ease, in a way that shows he has completely assimilated them. For instance, he explains what “contrary to nature,” “according to nature” and “above nature” mean; what *praxis* and *theoria* are; what noetic prayer is, and how it differs from rational prayer; and what we mean when we speak of God’s purifying, illuminating and deifying energy. Exalted concepts become easy to understand, and these moving texts actually lead the reader to experience such concepts within the furnace of longing and love for God.

I should like to cite a wonderful, divinely inspired passage: *The spiritual life is divided into three stages, and Grace acts in a person accordingly. The first stage is called purification, during which a person is cleansed. What you have now is called the Grace of purification. This form of Grace leads one*

to repentance...The second form of Grace is called the Grace of illumination. During this stage, one receives the light of knowledge and is raised to the vision of God. This does not mean seeing lights, fantasies, and images, but it means clarity of the nous, clearness of thoughts, and depth of cognition...The third stage—when Grace overshadows—is the Grace of perfection, truly a great gift. I shall not write to you about this now, since it is unnecessary.

Elder Joseph knows that the energy of God is one, but according to the effects that it has on each person it is called by different names. Sometimes it purifies, sometimes it illumines and sometimes it makes perfect and deifies, and so it takes the corresponding names. The Elder is plainly aware of which state the recipient of his letter is in. On the one hand he puts the spiritual life in perspective for him, without restricting him to low spiritual levels, because otherwise he would just be moralizing. On the other hand, he shows him what to do in his present state, without explaining the exalted spiritual states to him *since it is unnecessary.*



One cannot love God, and his heart be warmed by the sensation of His love, if he does not first feel within his heart the fear of God. For the power of the fear of God soothes and softens the soul, so that it can attain to a state of forceful and vibrant love for Him.

Precisely those things which are observed in our bodies, also happen to our souls. As long as wounds to the body go without therapeutic attention and become scabbed over, they do not respond to the effects of the medicine which the doctor places on them; however, when they are washed and cleansed, they feel the effects of the medical treatment and thus proceed to quick healing. It is like that with the soul. When it goes without spiritual attention and is wholly covered by the leprosy of sensual pleasure, it is never possible for it to feel the fear of God; even if someone should continually remind it how fearful is the righteous wrath of God, as well as His omnipotence.

He who loves God, with all the warmth of his heart, is known to God as His own; for the more that a man is possessed by God and is filled with the love of God, that is, to the extent that he feels ever more strongly that he loves God, all the more is such a man taken up by the love of God. And so it is that this man, flooded by the light of Divine knowledge, is possessed by the most forceful Divine eros, to the extent that even his bones feel the sacred shuddering of this love; while he himself is no longer aware of his former self --- for he is found totally altered, changed by the action of God’s love.

St. Diadochos of Photiki

THE TRUE STORY OF A REPEN- TANT SINNER

By Claudia Vasilievna Ustignia, as disseminated by the Romanian Orthodox Monastery of the Dormition of the Mother of God, Rives Junction, Michigan.

The account of this miracle, which took place 50 years ago [1965], has reached America. It's authenticity is verified by the fact that it records the year, day, hour, city, address, names... etc. Reading it, we behold the great care which God has for the salvation of our sinful souls. Read it with attention, and compare it to the other miracles which are occurring today throughout the world (various weeping icons and apparitions). You will observe that the same message is repeated: We must repent, for the Son of Man will come soon, and then it will be too late for us to be saved even if we wanted to be. Work, while it is light...

† † †

I used to be an atheist mocking God and persecuting the Holy Church. I lived my life in sin, and spiritually I was completely dead. But suddenly, in His great mercy, God called me, His creation, to repentance so that I would not perish.

This is what happened: In 1962 I became ill with cancer and suffered from the disease for three years. The doctors treated me in vain, for my health deteriorated more and more each day; it reached the point where I couldn't even drink water without vomiting. I was transferred to another hospital where two doctors were called in from Moscow to operate on me. That was on February 19, 1965, at 11:00 a.m. They discovered during the operation that my intestines had decomposed. That was when I died.

While they were making their incisions on my body, my soul was standing with the two doctors. I looked on in horror at the disease which affected my body, seeing my stomach full of cancer. As I watched, I thought to myself. "How am I in two places; how am I standing here and lying down at the same time?"

The doctors removed the intestines and placed them on the table, saying that instead of being fleshy and pliable, they were nothing but liquid—in other words, they had already decayed. Then they put all of the rotted tissue in a pile and said: "She couldn't have lived any longer; there was nothing healthy inside of her, everything was decomposed." This operation was performed by Doctor Izrael Igaevici Newman, a professor, who was assisted by ten other doctors.

The doctors decided to give my body to the young interns to practice on, and thus, it was taken to the morgue where I was laid down naked, covered only with a sheet up to my chest.

Just then my brother came in with my son, Andrusha. My little boy came up to me, kissed me on the forehead, and broke out in tears, saying: "Mommy, why did you die? I'm still little, how will I live without you?"

I hugged him and kissed him, but he paid me no attention at all—my "living" presence was sensed by no one in the room. I saw that everyone in the room was crying.

After that, I found myself in my own house. My mother-in-law from my first marriage came in, followed shortly by my sister and her husband. (I didn't live with my first husband—he believed in God.) They began dividing up my belongings. I was well-to-do, but everything which I had was gained by sin, not by honest work. My sister began to take everything which was of any value, and my mother-in-law asked for something for my little boy. My sister then began ranting at her, saying: "The child is not your son's. You aren't even related to him."

While my sister was yelling these accusations, I saw demons, smiling with delight and writing down every word which she said! After that, my sister and mother-in-law left, locking the door, and going home with sacks full of my things.

Just then I, Claudia the sinner, flew very high. I was amazed at the fact that I was flying. I flew over Barnal, and then everything became dark. The darkness lasted for a long time during my journey. Someone showed me the places I had lived while I was young. I didn't know what I was flying on: Through the air? On a cloud? I couldn't tell; but when I reached the first place below Heaven, at first it was overcast, like a gloomy day, then the light became so strong that it was impossible to see.

Someone sat me down on a place which was very high, although during the entire time I was flying, I was lying down—I don't know on what, it seemed like some sort of platform, but whatever it was, it was flexible and black. I started going down a long pathway; on the sides of the path were bushes, not very tall, but they had leaves which were very thin and sharp. In the distance I saw tall trees with beautiful leaves of all colors. Between the trees were small new houses, but I didn't see anyone in them. There was beautiful green grass running along this valley, and I wondered where I was: Was it a village, a city?

There was no one to be seen. But who lived here? I looked about and saw that a short distance away a woman, tall and very beautiful, was approaching. She was wearing a long garment covered by a cape. A young man was following her, weeping uncontrollably. It seemed like he was saying something, asking for something, but she ignored him. I wondered to myself, "What kind of mother can this be; her child begs for something and she doesn't even look at him!"

When the woman came closer to me, she said: "Lord, where should I take her?" She was standing with her hands lifted to her breast, her eyes raised to Heaven.

It was then that I realized with a terrible shock that I had died; my soul was in Heaven, but my body was on earth. At that same time I realized that I had so many sins which I had to answer for. I began to cry bitterly. I looked about to see the

Lord, but couldn't see anyone; yet, I heard the voice of the Lord. He said: "Send her back to earth; it's too soon for her to be here. Her father is compassionate and has been praying to me constantly, and I have decided to have mercy on her."

Then I knew that this woman was the Mother of the Lord, the Virgin Mary, the Queen of Heaven and earth; and the young man who was crying was my guardian angel.

The Lord went on to say: "I'm tired of her mockery against God, and her foul life. I wanted to wipe her off the face of the earth without any sign of repentance, but her father has prayed so much. Show her all the places she deserves to be sent to."

Suddenly I was in some water, with the most horrific snakes climbing all over me. They had long tongues with flames of fire coming out of their mouths. There were many other forms of reptiles which all gave off an insufferable stench. These dragons climbed all over me, attaching themselves to me. There were also all kinds of worms wrapping themselves around my neck. They were as thick as a finger, a quarter of a yard long, with spikes on their tails. These worms found their way into my body through every orifice: genitals, eyes, nose, mouth, piercing my insides and fastening themselves to me. They were absolutely revolting and unbearable! I cried out with all my strength, but it was not my voice which I heard. But, there was no mercy to be found in that place, no help from anyone.

While I was there, a woman who died while having an abortion came in. She began to cry out and ask God to have mercy on her. But He answered: "Why didn't you ask me for help while you were alive on earth? You killed an infant in your womb and advised people not to have children, saying that it only made poverty worse. In my eyes, there is not an over-abundance of children. I give children to everyone. In my house, there are many rooms."

The Lord God said to me: "I sent you sickness so that you would repent, but you lived right up to your last moment blaspheming against me. You didn't acknowledge Me until you came here. Now I don't recognize you either."

I felt like the ground was spinning. I flew away from there toward the noisy earth. Then I saw my village church, the very church which I used to ridicule. When the doors of the church opened, a priest dressed in white, with bright rays emanating from him, came out. He stood with his head bowed. Then the voice of God asked me: "Who is this?" I answered that it is our priest.

The Lord said to me: "You used to always say that he is a lazy bum. He is not a bum, not a hired-hand. Whatever he may be personally, above all, he is a servant of the Lord among the little ones. If the priest does not read the prayer of absolution over you, neither will I forgive you."

The priest is living even to this day, serving his office of the priesthood. What I saw there was his soul. That was when I

began to beseech the Lord: "Lord, set me free and let me go back to earth. I have a little boy there; have mercy on him!"

"Look, you have compassion for one single person, but I have innumerable souls to consider. I have compassion for all of you, three thousand times more! But, what path did you choose in life? A wrong path! You work to accumulate riches which you use for all sorts of iniquity. Did you see now how I took away all your possessions? Everything is gone. They took your son to an orphanage, and your sinful soul has come here. You served Satan, an idol, offering him sacrifice, and now you ask me to release you from the punishment which you deserve. All you ever did was amuse yourself, going out to movies, theaters, dances; you gave money to Satan, but didn't so much as want to go into the Church of God. I waited and waited for you to wake up from this sinful state and repent."

After that, the Savior said: "Look after your souls, for there is a short time left. Very soon I will come to judge the world"

Then I asked the Lord: "Lord, how should I pray?"

He answered: "The most precious prayers are not theories which you learned by heart, but rather the prayer which you offer from a pure heart, from the depth of your soul. Say to the Lord, 'Lord, forgive me! Lord, help me!' offering these words with tears." That is what the Lord told me.

Then the Mother of God was near me and I found myself again on that small platform, but now, instead of lying down, I was standing up. The Queen of Heaven said: "Lord, how can I release her, she has short hair!?"

The Lord said: "Put a braid, the same color as her own hair, in her right hand."

When the Queen of Heaven went off to get the braid, I saw that she drew near to some large gates, constructed and sculpted along curved lines, like the Royal Doors of the Altar. They were indescribably beautiful, with a light coming out of them which was so bright that it was not possible to look at it or even explain. As the Mother of God approached, these gates opened on their own, and she went into a palace surrounded by a courtyard. I remained standing in my own place, with my guardian angel, who would not let me see his face, standing next to me. I decided to ask the Lord if I could see Paradise. He said nothing when I asked.

When the Queen of Heaven returned, the Lord said: "Show her Heaven!"

The Queen of Heaven gestured with her hand over me and said: "Earth was your Heaven; this is the place for sinners; look and see what it is like."

She lifted up something like a sheet and then I saw men far off: black, as though they were burned, and they looked like skeletons. There were so many of them, and they gave off an intolerable stench I was terrified that I would be left there. Then all of them, at once, stood up and with parched throats, begged that someone give them at least a drop of water to drink. I was horrified when they said: "This soul has

come to us from the earthly Paradise! There is a sweet smell coming from her. Man, while on earth, has the ability and the time to gain for himself the heavenly Paradise. He has to put forth spiritual effort on earth for the Lord, otherwise he will not escape this place of tortures.”

The King of Heaven said: “For those of you on the earthly Paradise mercy is something so very precious: offer charity to others, giving them water to drink, as much as you possibly can. Do this with a pure heart, as I said in the Gospel: If someone offers at least a cup of cool water in My Name, he will have recompense from the Lord. You not only have an abundance of water, but you also have all kinds of other good things which you much share with those who are in need, offering them water above all. Give water, so that the innumerable people who are suffering here can be relieved! This is the very reason why your rivers and seas are so full and never dry up.”

Then I found that I was in the very depths of hell. This was not just hell, it was worse. There I saw people and fire, and demons came running toward me with documents on which were written all of my sins and evil deeds. They said to me: “Look, we wrote down here that you served us on earth.”

I read all of my sins myself, which were written with large letters, and I was terrified by them. There was fire burning all around the demons, the flames shooting upwards; then suddenly they began beating me on the head and sparks from the fire pierced right into me.

Then, Oh! I heard feeble moans, like the crying of a tiny bird. They were asking for something to drink, and when the fire gave off some light, I saw all of them. They were weak and tortured. They said to me: “See, friend, you came here where we live. Come here to us! From now on you will live here. While we all lived on earth, we had no love for anyone; not for those who served God’s churches, not for the poor, we were just filled with pride. We mocked God, serving only that which was godless, and laughed at the shepherds of the Orthodox Church. We never confessed our sins. We never partook of Holy Communion. The sinners who repented for their sins with their whole hearts, went to church, received strangers, had mercy on the poor, helped those in need, and did other good deeds, all those souls are to be found there, up above.”

I was terrified, trembling with fright. It seemed like I was in this place for a hundred years. I felt completely crushed, but still they went on saying to me: “You will be here with us, you’ll be tormented for all eternity and will live like we do!”

Then the Mother of God appeared. Light shone all around. The demons fell one by one, and all the souls turned toward her with their weeping and began to pray to her: “O Mother of God, Queen of Heaven, don’t abandon us here alone where we are so terribly tormented. We don’t have even a drop of water, and the fire is unbearable.” All of them were weeping bitterly.

The Mother of God also wept and said to them: “When you were living on earth, you didn’t call to me for help; you didn’t pray to my Son and your God. Now I cannot help you; I cannot go against the will of my Son. And He cannot go against the will of the Heavenly Father. This is why I can’t intercede for you. I can show mercy to only those suffering souls in hell who are prayed for in the Church, and for those pilgrims who prayed, who performed deeds of virtue and who were worthy of mercy while they lived on earth.”

While I was in hell I was given all kinds of worms to eat: alive, dead, rotten, putrid. I cried out and said: “How can I eat them? It turns my stomach!”

The demons said: “You didn’t observe fasting periods while you were on earth. You ate meat, not worms. Now, eat worms.” Instead of milk, they gave me all sorts of foul things to drink.

Then, we began going upwards, but they were left in hell and began yelling: “Don’t leave us, O Mother of God!”

We left the darkness behind, and I again found myself on that same platform. After the Queen of Heaven had shown me all of these dreadful places, she lifted her hands to her breast, raised her eyes toward Heaven and asked what she should do with me, where should she take me?

The Lord said: “Let her go back to earth. Take hold of her hair and set her free.”

Immediately twelve wheelbarrows appeared, but they had no wheels. In order for me to move, the Mother of God told me to lean on them with my right foot and push with my left. I did as the Queen of Heaven told me, with her coming along beside me. But when I reached the last wheelbarrow I saw a bottomless abyss. She told me to step down first with my right foot and then with my left, but I told her that I was afraid and feared that I would fall. She answered that it was essential that I not fall, and she put the thick end of the braid of hair in my right hand. When she let go of it I flew toward earth.

While I was flying, I saw cars moving about on earth and people going to work. I was lying down on the platform in the middle of a new outdoor marketplace. I flew gently toward the morgue where my body had been taken. Then, all of a sudden, I was standing on solid ground. It was noon, the third day after I had died.

After the strong light that I had experienced up above, I didn’t like being on earth; but there was nothing I could do about it. I went to the hospital, toward the morgue, but it was locked. I went in and looked around. My body was laying on a table, dead, the head turned a bit to one side, one arm dangling down, and part of my torso was touching another corpse. I don’t know how my soul entered into the body, but I immediately felt cold and pulled away from the other cadaver. I drew my knees together, and just then a dead man whose legs had been severed from his body by a train, was brought

in on a bier. I opened my eyes and moved. Those carrying the bier ran off in all directions. Then the orderlies came in with two doctors. They gave orders to have me taken quickly into the hospital. There, all the doctors gathered quickly and said that my brain had to be warmed beneath the lights.

This took place at 9:00 a.m. on February 23, 1965. There were eight different incisions with stitches on my body; all the doctors had used it for research and study. After two hours, I was warm, I opened my eyes and began to talk. I was fed artificially for twenty days. Then they brought me something to eat; it was bread with sour cream, and coffee, but I told them that I would not eat. The nurse tried to convince me to eat, and everyone in the room turned their eyes toward me. Just then the doctor came in and asked me why I did not want to eat. I told him: "Today is Friday and I will not eat non-lenten food. If you sit down here next to me, I will tell you what I saw and where I was during the time I was dead."

The doctor sat down and listened attentively. I began by saying that whoever refuses to respect the fast of Wednesdays, Fridays, and the prescribed fasting periods throughout the year, in the afterlife will be given worms, snakes and reptiles to eat instead of meat. And instead of milk, he will have to drink the foulest things imaginable. This is the nourishment which is given to everyone who died without repenting before the Holy Altar, before a priest and without Holy Communion. This was the reason I refused to eat cheese and sour cream.

The doctor listened to me, his face turning red, then white, then red again. Other doctors and nurses had gathered there too and listened to what I was saying about what I had seen and heard on the other side of the grave.

After this many people began coming to me and I told them all which had been commanded me from the other side. Later, the secret police started chasing the people away from the hospital, and I was moved to another hospital in the city where I regained complete health.

The doctors were curious to find out how I came back to life, especially since they knew that my intestines were putrid and that other organs were not only diseased but decomposed. More so, after my operation, all my intestines had been removed, falling where they may.

In order to discover what had happened, they decided to operate on me again. When the doctor in charge made this announcement, Valentina Vasilievna said: "Why should we operate on her again? All of her organs are healthy."

I asked them not to give me anesthesia since I felt no pain. The doctors operated and removed the intestines. I was awake, watching in the mirror on the ceiling. I asked the doctors what was wrong with me, and they answered that I was fine, with no disease at all. Just then the doctor who had performed the first operation together with the other doctors came in.

They all looked at me, at my intestines and said: "But where is the disease? Everything in you was rotten before, but now it is all healthy."

All of the medical personnel were amazed and afraid. They ran through the room in all directions, holding their heads, wringing their hands, and all were as pale and colorless as a corpse.

I told them: "God had mercy on me so that I would go and tell others and so that you would also learn something, which you might lead you to believe that Heaven and the Power of the Most High are above us.

They themselves were saying these very same things.

I said to a Jewish doctor: "If you believe all of this, then go, be baptized and have your marriage blessed in the Church." He flushed with confusion.

Valentina Vasilievna, who had operated on me, went out into the hall, collapsed on a sofa, and broke down crying. I asked her why she was crying: did someone die? Did Claudia die? She answered: "No, she did not die, but I am completely stupefied by this miracle which is here before us."

God then helped her to tell me that Professor Newman had tried to convince her to kill me, but she refused completely and was caring for me herself because she was afraid that someone would kill me. She personally prepared my food. The director of the hospital was also amazed, saying that this incident was unique in the history of medicine throughout the world.

When I left the hospital, I called the priest whom I had mocked and accused of being a lazy bum when, quite to the contrary, he was a truly great man. The servant of the Altar of God came, heard my confession in which I laid forth all my sins which I had committed during my entire life; then he administered the Sacrament of Holy Communion to me and blessed my house. Up to that time my home was nothing but a place of filth and indecency, drunkenness, beatings, and things for which there are no words to describe.

The next day I went to the office of the Party and handed over my membership card, since the old Claudia, the atheist and activist, no longer existed. She had died!

I am forty years old. With the help of the Queen of Heaven, and through the mercy of God, I go to Church and live a Christian life. I go to various institutes and tell everyone there about what I saw and heard in the life on the other side of the grave. Many people come to me at my home and I also tell them all about what had happened. Now I advise everyone to repent so that they will not have to experience the tortures which I told them about. Repent for your evil sins and behavior so that you can receive remission from the priest for all your sins, and thus obtain eternal life.

I live at 99 Crupskaja Street, Banial, Altaiul County - I.

The servant of God and a repentant sinner,
Claudia Vasilievna Ustignia.

ORTHODOXY AS THERAPY

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

If we wished to conventionally define Christianity, as Orthodoxy, we would say it is the experiencing of the presence of the Uncreated (=of God) throughout history, and the potential of creation (=mankind) becoming God *by Grace*.

Given the perpetual presence of God in Christ, in historical reality, Christianity offers mankind the possibility of *theosis*, just as medical science offers mankind the possibility of preserving or restoring his health through a specific therapeutic procedure and a specific way of life.

The writer is in a position to appreciate the coincidence between the medical and ecclesiastic *poemantic* sciences, because, as a diabetic and a Christian, he is aware that in both cases, he has to faithfully abide by the rules that have been set out, in order to attain both of these two goals.

The unique and absolute goal of life in Christ is *theosis*, in other words, our union with God, so that man—through his participation in God's uncreated energy—may become *by the Grace of God* that which God is by nature (=without beginning and without end). This is what "salvation" means, in Christianity. It is not the moral im-



provement of man, but a re-creation, a re-construction in Christ, of man and of society, through an existing and an existential relationship with Christ, Who is the incarnate manifestation of God in History. This is what the Apostle Paul's words imply, in 2 Cor 5:17: *Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new*. Whoever is united with Christ is a new creation.

That is why *Christianically*, the incarnation of God-Logos—this redemptory "intrusion" of the Eternal and the Beyond-time God into Historical time—represents the commencement of a new world, of a (literally) "New Age," which continues throughout the passing centuries, in the persons of authentic Christians: the Saints. The Church exists in this world, both as the *body of Christ* as well as *in Christ*, in order to offer salvation, through one's embodiment in this regenerative procedure. This redemptory task of the Church is fulfilled by means of a specific therapeutic method, whereby throughout

history, the Church essentially acts as a universal infirmary. "Spiritual Infirmary" (spiritual hospital) is the characterization given to the Church by the blessed Chrysostom.

Further along, we shall examine the answers given to the following questions:

(1) What is the sickness that Christian Orthodoxy cures?

(2) What is the therapeutic method it implements?

(3) What is the identity of authentic Christianity, which radically separates it from all of its heretical deviations, and from every other form of religion?

The Sickness Cured by Orthodoxy

The sickness of human nature is the fallen state of mankind, along with all of creation, which likewise suffers (*sighs and groans together*, Rom 8:22) together with mankind. This diagnosis applies to every single person (regardless whether they are Christian or not, or whether they believe or not), on account of the overall unity of mankind. Christian Orthodoxy does not confine itself within the narrow boundaries of one

religion—which cares only for its own followers—but, just like God, *wants all people to be saved and to arrive at the realization of the truth* (1 Tim 2:4), since God is *the Saviour of all persons* (1 Tim 4:10). Thus, the sickness that Christianity refers to pertains to all of mankind; *Death has come upon all people, since all of them have sinned* (=they have veered

away from their path towards *theosis*, Rom 5:12). Just as the fall (i.e., sickness) is a pan-human issue, so is salvation-therapy directly dependent on the inner functions of each person.

The natural (authentic) state of a person is (patristically) defined by the functioning inside him of three mnemonic systems; two of which are familiar and monitored by medical science, while the third is something handled by *poemantic* therapeutics. The first system is cellular memory (DNA), which determines everything inside a human organism. The second is the cerebral cellular memory, brain function, which regulates our association with our self and our environment. Both these systems are familiar to medical science, whose work it is to maintain their harmonious operation.

The experience of the Saints is familiar with one other mnemonic system: that of the *heart*, or *noetic memory*, which functions inside the heart. In Orthodox tradition, the heart does not only have a natural operation, as a mere pump that circulates the blood. Furthermore, according to patristic

teaching, neither the brain nor the central nervous system is the center of our self-awareness; again, it is the *heart*, because, beyond its natural function, it also has a supernatural function. Under certain circumstances, it becomes **the place of our communion with God**, or, His uncreated energy. This is of course perceived through the experience of the Saints, and not through any logical function or through an intellectual theologizing.

Saint Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain (+1809), in recapitulating the overall patristic tradition in his work “Hortative Manual,” calls the *heart* a natural and supernatural center, but also a paranormal center, whenever its supernatural faculty becomes idle on account of the *heart* being dominated by passions. The *heart's* supernatural faculty is the ultimate prerequisite for perfection, for man's fulfillment, in other words, his *theosis*, for a complete embodiment in the communion in Christ.

In its supernatural faculty, the *heart* becomes the space where the mind can be activated. In the Orthodox terminology codex, the mind (*νοῦς*—appearing in the New Testament as *the spirit of man* and *the eye of the soul*) is an energy of the soul, by means of which man can know God, and can reach the state of *seeing* God. We must of course clarify that *knowledge of God* does not imply knowledge of His incomprehensible and unapproachable Divine Essence. This distinction between *essence* and *energy* in God is the crucial difference between Orthodoxy and all other versions of Christianity. The energy of the mind inside the *heart* is called the *noetic faculty* of the *heart*. We again stress that according to Orthodoxy, the mind (*νοῦς*) and logic (*λογικὴ*) are not the same thing, because logic functions within the brain, whereas the mind functions within the *heart*.

The *noetic faculty* is manifested as the *incessant prayer* (ref. 1 Thess 5:17) of the Holy Spirit inside the *heart* (ref. Gal 4:6, Rom 8:26, 1 Thess 5:19) and is named by our Holy Fathers as *the memory of God*. When man has in his *heart* the *memory of God*, in other words, when he hears in his *heart* the *voice* (1 Cor 14:2, Gal 4:6, etc.), he can sense God *dwelling* inside him (Rom 8:11). Saint Basil the Great in his 2nd epistle says that the memory of God remains incessant when it is not interrupted by mundane cares, and the mind *departs towards God*; in other words, when it is in communion with God. But this does not mean that the faithful who has been activated by this Divine Energy withdraws from the needs of everyday life, by remaining motionless or in some kind of ecstasy; it means that **his mind is liberated** from these cares, which are items that **preoccupy only his logic**.

To use an example that we can relate to: A scientist, who has re-acquired his *noetic faculty*, will use his logic to tackle his problems, while his mind inside his *heart* will preserve the memory of God incessantly. The person who preserves all three mnemonic systems is the Saint. To Orthodoxy, he is

a healthy (normal) person. This is why Orthodoxy's therapy is linked to man's course towards holiness.

The non-function or the below-par function of man's *noetic faculty* is the essence of his fall. The much-debated *ancestral sin* was precisely man's mishandling—from that very early moment of his historical presence—of the preservation of God's memory (=his communion with God) inside his *heart*. This is the morbid state that all of the ancestral descendants participate in; because it was no moral or personal sin, but a sickness of man's nature; *our nature has become ill of this sin*, observes Saint Cyril of Alexandria (+444), which is transmitted from person to person, exactly like the sickness that a tree transmits to all the other trees that originate from it.

The inactivating of the *noetic faculty* or the memory of God, and confusing it with the function of the brain (which happens to all of us), subjugates man to stress and to his natural environment; it further leads him to the quest for bliss through individualism and an anti-social stance. While ill because of his fallen state, man then uses God and his fellow man to secure his personal security and happiness. Personal use of God is found in “religion” (=the attempt to elicit strength from the divine), which can degenerate into a self-deification of man (*I became a self-idol* says Saint Andrew of Crete, in his “Major Canon”). The use of fellow man—and subsequently creation in general—is achieved by exploiting them in every possible way. This, therefore, is the sickness that man seeks to cure, by becoming fully incorporated in the *spiritual hospital* of the Church.

Orthodoxy's Therapeutic Methods

The purpose of the Church's presence in the world—as a communion in Christ—is man's cure; the restoration of his *heart-centred* communion with God; in other words, of his *noetic faculty*. According to the professor Fr. John Romanides, *the patristic tradition is neither a social philosophy, nor a system of morals, nor a religious dogmatism; it is a therapeutic method. In this context, it is very similar to medicine and especially psychiatry. The noetic energy of the soul that prays mentally and incessantly inside the heart is a natural instrument, which everyone possesses and is in need of therapy. Neither philosophy, nor any of the known positive or social sciences can cure this instrument. This is why the incurable cases are not even aware of this instrument's existence.*

The need for man to be cured is a pan-human issue, related firstly to the restoration of every person to his natural state of existence, through the reactivation of the third mnemonic faculty. However, it also extends to man's social presence. In order for man to be in communion with his fellow man as a brother, his self-interest (which in the long run acts as self-love) must be transformed into selflessness: *Love... does not ask for reciprocation.* (1 Cor 13:8). Selfless love exists; it is the love of the Triadic God (Rom 5:8, 1 Jn 4:7), which gives everything without seeking anything in exchange. That is why Christian

Orthodoxy's social ideal is not "common possessions" but the "lack of possessions," as a willed resignation from any sort of demand. Only then can justice be possible.

The therapeutic method that is offered by the Church is the spiritual life; the life in the Holy Spirit. Spiritual life is experienced as an exercise (*ascesis*) and a participation in the Uncreated Grace, through the Holy Sacraments. *Ascesis* is the violation of our self-ruled and inanimate through sin nature, which is coursing headlong into a spiritual or eternal death, i.e., the eternal separation from the Grace of God. *Ascesis* aspires to victory over our passions, with the intention of conquering the inner subservience to those pestiferous focal points of man and participating in Christ's Cross and His Resurrection.

The Christian, who is practicing such restraint under the guidance of his therapist-spiritual father, becomes receptive to Grace, which he receives through his participation in the sacramental life of the ecclesiastic corpus. There cannot be any un-exercising Christian, just as there cannot be a cured person who does not follow the therapeutic advice that the doctor prescribed for him.

The Authenticity of Orthodoxy

The above points lead us to certain constants, which verify the identity of Christian Orthodoxy:

(a) The Church, as the body of Christ, functions as a therapy center-hospital. Otherwise, it would not be a Church, but a "religion." The Clergy are initially selected by the cured, in order to function as therapists. **The therapeutic function of the Church is preserved today, mostly in monasteries which, having survived secularism, continue the Church of the Apostolic times.**

(b) The scientists of ecclesiastic therapy are the already cured persons. Those who have not had the experience of therapy cannot be therapists. That is the essential difference between the poemantic therapeutic science and medical science. The scientists of ecclesiastic therapy (spiritual fathers and mothers) bring forth other therapists, just as the professors of medicine bring forth their successors.

(c) The Church's confining itself to a simple forgiveness of sins so that a place in Paradise may be secured constitutes alienation and is tantamount to medical science forgiving the patient, so that he might be healed after death! The Church cannot send someone to Paradise or to Hell. Besides, Paradise and Hell are not places, they are ways of existence. By healing mankind, the Church prepares the person so that he might eternally look upon Christ in His uncreated light as a view of Paradise, and not as a view of Hell, or as *an all-consuming fire*. (Heb 12:29). And this of course concerns every single person, because ALL people shall look eternally upon Christ, as *the Judge* of the whole world.

(d) The validity of science is verified by the achievement of its goals (i.e., in medicine, it is the curing of the patient). It is the way that authentic scientific medicine is distinguished from

charlatany. The criterion of *poemantic* therapy by the Church is also the achievement of spiritual healing, by opening the way towards *theosis*. Therapy is not transferred to the afterlife; it takes place during man's lifetime, here, in this world (*hinc et nunc*, here and now). This can be seen in the un-deteriorated relics of the Saints that have overcome biological deterioration, such as the relics of the *Eptanisos* (seven Greek islands in the Ionian sea, *Ed.*) saints: Spyridon, Gerasimos, Dionysios and Theodora Augusta. Un-deteriorated relics are, in our tradition, the indisputable evidence of *theosis*, or in other words the fulfillment of the Church's ascetic therapy.

I would like to ask the medical scientists of our country to pay special attention to the issue of the non-deterioration of holy relics, given that they haven't been scientifically interfered with, but, in them is manifest the energy of Divine Grace; because it has been observed that, at the moment when the cellular system should begin to disintegrate, it automatically ceases to, and instead of emanating any malodor of decay, the body emanates a distinctive fragrance. I limit this comment to the medical symptoms, and will not venture into the aspect of miraculous phenomena as evidence of *theosis*, because that aspect belongs to another sphere of discussion.

(e) Lastly, the Divine texts of the Church (Holy Bible, Synodic and Patristic texts) do not constitute coding systems of any Christian ideology; they bear a therapeutic character and function in the same way that university dissertations function in medical science. The same applies to the liturgical texts, as for example the Benedictions. The simple reading of a Benediction (prayer), without the combined effort of the faithful in the therapeutic procedure of the Church, would be no different to the instance where a patient resorts to the doctor for his excruciating pains, and, instead of an immediate intervention by the doctor, he is limited to being placed on an operating table, and being read the chapter that pertains to his specific ailment.

This, in a nutshell, is Orthodoxy. It does not matter whether one accepts it or not. However, with regard to scientists, I have tried—as a colleague in science myself—to scientifically respond to the question "what is Orthodoxy." **Any other version of Christianity constitutes a counterfeiting and a perversion of it, even if it aspires to presenting itself as something Orthodox.**



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

Saint Dorotheos of Gaza

WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR A SAVING CONFESSION?

By Metropolitan Innocent of Moscow.



What is Confession? Confession is the oral avowal of one's sins which lie heavy upon the conscience. Repentance cleanses the soul and makes it ready to receive the Holy Spirit, but confession, so to

speak, only empties the soul of sins.

Let us present a simple analogy and comparison to confession. For example, suppose you had only one vessel of some kind, which you through negligence or laziness let reach a stage where little by little it accumulated all sorts of dirt so that your vessel became not only unusable but even unbearable to look at without repugnance. But what if a king wanted to give you as a gift some sort of fragrant and precious balm, one drop of which could heal all infirmities and protect—what then? Would you refuse such a valuable gift only because you had no other clean vessel in which to put it? No! It would be very natural for you to accept such a gift and you would try to clean your vessel. How would you begin to clean your vessel? No doubt, before anything else, you would rid it of all uncleanness; you would begin by washing it with water and, perhaps would even burn it out so that it no longer retained any of its former odors. Isn't that so?

Now let the vessel represent the soul given to you by God, which you have brought to such a state that it has been filled with all kinds of transgression and iniquities; let the sweet-smelling balm, given by the king, signify the Holy Spirit, Who heals all infirmities and afflictions, Whom the King of Heaven and earth, Jesus Christ, freely bestows upon us. To examine your vessel signifies feeling your guilt before God and recalling all sins which have stolen into your heart. To clean out the vessel typifies the confession of your sins before your spiritual father, and washing with water and burning with fire signifies a sincere and even tearful repentance and a voluntary resolve to endure all unpleasantness, needs, afflictions, misfortunes, and even calamities that befall us.

Now tell me: Is Confession profitable or needful? Certainly it is profitable and even essential; because, just as it is impossible to cleanse a vessel without ridding it of all uncleanness, so it is impossible to purge your soul of sins without confession. But tell me, is confession alone enough for the reception of the Holy Spirit? Certainly not, because in order to receive the sweet-smelling and precious balm into a defiled vessel it is not enough to just empty it, but it is necessary to wash it with water and refine it with fire.

Just so, in order to receive the Holy Spirit, it is not enough just to confess or recite your sins before a spiritual father, but it is necessary together with this to purge your soul with repentance or contrition and grief of soul, and burn it out with voluntary endurance of afflictions. So then, this is what confession and repentance mean!

What does a true and correct confession consist of? When we wish to cleanse our conscience of sins in the Mystery of Repentance:

(1) Before everything else it is necessary to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and firmly hope that He is ready to forgive all sins, no matter of what magnitude, if only the sinner repents open-heartedly; it is necessary to believe and hope that the God of all wants and seeks our return. Of this He assures us through the prophet thus: *As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways* (Ezek 33:11), i.e., I do not at all desire the death of a sinner, but entirely desire his conversion.

(2) It is necessary to have a broken heart. Who is God? And who are we? God is the Almighty Creator of Heaven and earth; He is the awful and righteous Judge. And we? We are weak and insignificant mortals. All people, even the greatest people, are less than dust before God, and we can never imagine how disgusting to God is any sin and how any transgression offends Him. And we, insignificant and weak, we mortals endlessly benefited by our God, dare to offend Him—the All-Good One? Oh! This is so horrible! We are such debtors before God, such transgressors, that not only should we not dare to call ourselves His children, but are not even worthy of being His lowliest servants.

Therefore, picturing all this, you see what contriteness, what lamentation it is necessary to have then, when we want to purge ourselves of sins. And such a feeling must be had not only before confession and during confession, but also after confession. And even more important, do you want to offer a sacrifice to God such as will be acceptable to Him? Naturally we all gladly want this and as far as possible we offer it. But what can we offer Him really acceptable? A broken heart. A sacrifice unto God is a broken spirit; a heart that is broken and humbled, here is an offering to God more priceless than all offerings and oblations! For as the psalmist says, *the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise*. (Pss 5:17)

(3) It is necessary to forgive all our enemies and offenders all the harmful and offensive things they have done to us. Forgiveness—what does it mean to forgive? **To forgive means never to avenge, neither secretly nor openly**; never to recall wrongs but rather to forget them and, above all, to love your enemy as a friend, a brother, as a comrade; to protect his honor and to treat him right-mindedly in all things. This is what it means to forgive. And who agrees that

this is difficult? So, it is a hard matter to forgive wrongs, but he who can forgive wrongs is for this reason great—truly great, both before God and before man.

Yes, it is a hard matter to forgive your enemies; it is necessary to forgive, otherwise God Himself will not forgive. Jesus Christ said: *For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* (Mt 6:14-15). On the contrary to this, though you pray to God every hour, though you have such faith that you can move mountains, even though you give away all of your belongings to the needy, and give your body to be burned, if you do not practice forgiveness and do not wish to forgive your enemy, then all is in vain; for in such circumstances neither prayer, nor faith, nor charity, will save you, in short, nothing will save you.

But if it is needful to forgive our enemies, so likewise it is indispensable to ask also forgiveness of those people whom we have offended. Thus, if you have offended anyone by word, ask forgiveness of him, come and bow down at his feet and say, “Forgive me.” Have you offended by deed? Endeavor to expiate your guilt and offenses and recompense his damage, then be certain that all of your sins, no matter how heavy they be, will be forgiven you.

(4) It is necessary to reveal your sins properly and without any concealment. Some say, “For what reason should I reveal my sins to Him Who knows all of our secrets?” Certainly God knows all of our sins, but the Church, which has the power from God to forgive and absolve sins, cannot know them, and for this reason She cannot, without confession, pronounce Her absolution.

Finally, it is necessary to set forth a firm intention to live prudently in the future. If you want to be in the kingdom of Heaven, if you want God to forgive your sins—then stop sinning! Only on this condition does the Church absolve the penitent of his sins. And he who does not think at all about correcting himself confesses in vain, labors in vain, for even if the priest says, *I forgive and absolve*, the Holy Spirit does not forgive and absolve him!



Do not neglect prostration. It provides an image of man’s fall into sin and expresses the confession of our sinfulness. Getting up, on the other hand, signifies repentance and the promise to lead a life of virtue. Let each prostration be accompanied by a noetic invocation of Christ, so that by falling before the Lord in soul and body you may gain the Grace of the God of souls and bodies.

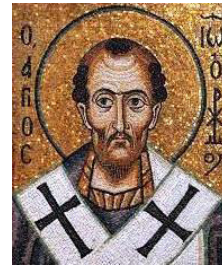
St. Theoliptos, Metropolitan of Philadelphia (+1322)

ON THE BETRAYAL OF JUDAS

By St. John Chrysostom.

Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you? (Mt 26:14-15).

† † †



These words seem to be clear and not to hint at anything more, but if you carefully examine each word, you will find deep meaning and a great deal to contemplate.

First, the time. The Evangelist does not indicate it without cause. He does not simply say, *One of the twelve went*, but adds, *Then one of the twelve ... went*. Then. Tell me, when? And why does he indicate the time? What does he want to teach me? He does not say Then for no reason: Speaking by the Spirit, he does not say anything at random or to no end. Therefore, what does this “then” mean?

Before that time, before that hour, a harlot came with an alabaster box of ointment and poured the oil onto the head of the Lord. She displayed great service; she displayed great faith, great obedience, and great piety. She was turned from her former life and became better and wiser. And when the harlot had repented, when she had been drawn to the Master, then the disciple betrayed his Teacher. Thus the Evangelist said then, so that you not accuse the Teacher of weakness when you see the disciple betraying Him. For the power of the Teacher was such that He drew even harlots to proper obedience.

Why then, you say, was He Who won over harlots not able to win over His disciple? He had the power to win over His disciple, but He did not wish to make him good by force or to forcibly draw him to Himself. Then [he] went. In this “went” there is not a little matter for contemplation: for he was not summoned by the chief priests, he was not constrained or forced. Rather, of himself and of his own accord, he gave birth to his intention and brought forth his treachery, without any counselor in his wickedness...



If we have been betrayed by someone close to us—and eventually we all will—our first response should be to cry out to Jesus who loves us, pursues us, and intimately understands the reality of that betrayal. It is hard to cope with betrayal, but we must approach it with prayer, remembering the path that Christ took, calmly, with hope in God’s will.

Archpriest Nicholas Kim

Γιὰ τοὺς Ποιμένους μας

Τοὺς Ποιμένους μας, τοὺς θέλουμε Καθαρόαιμους Ὁρθόδοξους καὶ Ὅχι Προτεσταντίζοντες καὶ Κρυπτοπαπικούς...

Γράφει ὁ Φώτης Μιχαήλ, ἰατρός.



Ἀναρωτιέμαι πολλές φορές, ποιά εἶναι ἡ στάση πού ὀφείλει νὰ κρατήσει ἕνας Ρωμηός σέ περιπτώσεις πού ἡ οὐσία τῆς Πίστεώς μας προσβάλλεται ἀπό κάποιους ἀνθρώπους, καὶ μάλιστα ἀπό «ἐγκριτοὺς» καθηγητὲς τῶν λεγόμενων θεολογικῶν μας σχολῶν ἢ ἀκόμα καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς γνωστούς μας «προβεβλημένους» Ἱεράρχες; Ἡ ἀλλιῶς, μέχρι ποῦ σημεῖο ἔχει τὸ δικαίωμα ἕνας Ὁρθόδοξος Χριστιανός, ἐν ὀνόματι τάχα τοῦ δυτικόφερτου κώδικα καλῆς συμπεριφορᾶς, νὰ σιωπᾷ καὶ νὰ μὴν ὑπερασπίζεται ἢ νὰ ὁμολογεῖ τὴν Πίστη τῶν Πατέρων του, ὅταν αὐτὴ ἢ Πίστις περιφρονεῖται ἀπὸ κάποιους ἐπιτήδειους καὶ—τὸ χειρότερο—παραχαράσσεται καὶ ἀλλοιώνεται;

Μερικοὶ θὰ σπεύσουν νὰ ποῦν ὅτι σ' ἐμᾶς τοὺς Χριστιανοὺς δὲν πρέπουν οἱ ἀντεγκλήσεις καὶ ὅτι, πάνω ἀπ' ὅλα, μπαίνει ἡ ἀγάπη. Naί, ὄντως, ἡ ἀγάπη εἶναι ὁ πυρήνας τῆς διδασκαλίας τοῦ Κυρίου μας, ἀλλὰ γιὰ ποιά ἀγάπη μιλάμε; Ἐκείνη πού συμβιβάζεται μὲ τὸ ψεῦδος ἢ ἐκείνη πού ἀληθεύει; Ἐκείνη πού διολισθαίνει πρὸς τὴν αἵρεση ἢ ἐκείνη πού διδάσκει ἀνόθευτη τὴν Ἀλήθεια;

Ὅταν ὁ Ὁρθόδοξος Χριστιανός—λαϊκός ἢ ἱερωμένος—ἀποσιωπᾷ σκοπίμως τὴν Ἀλήθεια, κάνει ἐκπτώσεις σὲ θέματα Πίστεως καὶ συμπορεύεται ἀνοιχτὰ μὲ τοὺς αἰρετικούς· τότε σὲ τί ὠφελοῦν οἱ ἀγαπολογίες, οἱ ἀσπασμοὶ καὶ τὰ χαμόγελα;

Πάνω στὸ θέμα αὐτὸ ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰωάννης ὁ Χρυσόστομος εἶναι σαφέστατος. Μᾶς λέει: «Οὐδὲν ὄφελος βίου καθαρῶ, δογμάτων διεφθαρμένων». Σὲ τίποτε δὲν ὠφελεῖ ὁ καθωσπρεπισμός, ὅταν ἡ Πίστη μας εἶναι ἀλλοιωμένη.

Ὁ κατ' ἐξοχὴν ὑμνητὴς τῆς ἀγάπης εἶναι ὁ Ἀπόστολος Παῦλος. Μήπως δὲν εἶναι ἐκεῖνος, πού μᾶς διδάσκει, ὅτι πρέπει νὰ κρατᾷμε ἀποστάσεις ἀπὸ τοὺς ἀμετανόητους αἰρετικούς; «Αἰρετικὸν ἄνθρωπον μετὰ μίαν καὶ δευτέραν νουθεσίαν παραιτοῦ». (Τίτ. 3:10).

Ἡ μήπως, ὁ Ἰωάννης, ὁ μαθητὴς τῆς Ἀγάπης, δὲν εἶναι ἐκεῖνος πού μᾶς προτρέπει νὰ τοὺς κόβουμε

ἀκόμα καὶ τὴν καλημέρα; «*Εἴ τις ἔρχεται πρὸς ὑμᾶς καὶ ταύτην τὴν διδαχὴν οὐ φέρει, μὴ λαμβάνετε αὐτὸν εἰς οἰκίαν, καὶ χαιρεῖν αὐτῷ μὴ λέγετε· ὁ γὰρ λέγων αὐτῷ χαιρεῖν κοινωνεῖ τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ τοῖς πονηροῖς*». (Β' Ἰωάν. 10-11).

Ἐμεῖς ἀπὸ πότε γίναμε ἀνώτεροι στὴν ἀγάπη ἀπὸ τὸν Ἀπόστολο Παῦλο καὶ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἰωάννη, τὸν ἡγαπημένον μαθητὴ τοῦ Κυρίου μας;

Ἀπ' ὅτι φαίνεται μᾶλλον δὲν μιλάμε γιὰ τὴν ἴδια ἀγάπη. Ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Παύλου καὶ τοῦ Ἰωάννου εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη ἢ πατρικὴ, ἐνῶ ἡ δική μας—κάποιων δῆθεν ἀνοιχτόμυαλων—εἶναι ἡ «ἀγάπη» τοῦ ἔμμισθου αὐτονομημένου μεταπατερικοῦ παιδαγωγοῦ. Ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Παύλου καὶ τοῦ Ἰωάννου εἶναι ἡ ἀγάπη, πού φωτίζει τὴν Ἀλήθεια καὶ ὀδηγεῖ στὸ Φῶς, ἐνῶ ἡ δική μας, εἶναι μιὰ κάλπικη ἀγάπη, πού θολώνει τὰ πεντακάθαρα νερὰ τῆς Ἀλήθειας καὶ ὀδηγεῖ στὸ σκοτάδι καὶ τὴν ἀπώλεια.

Σὲ ὀλόκληρὸ το Ἐὐαγγέλιο, Ἀγάπη καὶ ψεῦδος δὲν συναπαντῶνται πουθενά. Ἡ ἀγάπη ποτὲ δὲν θυσιάζει τὴν Ἀλήθεια. Ἀγάπη πού κρύβει καὶ συγκαλύπτει τὴν αἵρεση εἶναι ἐωσφορικὴ. Κάποιοι ἄλλοι θὰ μᾶς ὑπενθυμίσουν, ὅτι ὀφείλουμε σὲ ὅλους τοὺς συνανθρώπους μας, νὰ φερόμαστε μὲ ἐπιείκεια καὶ νὰ μὴν ἀποκαλύπτουμε τὰ ἀδύνατα σημεῖα τους.

Naί, ἔτσι εἶναι, ἀλλὰ, ὅπως μᾶς διδάσκουν οἱ Πατέρες, αὐτὸ ἰσχύει μονάχα σὲ ὅτι ἀφορᾷ στὰ πάθη καὶ τὶς ἀδυναμίες τῶν συνανθρώπων μας καὶ ὄχι σὲ διδασκαλίες αἰρετικὲς καὶ ὀλισθήματα βίου δογματικῆς τάξεως, προερχόμενα μάλιστα ἀπὸ ὑψηλόβαθμους ἱερωμένους ἢ καὶ «ἐπαγγελματίες» τῶν θεολογικῶν μας σχολῶν.

Τοὺς ποιμένους μας, ἐμεῖς οἱ Ρωμηοί, τοὺς θέλουμε καθαρόαιμους Ὁρθόδοξους καὶ ὄχι προτεσταντίζοντες καὶ κρυπτοπαπικούς. Τοὺς Ἱερεῖς μας, καὶ προπάντων τοὺς Ἐπισκόπους μας, τοὺς θέλουμε ἀνύστακτους καὶ αὐστηροὺς φύλακες τῆς πολυτίμητης Ὁρθοδοξίας μας—ὅπως ἀκριβῶς τοὺς θέλουν καὶ οἱ Πατέρες τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας καὶ οἱ Ἅγιοί μας—καὶ ὄχι δουρικὰ παρατρεχάμενους στὰ διεθνῆ ἰνστιτοῦτα τῆς πανθηρησκείας καὶ τοῦ οἰκουμενισμοῦ.

Πῶς ἀλλιῶς θὰ κρατήσουμε τὴν Πίστη μᾶς ἀνόθευτη; Πῶς θὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ ἀντισταθοῦμε στὶς ἀπανωτὲς ἐπιθέσεις πού δεχόμαστε; Ἡ μήπως δὲν εἶναι ὀλοφάνερη ἢ πρόθεση, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ πολυχρόνιος ἀντιχριστὴ δράση τῶν ποικιλώνυμων αἰρετικῶν, νὰ ξεριζώσουν ἀπὸ τὶς καρδιὲς μας τὴν Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ νὰ μᾶς κάνουν σὰν καὶ τοῦ λόγου τους;

Ἡ εὐθύνη ὅλων μας εἶναι μεγάλη. Ἀκόμα πιὸ μεγάλη, ὅμως, εἶναι ἡ εὐθύνη τῶν Ἱεραρχῶν καὶ Ποιμένων μας, ἰδιαίτερα μάλιστα στοὺς δύσκολους καιροὺς πού περνᾷμε.

Διδάγματα από τὰ Σεπτεμβριανά

Γράφει ὁ Κωνσταντῖνος Χολέβας, πολιτικός ἐπιστήμων, Σεπτέμβριος 2012.

Τὸ διήμερο 6-7 Σεπτεμβρίου 1955, ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς τῆς Κωνσταντινουπόλεως βίωσε ἓνα ἄγριο «πογκρόμ» μὲ δύο θανατώσεις κληρικῶν, βιασμούς, προπηλακισμούς καὶ ἀμέτρητες καταστροφές κομητηρίων, ναῶν, οἰκιῶν καὶ καταστημάτων. Ὁ ἀφηνιασμένος τουρκικὸς ὄχλος χρησιμοποιήθηκε ἀπὸ τὶς εἰδικές ὑπηρεσίες ἀνορθόδοξου πολέμου τοῦ τουρκικοῦ στρατοῦ γιὰ νὰ τρομοκρατήσῃ τὴν πολυπληθῆ τότε Ἑλληνορθόδοξη κοινότητα καὶ γιὰ νὰ τὴν ὀδηγήσῃ, ὅπως καὶ ἔγινε, στὸν σταδιακὸ ξεριζωμὸ.

Τὰ Σεπτεμβριανά, ὅπως ἔχουν πλέον καταγραφῆ, ἦταν τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα τοῦ γνωστοῦ καὶ μακροχρονίου σχεδιασμοῦ, τὸν ὁποῖο τηρεῖ μὲ ἀκριβεία τὸ τουρκικὸ κράτος στὰ ἐθνικὰ θέματα, παρὰ τὴν ἐναλλαγὴ κυβερνήσεων.

Ἀπὸ τὸ 1914, ὅταν ἄρχισε ἡ γενοκτονία τῶν Μικρασιατῶν—πέντε χρόνια προτοῦ ἀποβιβαστεῖ ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς Στρατός—μὲ ἀποκορύφωμα τὴ γενοκτονία τῶν Ποντίων Ἑλλήνων (1919-1922), μέχρι καὶ σήμερα ἡ πολιτικὴ τοῦ τουρκικοῦ κράτους κινεῖται σὲ δύο σταθεροὺς ἄξονες:

(α) Τὴ δημιουργία ἐνὸς ὁμοιογενοῦς ἐθνικοῦ κράτους μὲ τὴν ἐξόντωση ἢ ἐκδίωξη τῶν χριστιανικῶν μειονοτήτων.

(β) Τὴν ἐπέκταση τῆς στρατιωτικῆς, οικονομικῆς 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 φορές 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 Ἑλ. Βενιζέλος καλλιέργησε τὴν

Ἑλληνοτουρκικὴ «φιλία» μὲ τὸν Κεμάλ Ἄτατούρκ. Ἡ ἀνταμοιβή μας ἦταν τὸ «βαρλὶκ βεργκισί». Δηλαδή, κατὰ τὴ διάρκειά τοῦ Β΄ Παγκοσμίου Πολέμου, οἱ πολυάριθμοι Ἑλληνες (Ρωμηοὶ) τῆς Πόλης φορολογήθηκαν ὑπέρογκα καὶ ἄδιστα. Ὅποιος δὲν μποροῦσε νὰ πληρώσῃ 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 μὲ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Τούρκου προέδρου τῆς Δημοκρατίας Τζελάλ Μπαγιάρ καὶ ἀνάγκασε—πολὺ κακῶς—ὄλους τοὺς τότε μουσουλμάνους τῆς Θράκης νὰ μαθαίνουν τουρκικά. Ἡ ἀνταμοιβή μας δυστυχῶς 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 ἐξερράγη μία βόμβα στὸν αὐλόγυρο τοῦ Τουρκικοῦ Προξενείου στὴ Θεσσαλονίκη, ποὺ χαρακτηρίζεται ὡς τὸ σπίτι ὅπου γεννήθηκε ὁ Κεμάλ Ἄτατούρκ. Τὸ κλίμα στὶς σχέσεις τῶν δύο χωρῶν ἦταν φορτισμένο λόγω τοῦ μεγάλου ἐνωτικοῦ καὶ ἀπελευθερωτικοῦ ἀγώνα τῶν ἡρωικῶν Ἑλληνοκυπρίων κατὰ τῶν Βρετανῶν ἀπὸ τὴν 1/4/1955. Σὲ πολὺ ἐλάχιστες ὥρες πολλὲς ἐφημερίδες μέσα στὴν Πόλη κυκλοφόρησαν μὲ πηχταίους τίτλους, ἄρα κάποιον κέντρο ΜΜΕ τοὺς εἶχε εἰδοποιήσει πρὶν ἀπὸ τὴν ἔκρηξη. Ὁ

ὄχλος ἐφοδιάστηκε μὲ ὁμοίομορφους λοστούς, ἄρα ὑπῆρχε συντονισμὸς πίσω ἀπὸ τὴ μεγάλη καὶ μαζικὴ καταστροφὴ Ἑλληνικῶν περιοισιῶν.

Ὅπως ἀπεδείχθη, τὴ βόμβα τὴν εἶχε βάλει σκοπίμως ἓνας ὑπάλληλος τοῦ Τουρκικοῦ Προξενείου, ὁ ὁποῖος ἔπειτα ἀπὸ λίγα χρόνια ἀνταμφέθηκε μὲ θέση νομάρχου καὶ μὲ ἄλλα ἀξιώματα στὴν Τουρκία. Θυμίζω ὅτι ἡ μέθοδος τῆς σκηνοθεσίας ἐπαναλήφθηκε καὶ τὸν Ἰανουάριο τοῦ 1996, ὅταν ἡ δῆθεν τυχαία προσάραξη ἐνὸς 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, μὲ δηλώσεις τοῦ ὑπουργοῦ Ἐξωτερικῶν Ζορλού καὶ ἄλλων ὑπευθύνων, ἔκανε δημοσίως γνωστὴ τὴ σύνδεση τοῦ Κυπριακοῦ μὲ τὰ θέματα τοῦ Αἰγαίου καὶ τῆς Θράκης. Σήμερα ὁ Τοῦρκος ΥΠΕΞ Ἀχμέτ Νταβούτογλου κάνει γνωστὴ μέσω τῶν βιβλίων τοῦ τὴν ἐπιθυμία τῆς Ἄγκυρας νὰ μεταφέρει τὸ «πέιραμα» Κύπρου στὴ δυτικὴ Θράκη.

Δὲν κινδυνολογῶ, ἀλλὰ, ὅπως ἔλεγε ὁ ἀείμνηστος τουρκολόγος Νεοκλῆς Σαρρῆς, «ἡ Τουρκία πάντα προαναγγέλλει τὰ σχέδιά της»...

† † †
Ἱστορικές Λεπτομέρειες

Ἀπὸ τὸν Θεοφάνη Μαλκίδη.

ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑ
ΤΕΤΑΡΤΗ 7 ΣΕΠΤΕΜΒΡΙΟΥ 1955
ΑΥΤΟΚΥΒΕΡΝΗΣΙΝ ΧΩΡΙΣ ΑΥΤΟΔΙΑΘΕΣΙΝ ΠΡΟΤΙΝΕΙ Ο ΜΑΚ ΜΙΛΛΑΝ

ΤΟΥΡΚΙΚΟΣ ΟΧΛΟΣ ΕΠΙΤΙΘΕΤΑΙ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΩΝ ΕΛΛΗΝΩΝ

Εἰς τὴν Σμύρνην καὶ τὴν Κωνσταντινούπολιν

ΕΠΙΥΠΟΛΗΘΗ ΤΟ ΠΡΟΣΕΝΙΟΝ ΤΗΣ ΣΜΥΡΝΗΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΛΕΛΑΤΗΘΗΣΑΝ ΤΑ ΚΑΤΑΣΤΗΜΑΤΙΑ ΤΗΣ ΚΗΡΗΠΟΛΕΩΣ

Ἐνοχος «οὐδ' ἐκέρως» τῶν τουρκικῶν φροῶν

ΟΙ ΓΙΟΥΚΟΣΛΑΒΟΙ ΑΠΕΘΕΩΣΑΝ ΤΟΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΙΣ ΤΗΣ ΕΛΛΑΔΟΣ ΧΘΕΣ ΕΙΣ ΤΟ ΒΕΛΙΓΡΑΔΙΟΝ

ἘΠΙ ΤΗΣ ΣΥΝΑΝΤΗΣΕΩΣ ΤΗΣ ΤΡΕΠΕΖΗΣ ΤΗΣ ΒΑΛΚΑΝΙΚΗΣ ΣΥΝΘΕΣΗΣ

ΤΟ «ΦΕΡΒΑΔΙΣΤΟΝ» ΟΡΟΣ ΣΙΝΑ

3. Ἀντικρούοντας τὰ τεῖχη τῆς μονῆς

Εἰς ΚΑΙΣΤΡΟ ΜΕ ΛΙΓΟΝ ΚΑΘΑΡΟΝ ΠΟΥ ΔΟΥΣΕ ΜΟΝΟΤΗΤΑ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΟΥ ΑἰΟΝΟΣ ΤΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΤΟΡΑ ΚΑΤΑ ΤΟΝ... ΠΕΡΑΔΕΙΟΥ

ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΙΑ

Μέσα σὲ ἑννέα περίπου ὥρες καταστράφηκαν ὀλοσχερῶς 1000 σπίτια, ἐνῶ ἄλλα περίπου 2500 ὑπέστησαν μεγάλες ζημιές. Καταστράφηκαν ἐπίσης 4350 καταστήματα, 27 φαρμακεία, 26 σχολεῖα, 5 σύλλογοι, οἱ ἐγκαταστάσεις 3 ἐφημερίδων, 12 ξενοδοχεῖα, 11 κλινικές, 21 ἐργοστάσια, 110 ζαχαροπλαστεία καὶ ἐστιατόρια, 73 ἐκκλησίες, ἐνῶ συλήθηκαν πάρα πολλοὶ τάφοι καθὼς καὶ οἱ τάφοι τῶν πατριαρχῶν στὴν Μονὴ Βαλουκλῆ.

Τουλάχιστον 30 Ἕλληνες σκοτώθηκαν καὶ ἑκατοντάδες ἄλλοι κακοποιήθηκαν. Τὸ μῖσος ἐναντίον τῶν ἱερωμένων ἦταν πρωτόγνωρο, ἀφοῦ πολλοὶ ἀπ' αὐτοὺς ξυλοκοπήθηκαν, ἄλλοι γυμνώθηκαν καὶ διαπομπεύθηκαν, ἐξαναγκαζόμενοι νὰ φωνάζουν: «Ἡ Κύπρος εἶναι τουρκικὴ». Ὁ Ἐπίσκοπος Παμφίλου Γεράσιμος καὶ ὁ μοναχὸς Χρῦσανθος Μαντᾶς ξυλοκοπήθηκαν μέχρι θανάτου, ὁ Μητροπολίτης Ἡλιουπόλεως Γεννάδιος παρεφρόνησε ἀπὸ τοὺς ξυλοδαρμούς καὶ ὕστερα ἀπὸ λίγο χρόνο πέθανε, ἐνῶ διάκονος ὑπέστη περιτομή.

Ἐκεῖ ὅμως ποὺ ὁ ὄχλος ἔδρασε ἀνελέητα ἦταν ἐναντίον τῶν Ἑλληνίδων. Σε 2000(!) ὑπολογίζονται

οἱ βιασμοί, ἂν καὶ ἐπισημῶς καταγγέλθηκαν μόνο 200, γιὰ εὐνόητους λόγους...

Ἐπίθεση ἀπὸ ὀργανωμένες ὁμάδες δέχθηκε καὶ τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ προξενεῖο στὴ Σμύρνη, τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ περίπτερο στὴν ἔκθεση τῆς πόλης, ὅπου σχίσθηκε ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ σημαία, ἐνῶ οἱ Ἕλληνες ἀξιοματικοὶ ποὺ ὑπηρετοῦσαν στὸ στρατηγεῖο τοῦ ΝΑΤΟ, διασώθηκαν τὴν τελευταία στιγμὴ, ἂν καὶ οἱ γυναῖκες τους, πάλι γιὰ εὐνόητους λόγους, δὲν ἀναφέρθηκε σχεδὸν ποτὲ ὅτι βιάσθηκαν.



Ἡ Πίστη γιὰ τὸν Χριστιανὸ δὲν εἶναι Κάτι Ἀφρημένο...

Τὸυ Σέβ. Μητροπολίτου Χόνγκ-Κόνγκ κ. Νεκταρίου.

Δὲν εἶναι ἀποδοχὴ κάποιας ἰδεολογίας ἢ διδασκαλίας. Ἡ πίστη εἶναι συνάντηση, πορεία καὶ συμμετοχὴ.

Τὴν Κυριακὴ μετὰ τὴν Ὑψωση τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ, ἀκούσαμε τὸν Κύριο νὰ λέγει: «Ὅστις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἔλθειν, ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι.»

Ἡ πίστη γιὰ τὸν Χριστιανὸ δὲν εἶναι κάτι ἀφρημένο. Δὲν εἶναι ἀποδοχὴ κάποιας ἰδεολογίας ἢ διδασκαλίας. Ἡ πίστη εἶναι συνάντηση, πορεία καὶ συμμετοχὴ. Συνάντηση μὲ τὸν Χριστό. Πορεία μὲ τὸν Χριστό. Συμμετοχὴ στὴ ζωὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ὅλα αὐτὰ συντελοῦνται μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία Του. Ἐκεῖ ὁ Χριστιανὸς συναντᾷ τὸν Χριστὸ καὶ ἀποκτᾷ ἐμπειρία τῆς Θεϊκῆς ἀποκαλύψεως. Καὶ μέσα στὴν Ἐκκλησία πορεύεται, προσπαθώντας μέσω τῶν Μυστηρίων νὰ θεραπεύσει τὴν πεπτωκυῖα φύση του.

Εἶναι δύσκολο γιὰ πολλοὺς νὰ κατανοήσουν ὅτι πίστη στὸ Χριστὸ σημαίνει ἀπαραίτητα καὶ συμμετοχὴ στὴν Μυστηριακὴ ζωὴ τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Γι' αὐτὸ καὶ ὁ Κύριος μετὰ τὸ «ὅστις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἔλθειν...» προσθέτει: «ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι...»

Ἄν θέλεις νὰ εἶσαι Χριστιανὸς τότε ἄσε στὴν ἄκρη τὰ δικά σου «νομίζω» καὶ «θέλω», ἀναγνώρισε καὶ ὀνομάτισε τὶς ἀδυναμίες καὶ τὴν φθορὰ ποὺ κουβαλᾷς στὴν ψυχὴ σου καὶ ἀκολούθησε τὸν Χριστό.

Ὅχι μόνο πίστεψε στὸν Χριστό. Ἀλλὰ περπάτησε μαζί μὲ τὸν Χριστό. Ἀπλὰ πράγματα!

Ὁ Δάσκαλος τοῦ Γένους μας, ὁ κυρ- Φώτης Κόντογλου

Γράφει ὁ Δημήτρης Νατσιός, Δάσκαλος-Θεολόγος

«Ὅποτε καθίσω καὶ λογαριάσω τί γερό, τί ἀκατάλυτο ἔχω στὴν βιβλιοθήκη μου, τί θὰ μπορούσα νὰ πιάσω σὲ μίαν ὥρα ἀνάγκης καὶ νὰ στυλωθῶ, πιάνω τὸν Κόντογλου...»

[Γιῶργος Ἰωάννου]

† † †

Στις 13 Ἰουλίου τοῦ 1965 κλείνει γιὰ πάντα τὰ μάτια τοῦ ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου, ὁ Δάσκαλος τοῦ Γένους, ὁ «ἀρχαῖος» ἄνθρωπος τῆς Ἀνατολῆς. Κατὰ τὸ ξόδι του, ὁ τότε ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Ἀθηνῶν κυρὸς Χρυσόστομος, εἶπε μεταξὺ ἄλλων:

«Τοιοῦτον ἄνδρα προπέμπομεν σήμερον, ἀδελφοί, ἄνδρα, ὁ ὁποῖος μπορεῖ νὰ καταταγῆ, χωρὶς ὑπερβολῆν, μεταξὺ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ὁμολογητῶν τῆς Πίστεως.

Διότι οἱ ὁμολογηταὶ τῆς Πίστεως αὐτὸ ἀκριβῶς ἔκαμνον, ὅ,τι ἔκαμνε καὶ ὁ ἀείμνηστος Φώτιος. Ἐστάθη εὐθυτενής, ἐστάθη γενναῖος ἀπέναντι τῶν πολεμίων τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου ἡμῶν Πίστεως καὶ ἐγκατάλειπεν εἰς τὸν κόσμον αὐτὸν μίαν παράδοσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ γραπτὸν λόγον, ἵνα ἡ νεωτέρα γενεὰ ἐκπαιδεύεται εἰς τὰ Ἑλληνοχριστιανικὰ νάματα!».

Ὅταν αὐτὰ τὰ λόγια λέγονται ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα τοῦ ἀρχιεπισκόπου Χρυσόστομου Χατζησταύρου, Μακεδονομάχου, ἀρχιδιακόνου καὶ δεξιὸ χερί τοῦ ἐθνοῖερομάρτυρος Χρυσόστομου Σμύρνης ἀλλὰ καὶ προμάχου καὶ ὑπερασπιστῆ τῆς ἁγίας Ὁρθοδοξίας μας, τότε «τί ἔτι χρεῖαν ἔχομεν μαρτύρων»;

Ὅντως ἔζησε ὀσιακά, ὀρθόδοξα ὁ μαστρο-Φώτης, ποὺ φέτος τιμᾶμε τὰ 50 χρόνια ἀπὸ τὴν κοίμησή του. Ἀφήνουμε ὅμως τὸν ἴδιο νὰ διηγηθεῖ τὸν βίο καὶ τὴν πολιτεία του, σὲ ἐπιστολή του στὶς 5 Αὐγούστου τοῦ 1964 στὸν ἐπίσης μακαριστὸ γέροντα Θεόκλητο Διονυσιάτη. Περιλαμβάνεται στὴν ἐξαιρετικὴ ἔκδοση τοῦ Ἱεροῦ Κοινοβίου Ὁσίου Νικοδήμου Πενταλόφου Παιονίας Κιλκίς, «Ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου στὴν Τρίτη Διάστασή του». (Γουμένισσα 2003, σελ. 64-66):

Εἰς τὴν ζωὴν μου, ποτὲ δὲν ἐσκέφθην διὰ τὴν ἐξασφάλισίν μας οἰκονομικῶς. Μοῦ ἦλθαν καὶ μοῦ ἔρχονται εὐκαιρίαι διὰ νὰ ἀποκτήσω πολλὰ χρήματα (προτάσεις ἀπὸ τὸ ἐξωτερικὸν νὰ ζωγραφίσω ναοὺς

καὶ μέγαρα, δι' ἐκδόσεις βιβλίων—προπάντων κοσμικῆς γνώσεως καὶ τέχνης—διὰ δημοσιεύματα παντὸς εἴδους, ἱστορικά, λαογραφικά, αἰσθητικά, περιγραφικά ταξιδίων, κλπ). Τίποτε δὲν δέχομαι. Θέλω νὰ μείνω ἀκτῆμων καὶ ν' ἀποθάνω τοιοῦτος. Ὁ Χριστιανὸς πρέπει νὰ μὴν συνδέεται μὲ τίποτα μὲ τοῦτον τὸν κόσμον. Οὔτε εἰς τὴν Ἀκαδημίαν δὲν ἐδέχθην νὰ ἔμπω, παρ' ὅλας τὰς προσκλήσεις ἀπὸ πολλῶν ἐτῶν. Ὅχι ἀξιώματα. Ὅχι πρωτοκαθεδρία. Ἐπάνω εἰς τὸ ἱκρίωμα ἐργάζομαι σκληρῶς, ἰδρώνω, τσακίζομαι, ἀκόμα σήμερα, μὲ πόδι τσακισμένο.

Πέρασα τὸ ἥμισυ τῆς ζωῆς μου ἐπάνω στὴν σκαλωσιάν, ὡς στυλίτης. Μὲ χαρὰν ὑπηρετῶ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν, ἡ ὁποία ὑπῆρξεν ἀδιάφορος διὰ τὸ ἔργον τῆς ἀγιογραφίας, ἀκόμη καὶ ἐχθρική. Τώρα δέ, μὲ τὰ παπικά, οἱ πλείστοι τῶν προϊσταμένων τῶν ναῶν, ὄντες φιλοπαπικοί, δὲν μὲ θέλουν ὡς ἀγιογράφον καὶ μόλις ζῶ ἀπὸ τὴν μίαν ἐκκλησίαν ποὺ ἔχω, ἐνῶ



τιποτένιοι μογιατζήδες καὶ ἀνάξιοι μαθηταὶ μου ἔχουν ἐργασίαν ποὺ δὲν προφθάνουν, πλουτίζουν, καθ' ὅσον συναλλάσσονται μὲ τοὺς ἐπιτρόπους καὶ προϊσταμένους τῶν ναῶν καὶ μουντζουρώνουν τοὺς τοίχους, μὴ πατώντες εἰς τὴν λειτουργίαν, συχνὰ δὲ καὶ σαρκάζοντες τὰ τῆς θρησκείας.

Ἐγὼ, εἰς αὐτὰς τὰς ἐπιφορὰς τοῦ σατανᾶ ἀντιτάσσω τὴν πίστιν μου.

Καὶ ἐνῶ διασαλπίζεται ἀνὰ τὸν κόσμον ἡ φήμη μου ὡς «πρυτάνεως» τῆς β.(=βυζαντινῆς) τέχνης κ.τ.(=κ.τ.λπ.), ἐγὼ πολλάκις δὲν ἔχω ἐργασίαν. Οἱ Ζωῖκοί, παρ' ὅτι ποὺ ἔρχονται νὰ μὲ ἰδοῦν, δὲν μὲ χωνεύουν. Οἱ καθηγηταὶ τοῦ Πανεπ. (θεολόγοι) μὲ μισοῦν, καὶ μὲ ἐδίωξαν ἀπὸ τὴν ἀγιογράφησιν τῆς Καπνικαρέας καὶ πῆραν ἓναν ἄθλιον μαθητὴν μου. Οἱ Οὐνίτες μοῦ πρότειναν νὰ ζωγραφίσω τὴν ἐκκλησίαν των καὶ τοὺς ἐδίωξα, ἀλλὰ ἔσπευσε νὰ τὴν ζωγραφίσῃ ὁ Κοψίδης, πρ. μαθητῆς μου. Οὐδεὶς ἀνθίσταται εἰς τὸν μαμωνᾶν. Βασιλεία αὐτοῦ καὶ ὄχι τοῦ Χριστοῦ...

Λοιπόν, πάτερ Θεόκλητε, δὲν ἀφήνομεν τίποτε ἀπὸ ὅσα κερδίζω ἀπὸ τὴν ἐργασίαν μου, τόσον, ὥστε συχνὰ νὰ δανειζόμεθα διὰ νὰ βοηθήσωμεν ἄλλους. Ὅταν ἐπάθαμεν τὸ δυστύχημα, ἀπεκαλύφθη ἡ ἀπενταρία μας, καὶ ἔτσι ἐπίστευσαν καὶ κάποιοι φίλοι μας ὅτι ὄντως δὲν εἴχαμεν χρήματα. Ἐπιρρίπτομεν τὴν μεριμάν μας ἐπὶ τὸν Κύριον τὸν Θεόν μας. Αὐτά, σὰς παρακαλῶ, νὰ φυλαχθοῦν μεταξὺ μας.

Ὁ Κόντογλου ἀνήκει στους λίγους, τοὺς ἐλάχιστους πνευματικούς ἀνθρώπους, πὸν ὅσο ζοῦσε δὲν φιλοῦσε «κατουρημένες» ποδιές, ἀλλὰ μάλιστα ἀλύπητα μὲ τὴν μάχαιρα τῆς Ρωμαϊκῆς παράδοσης τοὺς Γραικύλους τῆς σήμερον, τοὺς προσκνημένους εὐρωλιγοῦρηδες.

Τρεῖς κυρίως ἄνθρωποι ἀπὸ τὴν εὐλογημένη Ἐπανάσταση τοῦ '21 καὶ ἐντεῦθεν εἶχαν συλλάβει ἐναργέστατα καὶ μὲ ἀξιοθαύμαστη συνέπεια λόγου καὶ πράξης τὸν πνευματικό μας ἐξανδραποδισμό: Ὁ Μακρυγιάννης, ὁ Παπαδιαμάντης καὶ ὁ Κόντογλου, σὰν νὰ παρέδιδε ὁ ἕνας στὸν ἄλλο τὴν σκυτάλη τῆς γνήσιας παράδοσης τοῦ Γένους καὶ τὰ ὄπλα γιὰ τὴν ἀπόσπηση τῶν μισμάτων τοῦ Φραγκολεβαντισμοῦ καὶ τῆς δυτικολαγνείας, πὸν σάπισαν—τὸ βλέπουμε στὶς ἡμέρες μας—τὸ «ὀλόδροσο κέντρο τῆς φυλῆς μας».

Γράφει ὁ κυρ-Φώτης γιὰ ὅλους αὐτοὺς τοὺς σπουδαγμένους στὴν σκοτεινὴ καὶ δυσώδη Εὐρώπη, πὸν ἐπιστρέφουν στὴν φτωχὴ πατρίδα καὶ λεηλατοῦν κυρίως τὴν ψυχὴ τῆς:

Οἱ περισσότεροὶ σπουδαστές μας, μόλις πατήσουνε στὴν Εὐρώπη ἀπομένουνε ἐμβρόντητοι ἀπὸ τὶς ψευτοφιλοσοφίες πὸν διδάσκουνε κάποιοι σπουδαῖοι καθηγητές, καὶ μάλιστα σὲ ξένη γλῶσσα. Ἡ ξένη γλῶσσα τοὺς κάνει μεγάλη ἐντύπωση! Κατάπληξη τοὺς κάνουνε καὶ οἱ μεγάλες πολιτείες, οἱ φαρδιοὶ δρόμοι, τὰ μεγάλα χτίρια, οἱ λεωφόροι, τὰ τραῖνα, οἱ λογιζ-λογῆς μηχανές, οἱ ἀγορές, τὸ πολὺ χρῆμα, τὰ βλοσυρὰ Πανεπιστήμια. Κι αὐτὸ γίνεται, γιατί οἱ περισσότεροὶ ἀπ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς σπουδαστές εἶναι χωριατόπουλα, πὸν νοιώθουνε μέσα τους ντροπὴ γιὰ τὸ χωριό τους, κι ὅ,τι βλέπουνε κι ἀκούνε, εἶναι γι' αὐτοὺς οὐρανοκατέβατο!

Τοὺς ξέρω καλὰ αὐτοὺς τοὺς σπουδαστές, γιατί καὶ ἐμεῖς περάσαμε ἀπὸ κείνες τὶς χώρες, καὶ ζήσαμε σ' αὐτὲς κάμποσα χρόνια. Ὅποτε ἐρχόντανε στὴν Εὐρώπη ἀπὸ τὴν Ελλάδα ἦτανε, στὴν ἀρχή, σασιτισμένοι καὶ ζαρωμένοι, σὰν καὶ κείνα τὰ μαντρόσκυλα πὸν ἀκολοθῆσανε τὸν τσομπάνο καὶ βρεθῆσανε στὸ κέντρο τῆς πολιτείας, μέσα στὴν ὄχλοβὴ κι ἀνάμεσα σ' αὐτοκίνητα, καὶ σαστίσανε, τὰ κακόμοιρα, καὶ βάζουνε τὴν οὐρὰ τους ἀνάμεσα στὰ σκέλια τους, τρομοκρατημένα. Μὰ σὰν γυρίσουνε στὸ μαντρί, τὴν ξανασηκώνουνε περήφανα, καὶ γίνονται θηρία ἀνήμερα.

Μ' αὐτὰ τὰ σκυλιὰ μοιάζανε, στὰ μάτια τὰ δικὰ μας πὸν εἶχαμε ζήσει πρὶν ἀπὸ χρόνια στὶς μεγάλες πολιτείες, ἐκεῖνα τὰ νεοφερμένα Ἑλληνόπουλα, πὸν μᾶς θεωροῦσανε στὴν ἀρχὴ σὰν προστάτες τους. Κ' ἦτανε ταπεινὰ καὶ φρόνιμα. Μὰ μὲ τὸν καιρὸ ξεθαρρεῦανε, καὶ πολλὰ ἀπ' αὐτὰ παίρνανε στὸ τέλος ἕναν ἐγωϊσμὸ σιχαμερόν, μιλώντας μὲ καταφρόνηση γιὰ τὴν πατρίδα τους. Καὶ πολλὰ ἀπ' αὐτὰ σὰν γυρίζανε πίσω στὴν Ελλάδα, κάνανε τὰ θηρία, κάνανε τοὺς πάνσοφους, κάνανε τοὺς προφέσορας, μιλώντας ὀλοένα γιὰ τὴν Εὐρώπη καὶ γιὰ τὴν κακομοιριὰ τῆ δικῆς μας σὲ ὅλα τὰ πράγματα.

Γι' αὐτὸ λέγω, πὸς ἡ Εὐρώπη εἶναι ἡ δοκιμαστικὴ πέτρα γιὰ κάθε ἕνα ἀπὸ μας, πὸν θὰ πάει σὲ κάποια χώρα τῆς: Ἡ θὰ γίνῃ πῖθηκος ξενόδουλος, θανατώνοντας

σὰν οὐρανοκατέβατα ὅλα ὅσα βλέπει κι ἀκούει σὲ κείνη τὴ χώρα, καὶ θ' ἀρνηθεῖ τὸ γάλα τῆς μάνας του, ἢ θὰ καταλάβει πόσο ψεύτικα εἶναι τὰ φανταχτερὰ στολῖδια τῆς, καὶ πόση βαρβαρότητα ὑπάρχει κάτω ἀπὸ τὴν πολιτισμένη ἐπιφάνειά τῆς, καὶ θὰ ἀγαπήσει μὲ πάθος τὸν τόπο του, νοιώθοντας «μὲ ἐπίγνωση», τὴν πνευματικὴ τῆς εὐγένεια καὶ τὴν ὑπεροχὴ μας, μπροστὰ σὲ κείνες τὶς ἀμέτροτες ἀθρωπομερμηγκιές. (Εὐλογημένο Καταφύγιο, ἔκδ. «Ἀκρίτας», σελ. 226-227).

Ἀτίμητη καὶ ἀνυπολόγιστη ὅμως εἶναι ἡ συμβολὴ του στὴν ἀναχαίτιση τῶν παπικῶν καὶ προτεσταντικῶν κακοθηριῶν στὸ ἦθος καὶ τὸ δόγμα τῆς

Ὁρθοδοξίας. «Ὁ παπισμὸς εἶναι ἡ πῖδ σατανικὴ διαστροφή τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. Εἶναι ὁ Ἀντίχριστος», θὰ γράφει σὲ ἐπιστολὴ του στὸν Γέροντα Θεόκλητο.

Χωρὶς ὑπερβολὴ ὑπῆρξε ὁ πρῶτος εὐαγγελιστὴς καὶ διδάσκαλος στὴν Ελλάδα τῆς βυζαντινῆς ἀγιογραφίας. Ἐπαναφέρει τὴν ἀγιογραφία στὴν ὀρθόδοξη περπατησιά τῆς, γιατί: Ἡ ἀγιογραφία εἶχεν ἀλωθεῖ ἀπὸ τὶς χαλκομανίες τοῦ δυτικοῦ ἀνθρωπισμοῦ, τὶς «γενοβέφες», ὅπως τὶς ἔλεγε, πὸν εἶχαν κυριαρχήσει στὸς ἀγιορεῖτες ἀγιογράφους μέσω τῶν ρωσικῶν παραγγελιῶν. (Ὁ Φώτης Κόντογλου στὴν Γίτη Διάστασή του, σελ. 204).

Μὲ ἀγωνία διαβλέπει καὶ προφητεύει τὴν ἀλλοτρίωση τοῦ Γένους σ' ὅλες τὶς καλλιτεχνικὲς του φανερώσεις ἐξαιτίας τῆς πνευματικῆς πανούκλας πὸν ὀνομάζεται ἐξευρωπαῖσμός:



Καμαρώστε τί «ἔργα» παρουσιάζουν οἱ «τέχνες» σήμερα. Εἶναι νὰ φράζει κανένας τὰ μάτια του. Ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ πασαλείμματα ἀπάνω στοὺς μουσαμάδες, ποὺ λέγονται «ἔργα ζωγραφικῆς», ὅλα αὐτὰ τὰ παλιοσίδερα ἢ τὰ νταμαροκοτρώνια ποὺ παρουσιάζονται γιὰ «ἔργα γλυπτικῆς» σὲ κάνουνε ὄχι μονάχα νὰ ἀηδιάσεις γιὰ τὸ κατάντημά μας, ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ θυμώσεις γιὰ τὴν ἀδιαντροπιὰ ποὺ φανερώνουν αὐτὰ τὰ τερατουργήματα... (Μυστικά Ἄσθη, ἔκδ. «Ἀστήρ», σελ. 14).

Δὲν ξεφεύγει ἀπὸ τὸ ἀνύστακτο ἐνδιαφέρον του γιὰ τὸ Γένος καὶ τὸ τυμπανιαίαις ἀποφορᾶς—σήμερα—πτῶμα τῆς Παιδείας:

Τώρα, ἄς ποῦμε καὶ τὰ σημερινά μας. Τὰ σχολειά, ἂν βγάλει κανένας λίγα στὴν μπάντα, τ' ἄλλα ὅλα δουλεύουν γιὰ νὰ βγάλουνε λεβαντίνους κι ὄχι Ἑλληνες, μὲ ὅλα τους τὰ ψευτοελληνικὰ ἐξωτερικὰ πασαλείμματα. Οἱ περισσότεροὶ ἀπ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ διδάσκουνε τὰ παιδιὰ μας κινήσανε ἀπὸ τὸ χωριό, καὶ πέσανε μὲ τὰ μούτρα στὰ «μοντέρνα». Γινήκανε θεριακλήδες τοῦ μοντερνισμοῦ. Ὁ νοῦς καὶ ὁ λογισμὸς τους, μέρα-νύχτα, στριφογυρίζει στὶς μοντέρνες ἀνοησίες. Τὴν Ἑλλάδα δὲν θέλουνε μὴδὲ νὰ τὴν ἀκούσουνε, τὴν «Ψωροκόσταινα»! Δὲν ὑπάρχει πιὸ ἀντιπαθητικὸ καὶ πιὸ μικρόμυαλο πλάσμα ἀπὸ τὸν ξιπασμένο ἄνθρωπο, ποὺ ἀρνήθηκε τὸ γάλα τῆς μάνας του καὶ ρεμπενύεται κιόλας γ' αὐτὸ τὸ κατόρθωμα.

Λοιπόν, ἀπὸ τέτοιους δασκάλους τί θὰ μάθουνε τὰ παιδιὰ μας, τὰ κακόμοιρα τὰ παιδιὰ μας; Θὰ μάθουνε, πὼς γιὰ νὰ γίνει κανένας σπουδαῖος καὶ γιὰ νὰ φαίνεται πὼς εἶναι ἐξυπνος, πρέπει νὰ μὴν ἔχει τίποτα Ἑλληνικὸ ἀπάνω του. Ἀκόμα καὶ τὸ μόρτικο ὕφος, ποὺ εἶναι σήμερα τῆς μοντέρνας μόδας, πρέπει νὰ εἶναι ξενικό, τεντυμποϊκό.

Εἶτε βιβλίο, εἶτε τραγούδι, εἶτε παιδικὸ θέατρο, εἶτε χορὸς, εἶτε προσευχή, ὅλα πρέπει νὰ μὴν εἶναι Ἑλληνικά, γιὰ νὰ εἶναι καλὰ γιὰ τοὺς μαθητὲς τῶν σχολειῶν μας. Στὰ βιβλία, στὰ παιδικὰ θέατρα, στὰ παραμύθια καὶ στὰ βλακώδη ἀναγνώσματα, ὅλα εἶναι ξανθά. Ὅλα! Ἄνθρωποι, ζῶα, σύννεφα, τοποθεσίες. Ἄν ἦτανε μπορετὸ νὰ γίνει κ' ἡ θάλασσα ξανθιά. (Εὐλογημένο Καταφύγιο, σελ. 183-184).

Δασκάλους «θεριακλήδες τοῦ μοντερνισμοῦ», «ἀναγνώσματα βλακώδη» ἐντοπίζει μὲ ἐκπληκτικὴ διορατικότητά ὁ Κόντογλου στὶς «σημερινές—καὶ διαχρονικές—γάγγραινες τῆς πολυπάθης Παιδείας!

Κορφολογοῦμε, ὡς ἐπίλογο, ἀπὸ τὸν πνευματικὸ του ἀνθῶνα τοῦτα τὰ ἐλάχιστα (τίποτε ἄλλο, ἐξάλλου, δὲν «ζωγραφίζει» καλύτερα τὸν Φῶτη Κόντογλου ἀπ' ὅτι τὰ ἴδια τὰ γραψίματά του): **Ὅσοι ἀπομείναμε πιστοὶ στὴν παράδοση, ὅσοι δὲν ἀρνηθήκαμε τὸ γάλα ποὺ βυζάξαμε, ἀγωνιζόμαστε, ἄλλος ἐδῶ, ἄλλος ἐκεῖ,**

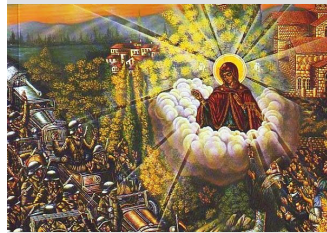
καταπάνω στὴν ψευτιά. Καταπάνω σ' αὐτοὺς ποὺ θέλουνε τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἕνα κουφάρι χωρὶς ψυχὴ, ἕνα λουλούδι χωρὶς μυρουδιά. Κουράγιο! Ὁ καιρὸς θὰ δείξει ποιὸς ἔχει δίκιο, ἂν καὶ δὲ χρειάζεται ὀλότελα αὐτὴ ἡ ἀπόδειξη. (Ἡ Πονεμένη Ρωμοσύνη, ἔκδ. «Ἀστήρ», σελ. 324).

Κατάντησε ἡ πατρίδα μας κουφάρι ἄψυχο, παίγνιο τῶν Εὐρωπαίων κακεργετῶν. Τὸν δρόμο γιὰ νὰ βροῦμε τὰ φτερὰ τὰ πρωτινά μας, τὰ μεγάλα, μᾶς τὸν δίδαξε ὁ Φῶτης Κόντογλου: πίσω στὴν Παράδοσή μας. Ἔως πότε θὰ εἴμεθα ἀχαρακτήριστοι Γραικύλοι;



Γιὰ τὴν Παναγία στὸ Ἔπος τοῦ '40

Ἄγγελος Σικελιανός, ἄρθρο στὸ περιοδικὸ «ΝΕΑ ΕΣΤΙΑ», Τεύχος 1ης Νοεμβρίου, 1945.



Στὴ μυστικότερη, στὴν ὑπερουσίαν αὐτὴν ὥρα, τῆς μετάστασης τῶν πάντων πρὸς τὶς σφαῖρες τοῦ ὑπέρτατου ἀγνισμοῦ καὶ λυτρωμοῦ ποὺ μᾶς προσφέρει ἡ Κοίμησις τῆς Χάρης τῆς, ὁ Ἴταλὸς σὰ νάθελε νὰ πλήξει ἀντάμα μὲ τὸ ἀκίρητό της σῶμα καὶ τὸ σῶμα τῆς βαθιὰ συναγιασμένης τῆ στιγμῆ ἐκείνη Ἑλλάδας, ξαφνικὰ χτυπάει στὴν Τῆνο, δολοφονικὰ καὶ καιρία, τὸ ἱερὸ ἀπ' τὴν ὥρα αὐτὴ πολεμικὸ καράβι μας, τὴν «Ἑλλη».

Ἄργα τ' ἀπόγεμα μονάχα ἦρθε τὸ μήνυμα στὴ Φτέρη. Ὁ ξωμάχος λαὸς ποὺ τόφερε εἶχε κιόλας πάνω στὴ μορφὴ του ὅλη τὴν προεικόνισις τοῦ ἀγῶνα, ποὺ ξεκίναε τόσο δόλια ἀπ' τὰ βάθη τοῦ Ἄδη νὰ προσβάλλει τὶς κορφές τῆς Λευτεριάς του καὶ τῆς ζωῆς του. Ἀλλὰ στὴ μορφὴ του ἀντιφεγγοῦσε κι ὅλας ἀπὸ τότε ἡ Ἀλβανία, ἀντιφεγγοῦσε ἡ κορυφαία του Νίκη. Καὶ τεράστιο Σύμβολο ἀμετάσειστο κι ἀπόρθητο, ἡ Κοιμημένη Παναγιά, μετουσιωμένη τώρα στὸν ὑπέρτατον αὐτὸν ἀγῶνα ἀπ' τὴν Ἑλλάδα, ἀναστημένη πιά, βάδιζε μπροστά του, Ἀρχιστρατηγοῦσα, ἀκοίμητη Ὑπέρομαχη, ἀκατάβλητή του Ὁδηγῆτρα.

Ὅταν τὸ ἴδιο βράδυ ὡστόσο ἀποτραβήχτηκα ἀπὸ τὸ λαὸ καὶ γύρισα στὸ σπίτι μου, ἐμπῆκα στὴ μικρὴ μου κάμαρα, ποὺ πάνω ἀπ τὸ κρεβάτι μου κρεμόταν μιὰ παλιὰ εἰκόνα τῆς Θεοτόκου—ἐνωμένη στὴν ψυχὴ μου ἄρρηκτα ἀπὸ τὴν ὥρα αὐτὴ μὲ τὴν Ἑλλάδα—κι ὅπως ὅταν εἴμουνα παιδί, κλειδῶθηκα καὶ προσευχήθηκα μπροστά της...

Ἡ Ἑλλάς τοῦ ΟΧΙ ἑορτάζει τὴν Ἑλλάδα τοῦ ΝΑΙ

Γ.Ζ., Ὀρθόδοξος Τύπος, 28/10/2011.

ΤΗΝ Ἑλλάδα τοῦ ΟΧΙ ἑορτάζει σήμερον ἡ Ἑλλάς τοῦ ΝΑΙ. Ἀκολουθοῦσα τὸν ὕμνον ἑνὸς φυγσοστράτου συνθέτου καὶ τραγουδοποιοῦ «Λέμε ΝΑΙ», ἡ σημερινὴ Ἑλλάς λέγει ΝΑΙ εἰς ὅλους καὶ διὰ ὅλα. ΝΑΙ εἰς τοὺς φίλους, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς τοὺς ἐχθρούς. ΝΑΙ εἰς τοὺς Εὐρωπαίους, ΝΑΙ καὶ εἰς τοὺς τριτοκοσμικοὺς. ΝΑΙ εἰς τοὺς πατριώτας, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς τοὺς πολιτικοὺς, οἱ ὁποῖοι ἀφελληνίζουν τὴν γλῶσσαν, τὴν ἱστορίαν, τὸν Ἑλληνοχριστιανικὸν πολιτισμὸν, τὴν οἰκονομίαν. ΝΑΙ εἰς τοὺς πατριώτας, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς τοὺς πρακτορίσκους καὶ εἰς ὅσους ὑπονομεύουν τὴν Θράκην, τὸ Αἰγαῖον καὶ τὴν Κύπρον. ΝΑΙ εἰς τοὺς ὀμαλοὺς, ΝΑΙ καὶ εἰς τοὺς ὁμοφυλοφίλους καὶ εἰς κάθε ἀνώμαλον. ΝΑΙ εἰς τοὺς τιμίους, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἰς τοὺς κλέφτας.

Ὀλόκληρος ἡ πλήρως χρεωκοπημένη χώρα εἶναι ἓνα ὀρθάνοικτον χαμαιτυπεῖον, τὸ ὁποῖον προσκαλεῖ τοὺς πάντας: «Περάστε, βρωμίστε, μὴ ψεκάσετε, ἀρπάξατε, καὶ ρημάξατε, τελειώσατε». Εἰς ἓνα τοιοῦτον κλίμα δὲν ἔχει οὐδεμίαν θέσιν πανηγυρικὸς διὰ τὴν τότε Ἑλλάδα τοῦ 1940. Ἔχει θέσιν μόνον ἓνας ἐπικηδεῖος διὰ τὴν Ἑλλάδα



τοῦ σήμερα. Τὸν συνέθεσε προφητικῶς ἓνας Ἑλληὺν τοῦ χθές. Δημοσιεύομεν ὠρισμένα ἀποσπάσματα ἐκ τοῦ ἐπικηδεῖου αὐτοῦ. Αὐτὰ ἔχουν ὡς ἑξῆς:

«Ἴδου ἡ Ἑλλάς σας. Ἡ Ἑλλάς τῶν δικηγορίσκων, ὑπαλληλίσκων καὶ βουλευτῶν. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ πραγματικὴ Ἑλλάς. Καὶ ἡ Ἑλλάς αὐτὴ, οὔτε μὲ ἀσβεστώματα, οὔτε μὲ μπογιατίσματα, οὔτε μὲ ἀποκεντρώσεις, οὔτε μὲ ἐνθουσνελεύσεις, οὔτε μὲ κανενὸς εἶδους ἐθνοπαλώσεις διορθώνεται καὶ μὲ μπαλωματῆδες πνευματικῶς ἀνικάνους καὶ ἠθικῶς καταρακνυλῶντας κάθε πρωί, δέκα βαθμίδας πρὸς τὴν ἀνηθικότητα.

Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ τωρινὴ Ἑλλάς. Καταχρεωκοπημένη πνευματικῶς ἀπὸ τὴν πρώτην ἡμέραν. Καταχρεωκοπημένη πραγματικῶς. Μὲ κράτος γνήσιον ληστρικώτατον. Στριφογυρίζουσα ἀδιεξόδως εἰς τὰ ἴδια καμώματα καὶ τὰ ἴδια ψεύματα, τῶν πρώτων ἡμερῶν τῆς Ἐλευθερίας της, τὰ ὁποῖα ἐβαρύνθησαν καὶ οἱ πέτρες, ἀδυνατοῦσα νὰ σταθεῖ εἰς τὰ πόδια της, ἀδυνατοῦσα νὰ δημιουργήσῃ τὸ παραμικρὸν ἐθνικόν,

ναρκώνουσα καὶ καταπνίγουσα τὴν Τιτάνειον δύναμιν τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ ἀτόμου.

Ἡ Βουλὴ, αὐτὴ ἡ ἀποτελέσσα τὸν ὅλον ἐγκέφαλον, τὸ ὅλον πνεῦμα, τὴν ὅλην δύναμιν, τὴν ὅλην ἐξουσίαν, τὴν ὅλην κινητήριον καὶ διευθυντήριον μηχανὴν Ἰδεῶν καὶ Πραγμάτων, ἡ ξεκουρδίσασα καὶ ἐξαχρειώσασα τὰ πάντα, ξεκουρδισθεῖσα τέλος καὶ αὐτὴ, πνιγομένη τώρα πλέον ἀπὸ τὴν ἰδίαν τὴν ἀποκτῆνωσιν, λιποθυμοῦσα ἀπὸ τὰς ἀναθυμιάσεις τῆς ἰδίας τῆς ἀποσυνθέσεως. Ἀφοῦ ἐξεπάτωσε ὅλους τοὺς κλάδους, ἀφοῦ ἐξέκαμεν ὅλους τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἀφοῦ ἐξηχρεῖωσε τὴν κοινωνίαν, ἀφοῦ διέφθειρε καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν οἰκογένειαν αὐτὴ, ἀπεδείχθη ὅτι δὲν ἦτο δυνατὸν παρὰ νὰ εἶναι ἀρχῆθεν καὶ νὰ εἶναι ὅσον ὑπάρχει. Ἐκατομμύρια διὰ τὸν Στρατόν-Κοπρίτην. Καὶ ὄχι μόνον νὰ μὴ ὑπάρχει Στρατός, ἀλλὰ νὰ μὴ εἶναι δυνατὸν νὰ ὑπάρξῃ ἓνας, μόνον, λόχος σωστός. Ἐκατομμύρια ἐπὶ τῶν ἑκατομμυρίων διὰ Στόλον, καὶ

Στόλος-Ἄστακός; Στόλος ἀνύπαρκτος καὶ ὑπάρχων, μὴ ἀφηνόμενος ἐλεύθερος νὰ κινηθεῖ, μὴ δυνάμενος νὰ κινηθεῖ καὶ κινούμενος δεινόμενος ἀπὸ τοὺς πολλοὺς εὐεργέτας δανειστὰς, χειροπόδαρα.

Ἐκατομμύρια ἐπὶ τῶν ἑκατομμυρίων διὰ δικαιοσύνην καὶ δικαιοσύνην ἀνύπαρκτος, καὶ εἰς τὴν ὁποῖαν οὐδεὶς δύναται νὰ προσέλθει χωρὶς λόχον

βουλευτῶν. Δικαιοσύνη τσακιζομένη νὰ παράσχει πᾶσαν βοήθειαν πρὸς παρανομίαν, ὅταν τῆς τὸ ζητοῦν οἱ βουλευταὶ της, ἀρνούμενη πᾶσαν συνδρομὴν πρὸς κάθε καταπατούμενον ἀναιδέστατα δίκαιον ὀλοφάνερον, ὅταν ὁ πολίτης παρουσιάζεται μόνος του.

Ἡ ζωὴ καὶ ἡ Περιουσία τοῦ καθενὸς ἐκτεθειμένη εἰς τὴν βίαν καὶ τὴν διαπραγῆν, τὸ Κράτος ληστεῦον τὸν πολίτην, ὁ πολίτης ληστεῦον τὸ Κράτος, τὸ Κράτος πιέζον, ἀδικοῦν, ἐξευτελίζον τὸν ὑπάλληλόν του, ὁ ὑπάλληλος ξεκαρφῶνων, ἐξοντώνων τὸ Κράτος καὶ πληρώνων μὲ τόκον τὰ ἀντίποινα ἓνας πόλεμος φανερός καὶ ἐξοντωτικὸς μεταξὺ πολίτου καὶ Κράτους. Ἀλλὰ τὸ ἀπελπιστικὸν δὲν εἶναι ἡ ἀζωγράφιστος καὶ ἡ ἀκατανόμαστος αὐτὴ κατάστασις. Τὸ ἀπελπιστικὸν εἶναι ἡ κατάστασις τοῦ Ἑλλαδικοῦ πνεύματος. Οὐδέποτε τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν δαιμόνιον κατήντησεν εἰς τοιαύτην ἀποχαύνωσιν, εἰς τοιοῦτον ἀφανισμόν.

Τὸ Ἑλλαδικὸν πνεῦμα ἀπεκρυσταλλώθη, εἰς ἓνα ἀνυπόφορον βλακόπνευμα. Τὸ καταχρεωκοπημένον Ἑλλαδικὸν βλακόπνευμα, τὸ ναυαγῆσαν καθ'

όλας του άνεξαιρέτως τὰς ἀνάνους ἐπιχειρήσεις, ἀπεκοκκαλώθη: Θρησκευτικός κοιλοτυμπανισμός. Ἐπιστημονιμὸς κομπογιαννιτισμός. Ναυτικὸς φασουλισμός. Κοινωνικὸς σαπισμός. Ἐμπορικὸς σαραφισμός. Ἰδεολογικὸς τζουμπεδισμός. Φιλολογικὸς φουστανελισμός καὶ Καλλιτεχνικὸς πανελλαδικὸς γκαρικτικώτατος γαϊδουρισμός.

Αὐτὸ τὸ Πανεπιστήμιον, τὸ ὁποῖον ἔπρεπε νὰ εἶναι ἀληθινὸν ἠφαίστειον ἀνθρώπων, ἀναστημάτων, χαρακτήρων, ἀνθρωποπλαστῶν καὶ ἰδεοπλαστῶν, φωτεινῶν ἰδεολόγων καὶ ἀνδρείων σηματοφόρων τῆς νεότητος. Κατακόμβη τοῦ πνεύματος, ἐντὸς δὲ ἀνθρωπάκηδες κάμνοντες τὶς δουλίσες τους, μισοτρωκτικοί, βιβλιοκαπιλικοί, δοῦλοι οἰκτρότατοι τοῦ βουλευτοῦ, γυαλισταὶ τῶν παπουτσιῶν τοῦ κόμματος, τρέχοντες διαρκῶς λαχανισμένοι, διὰ τὰ συμφέροντα τοῦ κόμματος ποὺ τοὺς ἔπλασε, τοὺς ἐνοικίασε, τοὺς διατηρεῖ. Ἄκαρδοι, ἄλαλοι, ἄμυαλοι, δηλητηριάζοντες, ἀφιονίζοντες καὶ σαβανώνοντες τὴν νεότητα. Πανεπιστήμιον ἀντὶ ἀναστηρίου, τάφος νεότητος, ἐκβράζον μίαν ἐλεεινοτάτην νέαν ἀνθρωπότητα σακάσισαν, λωβιασμένην, ἄχρηστον, ἀποσαπίζουσαν τὸ κάθε τι.

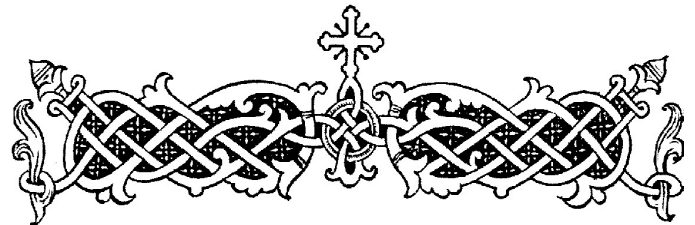
Τὸ ἐπιστημονικὸν πνεῦμα, μεταβληθὲν εἰς μπακαλικὸν πνεῦμα πρὸς πενταρολογίαν, οὔτε προτότυπος ἐπιστημονικὴ ἐργασία, οὔτε κανενὸς εἶδους ἐργασία πρωτότυπος. Ἐνας πανελλαδικὸς διωγμὸς κάθε ἀξίας. Ἐνας μισονεῖσμός τῶν γέρον. Ἐνα θανατικὸν κάθε ἀνθρώπου καὶ μιὰ ἀπελπιστικὴ ἐπιδημία μακροβιότητος κάθε μηδενικοῦ. Ἐνας σεβασμὸς κάθε ἀρρώστιας, κάθε ξεμωραμένου γεροντάματος, κάθε νερουλιασμένου μισθοφάγου. Δάσκαλοι κουκουβαγιάζοντες, πατριῶται παρομοιάζοντες μὲ πεσμένα βρακιά καὶ κλαίοντες σβέρκους. Ζωγράφοι μπογιατζήδες. Γλύπται μαρμαράδες. Ἀρχιτέκτονες κτίσται. Ἰδεολόγοι ἀεροκοπανίζοντες τὰ αἰώνια προγονικὰ συννεφολογήματα, ἐθνορήτορες πάσχοντες ἀπὸ τὴν ἀνίατον Ἑλλαδικὴν πατριδοουρίαν, φιλόλογοι βατραχιάζοντες, λογοκοποῦντες, λεξοποιοῦντες, πάσχοντες ἀπὸ τὴν γλωσσόλυσσαν.

Ἐκεῖνο τὸ ὁποῖον εἶναι ὁ ἀληθὴς καὶ βαρὺς ἀπελπισμὸς εἶναι ἡ ἐλεινότης τῆς νεότητος. Τῆς σχολιευομένης, τῆς σπουδαζούσης, τῆς στρατευομένης, τῆς Πανεπιστημιακῆς, τῆς διανοουμένης, τῆς καλλιτεχνούσης, τῆς πτωχῆς καὶ τῆς τρισχειροτέρας πλουσίας, τῆς εἰσερχομένης νεότητος εἴτε εἰς τὸν ἰδεολογικὸν εἴτε εἰς τὸν καλλιτεχνικὸν εἴτε εἰς τὸν πρακτικὸν κόσμον: **Τῶν νέων ἀνθρώπων. Νεότης ἄψυχος, ἄκαρδος, ἄμυαλος, ἄνανδρος, ἀνελεύθερος, ἀχαρακτήριστος, μὲ ὅλας τὰς νεανικὰς ἐκδηλώσεις ἀπούσας, μὲ ὅλας τὰς ἀνθρωπίνας ἐκφράσεις καὶ δυνάμεις, κατεβασμένας**

ὑπὸ τὸ μηδέν. Νεότης οὔτιδανή, ΜΙΣΘΟΣ. Νεότης χυδαία, ΨΗΦΟΣ.

Τὰ σχολεῖα ἐκφουρνίζοντα ἀγράμματα καὶ ἀνάγωγα καὶ μισελληνικὰ καὶ Φραγκομανῆ κούτσουρα. Τὸ Πανεπιστήμιον ἐκβράζον «ΝΕΩΝ ΑΝΔΡΩΝ σαπισμένην ἀνθρωπότητα σάπιων δικηγορίσκων καὶ τιποτένιων ἐπιστημόνων, ἓνα ὀξύτατον πανωλικώτατον ἰόν, ἐξολοθρευτικὸν καὶ κοινωνίας καὶ ἔθνους, μεταδίδοντα ὑπὸ τὴν βαρυτάτην τῆς μορφῆς, τὴν ἰδίαν τῆς σαπίαν, ψυχῆς, καρδιάς καὶ νοῦ εἰς ὄλον τὸν Ἑλλαδικὸν ὄργανισμὸν. Κατήντησε ἡ Ἑλλὰς τῶν ΨΗΦΩΝ, τῶν ΜΙΣΘΩΝ, τῶν ΧΑΡΤΟΠΑΙΚΤΩΝ καὶ τῶν ΒΟΥΛΕΥΤΩΝ».

Ὁ προαναφαιρθεὶς ἐπικήδειος τῆς παρακμῆς τὴν ὁποῖαν βιώνομεν ἐγράφη ὑπὸ ἐνὸς Ἑλλήνου τοῦ Χθές. **Ὁ Ἐπικήδειος ἐγράφη τὸ 1906 ἀπὸ τὸν Περικλῆ Γιαννόπουλον,** ἓνα ἀπὸ τοὺς ἐξοχωτέρους Ἑλληνας τοῦ εἰκοστοῦ αἰῶνος. Τὸ κείμενον προσφέρει διπλὴν παρηγορίαν εἰς τοὺς ἀκάμπτους πατριώτας τοῦ σήμερα πρῶτον, διότι πιστοποιεῖ ὅτι καὶ ἄλλοτε ἡ Ἑλλὰς ἐπέρασε παρακμὴν, ὡς τὴν σημερινήν, καὶ δὲν ἀπεβίωσε. Καὶ δεύτερον, διότι οἱ Ἑλληνας τῆς παρακμῆς τοῦ 1906, τρία ἔτη ἀργότερον (τὸ 1909) ἐξηγέρθησαν συμμετέχοντες εἰς τὴν πρώτην μεγάλην ἐπανάστασιν διὰ Ἐθνικὴν Ἀναγέννησιν. Διὰ νὰ ἐπιβεβαιωθῆ καὶ τότε ὁ πάγιος νόμος τοῦ Ἑλληνισμοῦ ὅτι **«ἂν δὲν πληθύνει τὸ κακό, δὲν βρίσκεται τὸ γατρικό!».**



Ἐξέταξε περισσότερον τὸν ἑαυτὸν σου καὶ ὄχι τοὺς ἄλλους. Προτιμότερον εἶναι νὰ σκέφτεσαι τὰ ἔργα σου, παρὰ τὰ χρήματα. Διότι τὰ μὲν προξενοῦν φθορά, ἐνῶ τὰ ἄλλα (τὰ ἔργα) μένουσιν.

Ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Θεολόγος

Ἡταπείνωσις, καὶ χωρὶς ἔργα, συγχωρεῖ πολλὰς ἁμαρτίας. Τὰ ἔργα ὅμως, χωρὶς τὴν ταπείνωσιν, ὄχι μόνον εἶναι ἀνωφελῆ, ἀλλὰ προξενοῦν καὶ πολλὰ κακά... Ὅταν ὅμως ἀποκτήσουμε τὴν ταπείνωσιν, αὐτὴ μᾶς κάνει παιδιὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ χωρὶς ἀγαθὰ ἔργα, μᾶς παρουσιάζει στὸν Θεόν. Διότι χωρὶς τὴν ταπείνωσιν ὅλα τὰ ἔργα μας καὶ ὅλες οἱ ἀρετὲς καὶ ὅλες οἱ πνευματικὲς ἐργασίες εἶναι μάταιες καὶ ἀνωφελεῖς. Τὴν ταπείνωσιν τῆς διανοίας (ταπεινοφροσύνη) ζητᾷ ὁ Θεὸς καὶ ἐμεῖς μὲ τὴν ταπείνωσιν τῆς διανοίας αὐξάνομε πνευματικῶς.

Ἅγιος Ἰσαὰκ ὁ Σύρος

WHAT WAS CHRIST WRITING ON THE GROUND?

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich (+1956); this article appeared originally in one of our past issues, "Orthodox Heritage," vol. 2, issue no. 6.



Bishop Nikolai, a gifted theologian combining a high level of erudition with the simplicity of a soul steeped in Christ-like love and humility, is often referred to as the "new Chrysostom" for his inspired preaching. As a spiritual father of the Serbian people, he constantly exhorted them

to fulfill their calling as a nation: to serve Christ. During WW II he was imprisoned at the Dachau concentration camp. He later served as a hierarch here in America, where he died.

† † †

And the Scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. [Jn 8:33-11]

† † †

Once, the All-loving Lord was sitting in front of the temple in Jerusalem, nurturing hungry hearts with His sweet teachings. *And all the people came unto Him.* (Jn 8:2). The Lord spoke to the people about eternal bliss, about the never-ending joy of the righteous in the eternal homeland in the heavens. And the people delighted in His divine words. The bitterness of many disappointed souls and the hostility of many of the offended vanished like snow under the bright rays of the sun. Who knows how long this wonderful scene of peace and love between Heaven and earth would have continued, had not something unexpected now occurred. The Messiah Who loves mankind never grew tired of teaching the

people, and pious folk never grew weary of listening to such healing and wondrous wisdom.

But something frightening, savage, and cruel occurred. It originated as even now it often does, with Scribes and Pharisees. As we all know, the Scribes and Pharisees outwardly kept the law, but actually transgressed it. Our Lord frequently chastised them. For example, He said: *Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! . . . ye . . . outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.* (Matt. 23:27-28)

What did they do? Perhaps they had caught the leader of a band of brigands? Nothing of the sort. They forcibly brought forth an unfortunate sinful woman, taken in the act of adultery; brought her forth with triumphant boasting and crude and deafening cries. Having brought her before Christ, they cried: *Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest Thou?* (Jn 8:4-5; cf. Lev 20:10, Deut 22:22).

The case was presented in this way by sinners, who denounced the sins of others and were adept at hiding their own shortcomings. The frightened crowd parted, making way for their elders. Some fled out of fear, because the Lord had been speaking of life and happiness, whereas these loudmouths were clamoring for death.

It would have been appropriate to ask why these elders and guardians of the law did not stone the sinful woman themselves? Why had they brought her to Jesus? The law of Moses gave them the right to stone her. No one would have objected. Who protests, in our day, when the death sentence is pronounced over a criminal? Why did the Jewish elders bring this sinful woman to the Lord? Not to obtain a commutation of her sentence or clemency from Him! Anything but that! They brought her with a premeditated, fiendish plan to catch the Lord in words contradictory to the law, that they might accuse Him as well. They hoped with a single blow to do away with two lives, that of the guilty woman and that of Christ. *What sayest Thou?*

Why did they ask Him, when the law of Moses was clear? The Evangelist explains their intent in the following words: *This they said tempting Him that they might have to accuse Him.* (Jn 8:6). They had lifted their hands up against Him once before to stone Him, but He had eluded them. But now they had found an opportunity to accomplish their desire. And it was there, before the Temple of Solomon, where the tablets of the commandments had been kept in the Ark of the Covenant, it was there that He, Christ, had to say something contrary to the law of Moses; then their goal would be attained. They would stone to death both Christ and the sinful woman. Far more eager were they to stone Him than her, just as they would later with even greater zeal ask Pilate to release the bandit Barabbas instead of Christ.

All of those present expected that one of two things would happen: either the Lord in His mercy, would release the sinful woman and thereby violate the law; or He would uphold the law, saying, *Do as it is written in the law*, and thereby break His own commandment of mercy and loving kindness. In the first instance He would be condemned to death; and in the second, He would become an object of mockery and derision.

When the tempters posed the question, *What sayest Thou?* a deathly silence fell: silence among the crowd which had gathered; silence among the judges of the sinful woman; silence and bated breath in the soul of the accused woman. A great silence falls in large circuses when the tamers of wild beasts bring forth tame lions and tigers and command them to perform various movements, to assume various positions and do tricks at their behest.

But we see before us no tamer of wild animals, but the Tamer of men, a task significantly more difficult than the former. For it is often harder to tame those who have become wild on account of sin, than to tame those who are wild by nature. *What sayest Thou?* Once more they pressed Him, burning with malice, their faces contorted.

Then the legislator of morality and human conduct *stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.* (Jn 8:6). What did the Lord write in the dust? The Evangelist maintains silence concerning this and does not write of it. It was too repulsive and vile to be written in the Book of Joy. However, this has been preserved in our Holy Orthodox tradition, and it is horrible.

The Lord wrote something unexpected and startling for the elders, the accusers of the sinful woman. With His finger He disclosed their secret iniquities. For these who point out the sins of others were experts in concealing their own sins. But it is pointless to try to hide anything from the eyes of One Who sees all.

M (eshulam) has stolen treasures from the temple, wrote the Lord's finger in the dust.

A (sher) has committed adultery with his brother's wife;

S (halum) has committed perjury;

E (led) has struck his own father;

A (marich) has committed sodomy;

J (oel) has worshipped idols.

And so one statement after another was written in the dust by the awesome finger of the Righteous Judge. And those to whom these words referred, bending down, read

what was written, with inexpressible horror. They trembled from fright, and dared not look one another in the eye. They gave no further thought to the sinful woman. They thought only of themselves and of their own death, which was written in the dust. Not a single tongue was able to move, to pronounce that troublesome and evil question, *What sayest Thou?* The Lord said nothing. That which is so filthy is fit to be written only in filthy dust.

Another reason why the Lord wrote on the ground is even greater and more wonderful. That which is written in the dust is easily erased and removed. Christ did not want their sins to be made known to everyone. Had He desired this, He would have announced them before all the people, and would have accused them and had them stoned to death, in accordance with the law. But He, the innocent Lamb of God, did not contemplate revenge or death for those who had prepared for Him a thousand deaths, who desired His

death more than everlasting life for themselves. The Lord wanted only to correct them, to make them think of themselves and their own sins. He wanted to remind them that while they carried the burden of their own transgressions, they shouldn't be strict judges of the transgressions of others. This alone did the Lord desire. And when this was done, the dust was again smoothed over, and that which was written disappeared.

After this our great Lord arose and kindly said to them: *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.* (Jn 8:7). This was like someone taking away the weapons of his enemies and then saying, "Now, shoot!" The once haughty judges of

the sinful woman now stood disarmed, like criminals before the Judge, speechless and rooted to the ground.

But the benevolent Saviour, *stooping down again, wrote on the ground.* (Jn 8:8). What did He write this time? Perhaps their other secret transgressions, so that they would not open their closed lips for a long time. Or perhaps He wrote what sort of persons the elders and leaders of the people should be like.

This is not essential for us to know. The most important thing here is that by His writing in the dust He achieved three results: first, He broke and annihilated the storm which the Jewish elders had raised against Him; second, He aroused their deadened consciences in their hardened souls, if only for a short time; and third, He saved the sinful woman from death. This is apparent from the words of the Gospel: *And they [the elders] who heard it, being convicted*



by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. (Jn 8:9).

The square before the temple was suddenly empty. No one was left except those two whom the elders had sentenced to death, the sinful woman and the Sinless One. The woman was standing, whereas He remained stooped towards the ground. A profound silence reigned. Suddenly the Lord arose again, looked around, and, seeing no one but the woman, said to her: *Woman, where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee?*

The Lord knew that no one had condemned her; but with this question He hoped to give her confidence, so that she would be able to hear and understand better what He would say to her. He acted like a skillful doctor, who first encourages his patient and only then gives him medicine. No one has condemned you? The woman regained the ability to speak, and she answered, *No man, Lord.* These words were uttered by a pathetic creature, who just before had no hope of ever uttering another word, a creature, who most likely was feeling a breath of true joy for the first time in her life.

Finally, the good Lord said to the woman: *Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more.* (Jn 8:11). When the wolves spare their prey, then, of course, the shepherd does not wish death for his sheep either. But it is essential to be aware that Christ's non-judgment means much more than the non-judgment of humans. When people do not judge you for your sin, it means that they do not assign a punishment for the sin, but leave that sin with and in you. When God does not judge, however, this means that He forgives your sin, draws it out of you like pus and makes your soul clean. For this reason, the words, *Neither do I condemn thee*, mean the same as *Thy sins are forgiven thee; go, daughter, and sin no more.*

What unspeakable joy! What joy of truth! For the Lord revealed the truth to those who were lost. What joy in righteousness! For the Lord created righteousness. What joy in mercy! For the Lord showed mercy. What joy in life! For the Lord preserved life. This is the Gospel of Christ, which means the Good News; this is Joyful News, the Teaching of Joy; this is a page from the Book of Joy.



If something pushes you to criticism in any matter regarding a brother or the monastery, try to pray about the matter instead, without passing it under the judgment of your reason. If you turn within yourself through prayer, humility, and mourning, you will find a spiritual treasure---just keep pride and criticism far from you.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou & Arizona

FOOD FOR THE SPIRIT

You probably read the story of Jacob and Esau today and thought, I can't believe Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of soup. But let's think beyond birthrights and soup. Is there anything of true value that you are trading for something of lesser worth? In other words, what is your "bowl of soup"?

Have you pursued wealth and a career at the expense of family? Maybe your busy schedule has kept you from spending time with God in His Word each day. Some people become involved in extramarital affairs, trading the well-being of their family for the satisfaction of lustful desires. Others sacrifice their health by consuming harmful or addictive substances, or even by overindulging in food. The list of ways we make foolish, shortsighted choices is endless.

Some of the decisions we make today could rob us of the blessings God wants to give us. When you yield to temptation in a moment of weakness, you're actually sacrificing your future for momentary pleasure. We can't afford to live thoughtlessly, basing our decisions on immediate desires or feelings. Since the principle of sowing and reaping cannot be reversed, we need to carefully consider what we are planting. The harvest will come, and we'll reap what we have sown--and more than we've sown.

Are you contemplating anything that could have serious long-term ramifications if you yield to the yearning? A wise person evaluates choices by looking ahead to see what negative consequences could follow a course of action. Don't let "a bowl of soup" hinder God's wonderful plans for you.

† † †

A monk went to the city to sell his handiwork, and on the way he happened to meet a beautiful young woman, the daughter of a pagan priest; he left himself unprotected, and was so dominated by evil desire that he forgot the promises which he had made to Christ about virginity and chastity, and asked her father to give her to him as his wife.

—I cannot promise her to you, he replied, 'without first asking my god. So he went to the oracle to obtain a response.

—Ask him to deny his God, his Baptism, and his monastic Schema, answered the oracle or, rather, the Devil.

—I deny them, the hapless monk dared to utter, darkened by his irrational desire; he then saw a white dove go out of his mouth and vanish into the immensity of the sky...

But the father of the young woman was not immediately satisfied; he sought a second oracle.

—Do not give him your daughter, said the oracle; his God has not abandoned him, but is still helping him. When the denier heard this, he was shocked and his heart was crushed.

—I, wretch that I am, he cried, 'have denied a God Who never rejects the work of His hands....

Bitterly lamenting his terrible sin, like Peter, he returned to the desert, where he confessed his sin and regained the Grace of the Holy Spirit with the guidance of a Holy Elder.

THE RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH ON HOMOSEXUALITY

CHURCHES EMBRACING HOMOSEXUALITY PREPARE MEMBERS TO ACCEPT THE ANTI-CHRIST

From *LifeSiteNews* (<https://www.lifesitenews.com/>), Moscow, June 5, 2015.

Churches that have deemed homosexuality morally acceptable have rejected Christianity and are preparing their followers to accept the Antichrist, according to one of the leading figures in the Russian Orthodox Church.

His statement came as the Russian Orthodox Church announced that it is ending “formal contacts” with the United Protestant Church of France and the Church of Scotland over those churches’ abandonment of traditional Christian sexual morality. In its statement, the church said ecumenical dialogue was pointless after France’s United Protestant Church last month voted to allow pastors to officiate at same-sex “marriages” and the Church of Scotland approved ordaining clergy who are in same-sex civil unions.

“The Russian Orthodox Church holds the firm position based on Holy Scriptures and has repeatedly declared that [homosexual ‘marriage’ is] inadmissible for moral teaching,” the statement reads. Churches that offer to “marry” homosexuals “trample upon the principles of traditional Christian morality.”

The statement explains that over a period of years, the Orthodox Church has shared her concerns with these Christian bodies and warned of ecumenical consequences if they adopt same-sex “marriage.”

“Regrettably, the words of warning have not been heard,” Orthodox officials concluded.

Following the decision, the Very Rev. Fr. Dimitry Smirnov—the chair of the Russian Orthodox Church Commission for Family, Protection of Motherhood and Childhood—told one of the leading Russian television stations the new moral teachings place these liberal denominations beyond the pale of Christianity.

“We separated ourselves from them as from the plague, as it’s contagious,” he said. “The Russian Orthodox Church cannot support with its authority something that is just an iniquity from the Biblical point of view.”



“These are not Christian communities anymore. This is another community with its own distinct name of ‘LGBT.’ Its future is simple and clear—the ‘fire of Gehenna’—this is just what the Holy Scripture says,” Fr. Smirnov said.

By rejecting the Christian faith’s immemorial teaching on sexual morality, “the former Christian peoples are preparing themselves for the solemn reception of the Antichrist.”

His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow has stated many times that gay “marriage” is incompatible with Christian teaching.

The Chairman of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department for External Church Relations, Metropolitan Hilarion, explained, “The legalization of same-sex cohabitations,

tolerant attitude to euthanasia and prostitution, disruption of the centuries-old institution of marriage and family, pose a clear threat to the future of humanity.”

Archpriest Jason Kappanadze of the Orthodox Church in America, the “daughter” church of Moscow, called the Moscow Patriarchate’s move “an appropriate statement of moral clarity,” noting that “certain Protestant denominations have crossed the line away from Christianity...making further dialogue impossible.”

Kappanadze was careful to point out that the reason for Moscow’s decision is not hatred but its care and concern for the well-being of all. “We stand with firm love for the salvation of our fellow human beings!”

Father Hans Jacobse of the American Orthodox Institute told LifeSiteNews, “People will look at the decision by the Russian Orthodox Church and think it is unfair. One must understand that the Russian Orthodox looks at gay marriage as a grave distortion of God’s design for men and women.”

Fr. Jacobse said the Russian Orthodox Church is concerned with the long-term societal effects of sanctioning homosexuality. “The Russians have always been brilliant long-term thinkers,” he told LifeSiteNews. Orthodox leaders believe that “legalizing same-sex marriage will change our understanding of who God created us to be, and that will have destructive ramifications for society down the road.”

The Russian Bishops’ Council of 2013 explained that “Dialogue with confessions which openly defy the Biblical moral norms is impossible.” The Church’s Department for External Church Relations “does not see any prospects in maintaining official contacts” with such groups.

Noting a tragic liberal trend throughout the Protestant world and implying there may be more severing of ties to

come, the Moscow Patriarchate statement read, “We regretfully acknowledge that today we have a new divide in the Christian world, not only regarding theological subjects, but regarding moral issues as well.”

The Russian Orthodox Church previously cut ties with The Episcopal Church in the United States in 2003 after it consecrated an open, practicing homosexual as bishop. Two years later, it severed its ecumenical relationship with the Swedish Lutheran Church after it sanctioned ceremonies for same-sex civil unions in 2005.

The bishops of the Orthodox Church in America, which together are called “the Holy Synod,” have made several public statements against homosexuality. “Homosexuality is to be approached as the result of humanity’s rebellion against God, and so against its own nature and well-being,” one such synodal statement from 1992 explained. “It is not to be taken as a way of living and acting for men and women made in God’s image and likeness.”

Those suffering from same-sex attraction are to be treated in the Orthodox Church with compassion.

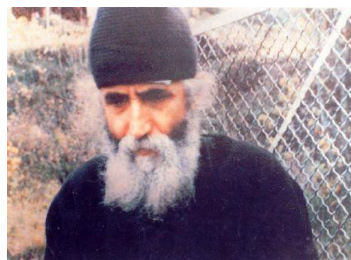
“Men and women with homosexual feelings and emotions are to be treated with the understanding, acceptance, love, justice and mercy due to all human beings,” the bishops said. “They are to seek assistance in discovering the specific causes of their homosexual orientation, and to work toward overcoming its harmful effects in their lives.”

However, homosexuals “who still want to justify their behavior” are barred from Holy Communion, “since to do so would not help, but harm them.”



SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE TO AVOID ANXIETY: WORLDLY HAPPINESS CAUSES WORLDLY ANXIETY

By St. Paisios the Athonite.



The more people distance themselves from 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.

This is why they go around restless; they even spin around the moon—like the belt of an engine spinning around the “crazy wheel”^(*)—since earth cannot contain all their restlessness.

Worldly stress is the result of worldly happiness, of worldly pleasures and self-indulgence. Educated externally and being full of anxiety, hundreds of people (even young children) are driven to psychoanalysis and psychiatrists. 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 in 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 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 the theories of yoga, and they neglect altogether the true serenity that comes when the soul is humble and God fills it with Divine consolation. And imagine how all those tourists must suffer who come from other countries to Greece, and walk the streets in the hot summer sun, in the dusty and noisy streets! What great pressure they must feel inside, how stressed they must be if they need all this heat and noise to find comfort! It’s like their own selves are driving them away, and all they can see in this trouble is rest!

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 a 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? Do you know how many people like this are in society? And these people suffer to the point that they lose their mind. What a dreadful thing! And if they happen to be independently wealthy and do not work, then they are the most miserable of all. If they at least had a job they would feel somewhat better.

† † †

^(*) In the old metal shops a “crazy wheel” was one not used for any other purpose, except to feed the belt of the wheel when they wanted to deactivate the wheel.

RESPECT FOR THE DEAD: OUR CEMETERIES ARE GOD'S VINEYARDS

From *"The Spiritual Meadow,"* by John Moschus, ch. 77.

Close to Antioch there once stood a monastery, called the Monastery of the Giants. The humble abbot of this monastic community recounted the following to two famous visitors, St. Sophronius and his blessed teacher, John Moschus:

Not long before your arrival, a young man came to see me.

—For the love of God, accept me into your monastery, said the youth. He looked extremely distraught. Sobbing loudly, he cried torrents of tears.

—Tell me, what is the cause of your grief?

—O father, I am an awful sinner ...

The youth again began to sob, and crying aloud, beat his breast. From his great turmoil and extreme grief, he had no strength to relate his calamity.

—My child, listen to me.

Collect yourself a little bit and tell me what is wrong, and Christ will bring peace to your soul. By His fathomless mercy He did not turn away repentant sinners and endured death on the Cross for our salvation. He will accept you with joy into His embrace, seeing your repentance.

Then, making a great effort, the youth began to speak.

—Father, I am not worthy of Heaven and earth. What

have I done! Not long ago, a lavish funeral was held in the city. A wealthy father was burying his only daughter. He spared nothing. All of the jewels which he had given her were placed in the tomb. The deceased one, as in life, shone with jewels and gold. The father, mortified with sorrow and in tears, walked behind the casket. At that time I came up with the satanic idea of robbing the departed one. For two days I deliberated my intent and set out at night to the lonely tomb outside the city. The silence was inexplicable, as if everything was holding its breath. Only the crescent moon hung down its sharp sickle, lighting up the environs and the marble sepulchre.

The youth sighed and continued:

—Breaking the locks, I entered the inner chamber. A weak light slipped over the dead one. She lay as if alive, a sleeping beauty. Suddenly, I was frightened. A quiet pain entered my heart. Nonetheless I threw myself on the dead girl and in

exasperation began to undress her. I took everything off... I did not even spare the last underclothes, and took those too... I left her naked, as her mother had borne her. I was collecting everything and about to leave. Suddenly, fear gripped me again. My hands shook. My heart beat loudly in my chest. I glanced at the deceased and froze in fright. She arose from her deathbed and grabbing me by the arm, she spoke:

“So foul one, you had to go so far as to undress me? Had you no fear of God? No fear of the final recompense at the Dread Judgment? Have you no compassion for me, who died in the spring of my life? Did you have no natural shame common to all of us? You are a Christian! Is this the way I am to stand before Christ? Did my gender not shame you? Did not a woman give birth to you? Did you not desecrate your own mother along with me? Oh, what answer, what excuse, wretched one, will you bring to Christ’s judgment seat? In life not a single stranger’s eye beheld my countenance, and you, following my death and burial, disrobed me and saw my nakedness. Oh, Mankind! To what depths have you fallen! With what feelings and hands will you approach the holiest Mysteries of the Body and Blood of our Jesus Christ?”

—Gasping from terror, I cried out with great effort: “Let me go!... I will never do any such thing again...”

“Yes, you came here of your own will, but it is not up to you to leave this place! This sepulchre will become our common abode—yours and mine... You will not die now, but right here, after countless

sufferings, you will give up your wicked soul in an awful manner...”

—I do not remember much of what else I told her... I besought by Almighty God that she release me, I repented, asked forgiveness...

She then said, “If you wish to rid yourself of this fate, give me your word that you will reject the world and will serve God alone...”

“Not only to what you have said,” I swore, “no, even more, I shall not even return to my own home.”

“Dress me as I was before!”

—As soon as I arrayed her, she fell breathless on her deathbed. Once again the eyes and mouth were closed, and the hand which had clutched me so firmly lay motionless. And I, the wretched one, ran from the tomb, and came to you...

Having heard this, I comforted the youth. Clothing him in a monk’s garb, I enclosed him in a mountain cave. Look



A destroyed Orthodox Monastery in Kosovo

in on him, if you wish, and see: he is now toiling for the salvation of his soul.

† † †

Alexandria long remained the center of Greek scholasticism—up to the time when the Islamic yoke brought its dark clouds to the Orthodox East. Then, it is said, Omar commanded that the Alexandrian library be burned down. Before the conquest of Egypt by the Arabs, not one curious traveler ever passed Alexandria by. With its museums, palaces, libraries, it was still considered the highest center of learning for philosophy, philology, literature, astronomy, and mathematics, as well as alchemy, astrology, magic, and other metaphysical studies for which ancient Egyptians were famous.

There were also humble and self-sacrificing ascetics of Christian thought. Dedicating their lives to study, they did not seek rewards, fame, riches—no. Their studies served as a pathway to an incomparably higher goal—moral perfection. Such a one was Cosmas the Scholastic, who was described briefly but distinctly by an eyewitness, St. John Moschus.

Blessed John Moschus and his pupil Sophronius (who later became more famous than his teacher), in undertaking their great journey, could not pass Alexandria by. Besides visiting Cosmas, they stopped to see other scholars of that time who lived in Alexandria.

It was hot at noon when they headed for the living quarters of the scholar Stephen. He lived close to the church of the Mother of God. For a long time they knocked at the door. Finally, the scholar's daughter looked out of the window and said:

—Wait a while. My father, wearied by his studies last night, has not yet risen.

—What shall we do, Master Sophronius? Let us go to the Tetrapil.

The Tetrapil was a huge portico, surrounded by columns, in four rows. One could always rest there. At the noon hour even the Tetrapil was empty. On the steps between the columns sat three beggars, all of them blind. What can one learn from blind men? However, the travelers quietly came towards them and, placing their books on the marble floor, sat down next to the blind men. They were engaged in a lively conversation.

—How did you lose your eyesight? one asked another.

—I was a sailor in my youth. During a journey from Egypt to Constantinople my eyes began to hurt. It was impossible to treat them aboard the ship, and there was no doctor. The disease progressed too far. White patches grew over my eyes and I am now blind.

—How were you stricken with blindness? the same beggar asked the other one.

—The tragedy was almost instantaneous. I was a glass blower. A flame jumped from the forge covering me with sparks, and burned my eyes.

Saying this, the blind man heaved a great sigh.

—Now you tell us of your misfortune, said both the blind men to their enquiring companion.

—Oh, my misfortune is my own fault! I will tell you the truth: as a youth I was very lazy. No matter how my parents tried, they could do nothing to develop a love of work in me. After their death I spent my fortune in a short time. I knew no trade, and did not like to work. What could I do? I became a thief. Once I had a particularly lucky day. I stole several times successfully, proceeded to finish off an excellent lunch, and then went to look around the town square. Right then I encountered a lavish funeral procession: a well-known rich man was being buried. Instantly, a demonic thought took hold of me: why not rob the deceased one? I followed the procession, which made its way to the church of St. John. Beside the church was a family crypt. When the man was interred, the crowd gradually dispersed. Evening was falling...

The blind man continued:

—Looking around, I decided that no one was watching me. I always carried a chisel and other instruments of my trade. Breaking the lock, I entered the crypt. I remember even now—the damp cold of the tomb encompassed me... The bier stood in the center. Without pausing, I came up to the dead one and took everything from him, then headed home. This will last a long time. Wait, the shroud! It is made from fine cloth and is expensive. Might as well... And I began to undress the dead man. Then—O, terror! He arose, fixed his lifeless gaze upon me—I froze on the spot like a stone. Cold sweat ran down my face. I felt the cold touch of his fingers. He passed them over my face and, stopping at the eyes, plucked them out. Recovering from fright, I threw everything down and ran from the tomb. I cannot describe to you the sorrow which overcame me. I cried unceasingly and considered myself to be lost forever. This is my story.

Glancing at Sophronius, the teacher noted that he was motioning for them to leave. Sophronius was visibly upset. Thank you, abba. Today we shall not attend the lecture: we have already received our lesson.

† † †

While visiting a cemetery, who has not noticed how some tombstones are broken by some daring hand, how crosses and holy images are defiled. What sorrow this brings to the heart! Is it possible that they do not know what a great sin this is? The wrath of the righteous Judge does not always descend immediately, as in the account above, but God's punishment will sooner or later come upon those vultures who have lost their conscience and sense of shame. Be wary of such a heavy sin. Do not disturb the peace and tranquillity of those who have reposed from earthly cares. Cemeteries are God's vineyards from which the angels will harvest the great crop into God's storehouses.

THE AROMA OF REVERENCE

Source: From "Elder Paisios of Mount Athos," by Hieromonk Isaac.

Once, a reclusive ascetic who had heard a lot about Elder Paisios came to visit him. They talked for a while, and he ascertained that Elder Paisios was an exceptionally reverent man. Indeed, the elder had a rare reverence, which he had learned from his parents, and mainly his mother.

While at the monastery, he benefited from many of the fathers, and especially from a particular hieromonk. He would say, "We can't reach the reverence he had—impossible. He would celebrate liturgy every day, and he struggled greatly. Once, for half a year, he ate nothing but half of a small *prosporon* and a few tomatoes dried in the sun." When this reverent priest would serve out in the chapels, like other priests of the monastery, he preferred to have as a chanter the young Father Averkios (as the elder was then called).

The elder had an innate reverence, but he also cultivated it a great deal. He placed such emphasis on it that he once said that "reverence is the greatest virtue, because it attracts the Grace of God." To the elder, reverence was the fear of God and spiritual sensitivity. Reverent people behave carefully and modestly, because they intensely feel the presence of God.

The elder wanted reverence to be unaffected and internal. He turned away from mere external forms. Regarding a group of monks who had great order and discipline in their liturgical life, he commented, "I respect that, if it's something that comes from within." The elder's conduct was reverent, but with a freedom that was alien to dry forms. If he didn't feel something, he wouldn't do it. He distinguished reverence from piety—a word he even avoided saying. He would say that reverence is like incense, while piety is just perfume. ⁽¹⁾

The elder's reverence encompassed not only small and seemingly unimportant matters, but also spiritual and essential issues. "If someone neglects the little things," he taught, "the danger is that he'll start neglecting greater, holier things. And then, without realizing it, rationalizing it all to himself—'This is nothing, that doesn't matter'—he can end up, God forbid, totally neglecting the things of God and becoming irreverent, arrogant, and atheistic."

His reverence could be seen in the way he prayed, venerated icons, received *antidoron* and holy water, partook of

Holy Communion, held icons during processions, chanted, and arranged and beautified the small chapel of his hermitage. He paid attention to details, but in a way that wasn't ritualistic or fastidiously formal. This was his own attitude toward God, which wasn't laid out in advance by any *typikon* of the Church: it was his personal disposition. He felt that his whole hermitage, not just his chapel, was sacred space. He arranged his cell, where he prayed, just like a little church. There was an *iconostasis* with many icons and a lamp that burned continuously, and he would cense and light many candles there. He had constructed his bed so that it was like a coffin, and he would say, "This is the altar of my cell." Icons and holy books never touched his bed, with the exception of an icon at its head.

The icon was rather tattered and faded, and a brother once asked him why it was in this condition. The elder tried to hide the truth, but the monk finally realized that it was like that because of his many kisses and tears. The elder reluctantly admitted, "I can get through an entire vigil that way"; that is, weeping.

He also treated the other areas of his hermitage with reverence—the workshop where he made the little icons, the guest-house where souls were reborn by God's Grace, the balcony, and even the yard. He thought that it was irreverent to have a toilet inside the hermitage. It was partly for ascetic reasons that he kept it at such a distance, but mostly it was out of reverence.

Once, when he was away from the hermitage of the Holy Cross, the fathers of the monastery (out of love, so he wouldn't be uncomfortable) made him a small outhouse, outside but sharing a wall with the hermitage. The elder never used it. At Panagouda, the Athonite location of his hermitage, when his health had deteriorated toward the end of his life and he needed to go out frequently at night—in cold, rain, and snow—his spiritual children began to insist on building him an outhouse just clear of the balcony to make things easier for him. He refused. "That's where the Panaghia appeared," he said. "How can I go to the toilet there?"

The elder's life was fragrant with deep and unaffected reverence, just as the angels in Heaven worship God day and night "with great reverence." This was clear to see from his relationship with God and from the expressions on his face when coming into contact with sacred things. He reacted to sacred objects as though they were alive.



Once, when Elder Paisios was visiting the hermitage of another monk, his hernia was bothering him. The elder of the hermitage begged him to lie down and rest a little, but Elder Paisios declined. He was only able to lie on his left side, and, if he had done that there, the bottom of his feet would have been pointing at some icons, which he thought of as irreverent.

Before entering the holy altar, he would make a prostration to the floor, remove his monastic cap, and kiss the cross on the altar-curtain; and then he would enter by the side door. During the Communion hymn at liturgy, if he intended to commune, he would make full prostrations. For a time, he had it as a rule to eat nothing for thirty-three hours before communing.

Because of his great reverence for the mystery of the priesthood, the elder never assented to ordination, even though, as he once said, “It’s been revealed to me three different times that I could become a priest.”⁽²⁾

Plainly, the elder saw reverence as a fundamental virtue for every Christian—although, rigorous as his criteria were, he considered it something rare. To the elder, reverence was greater than most of the other virtues. He often used it as a criterion. If a reverent person wrote or said or did something for which he was criticized, the elder, even before forming a clear opinion on the issue itself, would go out of his way to propose mitigating circumstances. He would say, “He’s a reverent man—I don’t believe he’d do something like that.” The elder believed that this quality preserved a person from making errors, from deceptions and from falling—perhaps in the sense of the verse declaring that the Lord *will carefully guard the way of those who reverence Him.* (Prov 2:8).

The elder considered reverence to be extremely important in all of a Christian’s life and struggles, and especially those of a monk. A person’s reverence, he believed, acts as a steady factor in his life, affecting everything and raising his spiritual level.

He advised monks to take care to acquire reverence. “A new monk, especially, has to be reverent through and through. It helps for him to always have the *Evergetinos* open⁽³⁾ and to spend time with other monks who are reverent.” When a new monk asked the elder what it was that he should pay the most attention to, the elder replied, “Reverence and attention to yourself.”

A Russian bishop, presented with many candidates for the priesthood, once asked the elder whom he should ordain.

“Those who are reverent and pure,” the elder answered—he did not say educated or energetic men, or candidates with good voices.

In chanting and iconography also, reverence was more important to the elder than technique. He was able to discern its presence in chanting or in an icon, and he would say, “If you pay attention to the meaning of a *troparion*, it’ll change you, and you’ll be able to chant in a reverent way. If you’re reverent, you might make a mistake while you chant, but it’ll come out sounding sweet. If you only pay attention to technique—I mean, going note-by-note, without a reverent spirit—then you’ll end up like a lay chanter I once heard: he was chanting *Bless the Lord, O my soul* like a blacksmith striking an anvil. I heard it in a car, and it disturbed me—I told the driver to turn off the tape. When someone doesn’t chant from the heart, it’s like he’s running you out of church. A sacred canon says that people who chant with improper voices should be given penances because they drive people away from church.”

Concerning iconography, he advised, “You should make



A rare photograph of the reposed St. Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

an icon with reverence, like we were going to be giving it to Christ Himself. How would we like it if someone gave us a photograph where our face wasn’t right? It’s not right for our Panaghia to be depicted like Saint Anna—I mean, not to show her physical beauty. There has never been a woman as beautiful as the Panaghia was in soul and body. How she transformed people’s

souls with her grace!”

Of the icon of the Tenderly Kissing Mother of God, at Philotheou Monastery, he remarked, “technically, it’s not quite perfect, because Christ’s feet are wedge-shaped, but it works miracles and has such Grace and sweetness. It’s probably because God rewarded the iconographer’s reverence.”

“The Grace of God,” observed the elder, “comes to reverent people, and it makes the soul beautiful.” But he observed with sadness that contemporary people pay little attention to such things. “If a person’s not reverent,” he said, “if he scorns Divine things, then Divine Grace abandons him; he’s overcome by temptations, and becomes like the demons. Divine Grace won’t come to an irreverent person—it comes to people who honor it.”

As examples of irreverence, he mentioned the sacrifice of Cain and the behavior of the sons of Eli related in the Old Testament. Their disdain provoked the wrath of God, and they were punished.

The elder considered it irreverent to place icons, ecclesiastical books, *antidoron*, and holy objects in general on the seats of church-stalls, and even more so on chairs or beds (except on a pillow). He suggested that people put the little icons that he would hand out in their chest pockets. Once, he related, a pilgrim came holding his head crooked from neck pain. Through Divine enlightenment, the elder realized that the man had suffered this at the hands of demonic powers, because he had put a cross the elder had given him, which contained a piece of the Precious Cross of the Lord, in his back-pocket. The elder forbade anyone who lived carelessly to carry the Precious Cross.

He once told us about someone who had become possessed because he had spit in an unclean place on a day when he had communed. The same had happened to a woman who had thrown holy water onto excrement. Another time, he related, a young man who was engaged to be married visited a conjurer, who told him to urinate on the wedding rings. Upon following the conjurer's instructions, the young man became possessed, because wedding rings are holy. The elder also gave other, similar examples of careless and irreverent people being abandoned by Divine Grace and becoming possessed.

He didn't think it was right to refer to the holy Fathers of the Church simply by their first names; for example, as "Basil" or "Gregory." "We talk about 'Father so-and-so' and use the term 'Father' for monks and clergy," he commented, "and this is how we're going to talk about the holy Fathers?"

He didn't want people to offer God candles made from impure or artificial beeswax or to fill their lamps with olive oil of poor quality or with seed-oil. On the contrary, he emphasized, "[we should] offer our best to God in worship. We should offer up our best efforts and our pure prayer—not our yawning." He considered it greatly irreverent to use *prosporon* for the liturgy that was tainted with mold. "Christ gives us His Body and Blood," he would say, "and we give Him moldy *prosporon*?" He would walk miles to find *prosporon* for the Divine Liturgy, and when he carried it he would hold it by the side, taking care not to touch the seal.

The elder tried to show gratitude and be pleasing to the One whom he loved. Out of his great love, he offered to God the very best, and he conducted himself with refinement, with spiritual sensitivity and reverence. And God, being pleased, bestowed His Grace on the elder in abundance.

† † †

(1) "Reverence," in Greek *evlavia* (εὐλάβεια); and "piety," *efsevia* (εὐσεβεία). The latter of these two words is used in Greek within the Scriptures and by the Church's holy Fathers to refer to true Christian reverence and correct faith; and, especially in older translations, it has often been rendered as "piety." By the elder's time, the Greek word had taken on a negative meaning in a somewhat similar fashion

as the word "piety" has come to do in English; to many, it was synonymous with pietism and formalism.

(2) Most likely these signs were not commands—rather, he was presented with the possibility of becoming a priest. When he was asked about this, he answered, "Christ gives us gifts. Do we have to accept all of them?"

(3) That is, to study it frequently. [The *Evergetinos* is a collection of anecdotes and teachings from the early Egyptian desert Fathers. Unlike the *Philokalia*, a more advanced spiritual text that treats the way in which "the intellect [nous] is purified, illumined, and made perfect" (vol. 1, p. 13), the *Evergetinos* focuses on the practice of Christian virtues, a necessary precursor to the exalted attainments described in the *Philokalia*.]



ON RELATIONS WITH THOSE WHO DO EVIL

Source: "The *Evergetinos*," book one, hypothesis 23.

We must keep away from those who harm us, even if they are friends or are otherwise quite indispensable.

Abba Agathon said: "Even if someone is extremely dear to me, but I know that he leads me into faults, I cut him loose from myself."

An Elder said: "We must flee from all who work iniquity, even if they be friends or relatives and even if they hold the office of Priest or King; for standing apart from those who work iniquity bestows on us friendship with God and boldness before Him."

The same Elder said: "It is not profitable for us to cling to transgressors, neither in Church, nor in the marketplace, nor in the council, nor in any other realm; rather, we must completely refrain from relations with them..."

A brother asked an Elder: "If my brother scandalizes me, do you want me to make a prostration to him?" The Elder answered: "Make a prostration, but cut yourself off from him; for we have Abba Arsenios, who said: Have love for all men, but keep a distance from all men."

Saint Symeon said: If you really see, how is it that you stumble like a blind man and your whole body and soul are covered with black marks? If you know what is good, how is it that you do evil, as though you did not know? If you know that all visible things are a shadow and all pass away, are you not ashamed of playing with shadows and hoarding transitory things? Like a child you draw water with a bucket full of holes; do you not realize it and take it into account, my dear friend? As though there were nothing more serious than appearance and illusion, as though reality has been taken from them?

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YOUR SINS ARE MY SINS, MY SINS ARE YOUR SINS

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich.



Love the sinner as well! Do not fly away from the sinners, but go to them without fear.

After all—whoever you may be—you are not much better than they are. Try to love the sinners; you will see that it is easier to love those whom you despise than those whom you envy.

The old Zosim (from the “Brothers Karamazov”) said, “Brothers, don’t be afraid of the sins of a sinner; but love a sinner also—that is the record of love upon earth.”

I know you love St. Peter and St. John, but could you love the sinner Zacchæus? You can love the good Samaritan but love, please, the prodigal son also!

You love Christ, I am sure; but what about Judas, the seller of Christ? He “repented,” poor human creature. Why don’t you love him? [from Mt 27:3, the original Gk word is «μεταμεληθείς», “changed his mind,” or “was remorseful,” i.e. not a true repentance; the Greek word for “repentant” is «μετανοήσας», *Ed.*]

Dostoyevsky—like Tolstoi and Gogol—emphasised two things: first, there is no great man; secondly, there is no worthless man.

He described the blackest crimes and the deepest fall and showed that the authors of such crimes are men just as other men, with much good hidden under their sins.

Servants and vagabonds, idiots and drunkards, the dirty *katorzniki* from the Serbian prisons—all those people are God’s sons and daughters, with souls full of fears and hopes, of repentance and longings after good and justice.

Between *saintliness* and *vice* there is a bridge, not an abyss. The saintliest and the meanest men have still common ground for brotherhood. Your sins are my sins, my sins are your sins.

That is the starting-point for a practical and lucid Christianity. I cannot be clean as long as you are not clean. I cannot be happy as long as you are unhappy. I cannot enter Heaven as long as you are in Hell.

What does that mean? It means that you and I are blended together for eternity, and that your effort to separate yourselves from me is disastrous for you and for me.

As long as you look to the greatest sinner in the world and say: “God, I thank thee that I am not as that man,” you are far from Christ and the Kingdom of God. God wants not one good man only, He wants a Kingdom of good men.

If ninety-nine of us are good and saintly but one of our brothers is far from our solace and support, in sin and darkness, be assured that God is not among us ninety-nine, but He has gone to find our brother whom we have lost and forgotten. Will you follow him or will you stand self-sufficient?

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

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

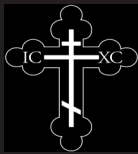
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Brotherhood of St. Poimen

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THE HOLY NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR

By St. Theophan the Recluse.

Glory to Thee, O Lord! Once again we greet the awaited bright days of Christ's Nativity. Let us be glad and rejoice.

In order to raise our festivities to a higher level in these days, the Holy Church has intentionally instituted a fast before them—a certain amount of constraint, so that as we enter the festive period we might feel as though we were coming out into freedom. Nevertheless, the Church in no way desires that we give ourselves over to mere sensual delights and fleshly pleasures. Since the Church has from olden times called these days *sviatki* (“holy days”), they require that our

very rejoicing on these days be holy, as they are holy. So that those who rejoice might not forget themselves, the Church has placed a short hymn upon our lips to glorify the newborn Christ, by which the flesh is settled down and the soul is uplifted, showing the proper occupations for these days: *Christ is born, give ye glory*, and the rest.

Glorify Christ; glorify Him, so that by this doxology your heart and soul might delight, and thereby silence any urge for various other deeds and occupations that might promise some kind

of pleasure. Glorify Christ: this does not mean that you have to compose lengthy songs of praise to Christ—no. But if when contemplating or hearing about the birth of Christ the Savior, you involuntarily cry out from the depths of your soul, *Glory to Thee, O Lord, that Christ is born!*—this is sufficient. This will be a quiet hymn of the heart, which will nevertheless pass through to heaven and enter into God Himself. Repeat a little more clearly to yourself what the Lord has wrought for us, and you will see how natural this exclamation now is.

So that this might be easier for us, we shall compare it to the following incident:

A king promises freedom to a man who is imprisoned in a dungeon and bound with fetters. The prisoner waits a day, then another, then months, and years. He sees no fulfillment of the promise, but does not lose hope, and

believes in the king's words. Finally, he sees signs that it is coming soon. His attention increases—he hears a noise; someone is approaching with cheerful words. Now the locks fall and the liberator enters. *Glory to Thee, O Lord!* the prisoner involuntarily cries. “The end of my imprisonment has arrived, and soon I will see God's light!”

Or another incident: A sick man is covered with wounds and paralyzed in all his members. He has tried all medicines and has changed doctors many times. His endurance is exhausted, and



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he is ready to give himself over to despair. He is told, "There is one more very skilled doctor, who heals everyone from those very illnesses that you have. We have asked him to come, and he has promised to do so." The patient believes them, hope springs up in him, and he waits for the promised one... One hour passes, then another, and anxiety again begins to torment his soul. Finally, at evening, someone arrives... The door opens, and the desired visitor enters... *Glory to Thee, O Lord!* the sick man shouts.

Here is another example: A thundercloud hangs over the face of the earth, and it is covered with darkness. Thunder shakes the foundations of the mountains and lightning tears the sky from one end to the other. All are in fear, as if the end of the world had come. When the thunder passes and the sky clears, everyone breathes freely, saying, *Glory to Thee, O Lord!*

Bring these examples closer to yourself and you will see our whole history in them. The threatening clouds of God's wrath were over us. The Lord—the Peacemaker—has come, and has dispersed the cloud. We were covered with the wounds of sins and passions; the Healer of souls has come and healed us. We were bound by the fetters of slavery; the Liberator has come and released our fetters. Bring all of these examples closer to your heart and take them in with your senses, and you will not be able to refrain from exclaiming, *Glory to Thee, O Lord, that Christ is born!*

I will not try to convey this joy to you with my words; it is inexpressible by any words. The work that was accomplished by the Lord Who is born touches each one of us. Those who enter into communion with Him receive from Him freedom, healing, and peace; they possess all of this and taste of its sweetness. There is no reason to say, *Rejoice!* to those

who experience this within themselves, for they cannot help but rejoice. But to those who do not experience it, why say, *Rejoice?* They cannot rejoice. No matter how much you say, "Rejoice at your deliverance," to one bound hand and foot, he will not rejoice. Whence can the joy of healing come to one who is covered with the wounds of sin? How can one who is threatened by the thunder of God's wrath breathe freely? You can only say to him, "Go to the Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger, and seek deliverance by Him from all the evils that encompass you, for this Infant is Christ, the Savior of the world."

I would like to see everyone rejoicing with this very joy, and not wanting to know any other joys; but not everything that comes from Israel is Israel. Now there will begin empty, wild merriment that inflames the passions... No matter how much you tell these people to calm down, they only shut their ears and pay no heed. And they always bring these bright days of the Feast to such a point that the merciful Lord is compelled to turn His eyes from us and say: *All of your solemnities are an abomination unto Me.* (cf. Isa 1:13-14)!

Truly, many of our social festivities are really pagan abominations; that is, some of them are brought to us straight from the pagan world, while others, though they appeared later in time, are penetrated with the spirit of paganism. And it is purposely contrived for such festivities to appear in great quantities during the Feasts of Nativity and Pascha. By getting caught up in them we give the prince of this world—our tormentor, the enemy of God—an excuse to say to God, "Look what You've done for me with Your Nativity and Resurrection! They're all coming to me!" But let the words of the Fiftieth Psalm be repeated more often in the depth of our hearts: *That*

Thou mightest be justified in Thy words, and prevail when Thou art judged (Pss 50:4).

Enlightened Europe is attracting us. Yes, the abominations of paganism that were almost completely cast out of the world were first restored there; they have now come from there to us. Having breathed in that hellish poison, we run around like madmen, forgetting our own selves. But let us remember the year of 1812—why did the French come to us then? God sent them to wipe out all the evil that we had imitated from them. Russia repented then, and God had mercy on her. But now it seems that we have forgotten that lesson. If we come to our senses, of course, nothing will happen. But if we do not come to our senses, who knows?

Perhaps the Lord will again send similar teachers, so that they would bring us to our senses and place us on the path of correction. Such is the law of God's righteousness: to cure someone from sin with the thing that enticed him into it. These are not empty words, but a matter that has been confirmed by the voice of the Church.

Know, ye Orthodox, that God is not mocked. And knowing this, make merry and rejoice during these days with fear. Illumine the bright Feast with bright deeds, occupations, and festivities, so that all who look upon us would say, "They have holy days—not the kind of amusements practiced by impious and profligates who don't know God."



Let there now be one common festal celebration in both Heaven and on earth. Let everything now celebrate: that which is in the world and that beyond the world. Now is made the created temple for the Creator of all; and creation is readied into a new Divine habitation for the Creator. Now our nature, having been banished from the land of blessedness, does receive the principle of *theosis* and does strive to rise up to the highest glory. Now Adam does offer from us—and for us—elements unto God, the most worthy fruit of mankind: Mary, in Whom the New Adam is rendered Bread for the restoration of the human race. Now is opened the great bosom of virginity, and the Church, in the matrimonial manner, does place upon it a pure pearl truly immaculate. Now human worthiness does accept the gift of the first creation and returns to its former condition; the majesty darkened by formless sin—through the conjoining by His Mother by birth of *Him made beautiful by Goodness*, man receives beauty in a most excellent and God-seemly visage... Now a barren one is become—beyond expectation—a mother, and the Birth-giver has given birth without knowing man, and she does sanctify natural birth.

St. Andrew of Crete

FAITH & HOPE IN GOD'S PROVIDENCE

By St. Ignatius Brianchaninov (+1867).

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov stands out as one of the greatest patristic writers of the nineteenth century. This great saint left to Orthodox Christians a compass by which we can check our direction as we traverse the complex path of spiritual life, to avoid the dark forests and pitfalls of spiritual delusion and pride.

There is no such thing as blind happenstance (a circumstance especially that is due to chance, *Ed.*)! God rules the world, and all that happens in heaven and under the heavens happens according to the wise and omnipotent God, unfathomable in His wisdom and omnipotence, and unfathomable in His governance.

If there is not a single event that is secret from God, then we must glorify God for everything that happens.

It is necessary to assure ourselves that God governs the fate of world and of each person. Life experiences are not long to prove and confirm this Gospel teaching.

All things pass—both the bad and the good—and neither men, nor demons can do anything if God does not allow it.

Why does our soul rebel against God's will and allowances? Because we have not revered God as God...

From living faith in God is born complete submission to God, and from submission to God is born peace in our thoughts and calm in our hearts.

From seeing God's Providence, in the soul develops profound meekness and unflinching love of neighbor, which no winds can disturb or agitate.

God watches over the times, events in society, and personal fates.

The vision of God's Providence preserves and grows our faith in God.

The Christian who keeps his gaze fixed upon God's Providence preserves constant courage and unshakable steadfastness, even amidst terrible misfortunes.

Before the sight of God's Providence, not only can temporary sorrows not stand, but also those that await a person when he crosses the threshold into eternity beyond the grave.

A Christian should never and for no reason worry, for God's Providence carries him in its arms. Our only care should be that we would ever remain faithful to the Lord.

That one soldier has fallen does not mean the entire army is defeated.

Salvation consists in the restoration of our communion with God.

Unhappy is he who is satisfied with his own human righteousness, for he does not need Christ, Who says of Himself: *I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance* (Mt. 9:13); men, who believe in Him and are transformed in accordance with Him, gods by grace.

THE HUMILITY AND PIETY OF ST. PORPHYRIOS OF KAVSOKALYVIA

Commemorated on December 2nd.



On December 2nd the holy Orthodox Church commemorates the recently-glorified God-bearing elder of our times, St. Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia, who reposed on this day in 1991. He was known as a humble ascetic with the gift of foresight who always served the Divine Liturgy with compunction. In his memory we offer below his final letter.

While at the Holy Skete of Kavsokalyvia on Mt. Athos, the Elder Porphyrios had given orders for his grave to be dug. Through a spiritual child of his, he dictated a farewell letter of advice and forgiveness to all his spiritual children.

Here is the letter as it was sent from the Holy Convent of the Transfiguration of the Savior. It was found amongst the monk's garments that were laid out for his burial on the day of his departure. This letter is a profound example of the humility of the saints who have acquired the likeness of God through their humble ascetic offerings.

† † †

My dear spiritual Children,
Now that I am still in charge of my faculties, I want to give you some advice.

Ever since I was a child, I was always in sin. When my mother sent me to watch the animals on the mountain, (my father had gone to America to work on the Panama Canal for us his children, because we were poor), there, where I shepherded the animals, I slowly read, word by word, the life of St. John the Hut-dweller and I loved St. John very much. I said a lot of prayers, like the young child that I was, twelve or fifteen years old, I don't remember too well. I wanted to follow his example. So, with a lot of difficulty, I secretly left my parents and came to Kavsokalyvia on the Holy Mountain. I became obedient to two elders, the true brothers, Panteleimon and Ioannikios.

They happened to be very devout and full of virtue, I loved them very much and because of that, with their blessing, I gave them absolute obedience. That helped me a lot. I also felt great love for God and got along very well. However, because of my sins, God allowed me to become ill, and my elders told me to go to my parents in my village of St. John, in Evia. Although I had sinned a lot from when I was a small child, when I returned to the world I continued to commit

sins, which today are very many. The world, however, thought highly of me, and everyone shouts that I'm a saint.

I however, feel that I am the most sinful person in the world. Of course, whatever I remembered I confessed, and I know God has forgiven me. But now I have the feeling that my spiritual sins are very many and I ask all those who have known me to pray for me, because, for as long as I lived, I humbly prayed for you, too. Now that I'm leaving for heaven, I have the feeling that God will say to me, *What are you doing here?* I have only one thing to say to him, "I am not worthy of here, Lord, but whatever your love wills, it'll do for me." From then on, I don't know what will happen. I however, wish for God's love to act.

I always pray that my spiritual children will love God, Who is everything, so that He will make us worthy to enter His earthly uncreated Church. We must begin from here. I always made the effort to pray, to read the hymns of the Church, the Holy Scriptures and the Lives of the Saints. May you do the same. I tried, by the grace of God, to approach God and may you also do the same.

I beg all of you to forgive me for whatever I did to upset you.

Hieromonk Porphyrios

Kavsokalyvia, June 4/17 1991



The life of the parents is the only thing that makes good children. Parents should be very patient and "saintlike" to their children. They should truly love their children. And the children will share this love! Parents themselves are usually responsible for the bad attitude. The parents don't help their children by lecturing them and repeating to them "advices," or by making them obeying strict rules in order to impose discipline. If the parents do not become "saints" and truly love their children and if they don't struggle for it, then they make a huge mistake. With their wrong and/or negative attitude the parents convey to their children their negative feelings. Then their children become reactive and insecure not only to their home, but to the society as well.

Love Christ and put nothing before His Love. He is joy, He is life, He is light. Christ is Everything. He is the ultimate desire, He is everything. Everything beautiful is in Christ.

Somebody who is Christ's must love Christ, and when he loves Christ he is delivered from the Devil, from hell and from death.

This is the way we should see Christ. He is our friend, our brother; He is whatever is good and beautiful. He is everything. Yet, He is still a friend and He shouts it out, *"You're my friends, don't you understand that? We're brothers. I don't hold hell in my hands. I am not threatening you. I love you. I want you to enjoy life together with me..."*

St. Porphyrios of Kavsokalyvia (+1991)

AMERICAN CHRISTMAS AND ORTHODOX NATIVITY

By ROCA Archbishop Seraphim (Ivanov) of Chicago (+1987). A timeless article for all Orthodox Christians that guides us to contrast the gentle image of the Holy Child with that of a jolly old Santa Claus.

On American Christmas, some of you more, some of you to a lesser extent, celebrate, have parties, give presents to each other, etc. Alas, American Christmas is acquiring a more and more pagan character: so much time is wasted on shopping, often unnecessarily, for clothing, for everything exterior, while inner spiritual concerns remain almost in oblivion.

The Nativity of the God-Child Christ, the Redeemer of mankind, is hardly given any thought whatsoever. The kind, gentle image of Christ is supplanted by that of jolly old Santa Claus—a distressing, blasphemous caricature of one of God's greatest saints—Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker of Mira, whom the Roman Catholics contrived to exclude from their order of saints some years ago.

The psychology of the masses is infectious. We, the zealots of religious piety, understand this and, in a fatherly way, for the sake of love, look askance, although not without sadness, at this chaotic tribute in the country which gave shelter to our flock. At the same time, we sincerely ask all members of our Russian Church Abroad: having given notice to the secular world, when the embers of the American festival have died, give some attention to your inner self—prepare yourself spiritually, in the Orthodox way, for our Orthodox Feast of the Nativity of Christ. First of all, for at least the remainder of Lent—*fast*. After all, there are not many fast days left. Whoever is able, prepare yourselves with fasting. On the holy eve of the feast, make certain that you come to church: the Nativity services are so beautiful! On the day of Nativity, try your best to get leave from work or school, even if you must lose a day's wages. Give them to God!

Keep holy, sanctify in a special way, this whole day of the Great Mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God. Do not do anything thoughtless on the Nativity. It is traditional on this day to visit the clergy, family or friends, to somehow reinforce the joy of the Festival. It is not sinful on this day to have guests or go out, within reason of course, so as not to lose the image of God, which we carry. It is certainly blessed for families and those of means (who have more of this world's goods) to invite people who are alone to their

Nativity dinner, especially those in poverty, to warm them with kindness and attention. How good this is and pleasing to God!

On this great day we can and must celebrate, especially spiritually. Too often this celebration is substituted with uncontrolled drunken parties. It is not a crime to be merry and celebrate a Festival, but not wildly. Examine the Holy Gospels. There the word *joy* appears nearly twenty times, but the word *gladness* appears only once, and even then in conjunction with the word *joy*. I will introduce the text: *But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth* (Lk 1:13-14).

On the Feast day of the Nativity it has become customary, seemingly from the Three Wise Men, to give each other gifts, especially the poor and needy. This is a good and holy custom! In America, we may divide it into two parts: on

American Christmas give gifts to family and friends, and on our Nativity to do good deeds; that is, send care packages to needy people, churches and charitable organizations.

In this way, we can pay tribute to the customary American Christmas as well as to our Great Orthodox Feast of the

Nativity of Christ. God grant that this advice would find its way to your hearts!

As pastors, we understand how, when all around people are celebrating, it is difficult not to be caught up in the festivities. However, blessed are those who maintain their fasting and prayer throughout the whole period of the Nativity Fast, leaving aside all celebration until our Orthodox Nativity.



The goal of reading is the application, in our lives, of what we read—not to learn it by heart, but to take it to heart; not to practice using our tongues, but to be able to receive the tongues of fire and to live the mysteries of God. If one studies a great deal—in order to acquire knowledge and to teach others—without living the things he teaches, he does no more than fill his head with hot air. At most, he will manage to ascend to the moon using machines. The goal of the Christian is to rise to God without machines.

St. Paisios the Athonite (+1994)

THE THREE GIFTS OF THE ORTHODOX SPIRITUAL FATHER

By Bishop Kallistos Ware.

Three gifts in particular distinguish the spiritual father.

Insight and Discernment

The first is *insight* and *discernment* (*diakrisis*), the ability to perceive intuitively the secrets of another's heart, to understand the hidden depths of which the other is unaware. The spiritual father penetrates beneath the conventional gestures and attitudes whereby we conceal our true personality from others and from ourselves; and beyond all these trivialities, he comes to grips with the unique person made in the image and likeness of God. This power is spiritual rather than psychic; it is not simply a kind of extra-sensory perception or a sanctified clairvoyance but the fruit of grace, presupposing concentrated prayer and an unremitting ascetic struggle.

With this gift of insight there goes the ability to use words with power. As each person comes before him, the *starets* knows—immediately and specifically—what it is that the individual needs to hear. (*Starets* is an elder of a Russian Orthodox monastery who functions as a spiritual father and teacher. Elders or spiritual fathers are charismatic spiritual leaders whose wisdom stems from God as obtained from ascetic experience. *Geronda* in Gk, *Ed.*). Today, we are inundated with words, but for the most part these are conspicuously *not* words uttered with power. The *starets* uses few words, and sometimes none at all; but by these few words or by his silence, he is able to alter the whole direction of a man's life. At Bethany, Christ used three words only: *Lazarus, come out* (Jn 11:43) and these three words, spoken with power, were sufficient to bring the dead back to life. In an age when language has been disgracefully trivialized, it is vital to rediscover the power of the word; and this means rediscovering the nature of silence, not just as a pause between words but as one of the primary realities of existence. Most teachers and preachers talk far too much; **the *starets* is distinguished by an austere economy of language.**

But for a word to possess power, it is necessary that there should be not only one who speaks with the genuine authority of personal experience, but also one who listens with

attention and eagerness. If someone questions a *starets* out of idle curiosity, it is likely that he will receive little benefit; but if he approaches the *starets* with ardent faith and deep hunger, the word that he hears may transfigure his being. The words of the *staretsy* (plural for *starets*, *Ed.*) are for the most part simple in verbal expression and devoid of literary artifice; to those who read them in a superficial way, they will seem jejune and banal (naïve/simplistic, and lacking in originality, *Ed.*).

The spiritual father's gift of insight is exercised primarily through the practice known as *disclosure of thoughts* (*logismoi*). In early Eastern monasticism the young monk used to go daily to his father and lay before him all the thoughts which had come to him during the day. (This practice is still maintained amongst authentic Orthodox monasteries, throughout the world, *Ed.*). This disclosure of thoughts includes far more than a confession of sins, since the novice

also speaks of those ideas and impulses which may seem innocent to him, but in which the spiritual father may discern secret dangers or significant signs. Confession is retrospective, dealing with sins that have already occurred; the disclosure of thoughts, on the other hand, is prophylactic, for it lays bare our *logismoi* before they have led to sin and so deprives them of their, power to harm. The purpose of the disclosure is not juridical (relating to "judicial" proceedings and the administration of the "law," *Ed.*), to secure absolution from guilt, but self-knowl-



edge, that each may see himself as he truly is.

Endowed with discernment, the spiritual father does not merely wait for a person to reveal himself, but shows to the other thoughts hidden from him. When people came to St. Seraphim of Sarov, he often answered their difficulties before they had time to put their thoughts before him. On many occasions the answer at first seemed quite irrelevant, and even absurd and irresponsible; for what St. Seraphim answered was not the question his visitor had consciously in mind, but the one he ought to have been asking. In all this St. Seraphim relied on the inward light of the Holy Spirit. He found it important, he explained, not to work out in advance that he was going to say; in that case, his words would represent merely his own human judgment which might well be in error, and not the judgment of God.

In St. Seraphim's eyes, the relationship between *starets* and spiritual child is stronger than death, and he therefore urged his children to continue their disclosure of thoughts to him even after his departure to the next life. These are the words which, by his own command, were written on his tomb: "When I am dead, come to me at my grave, and the more often, the better. Whatever is on your soul, whatever may have happened to you, come to me as when I was alive and, kneeling on the ground, cast all your bitterness upon my grave. Tell me everything and I shall listen to you, and all the bitterness will fly away from you. And as you spoke to me when I was alive, do so now. For I am living, and I shall be forever."

Ability to Love Others and to Make Others' Sufferings His Own

The second gift of the spiritual father is *the ability to love others and to make others' sufferings his own*. Of Abba Poimen, one of the greatest of the Egyptian *gerontes*, it is briefly and simply recorded: *He possessed love, and many came to him. He possessed love*—this is indispensable in all spiritual fatherhood. Unlimited insight into the secrets of men's hearts, if devoid of loving compassion, would not be creative but destructive; he who cannot love others will have little power to heal them.

Loving others involves suffering with and for them; such is the literal sense of compassion. *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.* (Gal 6:2). The spiritual father is the one who *par excellence* bears the burdens of others. "A *starets*," writes Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov*, "is one who takes your soul, your will, unto his soul and his will...." It is not enough for him to offer advice. He is also required to take up the soul of his spiritual children into his own soul, their life into his life. It is his task to pray for them, and his constant intercession on their behalf is more important to them than any words of counsel. It is his task likewise to assume their sorrows and their sins, to take their guilt upon himself, and to answer for them at the Last Judgment.

All this is manifest in a primary document of Eastern spiritual direction, the *Books of Barsanuphius and John*, embodying some 850 questions addressed to two elders of 6th century Palestine, together with their written answers. "As God Himself knows," St. Barsanuphius insists to his spiritual children, "there is not a second or an hour when I do not have you in my mind and in my prayers ... I care for you

more than you care for yourself ... I would gladly lay down my life for you." This is his prayer to God: *O Master, either bring my children with me into Your Kingdom, or else wipe me also out of Your book*. Taking up the theme of bearing others' burdens, St. Barsanuphius affirms: "I am bearing your burdens and your offences ... You have become like a man sitting under a shady tree ... I take upon myself the sentence of condemnation against you, and by the grace of Christ, I will not abandon you, either in this age or in the Age to Come."

Readers of Charles Williams will be reminded of the principle of "substituted love," which plays a central part in his *Descent into Hell*. The same line of thought is expressed by Dostoevsky's *Starets Zosima*: "There is only one way of salvation, and that is to make yourself responsible for all men's sins... To make yourself responsible in all sincerity for everything and for everyone." The ability of the *starets*

to support and strengthen others is measured by his willingness to adopt this way of salvation.

Yet the relation between the spiritual father and his children is not one-sided. Though he takes the burden of their guilt upon himself and answers for them before God, he cannot do this effectively unless they themselves are struggling wholeheartedly for their own salvation. Once a brother came to St. Anthony of Egypt and said: "Pray for me." But the Old Man replied: "Neither will I take pity on you nor will God, unless you make some effort of your own."

When considering the love of a *starets* for those under his care, it is important to give full meaning to the word "father" in the title "spiritual

father." As father and offspring in an ordinary family should be joined in mutual love, so it must also be within the "charismatic" family of the *starets*. It is primarily a relationship in the Holy Spirit, and while the wellspring of human affection is not to be unfeelingly suppressed, it must be contained within bounds. It is recounted how a young monk looked after his elder, who was gravely ill, for twelve years without interruption. Never once in that period did his elder thank him or so much as speak one word of kindness to him. Only on his death-bed did the Old Man remark to the assembled brethren, "He is an angel and not a man." The story is valuable as an indication of the need for spiritual detachment, but such an uncompromising suppression of all outward tokens of affection is not typical of the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, still less of Sts. Barsanuphius and John.



Power to Transform the Human Environment

A third gift of the spiritual father is *the power to transform the human environment*, both the material and the non-material. The gift of healing, possessed by so many of the *startsy*, is one aspect of this power: More generally, the *startets* helps his disciples to perceive the world as God created it and as God desires it once more to be. “Can you take too much joy in your Father’s works?” asks Thomas Traherne. “He is Himself in everything.” The true *startets* is one who discerns this universal presence of the Creator throughout creation, and assists others to discern it. In the words of William Blake, “If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything will appear to man as it is, infinite.” For the man who dwells in God, there is nothing mean and trivial: he sees everything in the light of Mount Tabor. “What is a merciful heart?” inquires St. Isaac the Syrian. “It is a heart that burns with love for the whole of creation—for men, for the birds, for the beasts, for the demons, for every creature. When a man with such a heart as this thinks of the creatures or looks at them, his eyes are filled with tears; an overwhelming compassion makes his heart grow! Small and weak, and he cannot endure to hear or see any suffering, even the smallest pain, inflicted upon any creature. Therefore he never ceases to pray, with tears even for the irrational animals, for the enemies of truth, and for those who do him evil, asking that they may be guarded and receive God’s mercy. And for the reptiles also he prays with a great compassion, which rises up endlessly in his heart until he shines again and is glorious like God.”

An all-embracing love, like that of Dostoevsky’s *Starets Zosima*, transfigures its object, making the human environment transparent, so that the uncreated energies of God shine through it. A momentary glimpse of what this transfiguration involves is provided by the celebrated conversation between St. Seraphim of Sarov and Nicholas Motovilov, his spiritual child. They were walking in the forest one winter’s day and St. Seraphim spoke of the need to acquire the Holy Spirit. This led Motovilov to ask how a man can know with certainty that he is *in the Spirit of God*:

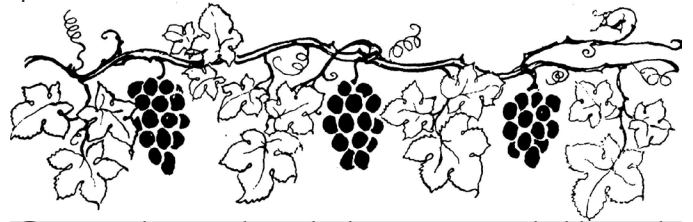
Then Fr. Seraphim took me very firmly by the shoulders and said: “My son, we are both, at this moment in the Spirit of God. Why don’t you look at me?”

“I cannot look, Father,” I replied, “because your eyes are flashing like lightning. Your face has become brighter than the sun, and it hurts my eyes to look, at you.”

“Don’t be afraid,” he said. “At this very moment you have yourself become as bright as I am. You are yourself in the fullness of the Spirit of God at this moment; otherwise you would not be able to see me as you do... but why, my son, do you not look me in the eyes? Just look, and don’t be afraid; the Lord is with us.”

After these words I glanced at his face, and there came over me an even greater reverent awe. Imagine in the center of the sun, in the dazzling light of its mid-day rays, the face of a man talking to you. You see the movement of his lips and the changing expression of his eyes and you hear his voice, you feel someone holding your shoulders, yet you do not see his hands, you do not even see yourself or his body, but only a blinding light spreading far around for several yards and lighting up with its brilliance the snow-blanket which covers the forest glade and the snowflakes which continue to fall unceasingly.

Such are, by God’s grace, the gifts of a *startets*, an Orthodox spiritual father.



Since we have pride—whether apparent or hidden without realizing it—God, desiring to purify us from this stinking condition, raises a storm in order to cast out all the “dregs” which have accumulated mainly in a time of spiritual negligence.

All kinds of rubbish and refuse are thrown into the sea, especially in the harbor, and if there were no storms, the sea would become a source of pestilence. But the fact that the sea is pure and wholesome is due to the occasional storms.

Spiritually, the same thing happens with our soul: with the sea of our soul. Refuse accumulates little by little from our various passions and careless deeds, and the devil throws in his own trash, too. We do not see how much refuse has accumulated. God knows, however, and since He wants to purify us, He stirs up storms in proportion to the accumulation of refuse, and thus He purifies the sea of our soul. Sometimes, after we pass through a temptation with patience, we see that our soul is calmed, joyful, and light as air. On our part, we must be careful not to accumulate refuse, so that storms of corresponding magnitude do not become necessary.

Storms are stirred up also in saints, but those are of another nature, they have another purpose: sometimes a trial helps them become more holy, or it is for their greater glory, or it is so that they may glorify God more, or it has to do with the storms raised against Orthodoxy, etc.

See to it, my child, that you have much humility, obedience to the advice of your Elder, love for all, and that you never trust your thoughts, but follow faithfully all of your Elder’s suggestions.

Elder Ephraim of Filotheou & Arizona
From *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*

HOW TO SAVE THE SOUL

By St. Theophan the Recluse.



What does one say to the person who asks: “How can I save my soul?”

This: Repent, and being strengthened by the power of grace in the Holy Mysteries, walk in the path of God’s commandments, under the direction which the Holy Church gives you through its God-given priesthood. All of this must be done in a spirit of sincere faith which has no reservations.

What then is faith?

Faith is the sincere confession that God, Who is to be worshipped by all, the Trinity, Who created all things and provides for all, saves us who are fallen, through the power of the death on the Cross of the incarnate Son of God and by the grace of the Most Holy Spirit in His Holy Church. The beginnings of renewal, which are established in this life, will appear in all their glory in the future age, in a way that the mind cannot comprehend nor the tongue express.

O our God, how great are Thy promises!

How then does one walk in the path of the commandments unswervingly? This cannot be answered in one word, for life is a complex matter. Here is what is necessary:

a) Repent, and turn to the Lord, admit your sins, weep for them, with heartfelt contrition, and confess them before your spiritual father. Vow in word and in your heart before the face of the Lord not to offend Him further with your sins.

b) Then, by abiding in God in mind and heart, endeavour to fulfil in body the duties and affairs which your station in life imposes upon you.

c) In this labor most of all guard your heart from evil thoughts and feelings—pride, vainglory, anger, judging of others, hatred, envy, scorn, despondency, attachment to things and people, scattered thoughts, anxiety, all sensual pleasures and everything that separates the mind and heart from God.

d) In order to stand firm in this labor, resolve beforehand not to withdraw from what you recognize to be necessary, even if it may, mean death. To achieve this, when you first resolve to do so, offer your life to God in order to live not for your own sake, but for God alone.

e) A support for life in this manner is a humble offering of one’s self to the will of God, and not depending on one’s self; the spiritual arena in which this life is accomplished is patience or an unswerving stand in the ranks of redeemed

life, with a cheerful endurance of all the labors and unpleasantness that are linked with this.

f) A support for patience is faith, or the assurance that, working in this way for God, you are His servant and He is your Master, Who sees your efforts, is gladdened by them and values them; hope that the help of God which is ever protecting you, is always ready and waiting for you, and will descend upon you in your time of need, that God will not forsake you to the end of your life, and preserving you as one faithful to His commandments here, among all temptations, He will lead you through death to His eternal Kingdom; love, which meditates day and night upon the beloved Lord, in every way strives to do only what is pleasing to Him, and avoids everything that might offend Him in thought, word or deed.

g) The weapons of such a life are: prayers in church and at home, especially mental prayer, fasting according to one’s strength and the rules of the Church, vigilance, solitude, physical labors, frequent confession of sins, Holy Communion, reading of the Word of God and the writings of the Holy Fathers, conversations with God-fearing people, frequent consultation with one’s spiritual father about all the events of one’s internal and external life. The foundation of all these labors in measure, time and place is wisdom, with the counsel of those who are experienced.

h) Guard yourself with fear. For this remember the end—death, judgment, hell, the heavenly Kingdom. Most of all be attentive to yourself: preserve a sober mind and an untroubled heart.

i) Set as a final goal the kindling of the fire of the spirit, so that the spiritual fire will burn in your heart and, gathering up all your strength into one, will begin to build your inner man and finally burn up the tares of your sins and passions.

Arrange your life in this manner, and with God’s grace you will be saved.



Provided they live a worthy life, both those who choose to dwell in the midst of noise and hubbub and those who dwell in monasteries, mountains and caves can achieve salvation. Solely because of their faith in Him God bestows great blessings on them. Hence those who because of their laziness have failed to attain salvation will have no excuse to offer on the day of judgment. For He who promised to grant us salvation simply on account of our faith in Him is not a liar.

St. Symeon the New Theologian

THE ORTHODOX CITY HERMIT

ALEXANDROS PAPADIAMANDIS (+ JANUARY 3RD, 1911), GREECE'S FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY AND CHARLES DICKENS

Source: "A Short Biography of Alexandros Papadiamandis," *From the first Chapter of A. Keselopoulos, "Greece's Dostoevsky: The Theological Vision of Alexandros Papadiamandis,"* (2011).

One of the greatest figures in modern Greek literature, Alexandros Papadiamandis was born on the Greek island of Skiathos on March 4th, 1851, "on the second Sunday of Lent and the feast day of Gregory Palamas, while they were chanting the *triadiká* in church" (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 intimation of God's favor appeared during Papadiamandis' 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] verse."

From his childhood years, Alexandros had the opportunity to live the tradition of the *Kollyvádes* fathers [the *Kollyvádes* (Greek *Κολλυβάδες*) were the members of a movement in Eastern Orthodoxy that began in the second half

of the eighteenth century among the monastic community of Mount Athos, which was concerned with the restoration of traditional practices and opposition to unwarranted innovations, and which turned unexpectedly into a movement of spiritual regeneration. *Ed.*] 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' 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 Angalianou, they built a beautiful, awe-inspiring monastery—patriarchal, *Stavropegic*, and coenobitic—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 *Kollyvádes*, who were under persecution on the Holy Mountain, as they insisted on *precisionx*

(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 by those venerable *Kollyvádes*, 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 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 and, even more so, Nikos Gabriel Pentzakis 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’s writings and life bear witness to the successful cultivation of his gifts.

It was in 1887 that he found what could be described as his spiritual bolt-hole in the turbulent and often harsh world of the metropolis: the small church of the Prophet Elisha, set in the courtyard of a private house in the old part of the city, under the rock of the Acropolis. There Papa-Nicholaos Planas, a simple priest born in the same year as Papadiamandis, a man of prayer and of great spiritual gifts, would regularly hold vigil services, gathering people from all walks of life into the crucible of the little church. Papa-Nicholaos was canonized in 1992.

Papadiamandis never married. He was a shy and retiring man, as the few extant photographs of him testify, a man seemingly

not of this world despite his acute observations of it. He also had to provide for his unmarried sisters at home. But despite his introspective nature he had a small circle of close friends, including Pavlos Nirvanas and Yannis Vlachoyannis, well-known Athenian men of letters who on various occasions undertook the role of literary agents and helped him during hard times.

Papadiamandis’ longest works were the serialized novels “The Gypsy Girl,” “The Emigrant,” and “Merchants of Nations.” These were adventures set around the Mediterranean, with rich plots involving captivity, war, pirates, the plague, etc. However, the author is best remembered for his scores of short stories. Written in his own version of the then official language of Greece, *katharevousa* (a “pur-



ist” written language heavily influenced by ancient Greek), Papadiamantis’ stories are little gems. They provide lucid and lyrical portraits of country life in Skiathos, or urban life in the poorer neighborhoods of Athens, with frequent flashes of deep psychological insight.

Papadiamantis’ deep Christian faith, complete with the mystical feeling associated with the Orthodox Christian liturgy, suffuses many stories. Most of his work is tinged with melancholy, and resonates with empathy with people’s suffering, regardless of whether they are saints or sinners, innocent or conflicted.

His work is seminal in Modern Greek literature. It is a body of work, however, that is virtually impossible to translate, as the magic of his language is founded on the Greek *diglossia*: elaborately crafted, high *katharevousa* for the narrative, interspersed with authentic local dialect for the dialogue, and with all dialectical elements used in the narrative formulated in strict *katharevousa*, and therefore in forms that had never actually existed.

Papadiamantis’ desire to glorify God is shown even more in the way he ended his life 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 Papadiamantis’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. Papadiamantis 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, on the 2nd 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, Papadiamantis wearily said, “Don’t worry about the book; tonight I will chant 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).

Papadiamantis chanted 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,” Papadiamantis 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.



On Theophany, that is, the Day of the Lord’s Baptism, every year a great miracle is performed. The Holy Spirit, coming down upon the water, changes its natural properties. It becomes incorrupt, that is it does not spoil, remains transparent and fresh for many years, receives the grace to heal illnesses, to drive away demons and every evil power, to preserve people and their dwellings from every danger, to sanctify various objects whether for church or home use. Therefore Orthodox Christians with reverence drink Holy Water, a great *Agiasma* (*holy thing*), as the Greeks call it.

One should always have at home enough Theophany water so that it will last the whole year, and make use of it at every need; in cases of illness, leaving on a journey, whenever one is upset, students when going to examinations. They do well who daily, before eating any kind of food, drink a little Holy Water. It strengthens the powers of our soul—if it is done, of course, with prayer and reverence, and one does not merely expect from it a mechanical result.

Every priest should take care to bless a sufficient quantity of water for his church, so that it will be on hand for the course of the whole year for every need and to be given out to those who ask for it; and parishioners should provide for themselves at Theophany with Holy Water for the whole year and even so that it can be kept for future years.

St. John Maximovich of Shanghai and San Francisco

Χριστούγεννα στή Σπηλιά

Φώτης Κόντογλου.

Χριστούγεννα παραμονές. Χριστούγεννα και χιονιάς πάντα πάνε μαζί. Μά εκείνη τη χρονιά οί καιροί ήτανε φουρτουνιασμένοι παρὰ φύση. Χιόνι δὲν ἔρριχνε. Μοναχὰ πὸν ἡ ἀτμόσφαιρα ἦτανε θυμωμένη, καὶ φυσούσανε σκληροὶ βοριάδες μὲ χιονόνερο καὶ μ' ἀστραπές. Καμμιά βδομάδα ὁ καιρὸς καλωσύνεψε καὶ φυσούσε μία τραμουντάνα πὸν ἀρμενιζότανε. Μά τὴν παραμονὴ τὰ κατσούφιασε. Τὴν παραμονὴ ἀπὸ τὸ πρῶτ' ὁ οὐρανὸς ἦτανε μαῦρος σὰν μολύβι, κ' ἐπίασε κ' ἔρριχνε βελονιαστὸ χιονόνερο.

Σὲ μία τοποθεσία πὸν τὴ λέγανε Σκρόφα, βρισκότανε ἓνα μαντρὶ μὲ γιδοπρόδατα, ἀπάνω σε μία πλαγιὰ τοῦ βουνοῦ πὸν κοίταζε κατὰ τὸ πέλαγο. Τὸ μέρος αὐτὸ ἦτανε ἄγριο κ' ἔρημο, γεμάτο ἀγριόπρινα, σκίνους καὶ κουμαριές, πὸν ἦτανε κατακόκκινες ἀπὸ τὰ κούμαρα. Τὸ μαντρὶ ἦτανε τριγυρισμένο μὲ ξεροτρόχαλο [=ξερολιθιά].

Οἱ τσομπάνηδες καθότανε μέσα σὲ μία σπηλιὰ πὸν βρισκότανε παραμέσα καὶ πιδ ψηλὰ ἀπὸ τὴ μάντρα καὶ πὸν κοίταζε κατὰ τὴ νοτιὰ. Μεγάλη σπηλιὰ, μὲ τρία-τέσσερα χωρίσματα, κὶ ἀψηλὴ ὡς τρία μπόγια. Τὰ ζωντανὰ σταλιάζανε κάτω ἀπὸ τὶς χαμηλές σάγιες, πὸν ἔσκυβες γιὰ νὰ μπεῖς μέσα. Σωροὶ ἀπὸ κοπριά στεκόντανε ἐδῶ κ' ἐκεῖ, καὶ βγάζανε μία σπιρτόζα μυρουδιά. Χάμω, τὸ χῶμα ἦτανε σκουπισμένο καὶ καθαρὸ, γιατί οἱ τσομπάνηδες ἦτανε μερακλήδες, καὶ βάζανε τὰ παιδιά καὶ σκουπίζανε ταχτικά μὲ κάτι σκουῦπες κανωμένες ἀπὸ ἀστοιβιές.

Ἀρχισέλιγκας ἦτανε ὁ Γιάννης ὁ Μπαρμπάκος, ἓνας ἄνθρωπος μισάγριος, γεννημένος ἀνάμεσα στὰ γίδια καὶ στὰ πρόβατα. Ἦτανε μαῦρος, μαλλιαρὸς, μὲ γένεια μαῦρα κόρακας, σγουρὰ καὶ σφιχτὰ σὰν τοῦ κριαριοῦ. Φοροῦσε σαλβάρια κοντὰ ὡς τὸ γόνατο, σελάχι στὴ μέση του, ζουνάρι πλατὺ, βαριὰ τζεσμέδια στὰ ποδάρια του. Τὸ κεφάλι του τὸ εἶχε τυλιγμένο μ' ἓνα μεγάλο μαντίλι σὰν σαρίκι, κ' οἱ μαρχαμάδες [= τὰ κρόσια] κρεμόντανε στὸ πρόσωπό του. Ἀρχαῖος ἄνθρωπος!

Εἶχε δυὸ παραγιοῦς, τὸν Ἀλέξη καὶ τὸν Δυσσέα, δυὸ παλληκαρόπουλα ὡς εἴκοσι χρονῶν. Εἶχε καὶ τρία παιδιά, πὸν τοὺς βοηθοῦσανε στ' ἄρμεγμα καὶ κοιτάζανε τὸ μαντρὶ νὰ ἴναι καθαρὸ. Αὐτὲς οἱ ἔξι ψυχές ἐζούσανε σὲ κείνο τὸ μέρος, κρυφὰ ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό. Ἀνάγια βλέπανε ἄνθρωπο.

Ἡ σπηλιὰ ἦτανε καπνισμένη κὶ ὁ βράχος εἶχε μαυρίσει ὡς ἀπάνω ἀπὸ τὴν καπνιά πὸν ἔβγαине ἀπὸ τὸ στόμα τῆς σπηλιᾶς. Ἐκεῖ μέσα εἶχανε τὰ γιατάκια τους, σὰν μεντέρια, στρωμένα μὲ προβιές. Στοὺς τοίχους τῆς σπηλιᾶς εἶχανε μπηξεί παλούκια μέσα στὶς σκισμάδες τοῦ βράχου, καὶ κρεμόντανε καρδάρες, τυροβόλια, μαγιές, τουφέκια καὶ μαχαίρια, λὲς κ' ἦτανε λημέρι τῶν ληστῶν. Ἀπ' ἔξω φυλάγανε οἱ σκύλοι, ὅλοι ἄγριοι σὰν λύκοι.

Ἡ ἀκροθαλασσιὰ βρισκότανε ὡς ἓνα τσιγάρο ἀπόσταση ἀπὸ τὴ μάντρα. Ἦτανε ἔρημη, κὶ ἄλλο δὲν ἀκουγότανε ἐκεῖ πέρα παρὰ μοναχὰ ὁ ἀγκομαχητὸς τοῦ πελάγου, μέρα - νύχτα. Μὲ τὸν βοριά ἀπαγκιάζε, καὶ καμμιά φορὰ πόδιζε κανένα καίκι. Ἀλλιῶς δὲν ἔβλεπες βάρκα πουθενά. Ἀπὸ τὸ μαντρὶ ἀγνάντευε κανένας τὸ πέλαγο ἀνάμεσα στὰ δέντρα, καὶ τὸ μάτι ξεχώριζε καθαρὰ τα βουνὰ τῆς Μυτιλήνης.

Τὴν παραμονὴ τὰ Χριστούγεννα, εἶπαμε πὼς ὁ καιρὸς χάλασε, κὶ ἄρχισε νὰ πέφτει χιονόνερο. Οἱ τσομπάνηδες εἶχανε μαζευτεῖ στὴ σπηλιὰ κὶ ἀνάψανε μία μεγάλη φωτιὰ καὶ κουβεντιάζανε. Τὰ παιδιά εἶχανε σφάξει δυὸ ἄρνια καὶ τὰ γδέρνανε. Ὁ Ἀλέξης ἔβαλε ἀπάνω σ' ἓνα ράφι μυτζήθρες καὶ τυρὶ ἀνάλατο μέσα στὰ τυροβόλια, ἀγίζι καὶ γιαοῦρτι. Ὁ Δυσσέας εἶχε μία παλιὰ Σύνοψη, κ' ἐπειδὴ γνῶριζε λίγο ἀπὸ ψαλτικά κ' ἤξερε καὶ πέντε γράμματα, διάβαζε τὶς Κυριακάδες κὶ ὅποτε ἦτανε γιορτὴ κανένα τροπάρη καὶ λιγοστὰ ἀπὸ τὸν Ἐξάψαλμο. Ἐκείνη τὴν ὥρα φυλλομετροῦσε τὴ Σύνοψη, γιὰ νὰ δεῖ τί γράμματα ἦτανε νὰ πεῖ.

Θᾶ ἴτανε ὥρα σπερινοῦ. Κεῖνη τὴν ὥρα ἀκούσανε κάτι τουφεκιές. Καταλάβανε πὼς θᾶ ἴτανε τίποτα κυνηγοί. Τὸ ἓνα παιδί, πὸν εἶχε πάγει νὰ φέρει ξύλα μὲ τὸν γάϊδαρο, εἶπε πὼς τὸ πρῶτ' εἶχε ἀκούσει τουφεκιές κατὰ τὴν ἀπὸ μέσα θάλασσα, κατὰ τὴν Ἅγια-Παρασκευή. Οἱ σκύλοι πιάσανε καὶ γαβγίζανε ὅλοι μαζί καὶ πεταχτήκανε ὄξω ἀπὸ τὴ μάντρα.

Σὲ λίγο φανερωθῆκανε ἀπὸ πάνω ἀπὸ τὴ σπηλιὰ δυὸ ἄνθρωποι μὲ τουφέκια, καὶ φωνάζανε τοὺς τσομπάνηδες νὰ μαζέψουνε τὰ σκυλιά, πὸν χυμήξανε ἀπάνω τους. Ὁ Σκούρης ἄφησε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους κὶ ἄρπαξε ἓνα ἀπὸ τὰ ζαγάρια πὸν ἔχανε οἱ κυνηγοὶ καὶ τὸ ξετίναζε νὰ τὸ πνίξει. Ὁ κυνηγὸς ἔρριξε ἀπάνου του, καὶ τὰ σκάγια τὸν πονέσανε καὶ γύρισε πίσω, μαζί μὲ τ' ἄλλα μαντρόσκυλα, πὸν πηγαίνανε πισώδρομα



ὅσο κατεβαίνανε οἱ κυνηγοί. Τέλος πάντων, ἐβγήκε ὁ Μπαρμπάκος μὲ τοὺς ἄλλους καὶ πιάσανε τὸν Σκούρη καὶ τὸν δέσανε, διώξανε καὶ τ' ἄλλα σκυλιά.

«Ὡρα καλή, βρὲ παιδιά!» φώναξε ὁ Παναγῆς ὁ Καρδαμίτσας, ζωσμένους μὲ τὰ φουσεγκλίκια, μὲ τὸ ταγάρι γεμάτο πουλιά.

Ὁ ἄλλος, ποὺ ἦτανε μαζί του, ἦτανε ὁ γυιὸς του ὁ Δημητρός.

«Πολλὰ τὰ ἔτη!» Ἀποκριθῆκανε ὁ Μπαρμπάκος κ' ἠ συντροφιά του. «Καλῶς ὀρίσατε!»

Τοὺς πήγανε στὴ σπηλιά.

«Μωρέ, τ' εἶν' ἐδῶ; Παλάτι! Παλάτι μὲ βασιλοποῦλες!» Εἶπε ὁ μπαρμπα-Παναγῆς, δείχνοντας τὶς μυτζιθρες ποὺ ἀχνίζανε.

Τοὺς βάλανε νὰ καθήσουνε, τοὺς κάνανε καφέ. Οἱ κυνηγοὶ εἶχανε κονιάκι. Κεραστήκανε.

«Βρὲ ἀδερφέ», ἔλεγε ὁ μπάρμπα-Παναγῆς, «ποιὸς νὰ τὸ ἔλεγε, χρονιάρια μέρα, πὼς θὰ κάνομε Χριστούγεννα στὸ σπήλαιο ποὺ ἐγεννήθη ὁ Χριστός! Ἐχτὲς περάσαμε στὴν Ἅγια - Παρασκευή, νὰ κυνηγήσουμε λίγο. Ἄ, δικός μας εἶναι ὁ ἡγούμενος, κοιμηθήκαμε στὸ μοναστήρι, καὶ σήμερα τὴν αὐγὴ βγήκαμε στὸ κυνήγι.

Βλέποντας πὼς φουρτούνιασε ὁ καιρὸς, εἶπαμε πὼς δὲ θὰ μπορέσουμε νὰ περάσουμε τὸ μπουγάζι μὲ τὴ σαπιόβαρκα τοῦ μπαρμπα-Μανώλη τοῦ Βασιλέ. Κ' ἐπειδὴ ξέραμε ἀπ' ἄλλη φορὰ τὸ μαντρί, καὶ μὲ τὸ κυνήγι πέσαμε σὲ τοῦτα τὰ σύνορα, εἶπαμε νὰ ῥθουμε στ' ἀρχοντικό σας... Μωρέ, τί σκύλο ἔχετε; Αὐτὸ εἶναι θηρίο, ἀσλάνι καὶ καπλάνι!

Μπρέ, μπρέ, μπρέ! Τὸ ζαγάρι τὸ πετσόκοψε! Γιὰ κοίταξε τί χάλια τὸ ἔκανε!»

Καὶ γύρισε σὲ μία γωνιὰ τῆς σπηλιάς, ποὺ κλαμούριζε τὸ σκυλλὶ κ' ἔτρεμε σὰν θερμισσμένο.

«Ἐλα δῶ, Φλόξ! Φλόξ!»

Μὰ ἡ Φλόξ ἀπὸ τὴν τρομάρα τῆς τρύπωνε πιὸ βαθιά.

Ἄμα ἤπιανε δυὸ-τρία κονιάκια, ὁ μπαρμπα-Παναγῆς ἄρχισε νὰ μασᾶ τὰ μουστάκια του, καὶ στὸ τέλος ἐπίασε νὰ τραγουδᾶ:

Καλὴν ἐσπέραν, ἀρχοντες, ἂν εἶναι ὀρισμός σας,

Χριστοῦ τὴν θεῖαν γέννησιν νὰ πῶ στ' ἀρχοντικό σας.

Ἦστερα ὁ Δυσσέας ἔψαλε τὸ «Χριστὸς γεννᾶται, δοξάσατε».

Ἐκεῖνη τὴν ὥρα ἀκούσανε πάλι τὰ σκυλιά νὰ γαβγίζουνε. Στείλανε τὰ παιδιά νὰ δοῦνε τί εἶναι. Ὁ ἀγέρας εἶχε μπουρνιασει κ' ἔρριχνε παγωμένο νερό. Κρύο τάντανο!

Σὲ λίγο πάψανε τὰ σκυλιά, καὶ γυρίσανε πίσω τὰ παιδιά. Ἀπὸ πίσω τους μπήκανε στὴ σπηλιά τρεῖς ἄντρες, ποὺ φαινότανε πὼς ἦτανε θαλασσινοί, καὶ δυὸ καλόγεροι, βρεμένοι ὅλοι καὶ ξυλιασμένοι ἀπ' τὸ κρῦο. Τοὺς καλωσορίσανε, τοὺς βάλανε καὶ καθήσανε.

Μόλις πήγε κοντὰ στὴ φωτιὰ ὁ πρῶτος, ὁ καπετάνιος, τὸν γνώρισε ὁ Μπαρμπάκος κ' ἔβγαλε μία χαρούμενη φωνή. Ἦτανε ὁ καπετάν-Κωσταντῆς ὁ Μπιλικτσῆς, ποὺ ταξίδευε στὴν Πόλη. Εἶχε περάσει κι ἄλλη φορὰ ἀπὸ τὴ Σκρόφα, κ' εἶχανε δέσει φιλία μὲ τὸν Μπαρμπάκο, ποὺ δὲν ἤξερε τί περιποίηση νὰ

τοὺς κάνει. Οἱ ἄλλοι δυὸ ἦτανε γεμιτζῆδες κι αὐτοί, ἄνθρωποι τοῦ καιριοῦ του.

Ὁ ἕνας ἀπὸ τοὺς καλόγερους, ἕνας σωματώδης μὲ μαῦρα γένεια, ὁμορφάνθρωπος, ἦτανε ὁ πάτερ-Σιλβέστρος Κουκουτός, καλογερόπαπας. Ὁ ἄλλος ἦτανε λιγνός, μὲ λίγες ἀνάριες τρίχες στὸ πηγούνι, σὰν τὸν

Ἅγιο Γιάννη τὸν Καλυβίτη. Τὸν λέγανε Ἀρσένιο Σγουρηῆ.

Ὁ καπετάν-Κωσταντῆς ἐρχότανε ἀπὸ τὴν Πόλη καὶ πήρε στὸ καίκι τὸν πάτερ-Σιλβέστρο, ποὺ εἶχε πάγει στὴν Πόλη ἀπὸ τ' Ἅγιον Ὄρος γιὰ ἐλέη, κ' ἤθελε νὰ κάνει Χριστούγεννα στὴν πατρίδα του. Ὁ πάτερ-Ἀρσένιος εἶχε ταξιδέψει μαζί του ἀπὸ τὴ Μονὴ τοῦ Παντοκράτορα στὸ Ὄρος, κ' ἦτανε ἀπὸ τὴ Θεσσαλία.

Ταξιδέψανε καλά. Μὰ σὰν καβατζάρανε τὸν Κάβο-Μπαμπά, ὁ ἀγέρας μπουρνιασε, κι ὅλη τὴ μέρα ἀρμενίζανε μὲ μουδαρισμένα πανιά καὶ μὲ τὸν στάντζο, ὡς ποὺ φτάξανε κατὰ τὸ βράδυ ἀπ' ἔξω ἀπὸ τὸ Ταλιάνι. Ὁ καιρὸς σκύλιαξε κι ὁ καπετάνιος δὲν μπόρεσε νὰ μπεῖ στὸ μπουγάζι, νὰ κάνομε Χριστούγεννα στὴν πατρίδα.

Ἀποφάσισε λοιπὸν νὰ ποδίσει, καὶ πήγε καὶ φουντάρισε στ' ἀπάγκειο, πίσω ἀπὸ ἕναν μικρὸν κάβο, ἀπὸ κάτω ἀπὸ τὸ μαντρί. Κ' ἐπειδὴ θυμήθηκε τὸν φίλο του τὸν Μπαρμπάκο, πήρε τοὺς γέροντες καὶ τοὺς δυὸ ἄλλους νοματέους καὶ τραβήξανε γιὰ



τὸ ἀγίλι [=μαντρὶ]. Στὸ τσερνίκι εἶχανε ἀφήσει τὸν μπαρμπ' - Ἀπόστολο μὲ τὸν μοῦτσο.

Σὰν εἶδανε πὼς στὴ σπηλιὰ βρισκότανε κι ὁ κὺρ-Παναγῆς μὲ τὸν κυρ-Δημητρός, γίνηκε μεγάλη χαρὰ καὶ φασαρία.

«Μωρὲ νὰ δεῖς», ἔλεγε ὁ κὺρ-Παναγῆς, «τώρα ψέλναμε τὸ τροπάρι, κι ἀπάνω ποὺ λέγαμε «ἐν αὐτῇ γὰρ οἱ τοῖς ἄστροις λατρεύοντες ὑπὸ ἀστέρος ἐδιδάσκοντο...», φτάξατε κ' ἐσεῖς οἱ μάγοι μὲ τὰ δῶρα! Γιατί βλέπω μία νταμιζάνα κρασί, βλέπω λακέρδα, βλέπω χαβιάρια, βλέπω παξιμάδια, μπακλαβάδες, «σμύρναν, χρυσὸν καὶ λίβανον»!

Χά! Χά! Χά! — γελοῦσε δυνατὰ ὁ κὺρ-Παναγῆς, μισομεθυσμένος καὶ ψευδίζοντας, καὶ χάιδευε τὴν κοιλιὰ του, γιατί ἦτανε καλοφαγάς.

Στὸ μεταξὺ ὁ πάτερ Ἀρσένιος ὁ Σγουρῆς ζωντάνευε ὁ καϊμένος, κ' εἶπε σιγανὰ χαμογελώντας καὶ τρίδοντας τὰ χέρια του:

«Δόξα σοι ὁ Θεός, Κύριε ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστέ, ποὺ μᾶς ἐλύτρωσες ἐκ τοῦ κλύδωνος!» κ' ἔκανε τὸν σταυρό του.

Ὁ πάτερ- Σίλβεστρος εἶπε νὰ σηκωθοῦνε ὄρθιοι, κ' εἶπε λίγες εὐχές, τὸ «Χριστὸς γεννᾶται», κ' ὕστερα μὲ τὴ βροντερὴ φωνή του ἔψαλε:

«Μεγάλυνον ψυχὴ μου, τὴν τιμιωτέραν,
καὶ ἐνδοξοτέραν τῶν ἄνω στρατευμάτων
Μυστήριον ξένον, ὁρῶ καὶ παράδοξον!
Οὐρανὸν τὸ Σπήλαιον, θρόνον Χερουβικόν,
τὴν Παρθένον, τὴν φάτνην χωρίον,
ἐν ᾧ ἀνεκλίθη ὁ ἀχώρητος, Χριστὸς ὁ Θεός,
ὄν ἀνυμνοῦντες μεγαλύνομεν.»

Ὑστερα καθίσανε στὸ τραπέζι. Τέτοιο τραπέζι βλογημένο καὶ χαρούμενο δὲν ἔγινε σὲ κανένα παλάτι. Τρώγανε καὶ ψέλνανε. Καὶ τοῦ πουλιοῦ τὸ γάλα εἶχε ἀπάνω, ἀπὸ τὰ μοσκοβολημένα τ' ἄρνια, τὰ τυριά, τὰ μανούρια, τὶς μυτζήθρες, τὶς μπεκάτσες καὶ τ' ἄλλα πουλιὰ τοῦ κυνηγιοῦ, ὡς τὴ λακέρδα καὶ τ' ἄλλα τὰ πολίτικα ποὺ φέρανε οἱ θαλασσινοί, καθὼς καὶ κρασὶ μπρούσικο.

Ὅξω φουσομανοῦσε ὁ χιονιάς, καὶ βογγούσανε τὰ δέντρα κ' ἡ θάλασσα ἀπὸ μακριά. Ἀνάμεσα στὰ βουίσματα ἀκουγότανε καὶ τὰ κουδούνια ἀπὸ τὰ ζωντανὰ ποὺ ἀναχαράζανε. Μέσα ἀπὸ τὴ σπηλιὰ ἔβγαине ἡ κόκκινη ἀντιφεγγιὰ τῆς φωτιᾶς μαζί μὲ τὶς ψαλμωδίες καὶ μὲ τὶς χαρούμενες φωνές. Κι ὁ κὺρ-Παναγῆς ἔκλεβε κάπου-κάπου λίγον ὕπνο, ρουχάλιζε λιγάκι κ' ὕστερα ξυπνοῦσε κ' ἔψελνε μαζί μὲ τὴ συνοδεία.

Ἀληθινά, ἀπὸ τὴ Γέννηση τοῦ Χριστοῦ δὲν ἔλειπε τίποτα. Ὅλα ὑπῆρχανε: τὸ σπήλαιο, οἱ ποιμένες, οἱ μάγοι μὲ τὰ δῶρα, κι ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Χριστὸς ἦτανε παρὼν μὲ τοὺς δύο μαθητές του, ποὺ εὐλογοῦσαν «τὴν βρῶσιν καὶ τὴν πόσιν».

Μίας Οικονομικῆς Κατάρρευσης Προηγείται ἡ Πνευματικὴ Ἥττα

Γράφει ὁ Δημήτριος Νατσιός, Δάσκαλος.

Πλησίασε κάποτε ἓνας Εὐρωπαῖος, ἓνας Φράγκος, τὸν τροπαιοῦχο νομπελίστα μας ποιητὴ, Γιῶργος Σεφέρη, πειράζων αὐτὸν καὶ λέγων:

—Μά, πιστεύετε σοβαρὰ ὅτι εἶστε ἀπόγονοι τοῦ Λεωνίδα, τοῦ Θεμιστοκλή;

Ἀπάντησε ὁ ποιητής:

—Ὅχι, εἴμαστε ἀπόγονοι μονάχα τῆς μάνας μας, ποὺ μᾶς μίλησε Ἑλληνικά, ποὺ προσευχήθηκε Ἑλληνικά, ποὺ μᾶς νανούρισε μὲ παραμύθια γιὰ τὸν Ὀδυσσεά, τὸν Ἡρακλῆ, τὸν Μαρμαρωμένο Βασιλιὰ καὶ τὸν Παπαφλέσσα, ποὺ ζύμωνε κάθε Πρωτοχρονιὰ τὴν βασιλόπιτα καὶ ἔνιωθε τὴν ψυχὴ τῆς νὰ βουρκώνει τὴν Μεγάλη Παρασκευή, μπροστὰ το ξόδι τοῦ νεκροῦ Θεανθρώπου.

Βαθιὰ θεολογικὴ ἢ ἀπάντηση τοῦ ποιητῆ. Τὸ ἐρώτημα εἶναι πόσοι ἀπὸ μᾶς μποροῦν νὰ δώσουν σήμερα τὴν ἴδια ἀπόκριση.

Χριστούγεννα σὲ λίγες μέρες. «*Ἡ πασῶν τῶν ἑορτῶν ἐπεδήμησεν ἑορτῆ, καὶ τὴν οἰκουμένην εὐφροσύνης ἐπλήρωσεν ἑορτῆ ἢ τῶν καλῶν ἀπάντων ἀκρόπολις, ἢ πηγῆ καὶ ῥίζα τῶν παρ' ἡμῖν ἀγαθῶν, δι' ἧς ὁ οὐρανὸς ἀνεώχθη, πνεῦμα κατεπέμφθη, τὸ μεσότοιχον ἀνῆρέθη, ὁ φραγμὸς ἐλύθη, τὰ διεστῶτα ἠνώθη, τὸ σκότος ἐσβέσθη, τὸ φῶς ἔλαμψεν, οὐρανὸς ἐδέξατο τὴν φύσιν τὴν ἀπὸ γῆς, γῆ τὸν ἐπὶ τῶν Χερουβιμ καθήμενον οἱ δοῦλοι γεγόνασιν ἐλεύθεροι, οἱ ἔχθροὶ υἱοὶ, οἱ ἀλλότριοι κληρονόμοι...*» Εἶναι λόγια τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰωάννη τοῦ Χρυσοστόμου. (Λόγος ΛΔ', «Εἰς τὴν Ἁγίαν τοῦ Χριστοῦ Γέννησιν»). Ἀπὸ ἐχθροί, λέει ὁ ἅγιος, χάρις στὴν ἐνανθρώπιση τοῦ Λόγου τοῦ Θεοῦ, γίναμε υἱοί. Ὅμως τὰ τελευταῖα χρόνια ἐγκαταλείψαμε τὸν πατρικὸ οἶκο καὶ περιπλανιόμαστε στὶς Λόντρες καὶ τὰ Βερολίνα.

Ἄλλους ἢ στείρα προγονολατρία, ἄλλους ἢ ξενομανία καὶ ὁ ἄκρατος πιθικισμὸς, ἄλλους ὁ παρασιτικὸς καταναλωτισμὸς καὶ τὸ διογκωμένο σύμπλεγμα κατωτερότητας μᾶς ὀδήγησαν στὴν περιφρόνηση τοῦ μοναδικοῦ αὐτοῦ θησαυροῦ, τῆς παράδοσης τῆς Ρωμαιοσύνης. Γιορτάζουμε τὰ Χριστούγεννα χωρὶς Χριστό.

Μιᾶς οἰκονομικῆς κατάρρευσης καὶ κρίσης προηγείται μιὰ πνευματικὴ ἥττα. Ἥττηθήκαμε, γιατί ξεχάσαμε τὸ Ρωμαῖκο ἦθος. Τὸ ἦθος αὐτὸ εἶναι ἡ «ἐντιμος πενία» τοῦ Παπαδιαμάντη, τὸ καθαρὸ μέτωπο τῶν γονέων μας, τὸ δόξα τῷ Θεῷ τῶν παππούδων μας, τὸ χιλιοτραγουδισμένο φιλότιμο τοῦ λαοῦ μας. Ἥττηθήκαμε, μὰ ὁ πόλεμος δὲν χάθηκε. «Ἡμεῖς νικῶμεν, νικῶντων τῶν ἄλλων». (Ἅγιος Νικόλαος Καβάσιλας).

Ρώτησαν έναν άγιορείτη μοναχό. Γέροντα ή κρίση θα περάσει; Και αυτός άπάντησε: «Δυστυχώς παιδί μου θα περάσει». Τά όλονύχια ρεβεγιόν, τά πανάκριβα δώρα, τά διακοποδάνεια, τό φάγωμεν, πίνωμεν δέν είναι Χριστούγεννα. Ό πρόδ αιώνων Θεός τής ταπεινής φάτνης, άλλα μās διδάσκει.

«Τιμήσατε τόν Θεόν πλέον τής σννηθείας» λέει ό άγιος Γρηγόριος ό Θεολόγος. Η κρίση είναι και εύκαιρία νά έπιστρέψουμε στο σπίτι του Πατέρα μας, στην ήλιόλουστη Όρθοδοξία μας, νά βρούμε τόν έαυτό μας, νά ξαναγίνουμε Ρωμιοί. «Όλα τα έθνη για νά προοδεύσουν πρέπει νά βαδίσουν έμπρός πλίν του Έλληνικού πού πρέπει νά στραφεί πίσω» έλεγε ό σοφός Αθηναιογράφος Δημ. Καμπούρογλου. Πίσω, όχι ως στείρος συντηρητισμός, άλλα ως αναζήτηση τής πηγής έξ ής ρέει τό ύδωρ τό άλλόμενον εις ζωήν αιώνιον, ό Χριστός.

Καί, άς μου έπιτραπεί ή φράση, πολλά ρουσφέτια ζητήσαμε από διάφορους τα προηγούμενα χρόνια. Για μās τούς Όρθόδοξους μόνο ένα ρουσφέτι μās έπιτρέπεται. «**Ταίς προσβείας τής Θεοτόκου, Σώτερ σώσον ήμās**». Τήν μεσιτεία, τό «πνευματικό ρουσφέτι» τής Θεομάνας μας, άς ζητήσουμε γονυπετώ.

Η Παναγία μās είναι Έλληνοσώτριά. Διαβάζω τήν αφήγηση του Γάλλου Ίησουίτη, περιηγητή Richard στα μέσα του 17ου αιώνα, για τήν ζωή των υπόδουλων Ρωμηών.

«Πολλές φορές άπορώ πώς κατόρθωσε νά έπιβίωση ή Χριστιανική πίστη στην Τουρκία και πώς υπάρχουν στην Ελλάδα εκατομμύρια Όρθόδοξοι. Και νά σκεφθεί κανείς ότι ουδέποτε από τήν έποχή του Νέρωνος, του Δομητιανού και του Διοκλητιανού έχει ύποστει ό Χριστιανισμός διωγμούς σκληρότερους από αυτούς, πού άντιμετωπίζει σήμερα ή ανατολική Έκκλησία... Και όμως οι Έλληνες είναι εύτυχημένοι πού παραμένουν Χριστιανοί. Νομίζω πώς αυτό όφείλεται στη λατρεία πού τρέφουν στην Παναγία... Σε όλα τα σπίτια βλέπεις εικόνες τής Παναγίας. Είναι ό φρουρός ή καλύτερα ή νοικοκυρά του σπιτιού. Σ' αυτήν τήν εικόνα στρέφουν τό βλέμμα, όταν τούς συμβεί κάτι κακό, ίκετεύοντας τή βοήθειά της. Σ' αυτήν άπευθύνονται για νά εύχαριστήσουν τό Θεό, άν με τή δική της μεσολάβηση έλθει κάτι καλό στο σπιτικό τους... Ό ίδιος διαπίστωση με πόση

φυσικότητα, με πόση εύγλωττία και συγκίνηση μιλούν στις οικογενειακές τους κουβέντες γι' αυτή τή βασίλισσα των Ουρανών». (Ιστορία του Έλληνικού Έθνους, τόμ. 10, Αθήνα 1974, σ. 150).

Στά σχολεία, άς αφήσουν οι δάσκαλοι τις «Φρικαντέλες τις μάγισσες, πού μισούν τά κάλαντα και διώχνουν τά σκουπιδόπαιδα πού τά ψέλνουν» (βιβλίο γλώσσας Ε' Δημοτικού, α' τεύχος, σελίδα 26-27), τις «συνταγές μαγειρικής» κι άς συλλαβίσουν στους μαθητές τούς τά μυρίνοα άνθη τής παράδοσής μας. Νά τούς μάθουν και κάποιο «τραγούδι του Θεού», όπως μās κανοναρχεί και ό μάριμπα-Αλέξανδρος ό Παπαδιαμάντης, τό άπολυτικό των Χριστουγέννων, τό έξαισιο κοντάκιον «Η Παρθένος σήμερα». Νά μπει ό Χριστός στις τάξεις, νά «ξεμουχλιάσουν» οι αίθουσες, νά διασκορπιστούν οι άναθυμιάσεις τής

φραγκοεκπαίδευσης, στην όποία καταδικάσαμε τά παιδιά μας. Έκπαίδευση πού βγάξει «Ρωμανούς», έγωτικά μειράκια, μοσχοαναθρεμμένα από άξιολύπητους γονείς, «κατάλληλα» για τό παρανοϊκό κράτος.

Αυτές τις ήμέρες οι μασκαράδες τής τηλεοπτικής κερδεμπορίας, βάλθηκαν νά μαγαρίσουν τά παιδιά με τις βρωμοδιαφημίσεις τρισάθλιων παιχνιδιών. Αντί

για τό ταπεινό σπήλαιο τής Βηθλεέμ, άνοιξαν τά σπήλαια του θεού μαμωνά τής κατανάλωσης. Τέτοια μασκαριλίκια βλέπουν κι άκούνε τά παιδιά μας, κι ή ψυχή τους πλάθεται «Έλληνοπρεπώς».

«Κακόμοιρη Ελλάδα! Άλλες φορές παίδευες τόν κόσμο κι έκανες παιδιά σου τούς ξένους. Μά τώρα άπόμεινες άκληρη, γιατί και τά δικά σου παιδιά δέν θέλουνε νά σε ξερουνε», βροντοφωνάζει ό Κόντογλου.

Άς προσθέσω και τά προφητικά, από τό 1849, λόγια του περίφημου Μοναχού Κοσμά Φλαμιάτου, πού έχουν διαχρονική και έτεροχρονική ισχύ. Ό Κοσμάς Φλαμιάτος στιγματίζει τούς Εύρωπαίους, τούς υίους τής άνομίας τής Δύσεως, όπως τούς όνομάζει, δηλαδή τούς παράνομους και πονηρούς Εύρωπαίους, ως τούς κύριους αίτιους κάθε «κρίσης» και γράφει: (Περιέχεται σε όμιλία πού εκφώνησε, τό 2013, ή έξαιρετική καθηγήτρια Μαρία Μαντουβάλου, στην Ίερά Μονή Όσίου Νικοδήμου—κάστρο πραγματικό τής Όρθοδοξίας,



πού δεσπόζει στο ὄρος Πάϊκο τοῦ νομοῦ Κιλκίς—κατὰ τὴν ἐπέτειο τῆς Αλωσης τῆς Πόλης):

«Ὁ υἱὸς τῆς ἀνομίας τῆς Δύσεως εἶναι ὁ ὑπερόπτης, ὁ ἐπηρμένος, ἀλαζονικὸς καὶ ὑπερφίαλος ἀπατεώνας καὶ χλευαστὴς τῆς Χριστιανικῆς θρησκείας καὶ δραστηριοποιεῖται, μὲ ὑπουλες κινήσεις, ὥστε νὰ ἀνεβάζει σὲ ὑψηλὰ ἀξιώματα καὶ νὰ ἐπιβραβεύει μὲ ἀνταμοιβὲς ἄτομα τῆς ἀπάτης καὶ τῆς διαφθορᾶς. Δὲν ἀναπτύσσει δραστηριότητα μόνο γιὰ νὰ ψηφίζονται νόμοι ὀλεθριότατοι, πού προκαλοῦν καταστροφή, φθορὰ καὶ ἀφανισμό, ἀλλὰ φροντίζει κρυφὰ μὲ ὑπουλες σκέψεις, μηχανορραφίες καὶ δολοπλοκίες νὰ καθιερώνονται πολιτικὰ συστήματα γιὰ τὴν ἀπονέκρωση καὶ τὸν πλήρη μαρασμὸ τῆς γεωργίας, τῆς κτηνοτροφίας, τῆς βιομηχανίας, τῆς ναυτιλίας καὶ τοῦ ἐμπορίου, ὥστε μὲ τὴν γενικὴ ἔνδεια, τὴν ἔλλειψή των πρὸς τὸ ζῆν ἀναγκαιῶν, τὴ φτώχεια καὶ τὴν πλήρη καταστροφή, οἰκονομικὴ καὶ ἠθικὴ, αὐτῶν πού ἐπιβουλεύεται καὶ σκευωρεῖ σὲ βάρος τους, νὰ μπορεῖ ὁ δόλιος νὰ ἐνεργεῖ, ὥστε νὰ καταδυναστεύεται ὁ λαός, ἐνῶ αὐτὸς ὑποκρίνεται τὸν φίλο καὶ σύμμαχο προκειμένου νὰ διορθώσῃ τὰ ἐπικείμενα δεινά, τίς ἐπαπειλούμενες συμφορὲς καὶ δραστηριοποιεῖται ἔτσι, ὥστε νὰ φέρνει χρεοκοπία στὰ ταμεῖα, ἀλλὰ καὶ νὰ ἐνεργεῖ ὑπουλα καὶ δόλια, ὥστε νὰ ἐπιβραβεύονται καὶ νὰ μισθοδοτοῦνται ἀπὸ τὸ Ταμεῖο τοῦ κράτους καὶ ἀπὸ τοὺς ἰδρῶτες τοῦ ἐπιβουλεύομένου λαοῦ πολλὰ ὄργανα τῆς προδοσίας».



Ἐπειδὴ δὲ τὰ πνευματικὰ συμπορεύονται πάντοτε μὲ τὰ πολιτειακά, πρέπει νὰ ὑπενθυμίσουμε, ὅτι ἡ πνευματικὴ καὶ πολιτιστικὴ ἀποδόμηση τοῦ Ἔθνους ἔχει σημαντικὸ ἀντίκτυπο καὶ στὰ ἐθνικὰ θέματα σὲ κάθε περίοδο τῆς ἱστορίας μας. Καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ ζοῦμε σήμερα μὲ τὴ νέα κατοχή μας καὶ πάλι ἀπὸ τὴν Φραγκία, ὅπως τὸ 1204! Ἡ διαφορὰ τῆς προϊούσας σήμερα Τρίτης Ἀλώσεως ἀπὸ ἐκείνες τοῦ 1204 καὶ τοῦ 1453 εἶναι, ὅτι τότε ἠττηθήκαμε, ἐνῶ σήμερα προχωρήσαμε στὴν ἀλωση μὲ τὴν συγκατάθεσή μας, θεωρώντας τὴν μάλιστα ὡς σωτηρία! ... Εὐτυχῶς ὁμως ὑπάρχει—εἶναι βέβαιο—καὶ ἡ «μαγιά» τοῦ Μακρυγιάννη. Σ' αὐτὴν ἀνήκουν ὁσοι σημερινοὶ Ἕλληνες μένουμε πιστοὶ στὴν Ὁρθοδοξία τῶν Ἁγίων μας καὶ τὸν Σωτῆρα μας Κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν. Οἱ ἀληθινοὶ πατερικὸι καὶ Ὁρθόδοξοι. Αὐτοὶ μὲ τὴν Χάρη τοῦ Θεοῦ μας, θὰ ἀναστήσουν τὸ Ἔθνος, σὲ κάποιο νέο '21, ὅταν ὁ Θεὸς τὸ ἐπιτρέψει!

Πρωτοπρεσβ. π. Γεώργιος Μεταλληνός

Ἵχι Συμπροσευχὲς μὲ «Ἀκοινώνητους»

Ὁ Δέκατος καὶ Ἐνδέκατος Ἀποστολικὸς Κανόνας μᾶς λέει καθαρά: Ἵχι Συμπροσευχὲς μὲ «Ἀκοινώνητους»

Δημητσάνα - Μεγαλόπολη, Κυριακὴ 30 Νοεμβρίου 2014, Κυριακάτικο ἐγκύκλιο κήρυγμα Μητρ. Γόρτυνος καὶ Μεγαλοπόλεως Ἱερεμιά.

Στὸ σημερινό μου κήρυγμα, ἀδελφοὶ Χριστιανοί, θὰ Σᾶς ἐρμηνεύσω δύο ἱερούς Κανόνες. Τὸν δέκατο καὶ τὸν ἐνδέκατο Ἀποστολικὸ Κανόνα. Ὁ δέκατος Κανὼν λέει ὅτι ἂν ἕνας Χριστιανὸς προσευχηθεῖ, ἔστω καὶ σὲ ἕνα σπίτι, μὲ κάποιον «ἀκοινώνητο», αὐτὸς νὰ ἀφοριζέται. «Ἀκοινώνητο» λέγουμε ἐκεῖνον πού ἡ Ἐκκλησία, γιὰ παιδαγωγικὸ λόγο, ἀπέκοψε ἀπὸ τὴν σύναξη τῶν πιστῶν γιὰ τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία. Εἶναι «ἀκοινώνητος» αὐτός, γιὰτὶ δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ λάβῃ τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία. Ὁ «ἀκοινώνητος» λέγεται καὶ «ἀφορισμένος», χωρισμένος δηλαδὴ ἀπὸ τὸ σῶμα τῶν πιστῶν, πού μετέχουν στὴν Ἁγία Τράπεζα τοῦ Θεοῦ γιὰ τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία. Μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν «ἀκοινώνητο» δὲν ἐπιτρέπεται κανεὶς Χριστιανὸς νὰ προσευχηθεῖ μαζί του. Ἄν τὸ κάνει αὐτό, ὄχι μόνο σὲ Ἱερὸ Ναό, ἀλλὰ καὶ σὲ ἕνα ἰδιωτικὸ σπίτι, αὐτὸς πρέπει νὰ ἀφοριστεῖ, λέγει ὁ Κανόνας μᾶς ἐδῶ.

Ἄς προσέχουμε, ἀδελφοί μου Χριστιανοί, μήπως ἀπὸ καλὴ διάθεση γίνουμε παραβάτες τοῦ ἐδῶ Κανόνα μᾶς. Γιατὶ μπορεῖ κάποιος νὰ πεῖ: «Ἡ προσευχὴ εἶναι καλὸ πράγμα. Ἄς κάνω λοιπὸν μιὰ προσευχὴ μὲ αὐτὸν τὸν ἀφορισμένο, πού βρέθηκε στὸ σπίτι μου. Μπορεῖ ἔτσι νὰ τὸν προσελκύσω καὶ νὰ μετανοήσῃ». Ὅποιος τὸ κάνει αὐτὸ εἶναι παραβάτης τοῦ Κανόνα μᾶς ἐδῶ καὶ πρέπει νὰ ἀφοριστεῖ καὶ αὐτός, γιὰτὶ, ὅποιος προσευχηθεῖ μὲ ἀφορισμένο—γνωρίζοντας ὅτι εἶναι ἀφορισμένος—καταφρονεῖ τὴν Ἐκκλησία πού τὸν ἀφόρισε, ὅτι δὴθεν ἄδικα ἔπραξε (ἡ Ἐκκλησία).

Τὸ νόημα τοῦ Κανόνα μᾶς, ἀδελφοί μου Χριστιανοί, εἶναι ὅτι πρέπει νὰ ἔχουμε ἐμπιστοσύνη στὴν Ἐκκλησία καὶ κοινωνία μὲ αὐτήν. Ἐὰν ἡ Ἐκκλησία διακόπτει τὴν κοινωνία της μὲ κάποιον, πρέπει καὶ ὁ πιστὸς Χριστιανὸς νὰ διακόπτει τὴν κοινωνία του μ' αὐτόν, γιὰτὶ ἔτσι ἔπραξε ἡ Μητέρα τοῦ Ἐκκλησία. Ὅταν ὁμως λέμε νὰ διακόπτουμε τὴν κοινωνία μὲ ἕναν «ἀκοινώνητο», μὲ ἕναν δηλαδὴ ἀφορισμένο, ἐννοοῦμε νὰ διακόπτουμε τὴν κοινωνία προσευχῆς μόνο μαζί του καὶ δὲν ἐννοοῦμε ὅτι ἀπαγορεύεται νὰ συνομιλοῦμε ἢ νὰ ἐπικοινωνοῦμε ἐπαγγελματικὰ μαζί του.

Κατὰ τὸν Κανόνα μᾶς ἐδῶ καταδικάζεται καὶ ἡ συμπροσευχὴ μὲ τοὺς αἵρετικούς, γιὰτὶ οἱ αἵρετικοί, ἀφοῦ προσεχώρησαν σὲ αἵρεση, ἔπαυσαν νὰ ἔχουν

κοινωνία με την πραγματική Ἐκκλησία, δηλαδή την Ὁρθόδοξη Ἐκκλησία. Οἱ αἰρετικοὶ εἶναι «ἀκοινωνήτοι», γιατί δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ λάβουν τὴν Θεία Κοινωνία. Καὶ ὁ δέκατος λοιπὸν Ἀποστολικὸς Κανὼνας ποὺ μελετᾶμε μᾶς ἀπαγορεύει νὰ συμπροσευχώμαστε με ἀκοινωνήτους, ἔστω καὶ σὲ ἰδιωτικὸ σπίτι ἀκόμη, πολὺ περισσότερο μᾶς τὸ ἀπαγορεύει αὐτὸ σὲ Ἱερὸ Ναὸ.

Πονοῦμε πραγματικὰ ὅταν ἀκοῦμε, ὄχι μόνο, ἀλλὰ καὶ βλέπουμε, συμπροσευχῆς μεγαλοσχημῶν ρασοφόρων με τοὺς αἰρετικούς Παπικούς, ἀκόμη καὶ με αὐτὸν τὸν ἴδιο αἰρετικὸ Πάπα. Ὁ ἁγιασμένος Γέροντας Πατὴρ Παῖσιος μᾶς λέγει ὅτι γιὰ νὰ προσευχηθῶμε με κάποιον πρέπει νὰ ἔχουμε τὴν ἴδια πίστη με αὐτόν. Ἀλλὰ ὁ Πάπας καὶ οἱ Παπικοί, ὅπως μᾶς τὸ λέγει ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς καὶ τόσο ἄλλοι ἅγιοι Πατέρες καὶ Οἰκουμενικὲς Σύνοδοι, εἶναι αἰρετικοί. Ὅσοι κληρικοὶ καὶ λαϊκοὶ συμμετέχουν

στὶς συμπροσευχῆς με τοὺς ἀκοινωνήτους Παπικούς ἢ ἄλλους αἰρετικούς, πρέπει νὰ ἀφορίζονται κατὰ τὸν δέκατο Ἀποστολικὸ Κανόνα. Πῶς ἐγίναμε ἔτσι, ἀδελφοὶ Χριστιανοί; Ἄς μᾶς ἐλεήσει ὁ Θεὸς γι' αὐτὲς τὶς ὥμες παραβάσεις τῶν Ἱερῶν Κανόνων, ποὺ βλέπουμε νὰ γίνονται στὶς μέρες μας.

Στὸ ἴδιο πνεῦμα τοῦ δεκάτου Ἀποστολικοῦ Κανόνος εἶναι καὶ ὁ ἐπόμενος ἐνδέκατος Ἀποστολικὸς Κανὼνας, ὁ ὁποῖος λέει ὅτι ὁποῖος κληρικός, ἕνας ἱερέας, «συνεῦξεται», προσευχηθεὶ δηλαδή με ἕναν ἄλλο καθηρημένο ἱερέα, νὰ καθαιρεθεὶ καὶ αὐτός. Ἀλλὰ γεννᾶται τὸ ἐρώτημα: Γιατὶ εἶναι ἁμαρτία νὰ συμπροσευχηθεὶ ἕνας κληρικός με ἕνα ἄλλο καθηρημένο κληρικό; Ὁ καθηρημένος κληρικός ἀνήκει πλέον στὴν τάξη τῶν λαϊκῶν καὶ σὰν λαϊκός—βιώνοντας τὴν μετάνοια βέβαια γιὰ τὴν ἁμαρτία ποὺ διέπραξε καὶ καθαιρέθηκε—μπορεῖ, σὰν λαϊκός, λέγω, νὰ συμμετέχει καὶ στὴν Θεία Λειτουργία καὶ στὴν Θεία Κοινωνία.

Ἐπιτρέπεται λοιπὸν ἕνας Ἱερεὺς νὰ συμπροσευχηθεὶ με ἕναν καθηρημένο κληρικὸ στὴν τάξη τῶν λαϊκῶν εὐρισκόμενο. Γι' αὐτό, ἐκεῖνο τὸ «συνεῦξεται» ποὺ λέγει ὁ Κανὼνας, δὲν πρέπει νὰ τὸ ἐρμηνεύσουμε ὡς νὰ «συμπροσεύχεται», ἀλλὰ ὡς νὰ «συλλειτουργήσει». Ἕνας λοιπὸν κληρικός ἀπαγορεύεται ὄχι νὰ προσευχηθεὶ με ἕναν καθηρημένο κληρικό, ἀλλὰ νὰ συλλειτουργήσει μαζί του. Ἄν ὅμως ἐπιμένουμε

καὶ θέλουμε νὰ ἐρμηνεύσουμε τὸν Κανὼνα μας ὅτι ἀπαγορεύει στὸ κληρικὸ νὰ συμπροσευχηθεὶ με ἕνα καθηρημένο κληρικό, τότε πρέπει νὰ ὑποθέσουμε ὅτι ὁ κληρικός αὐτὸς εἶναι ὄχι μόνο καθηρημένος ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀφορισμένος ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία.

Ἔτσι ἐρχόμαστε στὴν περίπτωση τοῦ προηγουμένου δεκάτου Κανόνος. Ἐὰν λοιπὸν κατὰ τὸν προηγούμενο δέκατο Ἀποστολικὸ Κανόνα ὁ λαϊκὸς ἀφορίζεται, ἂν συμπροσευχηθεὶ με ἀφορισμένο, τότε ὁ κληρικός ὄχι μόνο ἀφορίζεται, ἀλλὰ καὶ καθαιρεῖται, ἂν συμπροσευχηθεὶ με ἕναν καθηρημένο καὶ συνάμα ἀφορισμένο κληρικό. Οἱ παπικοὶ καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι αἰρετικοὶ εἶναι, ξαναλέγουμε, «ἀκοινωνήτοι», ἀφοῦ δὲν μποροῦμε νὰ τελέσουμε μαζί τους τὴν Θεία Λειτουργία καὶ νὰ κοινωνήσουμε μαζί τους ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Ποτήριο. Γι' αὐτὸ λέγονται «ἀκοινωνήτοι» ἐπειδὴ δὲν μποροῦν νὰ μετέχουν στὴν Τράπεζα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ νὰ κοινωνήσουν μαζί μας.



Πῶς λοιπὸν συμπροσεύχονται με τοὺς ἀκοινωνήτους παπικούς δικοὶ μας μεγαλοσχημονες κληρικοί; Εἶναι δυνατόν νὰ ἀκουστεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν Θεὸ μας αὐτὴ τους ἡ προσευχή; Συγχωρήσατέ μας Ἅγιοι Πατέρες, γιατί εἴμαστε ἀδιάφοροι σὲ τέτοιες ὥμες παραβάσεις τῶν Ἱερῶν σας Κανόνων καὶ ἱκετεύσατε τὸν Κύριο νὰ μὴν μᾶς τιμωρήσει καὶ

μᾶς πάρει τὴν Χάρη Του γιὰ τὴν ἀδιαφορία μας αὐτή.

Σεῖς ὅμως, ἀδελφοὶ Χριστιανοί, μὴ βλέπετε τὸ δικό μας κακὸ παράδειγμα, ἀλλὰ νὰ εἴστε ἀγωνιστές καὶ θερμοὶ ὑπερασπιστές τῶν ἱερῶν Κανόνων τῶν Ἁγίων Πατέρων τῆς Ὁρθόδοξης Πίστεως μας. Βλέποντας ἐμεῖς οἱ κληρικοὶ σας τὸν δικό σας θερμὸ ζήλο γιὰ τὴν πίστη καὶ τὴν διαμαρτυρία σας καὶ τὸν ἀγώνα σας γιὰ τὶς συμπροσευχῆς δικῶν μας μεγαλοσχημῶν κληρικῶν με τοὺς ἀκοινωνήτους Παπικούς καὶ ἄλλους αἰρετικούς, ξυπνάμε ἀπὸ τὴν ἀδιαφορία μας καὶ ξεχνόμαστε καὶ ἐμεῖς μαζί σας σὲ ἱερὸ ἀγώνα γιὰ τὶς παρατηρούμενες καταπατήσεις τῶν ἱερῶν Κανόνων.

Κάτω ὁ Παπισμὸς καὶ ὁ Οἰκουμενισμὸς καὶ ψηλὰ τὰ λάβαρα, τῆς ἀμωμήτου Ὁρθόδοξης πίστεως μας τὰ λάβαρα!

Μὲ πολλές εὐχές,

† Ὁ Μητροπολίτης Γόρτυνος καὶ Μεγαλοπόλεως Ἱερεμίας

Περὶ Ἑλληνισμοῦ καὶ Ὁρθοδοξίας

Ἐνα συγκλονιστικὸ ἄρθρο περὶ Ἑλληνισμοῦ καὶ Ὁρθοδοξίας, τοῦ Ν. Γιαννιώτη, ποὺ δημοσιεύθηκε στὶς ἰστοσελίδες τοῦ «Ἡπειρος-Ἑλλάς» (<http://www.epirus-ellas.gr>), 1 Νοεμβρίου, 2012.

Ὁ Ἕλλην εἶναι πλασμένος φιλόσοφος, εἶναι καὶ πλασμένος Χριστιανός, εἶναι πλασμένος νὰ γνωρίζει τὴν Ἀλήθεια καὶ νὰ τὴν διαδίδει εἰς τὰ ἄλλα Ἔθνη. Ναί, ὁ Ἕλλην ἐγεννήθη κατὰ τὴν Θεία Πρόνοια διδάσκαλος τῆς ἀνθρωπότητας.

[Ἅγιος Νεκτᾶριος Πενταπόλεως]

Τὰ ἐξουσιαστικὰ ἱερατεῖα ποὺ ὑπογεῖως κινοῦν τὰ νήματα τοῦ κόσμου καὶ κατευθύνουν σὲ πολὺ μεγάλο βαθμὸ τὴν Γνώση προσπαθοῦν ἐδῶ καὶ πολλοὺς αἰῶνες, πλαστογραφώντας τις πηγὲς ἢ ἀποκρύπτωντας τές, νὰ φέρουν σὲ σύγκρουση τὸν Ἑλληνισμὸ καὶ τὸν Χριστιανισμὸ. Ξέρουν ὅτι ἡ «σύνδεση» αὐτῶν τῶν δυο δυνάμεων εἶναι τὸ ἰσχυρότερο ἐμπόδιο γιὰ τὴν ὑλοποίηση τῶν ὑποχθόνων σχεδίων τους. Ξέρουν ὅτι ἂν οἱ Λαοὶ «γαντζωθοῦν» πάνω σὲ αὐτά, θὰ εἶναι ἀδύνατο νὰ ἐφαρμόσουν τὴν νέα τάξη πραγμάτων. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ λόγος ποὺ ἀποκρύπτονται οἱ Προφητεῖες τῶν Ἀρχαίων Ἑλλήνων οἱ ὁποῖες μιλοῦν ξεκάθαρα γιὰ τὴν ἔλευση τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Προσπαθοῦν νὰ παρουσιάσουν τὸν Χριστιανισμὸ ὡς ἐβραιογενὴ θρησκεία καὶ ὅλους τοὺς Ἀρχαίους Ἑλληνες ὡς εἰδωλολάτρες.

Ὡστόσο ἔχουν διασωθεῖ κείμενα ποὺ ἀποδυνκνεῖουν ἀκριβῶς τὸ ἀντίθετο. Στὴν Πολιτεία τοῦ Πλάτωνα—βιβλίον ποὺ «τὸ σύστημα» τὸ ἀποδέχεται—περιέχεται μία προφητεία ἰσαξία μὲ αὐτὲς τῶν προφητειῶν τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης (**Συντ:** ὅλα τὰ ἀρχαῖα κείμενα παρουσιάζονται μεταφρασμένα στὴν Νεοελληνικὴν):

«Θὰ ἀπογυμνωθεῖ ἀπ’ ὅλα ἐκτὸς τῆς δικαιοσύνης, διότι φτιάχθηκε ἀντίθετος στὴν ἔως τότε συμπεριφορὰ. Χωρὶς νὰ ἀδικήσει κανέναν θὰ δυσφημισθεῖ πολὺ ὡς ἄδικος ὥστε νὰ βασανισθεῖ γιὰ τὴν δικαιοσύνη καὶ θὰ γεμίσει μὲ δάκρυα ἐξαιτίας τῆς κακοδοξίας... Ἀλλὰ θὰ μείνει ἀμετακίνητος μέχρι θανάτου καὶ ἐνῶ θὰ εἶναι δίκαιος θὰ θεωρεῖται ἄδικος γιὰ ὅλη του τὴ ζωὴ. Ἔχοντας τέτοιες διαθέσεις ὁ δίκαιος θὰ μαστιγωθεῖ, θὰ στρεβλωθεῖ, θὰ δεθεῖ, θὰ ἀνάψουν τὰ μάτια του... καὶ στὰ τελευταῖα του, ἀφοῦ πάθει κάθε κακό, θὰ καρφωθεῖ πάνω σὲ πάσσαλο, καὶ νὰ ξέρεις ὅτι δὲν εἶναι δίκαιο, ἀλλὰ ἀφοῦ ἔτσι τὸ θέλει ἄς γίνεαι». [Πλάτωνος, Πολιτεία Β’, IV-V (361 C-361 D)].

Στὸ ἔργο «Προμηθεὺς Δεσμωτῆς» τοῦ Αἰσχύλου, ὁ Προμηθεὺς, φυλακισμένος στὸν Καύκασο προλέγει ὅτι ὁ λυτρωτῆς του θὰ γεννηθεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν Παρθένο Ἰὼ καὶ τὸν Θεὸ (στ.772,834,848)... Θὰ εἶναι δηλαδὴ, Υἱὸς Θεοῦ καὶ Υἱὸς Παρθένου. Αὐτὸς ὁ Θεάνθρωπος θὰ καταλύσει τὴν ἐξουσία τῶν παλαιῶν Θεῶν καὶ θὰ ἀφανίσει αὐτοὺς καὶ τὴν δυνάμη τους (στ. 908, 920).

Ὁ Ἐρμῆς τότε σταλμένος ἀπὸ τὸν Δία προαναγγέλει στὸν Προμηθεὺς τὰ ἐξῆς: «Μὴν περιμένεις νὰ λυτρωθεῖς ἀπὸ τοὺς πόρους προτοῦ Θεοῦ πάρει τὰ πάθια τὰ δικά σου πάνω του καὶ μὲ τὴν θέλησή του κατέβει στὸν Ἄδη τὸν ἀνήλιαγο, στοὺς ἄφεγγους τοῦ Ταρτάρου βυθοῦς...» (στ. 1041,1043).

Ὁ Σωκράτης στὴν ἀπολογία του ἀναφέρει τὰ ἀκόλουθα: «Θὰ μείνετε κοιμισμένοι σὲ ὅλη σας τὴ ζωὴ ἐὰν δὲν σᾶς λυπηθεῖ ὁ Θεὸς νὰ σᾶς στείλει κάποιον Ἄλλον» (Πλάτωνος, Ἀπολογία Σωκράτους 18:31α).

Στὸ Ἅγιο Ὅρος ὑπάρχουν χειρόγραφα ποὺ διασώζουν τὶς προφητεῖες τῆς Σίβυλλας τῆς Ἐρυθραίας—τῆς ἱερείας τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνα—γιὰ τὴν ἔλευση τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Σὲ χειρόγραφο μὲ τὴν ὀνομασία «Υπόμνημα εἰς τὸν Ἅγιον Ἀπόστολον Φίλιππον» ποὺ φυλάσσεται στὴν Ἱερὰ Μονὴ Δοχειαρίου ἀναφέρονται τὰ ἐξῆς: «Ὑστερα ἀπὸ πολὺ καιρὸ θὰ φθάσει κάποιος εἰς αὐτὴν τὴν πολυδιηρημένην γῆν καὶ θὰ γεννηθεῖ μὲ σάρκαν ἀμόλυντον. Μὲ ἀνεξάντλητα ὄρια, ὡς Θεότητα θὰ λυτρώσει τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἀπὸ τὴν φθορὰν τῶν ἀνιάτων παθῶν... καὶ θὰ φθονήσει ἄπιστος λαὸς καὶ θὰ κρεμασθεῖ ψηλὰ ὡς κατὰδικος εἰς θάνατον. Ὅλα αὐτὰ θὰ τὰ ὑποφέρει μὲ πραότητα...»

Στὸ ἴδιο χειρόγραφο ἀναφέρεται μία ἀνατριχιαστικὴ προφητεία γιὰ τὴν Θεανθρώπινη φύση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, γιὰ τὸ ἐκούσιο πάθος Του, ἀλλὰ καὶ γιὰ τὴν Ἀνάστασή Του: «Ἐνας Οὐράνιος μὲ πιέξει ἰσχυρὰ, ὁ ὁποῖος εἶναι φῶς Τριλαμπές. Αὐτὸς εἶναι ὁ παθὼν Θεός, χωρὶς νὰ πάθει τίποτε ἢ Θεότης Του, διότι εἶναι συγχρόνως Θνητὸς καὶ Ἀθάνατος. Αὐτὸς εἶναι συγχρόνως Θεὸς καὶ Ἄνθρωπος ποὺ ὑποφέρει ἀπὸ τοὺς θνητοὺς τὰ πάντα... δηλαδὴ τὸν σταυρό, τὴν ὕβριν, τὴν ταφή. Αὐτὸς κάποτε ἀπὸ τὰ μάτια Του ἔχυσε δάκρυα θερμᾶ. Αὐτὸς πέντε χιλιάδες χόρτασε μὲ πέντε ἄρτους, κάτι ποὺ ἤθελε δύναμη Θεϊκή...»

Σὲ ἄλλη περικοπὴ ἀναφέρεται: «Ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι ὁ δικός μου Θεός, ὁ ὁποῖος ἐσταυρώθηκε εἰς τὸ ξύλον, ὁ ὁποῖος ἐξέπνευσε, ὁ ὁποῖος ἐκ τοῦ τάφου ἀνήλθεν εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν.»

Οἱ παραπάνω προφητεῖες ἀναφέρονται καὶ σὲ ἄλλα χειρόγραφα ποὺ βρίσκονται σὲ ἄλλες Μονές τοῦ Ἁγίου Ὅρους ἢ ἀλλοῦ. (π.χ. στὴν Μονὴ Σινᾶ). Παρατίθενται ἀκόμη καὶ σὲ σύγχρονο βιβλίον, στὸν «Μέγα Συναξαριστὴ τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου Ἐκκλησίας» τοῦ Ἀρχιμανδριτοῦ Βίκτωρος Ματθαίου.

Καὶ γιὰ αὐτοὺς ποὺ ἴσως ἀμφισβητήσουν ὅτι τὰ παραπάνω εἰπώθηκαν πράγματι ἀπὸ τὴν Σίβυλλα τῆς Ἐρυθραίας καὶ ἰσχυριστοῦν ὅτι εἶναι ἐπινοήσεις κάποιων Χριστιανῶν Μοναχῶν... ἀρκεῖ τὸ ἐξῆς ἀδιαμφισβήτητο γεγονός: Ἀπὸ διάφορες πηγὲς ἔχει διασταυρωθεῖ πὼς τὶς προφητεῖες αὐτὲς ἀλλὰ καὶ

ἄλλες—εἴτε τῆς Σίβυλλας εἴτε ἄλλων σοφῶν Ἑλλήνων—χρησιμοποίησε ἡ Αγία Αἰκατερίνη.

Συγκεκριμένα, τὸ 305 ἡ Αγία Αἰκατερίνη ἡ Ἀλεξανδρινὴ ἔλεγε τὸν αὐτοκράτορα Μαξιμίνου γιὰ τὴν εἰδωλολατρικὴ του πολιτικὴ. Ὁ τελευταῖος συγκέντρωσε τότε τοὺς σοφότερους εἰδωλολάτρες τῆς αὐτοκρατορίας γιὰ νὰ τὴν μεταπείσουν καὶ νὰ τὴν κάνουν παγανίστρια. Στὸν διάλογο ποὺ ἀκολούθησε, αὐτὴ ἡ πάνσοφη καὶ σπουδαγμένη στὴν Ἑλληνικὴ παιδεία γυναίκα, στὴν προσπάθειά της νὰ ἀποδείξει ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι ὁ μοναδικὸς Θεὸς ἀνέφερε—μεταξὺ ἄλλων—καὶ τὶς προφητεῖες τῆς Σίβυλλας. Καὶ γιὰ νὰ προληφθεῖ ἡ κάθε ἀπερίσκεπτη «σκέψη», δὲν ὑπάρχει καμιά περίπτωση νὰ ἔπλασε αὐτὲς τὶς προφητεῖες ἡ ἴδια ἡ Αγία γιὰ τοὺς ἐξῆς βασικότατους λόγους: Δὲν θὰ μποροῦσε νὰ πεῖ ἓνα τόσο μεγάλο ψέμα σχετικὰ μὲ τὴν ἰέρεια τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνα μπροστὰ στοὺς σοφότερους ἐκπροσώπους τῆς ἀρχαίας θρησκείας διότι ἀμέσως ὅλοι θὰ διαπίστωναν τὸ ψέμα της. Ὅμως ὄχι μόνο κανεὶς δὲν τὴν κατηγόρησε γιὰ ἀναλήθειες, ἀλλὰ ἀντιθέτως οἱ σοφοὶ εἰδωλολάτρες παραδέχθηκαν τὴν λεκτικὴ τους ἡττα καὶ ὅλοι ἀμέσως ἀσπάστηκαν μὲ τὴν θέλησή τους τὸν Χριστιανισμό, μὲ ἀποτέλεσμα ὁ αὐτοκράτορας νὰ τοὺς θανατώσει.

Σὲ ἄλλο χειρόγραφο ποὺ βρῖσκεται στὴν Ἀγιορείτικη Μονὴ Διονυσίου, ἀναφέρεται ἄλλη μία προφητεία τῆς Σίβυλλας: «Σὰς προφητεύω ἓναν τρισυπόστατο Θεὸν στὰ ὕψη ἐκτεινόμενο τοῦ ὁποίου ὁ αἰώνιος Λόγος σὲ ἀνυποψίαστο κόρη θὰ κυφορηθεῖ, ὅπως ἀκριβῶς τὸ φέρον φωτιὰ τόξο, τὸ μέσον του κόσμου διαπερνώντας... Ὅλο τὸν κόσμον ἀφοῦ ἐπαναφέρει στὴν ζωὴ, καὶ στὸν Πατέρα θὰ τὸν προσφέρει σὰν δῶρο. Μαρία θὰ εἶναι τὸ ὄνομα Αὐτῆς.»

Ὁ μεγάλος ἐκκλησιαστικὸς συγγραφέας Κλήμης ὁ Ἀλεξανδρεὺς (2^{ος} αἰώνας μ.Χ.) στὸ ἔργο του «Στρωματεῖς (5:13)» δηλώνει ἀπερίφραστα: «Δὲν εἶναι δυνατόν, νομίζω, νὰ προαναγγελθεῖ σαφέστερα ἀπὸ τοὺς Ἑλληνες ὁ Σωτῆρας μας».

Καὶ μόνο αὐτὲς οἱ λίγες προφητεῖες ποὺ ἀναφέρθηκαν (σὲ σχέση μὲ τὸ πλῆθος ποὺ ὑπάρχει ἀλλὰ βρῖσκεται κρυμμένο ἐδῶ καὶ αἰῶνες) ἀρκοῦν νὰ καταρρίψουν τὴν γελοιότητα ἐκείνη ποὺ δυστυχῶς παρασέρνει πολλοὺς καὶ ποὺ ψευδῶς κυρρῆται ὅτι ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς εἶναι ἓνα ἐβραϊκὸ κατασκευάσμα, ὅλοι οἱ ἀρχαῖοι Ἑλληνες ἦταν εἰδωλολάτρες καὶ πῶς ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς καὶ ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς εἶναι δυὸ ἐντελῶς ἀντικρουόμενοι κόσμοι.

Γιὰ νὰ τελειώσουν τὰ ψέματα, ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς δὲν εἶναι ἐβραιογενὴς θρησκεία. Δὲν εἶναι κατασκευάσμα τῶν Ἑβραίων ἀλλὰ οὔτε κανενὸς ἄλλου λαοῦ. Εἶναι ἡ ἀληθινὴ θρησκεία ποὺ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἀνεξαιρέτως σὲ ὅλους τοὺς λαοὺς τῆς γῆς. Τὸ ὅτι ἀποκαλύφθηκε

πρῶτα στοὺς Ἑβραίους δὲν σημαίνει σὲ καμιά περίπτωση ὅτι εἶναι ἐβραιογενὴς θρησκεία. Ἄλλωστε λίγες δεκαετίες μετὰ τὴν Ἀνάληψη τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς πέρασε στὰ χέρια τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ ἄρχισε νὰ ἀπομακρύνεται ἀπὸ τὰ ἐβραϊκὰ στεγανὰ γιὰ νὰ ἀπλωθεῖ σὲ ὅλη τὴ Γῆ.

Ἀπὸ τὴν ἄλλη βλέπουμε ὅτι οἱ σοφοὶ Ἑλληνες τῆς ἀρχαιότητος ὄχι μόνο πίστευαν στὸν ἓναν Θεὸ ἀλλὰ μίλησαν κιόλας γιὰ τὴν Τριαδικότητά Του, γιὰ τὴν διττὴ φύση τοῦ Χριστοῦ, γιὰ τὴν Σταύρωση καὶ τὴν Ἀνάστασή Του.

Ὅλα τα Εὐαγγέλια γράφτηκαν στὰ Ἑλληνικά, σὲ χέρια Ἑλλήνων πέρασε ἀπὸ τὴν πρώτη στιγμή ἡ Ἐκκλησία, Ἑλληνες Πατέρες διατύπωσαν τὶς αἰώνιες Ἀλήθειες. Στὸ αἶμα χιλιάδων Ἑλλήνων μαρτύρων στερεώθηκε τοὺς πρώτους αἰῶνες ἡ Ἐκκλησία, Ἑλληνες Αὐτοκράτορες καὶ κληρικοὶ ἀνέλαβαν ἐπὶ Βυζαντίου τὴν διάδοση τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου καὶ τὸν ἐκχριστιανισμὸ τῶν ὡς τότε βάρβαρων λαῶν.

Ἐπομένως ὄχι μόνο δὲν συγκρούονται ὁ Χριστιανισμὸς καὶ ὁ Ἑλληνισμὸς ἀλλὰ ἀντιθέτως συνδέονται τόσο στενά, σὲ σημεῖο ὁ Ἅγιος Νεκτάριος Πενταπόλεως νὰ γράψει στὸ ἔργο τοῦ «Περὶ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς φιλοσοφίας ὡς προπαιδείας εἰς τὸν Χριστιανισμὸν» τὰ ἐξῆς: «Ὁ Ἑλληὴν εἶναι πλασμένος φιλόσοφος, εἶναι καὶ πλασμένος Χριστιανός, εἶναι πλασμένος νὰ γνωρίζει τὴν Ἀλήθεια καὶ νὰ τὴν διαδίδει εἰς τὰ ἄλλα Ἔθνη. Naί, ὁ Ἑλληὴν ἐγεννήθη κατὰ τὴν Θεῖα Πρόνοια διδάσκαλος τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος. Αὐτὴ εἶναι ἡ ἀποστολή του, αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ ξεχωριστὸ κάλεσμα μεταξὺ τῶν Ἑθνῶν. Ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν Ἔθνος ἦταν πλασμένο διὰ τὸν σκοπὸν αὐτόν. Ὁ Θεὸς διέπλασε τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν Ἔθνος ὡς ὄφθαλμὸν εἰς τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἀνθρωπότητος».

Οἱ ἀρχαιοελληνικὲς προφητεῖες ἀποδεικνύουν περὶτρανα ὅτι ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι ὁ μοναδικὸς Θεός. Πολλοὶ ἀνόητοι κατὰ καιροὺς λένε πῶς οἱ Ἑβραϊκὲς προφητεῖες γράφτηκαν ἀπὸ Χριστιανούς μετὰ Χριστὸν γιὰ νὰ ἰσχυροποιήσουν τὴν πίστη τους. Ψέμα μεγάλο μιᾶς καὶ ἔχουν βρεθεῖ χειρόγραφα τῆς Παλαιᾶς Διαθήκης γραμμένα στὰ Ἑλληνικά (ἀπὸ τὴν μετάφραση τῶν ἐβδομήκοντα) ποὺ χρονολογοῦνται τὸν 2^ο μὲ 1^ο αἰῶνα πρὶν τὸν Χριστό.

Χωρὶς ἀμφιβολία ὁ Χριστὸς εἶναι ὁ μόνος Θεός, ἡ Ὁρθοδοξία εἶναι ἡ Κιβωτὸς τῆς Ἀλήθειας, καὶ τὸ Γένος τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐπιφορτισμένο μὲ τὸ ἱερὸ χρέος νὰ κρατᾶ τὴν δάδα τῆς ἀληθινῆς Πίστης ἄσβεστη μέχρι τὰ ἔσχατα. Ὅπως μᾶς λέει καὶ ὁ Ἅγιος Ἰουστίνος, «ὅποιος μπορεῖ νὰ πεῖ τὴν Ἀλήθεια καὶ δὲν τὸ κάνει, θὰ κατακριθεῖ ἀπὸ τὸν Θεό.

Ἐγὼ εἰμι τὸ Α καὶ τὸ Ω, λέγει Κύριος ὁ Θεός, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ παντοκράτωρ.

[Ἀποκ. 1:8]

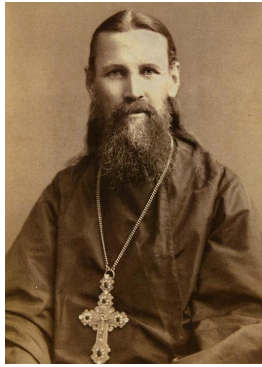
THE PEACE OF CHRIST

By St. John of Kronstadt.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

[Lk 2:14]

† † †



This great hymn to the incarnate God, the Infant Christ, was sung by the angelic hosts on earth at His Nativity. It is a brief song, but its meaning and significance are wise and full of substance. In it is contained and revealed to us the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God for the salvation of the world. This mystery, in the words of the Church, amazed all

the angelic powers.

But where is this peace on earth, which the angels announced to the Bethlehem shepherds?

In Jerusalem itself, the city of David, where was the temple of the living God, there was no peace. When the magi who came from the East to Jerusalem asked, “Where is the King of the Jews Who is born?” King Herod was enraged just to hear it, as was all of Jerusalem with him. In the world empire of Rome, there was no peace. Contemporaries describe in dark colors the moral degradation of the nations, and the deformation of God’s image in people.

All manner of defilement and iniquity was practiced then. Idol worship replaced the worship of the one God. Iniquity, shame, satiety, and drunkenness were what comprised mankind’s earthly happiness, aim, and striving. Enmity, civil strife, and disorder reigned everywhere. Pride, inhumanity, and all manner of vice corrupted social and family life.

The period that followed was no better. Terrible persecutions against those who believed in Christ drenched the world in blood over the course of three centuries: brother betrayed brother to torture, husbands betrayed their wives and children, children betrayed their parents. Human relations, blood ties, and family were all profaned and scorned. And in Jerusalem itself, there was the abomination of desolation.

In our times also, societies and kingdoms are also being shaken, international and civil wars and dissention continue, there are heresies and schisms, conspiracies and criminally

destructive teachings are intensifying to topple age-old state institutions and foundations of family, civilian, and religious community.

Evil raises its sacrilegious hand against the anointed of God, to whom God Himself has entrusted nations. The savages want to install unbelief atop the sacred remains, destroy the state, the family, and law in the guise of equality and brotherhood.

Where is the peace on earth that the angels proclaimed? Where is the peace brought to earth by the God-man? Where is the peace proclaimed by the Gospels and the Apostles’ preaching that reached to the ends of the earth, to all nations and kings? It is not in the world, for *the whole world lieth in wickedness*, said the Apostle (1 Jn 5:19).

This is the mystery sung by the angels: with the coming of the Son of God on the earth, peace began to reign at first in the small, chosen flock—His Church, in the Apostles whom He often taught this peace, and later in the whole kingdom of grace, His Church, which spread throughout the world.

Yes, brothers, a whole kingdom of God’s world is established by the Lord—a kingdom which is eternal, universal, and orderly; with laws, rules, and sacraments; with an order



of services, guidelines for life and inter-personal relationships. This kingdom is the holy, Orthodox, Apostolic Church, where there ever abides peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father.

True, the Church of God on earth was always under the cross, always persecuted,

and hated. But nevertheless, it always possessed an inner grace-filled peace—even during the cruelest persecutions, for God has always been and always will be in it, delivering it from all calamity according to His word that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*. (Mt. 16:18).

Therefore, every truly believing person who keeps Christ’s commandments, every truly repentant sinner has the peace of Christ within himself, and no external troubles of this world can destroy it—if only that person does not will to step once more upon the path of iniquity and sin.

Therefore, if earthly kingdoms and civil societies in general wish to attain and establish the peace brought to earth by the King of righteousness, peace, and love—our Lord Jesus Christ, then they should be closely united with the kingdom of the Lord, or His holy Church on earth; they should submit themselves to the commandments of Jesus Christ and the rules of His Church. Should these commandments be

broken, they should quickly straighten themselves out, after a sincere admission of their mistakes and iniquity. Members of a state that confesses the Christian faith should be kind, honest, and sincerely dedicated members of the Church. Disruption of this union between the Church and state, that is, its citizens, neglect of faith, the commandments, and the Gospels give birth to unbelief and all social disorder and vice, cause moral or political impotence in that society, and deprive it of the blessing of heaven.

Russia as a great nation was always closely tied with the Church; and only within this union was it able to grow, strengthen, and ascend to the heights of its might and glory. May God grant that this union of the state and the Church—this kingdom of peace—always continue! Then Russia will be a kingdom of peace, and God's blessing will be upon it. Then no sedition will be frightening, because it will not find a place to settle in.

May our Lord Christ reign in our hearts, and may peace and blessing reign with Him! Amen.



DEATH IS UNNATURAL

By Saint Nikolai Velimirovich.



Death is not natural; rather it is unnatural.

And death is not from nature; rather it is against nature.

All of nature cries out: "I do not know death! I do not wish death! I am afraid of death! I strive against death!"

Death is an uninvited stranger to nature.

All of nature bristles at this uninvited stranger and is afraid of it because it is like a thief in somebody else's garden who

does not just steal and eat the fruit, but also who tramples, spoils, breaks and uproots what is planted and the more it ravages, the more it becomes satisfied.

Even when one hundred philosophies declare that "Death is Natural!" all of nature trembles in indignations and shouts: "No! I have no use for death! It is an uninvited stranger!"

And the voice of nature is not sophistry.

The protest of nature against death outweighs all excuses thought up to justify death.

And if there is something that nature struggles to express in its untouched harmony, doing so without expectation in unison of voices, this it is a protest against death. It is its unanimous, frantic, and heaven-shaking elegy to death.

If in fact death is unnatural, if it is not natural and against nature, then a question arises: why is it so and whence does death enter nature?

Not a single kingdom of light and life accepts death as its native. It must have sneaked into the world's life secretly—crawling on its belly and staying out of sight so that it would not be spotted and exposed—from some bottomless abyss where even it was too cold and lonely.

When death was under the stinger of a snake, it was dead for itself and nobody in the world knew about good and evil—only the bliss existed; and nobody heard of knowledge and ignorance—there was only wisdom; and nobody knew of life and death—there was only the state of blissfully wise existence.

But because of an occasion, which is more dreadful than the most horrible nightmare, the mouth of the snake opened and the stinger full of venom appeared out of it—and death entered the first-created nature... This intrusion could be likened to the way a tiny worm penetrates the spine of a man without him even sensing the invasion so that the man continues to blossom and feel merry. Then he will feel the worm as a pleasant itching; he might rub his back, smile and say: "It is nothing." And this will go on until the moment the worm grows big, multiplies and exhausts the spine so that the man becomes like a hollow cane which mindlessly whistles a hymn of madness and death.

What doctor would say to this madman with a dried up spine when he, in the doctor's presence, like a hollow cane whistles a triumphal hymn to death: "Go and sin no more, and you will be whole."? Not a single doctor in this world. Perhaps only that doctor who is not different than his patient.

Why is it that the sickly-sweet upholders of ethics, with their sickly-sweet theories do not depict the devil on the front page? Why do they not say to say sinner: "Go and sin no more."? That is: Go and do not let more worms into your spine!

What a joy must feel the worm that has already burrowed into one's spine when it hears such counselors! Truly it rejoices with joy of a hungry one who has enough food for himself and knows that it will not have to be shared with anybody.



He who has love, lays down his life for his neighbor. For if one should hear an offensive word, and is himself able to respond with similar words, yet does not utter them, or if he is wronged, yet endures it and does not repay the one who has wronged him, then such a one lays down his life for his neighbor.

Abba Poimen

THE POWER OF THE ENEMY

Source: "Orthodox America," issue no. 88, March '89. Translated and slightly abridged from "Sila Bozhiya i Nemoshch Chelovecheskaya" by S. Nilus; *St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood*, 1979.

The following account comes to us from 19th century Russia. Although some distance away in time and space, it offers some striking parallels to our own day when we see materialism giving way before a growing fascination with spiritism. How will it end? Tragically, if the world continues to ignore the lessons which history has so generously provided. . .

Back in my early childhood I heard frightful tales of terrifying manifestations of the powers of unclean spirits over people, who cooperated through willfully, serving sin and the devil. My memory, even to this day when I am approaching the sunset of my life, has preserved in its treasure house recollections of those impressions gathered under the influence of my old nanny and those other elderly women to whom even relatively recently the doors to the nurseries of houses belonging to the old Russian nobility stood open. They had not yet lost their ties with the vast crowd of simple people, with its simple, guileless and childlike faith. What mysteries of the unseen world were revealed to this faith! How much in this foreign world was accessible to the eyes of these "children"! Who among us, whatever his profession or rank, was not acquainted in his formative years with that mysterious unseen world—full of wonders and also fearful—where the unclean powers operated and worked on the destruction of the Orthodox soul? Who does not remember all these "wood demons," "water sprites," "house spirits" (a "fantasy" according to the wisdom of this world) and their agents and slaves from the human race—"sorcerers," "witches" and their unclean colleagues of the same ilk?

What child's heart did not tremble, listening to these stories in the dim light of an autumn or winter evening, illumined by the flickering of a vigil lamp? And how it believed them! How it beat from a dread perturbation—it seemed it could burst were it not for the old nanny's calm and triumphant assurance that her charge had nothing to fear, for the powers of evil could not touch him because he was protected; this protection was by his Guardian-Angel, his pure, child's soul and its prayers and, finally, by all that grace present—in the form of Theophany water, Athonite incense, holy oil from the relics of God-pleasers, and various other holy things—in her icon corner which flickered with the flame of her perpetually burning vigil lamp. Yes, and what child's soul, sensitive to every truth, would not believe these stories, when the nanny herself and her interlocutors were even more convinced of them than her young listener; some of them were half-dead with fright having witnessed that which they related.

And I, too, believed them with all my young heart—until the spirit of the times, the spirit of skepticism all but suffo-

cated any faith in that which "smart" people called them "old wives tales." I had to submit to the directive of the "smart" people, and for a long time, in place of my childhood belief in the spiritual world, to set up another faith in other gods and in other idols before whom the "smart" people themselves bowed down. . . But what a struggle in my soul I had to pay for my disenchantments and the acquisition of that desired truth which was so simply given and so simply accepted by the "ordinary" folk in the Orthodox Church, through her Sacred Scripture, Tradition and Lives of God-pleasers.

My soul stubbornly refused to be satisfied with materialism alone, which tried to substitute for the life of the spirit the "liberation" movement or the "great" reforms of the '60's and the ensuing years. During this intense struggle in my soul, I became aware of a sharp discord: at the same time that the entire spiritual world was subject to scorn and derision (and later even denial), "smart" people, who stood at the head of the "social" movement, by some totally illogical jump, leapt from "transmutation of species" and "cells and proto-plasmas," into that very sphere which they had ostracized: materials extended a hand to spiritism, and "smart" people considered it possible to join these "un-joinables" into a general "kasha" (soft food made from cooked buckwheat or similar grain, *Ed.*). They "ate this kasha, licked their spoons and said 'Thanks'." What powerful, unseen hand threw the very cream of educated society, even professors toward spinning tables and saucers, and turned yesterday's despairing materialists into today's materializers of unseen spirits?

And now, for the first time since my evening sessions with nanny, I heard from the lips of educated people—who scoffed at nanny's prejudices and superstitions—convincing stories about that which was familiar to me from my childhood: "haunted" houses, premonitions, the influence of the dead upon the living; how in "haunted" houses dishes and glasses floated about in the air; knockings were heard at night; someone's footsteps sounded, bringing chills to the spine. Policemen and frightened inhabitants were not the only ill-fated witnesses of these outrageous happenings; entire streets, blocks and even whole towns crowded around to stare at the mysterious events.

"Smart" people, familiar with the phenomenon of mediums, attributed these appearances to the activity of "playful spirits"; ardent nihilists—to pranksters; simple people of simple heart and faith—to an unclean power. Thus, the majority were in favor of spirits, and in my eyes this confirmed by childhood beliefs which were destroyed by this same majority in the days of my youth—when I arrogantly scorned aloud simple people.

At once the forgotten world of children's stories and the stories of nanny was resurrected in my memory. But how much more complete was the unlearned world view of my dear old nanny—a worldview illumined and made intelligible by the light of faith—than the chaos in which the educated and

“enlightened” conducted their examinations of spiritist and mediumistic spheres. My nanny knew of such occurrences, and with her all the common Russian people, at a time when there was as yet no talk of psychic “science” and these occurrences were attributed to the activity of the man-destroyer, God’s arch-enemy and man-hater, the devil. They knew the purpose behind these occurrences: **the destruction of God’s creation, man’s soul, and its eternal torment in that place prepared by Satan and his army...**

Just look dear reader, at what the loss of this knowledge has cost humanity! Take a look around you, and if your soul isn’t yet devoid altogether of the ability to respond to the activities of your contemporaries with grief at the loss of Christian faith, then you will understand that nothing could have benefited the Evil One more than this, and that it is now he who is in reality the king of a depraved and possessed humanity. For how long? *Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.* (Rev 12:12)

From one of the elders of the great Optina Hermitage, God granted me to receive a manuscript which, already in the days of the great Optina Elder Ambrose of blessed memory, was under his care and editing. The person from whom I obtained the manuscript assured me that it was destined by the Elder himself to be printed for the edification of contemporaries, but for some reason it wasn’t done. By God’s unfathomable providence it is only now, fifteen years later, after the death of Elder Ambrose, that the time has come for it to be brought to light. Perhaps it will shed a little light on the darkness of the evils and distresses under which our land now groans. Here it is—the manuscript, already yellowed with age. In a fine hand there is set forth the following:

I

Among simple people one not infrequently hears stories such as might seem strange and even unbelievable. One such story, which we recorded from the words of an eye-witness, we offer to the reader. The extraordinary nature of the story makes it hard to believe, but neither can one completely dismiss it, because hundreds of people were eyewitnesses of the events we describe. We purposely indicate the place where this event took place and give the names of those persons who in whatever way were involved in order that those who are curious and who have the opportunity, can themselves verify what happened.

The case we describe is not unique. He who is interested may hear similar stories among the common people, and if he listens to them carefully and without bias, he will find good reason to believe them.

There was in the province of Novgorod, in the village of Mendiukin, a boy Michael belonging to the family of the serf (an agricultural laborer bound under the feudal system to work on his lord’s estate, *Ed.*) Trudnikov. He was a healthy and fun-loving lad, though rather naughty at that. In 1850,

or perhaps a year earlier, when Michael turned 15, the poor parents thought of sending him to be a shepherd; but the boy, being accustomed only to pranks and childish amusements, to whom even the slightest bit of serious work was a trial, began to grumble loudly against his mother when she announced her intention. The boy’s grumbling turned into impudence which in turn awoke fierce indignation in the heart of his mother. In a fit of anger the unthinking peasant woman cursed her son and harassed him as was possible only under such provocation. Willingly or unwillingly, Michael finally had to yield to his mother’s demand. He was soon sent to his appointed task, 35 versts from his village, to the country village of Lentevo in the province of Ustiug. [A verst is a Russian measure of length, about 0.66 mile (1.1 km), *Ed.*].

II

The boy lived there for some days. Time passed in its usual course without any particular incidents, and one could assume that he had come to terms with his unenviable destiny.

One day the head shepherd, Ivan, left his flock in the care of his young assistant. The day was drawing to a close and Ivan returned to his flock, only to find Michael gone. He began calling for him loudly but only an ominous echo came in reply.

Near the place where the flock was pastured was a lake on whose shore stood a small boat. Perhaps Michael was there, thought Ivan. The boy—spoiled—probably thought of taking a boat-ride. What if he had met with some calamity! With such thoughts Ivan went to the place where the boat was moored. There, not far from shore, he saw on the surface of the water the corpse of the unfortunate Michael, already devoid of any signs of life. Stunned by this tragedy, the shepherd ran to his village, a distance of four versts, with the story of his comrade’s wretched fate. News of the drowning soon spread throughout the entire village and brought the curiosity-seekers—both old and young—to the scene of the disaster. The corpse, already stiff as a board, was taken out of the water. It was arranged to inform the local militia and Michael’s mother who took no time in coming: the first—to conduct an investigation of the accident, and the second—to certify the truth of the matter and to mourn the unfortunate death of her son.

The cause of Michael’s death was evident to all and therefore, without further ado, the deceased was given the usual Christian burial. The corpse, judging from the age of the deceased, was not large and did not give the impression of weighing much. For this reason all those accompanying the drowned boy to the village were amazed that the horse was exerting such great effort in pulling him, as if the cart held an enormous load. All wondered at such an unusual circumstance and no one could offer any explanation.

Meanwhile, according to the statutes of the Holy Church, the burial service was performed over the deceased and his body was returned to the earth.

The poor mother wept over the remains of her Misha, and the witnesses of her unexpected grief also mourned and returned home, preserving a sorrowful remembrance of the tragic event.

III

Time had not yet succeeded in calming Mme. Trudnikov's agitation when one night her son revealed himself in a dream and related something so frightful and unbelievable concerning his supposed death that had there not already been examples of such occurrences in people's minds, it would have been difficult to believe. Here is what happened.

Night fell. Mme. Trudnikov went to bed and in a heavy sleep she saw her son Michael. He approached her as if alive and said:

"Mother, do not think that I have died; I am alive, but because you cursed me I am presently under the control of demons. If you want me to return to you, repent of your sin, pray to God for me more often and give alms for my sake."

Mme. Trudnikov saw this dream on three consecutive nights.

The great anguish over the loss of her son, the terrifying news of his death as a result of her curse, hope—although slight—of seeing him again among the living, all this led Mme. Trudnikov to seek the advice of a certain wise peasant who was deemed trustworthy by all the peasants in the area.

"Do not believe," he counseled, "that your son is alive, but to pray to God for him, to give alms for his sake and repent of your sin—this is your duty. Whether your son is dead or alive, in any case your repentance, prayers and almsgiving will benefit both you and him."

The counselor had reason to speak thus; stored in his memory was the following case:

In the village of Kurilov in the province of Cherepovets, there lived two merchant brothers, one of good character and the other given over to a dissolute life. Such a contrast in their characters led to their separation. The kindly brother began to prosper, while the other soon became completely rotten. Once the latter went for some reason to his brother's and found him with a serf, distributing a rather large sum of money. Noticing this, he lay in wait for this serf one evening in the woods through which there was a desolate path to his house, robbed him of the money, killed him and, as though nothing had happened, went to get drunk at a bar. The peasant, however, had not been mortally wounded. Upon recovering, he made his way to his village and told the proper authorities what had transpired. The crime was revealed, and the guilty one imprisoned.

The criminal had a wife. When this misfortune befell her, the unhappy woman wept for days on end. But then, as if to comfort her, her husband began to come to her at night. In response to his wife's astonishment—how this was possible for him, a prisoner—he answered:

"My friendship with the prison guard has given me total freedom. But why I come at night—this is so that people wouldn't see; if they don't see they won't imagine things."

In time the wife herself thought of visiting her husband. During the meeting she asked him about the night-time visitations. The husband at once suspected that something wasn't right. Leaving his wife's question unanswered, he wrote a letter and asked her not to delay in delivering it to his brother. Returning home, she postponed fulfilling her husband's behest until the morrow. In the morning a crowd was drawn by the cries of the young daughter; they found the poor woman dead. Upon being questioned, the young girl said that some man had come to them at night and had strangled her mother. On the icon stand they found the husband's letter which had never reached the brother and which confirmed the daughter's testimony concerning the secret nightly visitations to the deceased by some personage taking upon himself the image of the strangled woman's husband.

The counselor related this story to Mme. Trudnikov and persuaded her not to trust in nighttime visions, but to pray and give alms for the soul of her son. The mother heeded the good advice and began to pray to the Lord for her son and to give alms to the poor, as much as her scanty means would allow.

A year passed and then another. She again began to have dreams similar to that described above, although no longer as clear as before. The mother sincerely repented of her sin and did not cease to pray to God and give alms.

Twelve whole years passed since Mme. Trudnikov had been overtaken by grief. Not a word was heard about the son; even the dreams themselves, offering a glimmer of hope about his return, had long since ceased.

IV

At this time, 70 versts from the village of Mindiukin, not far from the town of Cherepov, there appeared from out of the blue a very strange young man from the peasant class. He was of medium height and very lean, what you would call "skin-and-bones"; his clothing consisted of rags. But what astonished everyone the most was his extraordinary savagery; truly he was a creature from some other world. He was afraid of everyone, tried to hide from everyone, and only extreme necessity—so as not to die of hunger—forced him to go to the houses of some peasants. "He comes," related eyewitnesses, "and stands by the door, not saying a word. And so he stands for several minutes. If he's given something to eat, he eats, if not—he just leaves, likewise without saying anything."

This mysterious stranger directed his steps towards the village of Mindiukin. About four versts from Mindiukin he stopped for a rest in the town of Vоротishin at the house of the peasant Vasily Yakovlevich, where he was received and comforted in a way in which until quite recently the common Russian people knew how to receive strangers, God's people. The heart of the old Russian peasant, always compassionate towards his neighbor's distress, lead the host to offer the stranger a meal and to treat him to whatever God had

provided. Since Vasily Yakovlevich had just heated the bathhouse, he offered his guest a bath.

And here in the bathhouse, the host was struck and even frightened by the strangeness of his guest: first he would let loose a very spooky laugh, then he would begin as if to hide from someone, crawling under the benches, behind the stove. Having somehow washed himself, he dressed, left the bathhouse and ran off somewhere. While running he made such enormous leaps that it appeared as though he were not running but flying through the air. Each leap lifted him three fathoms into the air.

Soon, however, this astonishing phenomenon ceased and he headed towards Mindiukin, leaving his kind host, it must be said, utterly terrified and bewildered.

Now I would ask my dear reader to forgive me if I interrupt the account of the manuscript lying before me and turn to some personal recollections.

Although a faithful copier of the document entrusted to me, I cannot but feel that the event described herein is so unusual, so terrifying, that to the reader who is ill-prepared to take in such stories of the mysterious otherworld, it may produce not only bewilderment but, God forbid, suspicion. I hasten to assure you, my dear reader, I not only believe in that which is here brought to your amazed consideration, but I recall from my childhood a conversation which I by chance overheard between my late mother and her sister, also now deceased.

They were both brought up in the liberal spirit of the gentry in the '40's; both were educated according to the latest word in education; they tasted and even got their fill of the materialism of the '60's, and, of course, did not believe in anything supernatural or miraculous. Nevertheless, I heard from their own lips about a boy of 6 or 7—it must have been my mother's brother, my uncle—who fell into some mysterious state during which he had the most amazing and incredible visions: without knowing how to play any instrument, he took into his hands the violin belonging to the first violinist of grandfather's home orchestra and played—to the astonishment and even fright of all—the most exquisite, hitherto unheard-of melodies; he spoke in foreign languages of which he had no knowledge or understanding; he would jump from one bank to another of a stream several yards wide and, in general, did such highly unusual things (not only for his age but for anyone) that he baffled all those around him. The simple people among the servants were horrified, seeing—as they firmly believed in the simplicity of their hearts—this evidence of an unclean power. The educated and learned, of course, thought differently, but just what it was they thought didn't make much sense—they couldn't explain it themselves. Afterwards, when people became absorbed in spiritism, "smart" people came to the idea of a "fourth dimension." But here, it seems, they came against a wall.

This is what I heard in my childhood.

And what is now going on in the realm of spiritist appearances, which "smart" people have given themselves over to,

not knowing with whom they are dealing—there, perhaps, you would come across stories even less credible than Mme. Trudnikova's. But they believe those stories, they are followed up, written about, talked about; intelligent people—professors even—are given over to them, heart and soul; they put their complete faith in them. It's amazing. They don't believe those cases when devils act openly as devils under their own clearly devilish guise, but they place their entire faith in these same devils when they appear as "angels of light," the light of psychic "sciences"—in spiritism, mediumism, motivism, or social sciences—"freedom, equality, brotherhood"...

Forgive me, dear reader, for this involuntary digression. I shall resume my story.

V

It was a Sunday before the Apostles' Fast in the year 1863. In front of the cottage of the Mindiukin peasant Feodor Ivanovich Grishin, his young children were playing about with their companions. Here also was Feodor himself with one of his elderly neighbors. They were approached by the mysterious and silent stranger.

"Where are you from?" asked Feodor.

"I'm a native of these parts," came the answer. "I know you, old man."

"And who are you?" Feodor continued.

"Did you ever know Misha Trudnikov?" asked the stranger.

"What do you mean, of course I knew him!"

"Well, that same Misha—that's me."

"How's that? Misha drowned; his body is buried."

"No, I didn't really drown," the stranger replied assuredly.

They began to examine the stranger's face and actually found a resemblance to the face of him who had drowned long ago. The only difference was that he had grown from a boy into a big fellow and on the bridge of his nose he had a scar, as if from some injury.

News of this unheard-of occurrence spread quickly through the entire village, and a large crowd gathered around Michael. Not believing their own eyes, the astonished peasants and especially the playful children, vied with each other in climbing over to him, each with his own probing question:

"And what's my name?" "And mine, and mine?..."

That's all that could be heard in the crowd. Michael answered all questions accurately. The crowd's astonishment reached a high pitch of intensity. Then a certain Grishkinskaya stepped up:

"And do you know me?"

"How could I not know you," replied Michael.

"In your family you have a blind old woman who knows only how to complain about everyone, and for this reason 'we' were often at your house and did all sorts of mischief."

"And what kind of scar have you there on your nose?" someone asked.

"I came by this scar when I was walking in the woods with 'Gramps.' Suddenly I remembered about God. As a punish-

ment for this ‘Gramps’ grabbed me by the legs and struck me so hard against a pine tree that even now the scar remains.”

“How did all this happen to you? Tell us, tell us!”

“Well then, listen.” And in this way Michael began his story.

“After my mother cursed me—this was the principal reason for my misfortune—I was sent off to herd sheep. As you yourselves know, the Lord endured my sins only one short week. The week went by. Suddenly there came up to me some old man with a long, grey beard and said to me: ‘Your own mother cursed you, and this maternal curse has given me full power over you.’ Here he began to strip me of all my clothes until I was completely naked. The only thing I had left on me was my cross; the old man was unable to touch it and told me to remove it myself. Willing or unwilling, I had to submit to him. Then he took an aspen log, lying nearby, put all my clothes on it, and instantly there where my face should be (on the log) he drew a face—the resemblance to my own was like two drops of water—and threw this log into the lake. I saw how the people came running to look at the corpse, how the militia arrived and how my mother came. I saw everyone’s amazement at the horse’s great difficulty in dragging the dead body. And do you know the reason for this?”

“What was it?”

“It was because,” continued Michael, “there were about twenty such as myself sitting on the cart in addition to our ‘Gramps.’ [*] And since then, since the old man stripped me, I became like a bodiless one. Right up to the burial of my supposed body, I stayed near it. I saw all the people who were there, heard all their conversations, but no one saw me. Since that time I no longer felt either hunger or cold and, although I sometimes ate and drank in great quantities, I did so only out of habit. I ate and drank, just as those like me, where people drink and eat without saying prayers or without the sign of the cross. This gave us the opportunity to defile the very dishes in which the food was served. The people couldn’t understand why the food and drink didn’t taste good; they would have had no cause for surprise had they known that we had defiled the dishes.

“I could fly over great distances in an instant; nothing could obstruct my path. Like a bird, I flew over sleeping forests and inaccessible mountains; I walked on water as if on dry land. And I shall tell you: there are a fair number of people like me. I remember that at one place up to a thousand of us gathered. Our favorite places to get together were various kinds of parties and indecent spectacles, and likewise where there were quarrels and abuse—in a word, wherever people sinned without any fear [of God]. During such gatherings I chanced more than once to meet with a blind girl from the village of Lipenki of the Ustiug province, who also took part in all our roguery. [**]

“In our actions and our wicked campaigns against people a certain order was observed. When we gathered, ‘Gramps’ divided us into squadrons and gave each squadron a spe-

cial assignment designed to harm people. We were always zealous in executing the promptings of human passions and lusts, and speedy collaborators in people’s wickedness and misfortunes. For example, should someone think of drowning or strangling himself, we would help him by all means available to us. Here’s the case of Akulina Potapova (six versts from Mendiukin in the village of Supranov), who for some trivial reason began to grow despondent, and from despondency she strangled herself in her cottage. Her children, in order to avoid suspicion and trouble with the law, secretly took her dead body out of the noose, drove it into the forest and there hung it on a birch tree. And in this case we were also participants. We were also present at fires and tried to intensify the disaster. By the way, if the houses of pious people were burning and the fire was not the result of God’s chastisement—allowed because of sin, we could in no way interfere. If the opposite was the case, we very actively participated. For example in the village on Zimnin a peasant woman was carrying a light as she went to feed the sheep one night, and she dropped a small spark. She was quarrelling with her father-in-law and this gave us power to blow the spark into a great fire which destroyed their entire property. Vorotishino burned in the same way. I recall it was in the morning; the weather was fine, calm, but during the fire such a whirlwind blew up as to scatter whole logs in different directions. We tried to do all this.

In general, we had access everywhere where the Name of God and the sign of the Cross were disregarded. Blasphemy and the deliberate scorn of what was holy gave us power to enter into communion with people who did this, and mock them just as we wanted and our state allowed. By the way, prayer itself and the sign of the cross received their power only with people of good Christian morality, while a sinner who had no desire to abandon his sin couldn’t save himself from us either through prayer or the sign of the cross. It happens occasionally that even a pious peasant will forget about prayer or the sign of the cross. However, we could not get to such a person; it was not ours even to know the houses of such people. For example, we couldn’t enter the village of Vanskoe. Why? Because there was a pious old woman there who had the custom every evening of going around her village praying.”

“And you no longer prayed to God?” someone asked.

“We prayed; we had a daily rule of prayer, morning and evening. But the prayers we recited were a blasphemous mockery of your prayers. The Lord’s Prayer, for example, we read as follows: Father who isn’t ours, may Thy Name not be hal- lowed...and other prayers, all in the same spirit.

“So this is how the Lord punished me for my brazenness and rebellion against my parents’ will. For twelve whole years I led this miserable life, and I should never again have seen God’s light as a Christian if the prayers and almsgiving of my mother hadn’t helped to save me from perdition.

“When the time drew near for my release from the power of the devil, our ‘Gramps,’ unwilling to let such a prey out of his hands, intended to do me in. He prepared a noose and told me to get into it myself. But no matter how bad my life was, I still had no desire to die. Well, I thought, they might shove me into a noose against my will—but no matter what the consequences I won’t climb into it myself for anything. I don’t know how it all would have ended if at the last minute there hadn’t appeared to defend me a kindly old man; he was wearing a pointed cap with a cross. ‘The mother’s threads [***] have pulled him out from your power,’ said the old man to ‘Gramps,’ and pushed him away from me. ‘Gramps’ disappeared.

“Then my benefactor turned to me and said: ‘Your mother cursed you, your mother prayed you out!’ And with these words he put a cross around my neck. After this I no longer saw the old man, and found myself in a field. I had no clothes on and began to feel cold—not once in the past twelve years had I experienced this. Fortunately, just then some women passed by. They took me for a crazy man and, taking pity on me, took me to their village and gave me some clothes. And then the Lord helped me to find my way here.”

“Why don’t you go home?” his stupefied listeners asked.

“I’m afraid!” answered the poor man.

VI

Meanwhile, news of Michael’s miraculous return reached his mother, and as soon as she heard about it she rushed to her son.

At the sight of his mother, Michael was seized with a kind of terror and some unseen power shook him, as it happens with one possessed. The mother immediately recognized the stranger to be her son and took him home.

Having recovered from his terror, Michael asked those near him to send quickly for the parish priest, Fr. Alexey, in the village of Grishkino. His desire was fulfilled.

On learning from the messengers all that had happened with Michael, the priest was thrown into bewilderment by such an extraordinary occurrence. “Could it be that a demon, appearing in the guise of a man, is fooling the people?” the priest wondered, and he hastened to Mme. Trudnikov’s.

There the priest read over Michael the prayers of exorcism from Peter Mogila’s Book of Needs [*Trebnik*], but could discover no evidence of an evil spirit present in him. The only strange thing was that ever since Michael had seen his mother, a certain timidity had not left him. To be perfectly certain that Michael had no demon, that he himself was not an evil spirit simply taking the form of a man, the priest took him into church and there served a service of intercession to the Saviour, to the Mother of God and to St. Nicholas the Wonderworker; and in the altar he had Michael make before the Lord a full-hearted repentance of all his sins, according to the rite of the Orthodox Church. From a sincere heart Michael confessed to his spiritual father all that he could remember

from his former life, when his mother’s curse weighed upon him. The prayer was read absolving him of all sins.

All this time the priest was expecting this “vision” to disappear, but Michael remained Michael. Nevertheless, even after all this the priest was not freed of doubt, and he was afraid of allowing Michael to receive the Holy Mysteries. Soon afterwards Michael was taken to the nearby Modensky Nikolaevsky monastery and there, having twice more confessed his sins—first in front of the superior and then before the monastery’s father confessor—he was granted, finally, to approach the Fearful Mysteries of Christ.

VII

The curiosity of Michael’s mother, and even more the desire to assure herself of the truth of her son’s appearance, led her to Lentevo, to the grave of the one she had buried as her son. She wanted to ask that the grave be opened and to see what lay there, but time had worked its own: there where the body—or that which had passed for the body—of Michael had been buried some buildings had been constructed and the grave could not be found.

For three weeks after his appearance Michael lived at home. Then he was called to the district police for questioning—was he really the person he claimed to be? Here also Michael held fast to his story, and in order to convince the police more strongly of its veracity he began in front of all those present to list the policeman’s secret sins. The peasants, before whom Michael revealed the policeman’s dark secrets, affirmed that he spoke the truth and were only amazed how he could know all this, but the policeman was so offended by the truth that he ordered his accuser to be beaten with rods and then shackled him like a criminal.

Having completed the trial and investigation, the policeman went to Mindiukin to check up on Michael’s story.

“Is this your son?” he asked Michael’s mother.

“Mine!” she answered firmly.

“Is this your resident?” he asked the other Mindiukin peasants.

“Ours!” answered the crowd in one voice.

“Oh, you fools, you fools!” admonished the policeman. “It’s time now to go to work: you’ll all go into the fields and he’ll set fire to your village. Then you can claim him as yours. You’ll repent, but it will be too late.”

The peasants lost courage; they scratched their heads and no one said a word. Alexis Kuptsov, the wealthiest peasant in Mindiukin, was the first to reject Michael; others followed. One by one everyone joined Kuptsov, and in a short time Michael was hidden away in a home for the insane.

The day after he had renounced Michael, Kuptsov fell ill and soon died of dropsy. The Mindiukin residents immediately saw here God’s chastisement, but, of course, they didn’t lift a finger to have Michael released from the crazy house. Nevertheless, there is a proverb, “The voice of the people is the voice of God.” Yes, and it is also said that the proverb itself

will never be destroyed, but those who scorn God's truth and righteous judgment are destroyed and wrecked like rotten boats, like decayed trees.

Here ends the manuscript.

In those same years of the '60's, if my memory does not fail me, in the magazine *The Pilgrim*, there was printed the case of a coachman from the village of Kostin, Petersburg province. This coachman was leading his horses to a river for a drink when suddenly, to his unspeakable terror, he saw that the branches of some trees on the bank were bowed down with what looked like a countless flock of ravens—they were demons. On account of their weight the branches bent down to the very surface of the water. Out of his mind with fright, the coachman left his horses and ran as fast as he could to the village, while the devils called out after him: **"Our time, our will! Our time, our will!"**

Whether he related this to his spiritual father or to another, what is certain is that in its day the story appeared in the religious press. But, of course, it was soon forgotten through the careless memory of contemporaries; and with them we, too, forgot.

One of our contemporary righteous men, Father Ambrose of Optina of blessed memory, revived this story in the minds of those few observant people who looked with sorrowful eyes at the events taking place in the world and begotten in Orthodox Russia. These events were born since the evil days of the '60's, but the spirit of faith penetrated the secret of their lawlessness and trembled before its threat. Father Ambrose did not comfort his widespread flock, his children according to the spirit, with hopes for the enlightenment of Russia's horizon, for even then Russia was troubled by the rotten breath of wind from the West. Calling to mind the Kolpinsk coachman, he gravely repeated the ominous demonic threat of the victory of the demonic will, demonic times.

And when you now lift from the earth your gaze, downcast and sorrowful, when you look around with fright at that demonic activity to which the young energies of this country are given over, a country which only recently was Orthodox, only through the story of Michael Trudnikov, related here, will you be able to explain the satanic hold upon our unfortunate, perishing, destructive youth.

Is it not upon it and upon us, their fathers and mothers, that there lies heavy the almost universal curse of our fathers and mothers, whose will and obedience we repudiated with such cruel hatred, scorning and trampling all that was holy, all that they lived by, all they believed and prayed and upon which they built in bygone days that which we destroyed with such furious hatred—a destruction we are now in the process of completing? But in Michael Trudnikov the demonic power which took possession of him through his mother's curse acted secretly, concealing for twelve whole years both itself and its weapons; now it acts openly: then it operated in the carelessness of a "backward" mass of simple people, but with

fear before the light of [this people's] faith; now it operates in the "educated" crowd and its leaders, openly and boldly in the darkness of its apostasy and disbelief. But Satan and his dark powers are still the same as they were 7,500 years ago. Alas! Those people who have been seduced by them, who have fallen away from Christ, are also the same, and just as once in Paradise before their expulsion, so also now they sell the blessedness of eternity for the fruit of knowledge—of evil.

Wretched, pitiable, blind, foolish Michael Trudnikovs! Who is there to pray for you? Whose "thread," offered for you in Christ's name, can tear you from the devil's claws? The majority of your fathers and mothers have forgotten how to pray, how to believe!...

Have mercy on us, O Lord! Lord, have mercy!

Nikola-Babeyvsky Monastery, July 13th, 1906

Epilogue

I hadn't had time to prepare my manuscript for the printer before there burst upon the unfortunate Sizran a terrible misfortune: The large flourishing city with its fifty thousand inhabitants was enveloped by flames and in a single night burnt to the ground, carrying away in its destruction many human victims. Let us look at the following excerpt from the official news story of a Count A. Tolstoy:

"A part of the city was burning, but although this was a great disaster it was not a catastrophe. Suddenly, about five o'clock in the afternoon, there appeared over the city, travelling from north to south, a tornado, a cyclone or hurricane—in a word, something unimaginable. It flattened haystacks in the fields and carried metal sheets from the roofs of houses a distance of fifteen versts from the city. It is hard to say what meteorological phenomenon this storm should be classified as, but the testimony of the stunned inhabitants in this case is unanimous—it was something altogether unimaginable. Lifting all the dust and heat from the burning part of the city, the hurricane in some 30 minutes set fire to the entire central part of the city simultaneously, so that within an hour the whole city was enveloped in flames..." "It seems to me," writes the author of this news story, "that this brief description is sufficient to convince the reading public that this catastrophe should be attributed to the category of elemental disasters..."

And you, dear reader, to which category of disasters or meteorological phenomena would you assign Sizran's punishment after having read my manuscript? Do you not hear in the belfries' booming alarm, floating over the scene of the conflagration, the mischievous satanic laughter: **"Our time, our will! Our time, our will!"**...

Have mercy, O Lord! Lord! Have mercy!...

Repent, O ye people, or you all will likewise perish!

† † †

[*] In the Life of Elder Shema-hieromonk Ambrose [of Optina], there is described an incident in which a massive chain fastened to the beam of the Optina ferry snapped and

flew up, hitting in the head a gentleman who was crossing on the ferry in a carriage. Everyone was amazed how such a chain could possibly break. Fr. Ambrose settled their bewilderment with these words: "Many of them (demons) sat on it."

[**] About this blind girl the local residents related the following. Cursed by her parents, she, like Michael, fell under the power of evil spirits and suddenly disappeared. The increased prayers of her parents did not allow her to remain long under this dreadful power: About two months after her disappearance, she was discovered abandoned in a field; it was winter and both her legs froze. When she was asked where she had been during those two months, she told a story similar to Michael's. At that time hers was a unique case in those parts, and no one believed the girl.

[***] Being poor, Mme. Trudnikov's principal form of charity was to give passing soldiers thread that she had spun.



A PROPHECY OF THE FUTURE LAWLESSNESS

From a letter of the Optina Elder (and New Martyr) St. Anatoly the Younger (+1922).

From that heresies will spread everywhere and deceive many people. The enemy of the human race will act with cunning in order to draw into heresy, if possible, even the elect.

He will not begin by crudely rejecting the dogmas of the Holy Trinity, the divinity of Jesus Christ and the virtue of the Theotokos, but he will begin imperceptibly to distort the teachings and statutes of the Church and their very spirit, handed down to us by the Holy Fathers through the Holy Spirit.

Few will notice these wiles of the enemy, only those more experienced in the spiritual life. Heretics will seize power over the Church and will place their servants everywhere; the pious will be regarded with contempt. He (the Lord) said, *by their fruits ye shall know them*, and so, by their fruits, as well as by the actions of the heretics, strive to distinguish them from the true pastors.

These are spiritual thieves, plundering the spiritual flock, and they will enter the sheepfold (the Church), climbing up some other way, using force and trampling upon the divine statutes. The Lord calls them *robbers* (cf. Jn 10:1). Indeed, their first task will be the persecution of the true pastors, their imprisonment and exile, for without this it will be impossible for them to plunder the sheep.

Therefore, my son, when you see the violation of patristic tradition and the divine order in the Church, the order estab-

lished by God, know that the heretics have already appeared, although for the time being they may conceal their impiety, or they will distort the Divine Faith imperceptibly, in order to succeed better in seducing and enticing the inexperienced into the net.

The persecution will be directed against not only pastors but against all servants of God, for all those ruled by heresy will not endure piety. Recognize these wolves in sheep's clothing by their proud dispositions and love of power. They will be slanderers, traitors, everywhere sowing enmity and malice; therefore the Lord said that by their fruits you will know them. True servants of God are humble, love their neighbor and are obedient to the Church.

Monastics will be greatly oppressed by the heretics and monastic life will be scorned. Monasteries will become scarce, the number of monastics will decline, and those who remain will endure violence. These haters of monastic life, however, having only the appearance of piety, will strive to attract the monks to their side promising them protection and worldly goods, and threatening those who oppose them with expulsion.

These threats will cause great despair among the fainthearted, but you, my son rejoice that you have lived until that time, for then the faithful who have not shown any other virtues, will receive crowns merely for *standing firm in the faith*, according to the word of the Lord (cf. Mt 10:32).

Fear the Lord my son. Fear to lose the crown prepared (for you), fear to be cast by Christ into the outer darkness and eternal torment. Stand bravely in the faith, and if necessary, endure persecution and other sorrows, for the Lord will be with you... and the holy martyrs and confessors, they will look upon you and your struggle with joy.

But woe to the monks in those days who will be bound with possessions and riches, who because of love of peace will be ready to submit to the heretics. They will lull to sleep their conscience, saying, "We are preserving and saving the monastery and the Lord will forgive us." The unfortunate and blind ones do not at all consider that through heresy the demons will enter the monastery and then it will no longer be a holy monastery, but merely walls from which grace will depart.

God, however, is more mighty than the enemy, and He will never leave His servants. True Christians will remain until the end of this age, only they will choose to live in secluded, deserted places. Do not fear sorrows, rather fear pernicious heresy, for it strips us of grace and separates us from Christ. This is why the Lord commanded us to consider the heretic as a pagan and a publican.

And so my son strengthen yourself in the grace of Jesus Christ. Hasten to confess the faith, to *endure suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ* (cf. 2 Tim 2:13), Who has said, *Be faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.* (Rev 2:10).

To Him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be honor, glory and dominion unto the ages of ages. Amen.

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THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD

By St. Peter Chrysologus (+450).



A Virgin conceived, bore a son, and yet remained a Virgin. This is no common occurrence, but a sign; no reason here, but God's power, for He is the cause, and not nature. It is a special event, not shared by others; it is divine, not human. Christ's birth was not necessity, but an expression of omnipotence, a sacrament of piety for the redemption of men. He who made man without generation from pure clay made man again and

was born from a pure body. The hand that assumed clay to make our flesh deigned to assume a body for your salvation. That the Creator is in his creature and God is in the flesh brings dignity to man without dishonor to him who made him.

Why then, man, are you so worthless in your own eyes and yet so precious to God?

Why render yourself such dishonor when you are honored by Him?

Why do you ask how you were created and do not seek to know why you were made?

Was not this entire visible universe made for your dwelling? It was for you that the light dispelled the overshadowing gloom; for your sake was the night regulated and the day measured, and for you were the heavens embellished with varying brilliance of the sun, the moon and the stars. The earth was adorned with flowers, groves and fruit; and the constant marvelous variety of lovely living things was created in the air, the fields, and the seas for you, lest sad solitude destroy the joy of God's new creation.

And the Creator still works to devise things that can add to your glory. He has made you in His image that you might in your person make the invisible Creator present on earth; He has made you His legate, so that the vast empire of the world might have the Lord's representative. Then in his mercy God assumed what He made in you; He wanted now to be truly manifest in man, just as He had wished to be revealed in man as in an image. Now He would be in reality what He had submitted to be in symbol.

And so Christ is born that by his birth He might restore our nature. He became a child, was fed, and grew that He might inaugurate the one perfect age to remain forever as He created it. He supports man that man might no longer fall. And the creature He had formed of earth He now makes heavenly; and what He had endowed with a human soul He now vivifies to become a heavenly spirit. In this way He fully raised man to God, and left in him neither sin, nor death, nor travail, nor pain, nor anything earthly, with the grace of our Lord Christ Jesus, who lives and reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever, for all the ages of eternity. Amen.